

MeadowBrook Church | December–February 2019

life GROUP

Life together for the Kingdom of God



40
DAYS
of Renewal



life
group
*Life together for the
Kingdom of God*

MeadowBrook seeks to CONNECT people to Christ and His church, GROW them as disciples to be disciplers, and equip them to SERVE through missions, ministry, and worship, all to GLORIFY God.

Christ Centered | Community Driven | Kingdom Focused

40 DAYS

of Renewal

Putting to death the sinful flesh and putting on our new nature in Christ can seem a daunting task. During 40 Days of Renewal, we hope that you would understand the power of the Spirit's work in your life. He is freely offering to each of us in Christ lasting renewal that would affect every area of our life. His renewal is what we are searching for. We do not need a resolution; we need transformation. Coupling with Randy's teaching on the seven deadly sins, this curriculum examines seven virtues of Christ given to us through the gospel. We will discuss the biblical foundation for receiving the gift of the Spirit's renewal and how to actively pursue renewal in each area of our lives. This pursuit is best expressed in community with other believers, a.k.a. your Life Group. My prayer is that this material would assist you as you seek to make healthy choices, develop your spiritual lives, and purpose to live for the glory of God.



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Life Groups Minister

Special thanks to Taylor Hindsman, Heather Clough, and Chip Tucker for their contributions to this curriculum. If you are interested in writing or editing in the future, email hunter@mbchurch.com today.

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Spiritual Formation

Assorted Scriptures | January 5th, 2020

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.

⁸ It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. (Proverbs 3:5-8 ESV)

In this important passage in the book of Proverbs, Solomon lays the foundation for understanding how to obtain lasting renewal in this life—a thought further developed throughout the Scriptures. The Christian’s pursuit of renewal is not a mystical pursuit of discovering oneself, but rather to recognize the pathway to change is not through self-knowledge or self-care. Lasting renewal is found in Christ, and in Christ alone. Our own understanding fails us time and time again. We need the gift of renewal the Lord gives us.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18 ESV)

Renewal is a gift from the Spirit.

When the Spirit of the Lord comes and takes up residence within us, the veil of spiritual blindness and the chains of spiritual bondage are removed. We are set free from our crooked paths. We are the benefactors of his gracious ministry as the Spirit transforms us from our old broken image, marred by sin, into the glorious image of Christ. This occurs incrementally from one degree of glory to another during this life until we, glorified in the resurrection, experience the fullness of his ministry in the New Heaven and New Earth. This is good news. Lasting renewal can be achieved because it is the Spirit of God who brings it about. Therefore, the old adage that “people never change” is indeed false. The fundamental truth of the gospel is that through Christ people can change, for it is the Spirit who changes them.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

How do I need to better love God?

How does my life need to be altered?

R: Respond to the Text

How does viewing renewal as a gift from the Spirit change the way you pursue renewal?

How does prayer function in the pursuit of renewal when renewal is viewed as a gift from the Lord?

Renewal is a gift from the Spirit that must be exercised.

While renewal is a gift from the Lord, it is a gift that must be worked out. It is an active pursuit that begins in faith. And in that faith...

- We reject the world's wisdom.
- We fear the Lord, meaning that in our relationship with him we choose to draw near and remain under his protection. We choose to obey rather than stray into the dangerous pathways of sin that lead to the Lord's discipline.
- We turn from evil, actively putting to death the deeds of the flesh by the power of the Spirit graciously given to us.
- We walk in the straight paths prepared for us beforehand.

We must never forget that lasting renewal is a gift from the Lord. However, we must also diligently seek after this renewal that comes from above, both as individuals and in community with other believers, specifically with those at MeadowBrook.

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13 ESV)

How do we actively pursue renewal?

What does it look like when we pursue renewal together?

How will your Life Group pursue renewal?

³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV)

Renewal is a gift from the Spirit that must be exercised in every aspect of your life to the glory of God.

The Spirit is not in the business of partial renewal. He is not satisfied with some areas of your life being lived to the glory of God while other areas are lived to the glory of self. No! God desires all our heart in it until the renewal of the Spirit is experienced in every area of our life—all to the glory of God.

This 40 Days of Renewal make the commitment to pursue renewal each day in the grace of God. This is accomplished by:



Making Healthy Choices

- Eat healthy. Some guides below:
 - Daniel Fast
 - Whole 30
 - RP
- Exercise.
- Get adequate rest.



Developing your spiritual life

- Formulate habits of Bible intake.
- Pray individually and with others.
- Evangelize and invite others to church.




Purpose to live for the glory of God

- Cut out worldly media.
- Practice generosity.
- View your job as ministry.
- Show discipline in the small things of life.
- Steward resources well.

Convenience, comfort, and the prevailing culture will seek to distract you from the renewal God desires for you. Let's commit to casting aside the sin that so easily entangles us and to diligently seek after the renewal of Christ in every area of our lives for the glory of God.

How will you pursue renewal by the grace of God these 40 Days? Write it down in the boxes below.




Make Healthy Choices

I will pursue renewal by...



Develop your spiritual life

I will pursue renewal by...



Purpose to live for the glory of God

I will pursue renewal by...

Life Group Prayer Time (20 Minutes)

Since renewal is first and foremost a gift received from the Lord, let us ask him to renew our lives and the lives of our church family. Break up into groups of 4-5 and pray over these areas.

Pray that the Lord would renew the physical health of the people at MeadowBrook so we may possess a greater enjoyment of Christ and more richly engage in his kingdom ministry.

- Pray for those purposing to make healthy choices in their eating and lifestyles that the Lord would strengthen and encourage them.
- Pray that the Lord would use this pursuit to teach us discipline, patience, and self-control.
- Pray that the Lord would use this pursuit to break the power the idols of convenience and comfort have over our lives.

Pray that the Lord would renew the spiritual lives of the people at MeadowBrook so we may regularly draw near to God both individually and corporately. Pray we will experience the Spirit's transformation in our lives and the lives of those around us.

- Pray that the Lord would give us an insatiable desire for Bible intake, prayer, and the corporate gathering of the saints in both worship and Life Group.
- Pray that we would be burdened for the lost, intentionally reaching out to them in order to invite them to church and to share the good news of the gospel with them.
- Pray for wisdom, asking the Spirit to teach us the meaning of the Scriptures.

Pray that the Lord would renew the way we purpose to live our lives so that our lives may result in lives being lived to the glory of God.

- Pray that the Lord would give us a spirit of discernment regarding the media we consume and the unholy patterns we have allowed into our lives.
- Pray that the Lord would reveal areas of our lives that are not being lived out to the glory of God and that, in the fear of the Lord, we would turn from evil.
- Pray for those seeking to break unwholesome habits. Pray that the Lord would strengthen them and that they would see the greater joy that is to be found in Christ.

Humility

Philippians 2:5-11 | January 12th, 2020

Last week Randy discussed the sin of pride; let's look at Proverbs 18:12 to see what the path of wisdom looks like in contrast to pride:

Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. (Proverbs 18:12 ESV)

Wisdom teaches that humility comes before honor. What does the prevailing culture of the world teach about securing honor? Discuss as a group.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

How do I need to better love God?

How does my life need to be altered?

R: Respond to the Text

Look to Christ

When tempted by a way to illegitimately secure honor, Jesus humbled himself and submitted to the will of his Father. Throughout Jesus' life we see the Son of God embrace humility—he was born in a manger, he worked as a carpenter for 90% of his life, he washed feet, but most of all we see the humility of Christ in his death on the cross in the place of unworthy sinners like you and me.

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 ESV)

The Philippians took full advantage of their status as a Roman colony. They lived for glory. They cherished being honored and pursued the praise of others, promoting themselves whenever they had the chance. The Philippians' outlook on status helps us understand Paul's description of Jesus as "servant" (Greek: bondservant, *doulos*)—"the most degrading legal status in the Roman world," according to the ancient historian, Josephus. Paul's description of Christ as "servant" teaches us that clinging to a prideful love for status impedes the expression of our new nature of humility given to us in Christ. We need to embrace humility.

What does it mean for Jesus to take the form of a servant? How does it impact the way we view ourselves?

Humility flows from a renewed mind given to us by Jesus Christ.

After exhorting the Philippian church to reject the prevailing way of the surrounding culture and to count others as more significant than themselves, Paul connects these actions to a mindset—one that is already theirs in Christ! When a person turns from their sins and believes in Jesus, Christ frees them from their debased mind and renews their thinking through the giving of the Holy Spirit. Humility, thus, is an inward mindset given to us by the Spirit that reveals itself in actions toward others that conform to the very nature and actions of Christ.

How does Paul's commands in verses 3-4 relate to this truth?

What does the mind of humility look like—at work? in your marriage? with your kids? at church?

Jesus humbled himself in life and death.

Christ was the one who, although existed in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be asserted. Christ didn't simply preexist, but he eternally existed in the form of God. While he was on earth, however, the benefits of being in the form of God was not something he sought to grasp for himself. Christ had full equality with God but chose not to assert that right or exploit it while on earth.

How does the incarnation, which we just celebrated at Christmas, and the crucifixion we will soon celebrate during Easter, help us to embrace the humility of Christ?

Jesus, being fully God, took on flesh and became fully human, being both God and man, retaining the two distinct natures in one person. He was not concerned with the vanity of self-glorification outside of the will of the Father, but he willingly emptied himself the privileges of his divinity and took on the limitations of human flesh. The Son of God who had never needed sleep, slept. Jesus who knew all things, grew in wisdom. Jesus, through whom the entire universe was created, fell from exhaustion carrying his cross and had to have the help of another. The incarnation truly is a miracle beyond the comprehension of any human.

Christ's humility is shown on full display, because not only did God become a man, but he also died a man's death. Mark Keown in his commentary refers to this moment on the cross as the "greatest demonstration of true humanity in history." Jesus obeyed God to the very end, accomplishing what Adam, or any of his descendants, could not. Jesus, the sinless King of kings, died a servant's death in our place, willingly enduring our guilt, our shame, our suffering.

² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:2-5 ESV)

The Father exalted Christ—and all those who are in Christ—for his obedience.

Thankfully, the story doesn't end with the earthly humiliation of Christ! Paul turns his focus to the exaltation Christ currently possesses and will share one day with his followers. Christ was raised from the dead, vindicated as the innocent Son of God. He ascended to the Father where he reigns on the throne as head of his church. And he will return again manifesting his full glory as he judges the living and the dead. Having refused to grasp it for himself, Christ receives, as a gift from the Father, the name above all names to which every knee will bow.

How does the hope of heaven help us to embrace the humility of Christ?

Discuss concrete examples as a group.

The application of Philippians is clear as crystal: do nothing according to selfish ambition or empty self-glorification, but in humility of mind regard one another as being more important than yourself. Do not look out only for yourself, but look out for each other. And do all this in power of God that he graciously gives and for the glory of God in which he will graciously allow his children to share.

In the church, this means that one does not make divisions over preferences, but rather they consider the other's preferences worthier of being met. So, worship style is not an issue for the older generation because in an effort to reach the younger generation, they consider their younger brother's preferences first. The younger generations are called to do the same. The church who applies this text creates a culture of harmony and service. The older parents without kids living at home serve in the nursery. The younger families visit the widows and those in nursing homes. Everyone serves faithfully in the community of believers.

Individually, the applications are endless and impact every sphere of life. The career-minded do not promote themselves in order to get ahead. The family, when deciding where to eat after church, considers others' preferences before their own. A husband looks out for ways to serve his wife in the home and the wife does the same for her husband. One does not make up excuses of busyness when asked to help a friend with something on their off day. These examples just name a few of the practical applications derived from this text that are to be lived out for the glory of the Son and the Father.

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

"Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure"—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:6-9, ESV)

Apply

In which areas of your life is the Spirit seeking to conform you to the humility of Christ?

What actions do you need to do, or what goals do you need to set in order to aid you as you live out your new identity in Christ?

Contentment

1 Timothy 6:3-10 | January 19th, 2020

Last week Randy discussed the sin of envy, let's look at Proverbs 13:25 to see what the path of wisdom looks like in contrast to envy:

The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the belly of the wicked suffers want. (Proverbs 13:25 ESV)

Wisdom teaches that the righteous are satisfied with what they already possess. What does the prevailing culture of the world teach about satisfying your wants and desires? Discuss as a group.

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

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R: Respond to the Text

Look to Christ

Jesus perfectly embraced contentment, trusting God to provide all that he needed, and he taught his followers to do the same. Read his words:

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:24-26, ESV)

Never once do you see Jesus display lack of contentment. After not eating for 40 Days, he was content in his hunger and did not eat Satan's short-cut bread. When offered all the kingdoms and wealth of the world, he was content with the worship of his Father. When he had no place to lay his head, he was content. Jesus trusted his benevolent, heavenly Father, and embraced a life of contentment. Let's look at 1 Timothy 6:3-10 and see the perils of envy and the blessing of contentment.

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain...

Paul charged Timothy to remain in Ephesus so that he might “charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine” (1:3), for apparently there was false teaching rising up in the Ephesian churches. “The false teachers are the primary occasion for the letter. The exact nature of the false teaching is unclear. Paul’s real concern is with the results of the false teaching—for example, promoting speculations (1:4; 6:4), arrogance (6:4), and greed (6:5–10). Paul addresses the content of the false teaching only in passing but focuses on the fact that true Christianity is evidenced by lifestyles shaped by the gospel” (ESV Study Bible).

In chapter 6, we see those who have embraced bad doctrine being given over to envious greed, but we see those who have believed the true gospel marked by godly contentment. We need to let the gospel move us away from envy toward an embracement of Christ-like contentment.

Bad doctrine leads to bad behavior—namely envious greed—and it will destroy a person.

Doctrine determines behavior. Beliefs are not impractical precepts that one can hold to with minimal effect on their life. Beliefs form the core of who we are and shape the way we live and act. Bad beliefs about God and his gospel inevitably produce bad behavior. Good belief yields Christ-like behavior. Therefore, what you believe about God is the most important thing about you, and a departure from the truth produces all sorts of wicked behavior and mindsets—namely envy and greed.

Even just a cursory glance at false teachers throughout history gives insight to the connection between envious greed and bad doctrine. Paul highlights this connection when says these false teachers imagine that godliness is a means of gain. From Arius to Jim Jones to Joel Osteen, Paula White, and Kenneth Copeland to churches that teach that Jesus is the means to some other end, these teachers produce people “who are depraved in mind and deprived of truth.” If Jesus is a means to more wealth, a more comfortable life, a better 401k, he is not your God. Money is. And this bad belief will lead to all sorts of wickedness that will plunge them into painful destruction.

Money is not inherently evil. Even possessing more money than most is not inherently evil, but the desire to be rich and the love of money is wicked to its core. It produces dishonest business practices, tax-cheats, cold heartedness toward others, insatiable cravings that enslave people to the hamster wheel of “get more, have more, do more” that never satisfies and destroys them in this exercise of chasing after wind.

Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man’s envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.
(Ecclesiastes 4:4, ESV)

How does Paul connect belief and behavior?

How does this change the way we view doctrine and theology?

What does it look like for Jesus to be a means to an end? How do we fall into that trap in our own lives and practices? What can we do to avoid it?

How does this change the way we approach situations where people are being drawn into churches who promote false teachings?

The truth about possessions will set you free.

The Spirit desires for us to know that the wealth and possessions of this earth are temporary. The Spirit is the down payment of a future inheritance that far surpasses all the wealth of this world combined. Remember, Christ was offered it all, yet in his contentment chose a life of poverty, affliction, and suffering in the will of God. His nature is now our nature through faith, shaping us to have his godly character and his contentment. He promises to provide our basic needs, asking that we trust him as a child does their father. Joanna and Mason have never wondered if Taylor and I would feed and clothe them. They trust us to provide their needs. God is asking us to trust him in the same way with all of our heart.

If you desire to be set free from the deadly snare of envying your neighbor and embrace Christ-like contentment, then trust Jesus to provide for you as you seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and recognize that this world is passing away along with all its wealth. Contentment, thus, is a virtue of the heart that is produced by faith in these two truths of the gospel: we can take no treasure from this world into the next, and what Christ has for us there is far better anyway.

*⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for **we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.** ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6:3-10 ESV)*

²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷ This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:26-29, ESV)

What is the gain of godliness with contentment?

Trusting the Lord is a simple truth, but it is by no means easy. Why is it so difficult for us to trust Jesus at his word?

How does Heaven help us live out contentment on this earth?

Discuss concrete examples as a group.

Apply

Look at your life and discern where you need to embrace contentment.

- Do you cheat on your taxes?
- Are you skimming off the top at work?
- Are you anxious about God's future provision? Are you seeking first the kingdom of God or the building up of your 401K?
- Are you teaching your kids contentment, or are you teaching them to envy their neighbor?
- Are you content in the size of your house?

Are you content?

If not, what needs to change?

Self-Control

Titus 2:11-14 | January 26th, 2020

Last week Randy discussed the sin of gluttony, let's look at Proverbs 25:16, 28 to see what the path of wisdom looks like in contrast to gluttony:

¹⁶ If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it and vomit it.

²⁸ A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

Wisdom teaches that self-control leads to a more pleasurable and secure life than what is offered through indulging the desires of the flesh. What does the prevailing culture of the world teach about fulfilling the desires of the flesh?

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

How do I need to better love God?

How does my life need to be altered?

R: Respond to the Text

Look to Christ

Self-control is a gift of the Holy Spirit produced within us as we walk by the Spirit. This virtue helps us in the battle against gluttony, yes, but also against drunkenness, anger, sexual immorality, and gossip, to name a few. Read how David Mathis describes the self-control of Christ:

Jesus was “the most self-controlled man in the history of the world. All his life he was “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). He stayed the course even when sweat came like drops of blood (Luke 22:44). He could have called twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53), but he had the wherewithal to not rebut the false charges (Matthew 27:14) or defend himself (Luke 23:9). When reviled, he did not revile in return (1 Peter 2:23). They spit in his face and struck him; some slapped him (Matthew 26:67). They scourged him (Matthew 27:26). In every trial and temptation, “he learned obedience through what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8), and at the pinnacle of his self-control he was “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). And he is the one who strengthens us (1 Timothy 1:12; Philippians 4:13).” www.desiringgod.org/articles/self-control-and-the-power-of-christ

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11-14, ESV)

After urging self-control for men and women old and young as well as employees and Titus, Paul points young Titus to the source of self-control—the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

The grace of God trains us to renounce the irreverent ways of this world that enslave us to the desires of our flesh.

When we are born, we are born into a system that is ungodly, showing no fear of the Lord. We come into this world enslaved to the passions of the flesh and the desires of the mind. Our culture despises the idea that there be any desire in us that ought not be fulfilled. The grace of God trains us to renounce this oppressive system of thinking. Before Christ, we were slaves, but the grace of God set us free from our sin. Now we can say “no” to our flesh by the power of the Spirit. This gives us great freedom.

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans 6:6-7, ESV)

In Christ, you are being trained to renounce...

- **Your overeating that is keeping you from greater joy and service in the kingdom of God.**
- **Your drunkenness that is not fixing your problems, but adds to them.**
- **Your gossiping that destroys relationships and tarnishes your reputation.**
- **Your anger that consumes any and all in its path.**
- **Your pornography that is destroying your family.**
- **Your biting words that may give you the upper hand in argument, but at a painful cost.**

Christ is empowering you to renounce all of it. Jesus redeemed us from lawlessness, setting us free from sin’s grip, and is purifying us, giving us new passions. By his Spirit, you can put to death that which brings shame, guilt, and destruction into your life, and walk in the good works prepared beforehand for you. But this takes work on your end. Self-control is a gift that must be diligently sought after.

What did Christ save or redeem us from, based on Titus 2:11-14? How does that impact the way we view the gospel and our own sin?

The word for train could easily be translated as discipline, as in a father disciplining his child. Have you ever thought about the grace of God disciplining you over your sin? What does that mean? How does that shape your outlook on grace?

The grace of God trains us to live self-controlled lives in this current age as we await the return of Christ.

“Self-control is not a gift we receive passively, but actively. We are not the source, but we are intimately involved. We open the gift and live it. Receiving the grace of self-control means taking it all the way in and then out into the actual exercise of the grace. ‘As the Hebrews were promised the land, but had to take it by force, one town at a time,’ says Ed Welch, ‘so we are promised the gift of self-control, yet we also must take it by force.’”—David Mathis

What does it mean for something to be a gift that is also to be sought after?

Jesus does not only empower and train us to renounce that which is bad, but also to live in that which is good. Once we were enslaved to sin, now to righteousness. Once we acted against our fellow man in lawlessness, now in uprightness. Once we were irreverent in our attitudes and behavior, now godly. The Spirit of Christ dwells within us, transforming our affections and reminding us of our blessed hope in Christ. Therefore, we press all the more into the gospel, disciplining our bodies, holding captive our thoughts, arresting our wicked and fleshly desires that we may mature into the new nature given to us in Christ—a nature marked by self-control.

²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.
 (1 Corinthians 9:25-27, ESV)

How does the hope of heaven help us to embrace the self-control of Christ?

Discuss concrete examples as a group.

The hope of Heaven is monumental in this pursuit. It encourages us in the battle, reminding us of the superior pleasure offered in Christ. Better than another basket of chips and salsa, better than an extra piece of cake to help us cope through a tough week, better than the buzz from one more drink, better than the fake sense of community felt through gossip, better than the release of anger, and better than the fleeting pleasure of self-desired sin, self-control produced by the Spirit leads to a reward more joyous than the best of these.

All of the above sins are outward symptoms of deeper problems. There are many reasons one might be a glutton for example (I pick this example because I battle this sin in my life often). Some overeat in order to comfort. Their lack of self-control reveals a lack of faith in Jesus Christ, the God of all comfort. Some overeat because they are enslaved to the pleasure of taste. Their god is their belly. Rather than eating to live they live to eat. Their problem is a worship problem. For some it's a mechanism to cope with stress. Still for others it's something else. The problem is not the external expression of the sin, but rather the deeper character issue the Spirit needs to conform to the character of Christ. Seeking to tackle the external problem without the inner work needed from the Spirit on the deeper issue is a fool's errand.

Apply

In which areas of your life is the Spirit seeking to conform you to the self-control of Christ?

What are some of the deeper issues behind your problems with self-control? What needs to change?



Review your commitment statements from the first week.

- **How are things going?**
- **Any adjustments needed?**
- **Any areas that need more focus?**

Stay in there! Do not grow weary of doing good! If you have not yet started, go ahead and jump in!

Purity

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 | February 2nd, 2020

Last week Randy discussed the sin of lust; let's look at Proverbs 5:15-23 to see what the path of wisdom looks like in contrast to lust:

¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern,
flowing water from your own well.

¹⁶ Should your springs be scattered abroad,
streams of water in the streets?

¹⁷ Let them be for yourself alone,
and not for strangers with you.

¹⁸ Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your youth,

¹⁹ a lovely deer, a graceful doe.

Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight;
be intoxicated always in her love.

²⁰ Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a
forbidden woman

and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?

²¹ For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD,
and he ponders all his paths.

²² The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him,
and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.

²³ He dies for lack of discipline,
and because of his great folly he is led astray.

(Proverbs 5:15-23 ESV)

Wisdom teaches that purity leads to a more joyful, secure, and satisfied life. How does the prevailing culture shepherd us away from purity into the arms of the forbidden woman (lust)?

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

How do I need to better love God?

How does my life need to be altered?

R: Respond to the Text

Look to Christ

Purity was perfectly modeled in Jesus Christ. Jesus, having remained celibate his entire life, did ministry among, with, and toward women, never straying into the wicked snare of sexual immorality. Never once did he look upon a woman with lust in his heart. He was absolutely pure—in secret and in public. The good news of the gospel is that he shares his purity with us. Read what God says in 1 John 3:2-3, ESV:

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

1 John 3:2-3, ESV

The hope of being patterned after Christ in glory (glorification) helps us to purify ourselves today. As we will see in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, purity is the will of God for your life, and he has equipped you with everything you need to embrace it.

¹ Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 ESV)

Paul moves into the latter part of his letter to the Thessalonians by urging them to walk in way that is pleasing to God, even more than they are already doing. He doesn't want the Thessalonians to be confused as to what he is asking of them, so he spells out plainly what the will of God is for their life. The will of God for your life is sanctification, specifically highlighting the avoidance of any and all kinds of sexual immorality. Sanctification is the process through which the Spirit sets you apart and makes you look more and more like Christ. It is why Jesus died for you on the cross (cf. John 17:19), and your sanctification will surely be accomplished by God (cf. 1 Thess. 5:23-24).

Avoiding sexual sin is vital to the sanctification process, for when we commit sexual sin we defile the temple of God—our bodies (cf. 1 Cor. 6:18-20). However, Paul is not concerned about short term behavioral fixes; he desires a lifestyle of purity. In this passage, Paul calls for us to pursue the deeper, inward change brought about by the Spirit that is expressed in outward holiness.

Know God.

Theology, or what we believe about God, matters. Contrary to what many may think, theology is intrinsically practical. Theology forms the foundation upon which we approach God in faith. Those who know God—meaning they know the right things about God and they are intimately acquainted with him in close personal relationship—walk in purity. Those who do not, walk in the passions of lust. The key to embracing purity is not to bounce your eyes or to set up accountability structures, though both are helpful and worthy of doing. The key to embracing purity is knowing God in such a way that kindles a “deep and abiding love for the God of the Bible” that seeks to find ultimate satisfaction in Christ, not the arms of the adulterer or the allure of pornography. This intimate, scriptural knowledge of God will give you lasting success as you put to death lust by the Spirit and put on the purity of Christ, for you know the greater pleasure of loving and obeying God. Knowing God is better than porn, better than an affair, better than everything.

Do you consider yourself a theologian? Whether you do or not, the truth is you are one. The question then becomes: Are you a good theologian? How can you study the Bible in such a way to become a good theologian?

This concept does not negate the necessity of specific, concrete steps in the battle against lust, but it does change the way we approach the battle. The steps of obedience flow from the inward intimacy fostered with God through faith.

How does this change the way you have been approaching your battle with sin?

Know that the Lord avenges sin.

God avenges sin. He does not let sin go unpunished. Thankfully, for those in Christ, Jesus bore the punishment in our place. However, it should be noted that Paul is writing to Christians warning them of the consequences of sin. The grace of God may absolve the wrath of God, but it does not remove the consequences of sin. Those who commit adultery and repent may still lose their family, lose the respect and trust of their kids, or lose their job, or lose their health. Repeated use of pornography can actually lead to an inability to function sexually. Sin is destructive, and the Lord allows us to feel the consequences of sin so that we turn from it and run into his safe and secure arms.

During the moment of temptation, people typically do not think of the consequences. They do not think that after this fling, they could spend Christmases or Thanksgivings alone. Sin never satisfies. It is always lackluster, leaving people longing for what they had before they sinned against God and others. God's warning in this passage is not God being harsh, but God lovingly warning his children as a parent warns their child against playing with electrical sockets.

John Piper breaks down Packer's process down into this acronym:

A: *Admit your need.*

P: *Pray.*

T: *Trust that the Lord will uphold his promises.*

A: *Act in faith.*

T: *Thank God for providing the help needed.*

How are you failing to live in the power of the Holy Spirit?

Live in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, God gives his greatest encouragement. He has given us his Holy Spirit. He calls us to be holy and pure, then fills and empowers us with his Holy Spirit. So, how do we live in the power of the Holy Spirit? J.I. Packer outlines what that may look like when he says,

“First, as one who wants to do all the good you can, you observe what tasks, opportunities, and responsibilities face you. Second, you pray for help in these, acknowledging that without Christ you can do nothing—nothing fruitful, that is (John 15:5). Third, you go to work with a good will and a high heart, expecting to be helped as you asked to be. Fourth, you thank God for help given, ask pardon for your own failures en route, and request more help for the next task. Augustinian holiness is hard working holiness, based on endless repetitions of this sequence.”

Apply

- **Abstain from sexual immorality.** There is no need to wait. Start today!
- **Control your body with holiness and honor.**
- **View all people as people fearfully and wonderfully created in the image of God and love your neighbor as yourself.** Women (and men) are not objects to be lusted over. They are creations of our God, and someone's little girl (or boy). Pornography affects more than the one viewing it.
- **Embrace your calling.** God has called you to holiness and has equipped you with his Spirit, his Word, and prayer. You have everything you need! Embrace purity!

What actions do you need to do, or what goals do you need to set in order to aid you as you live out your new, pure identity in Christ?

Meekness and Mercy

1 Peter 2:17-25 | February 9th, 2020

Last week Randy discussed the sin of wrath, let's look at Proverbs 16:32 and 12:16 to see what the path of wisdom looks like in contrast to wrath:

Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. (Proverbs 16:32 ESV)

The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult. (Proverbs 12:16 ESV)

Wisdom teaches that it is better to be slow to anger and to ignore an insult rather than respond in wrath. What does the prevailing culture of the world teach about responding to those who disagree, insult, or even harm you?

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

How do I need to better love God?

How does my life need to be altered?

R: Respond to the Text

¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. ¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:17-25 ESV)

Look to Christ

Instead of wrath, Jesus embodied the virtues of meekness and mercy, especially in his crucifixion. Jesus was innocent and even created each of the individuals carrying out his execution. Still, he meekly submitted to the cross—for he knew it was the will of God.

Peter witnessed the immense suffering Jesus experienced. Peter observed that when the Son of God and Lord of this universe was mocked, beaten, and crucified, he did not fight back, nor did he threaten. Instead, in his meekness, Jesus entrusted himself to his heavenly Father, praying for the forgiveness of his executioners. As our example and shepherd, Jesus helps us to embrace his meekness and mercy during the temporary sufferings of this world as he leads us into our eternal inheritance.

Because of the healing brought about through Christ's death in our place and resurrection, we can renounce the way of wrath and walk in the meekness and mercy of Christ.

Jesus' death on the cross sets us free from the sin of wrath. Now we can die to wrath and live to righteousness. We were once lost, but now we are following after our meek and merciful Shepherd, who oversees our souls.

What is meekness, and what does it look like lived out? Simply put, meekness is "not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance" (BDAG). In his work *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said,

"[The meek] renounce every right of their own and live for the sake of Jesus Christ. When reproached, they hold their peace; when treated with violence, they endure it patiently; when men drive them from their presence, they yield their ground... They are determined to leave their rights to God alone... They show by every word and gesture that they do not belong to this earth. Leave heaven to them, says the world in its pity, that is where they belong. But Jesus says, 'they shall inherit the earth.' To these, the powerless and the disenfranchised, the very earth belongs. Those who now possess it by violence and injustice shall lose it, and those who here have utterly renounced, who were meek to the point of the cross, shall rule the new earth... The renewal of the earth begins at Golgotha, where the meek One died, and from there it will spread. When the kingdom finally comes, the meek shall possess the earth."

The Spirit produced virtue of meekness and the hope in the promise that the meek shall inherit the earth. The Spirit helps one to turn away from wrath, endure wrongdoing patiently, and extend mercy to others. It is the ability to turn the other cheek when struck, to give one your jacket when they take your shirt, and to go the second mile when forced to go one (cf. Matthew 5:38-41). Mercy arising out of meekness is the way of Christ, and it stands in direct opposition to wrath and, honestly, the current cultural understanding of "rights." One must note, however, that meekness does not facilitate abuse. The meek still seek justice and love mercy, but when unjust suffering results from this good pursuit, the meek endure it with patience, knowing that it "is a gracious thing in the sight of God."

Discuss the Bonhoeffer quote.

- **Is that the attitude we embrace? Why or why not? List the reasons we do not embrace the meekness of Christ.**
- **Do you agree with his quote? Why or why not? If not, how would you reframe it?**
- **What does it look like to renounce every right and to live for the sake of Christ?**
- **Why are meekness and mercy hard to embrace?**
- **How does the promise of the future inheritance of the kingdom help us to embrace meekness and mercy today? List the ways.**
- **How do meekness and mercy-driven pursuits of justice come together?**

⁷ *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!*

⁸ *Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.*

⁹ *For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.*

¹⁰ *In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.*

¹¹ *But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.*

(Psalm 37:7-11 ESV)



Last week! Review your commitment statements and finish strong, launching into the rest of the year.

Meekness enables us to not worry about the course of this world and the actions of the evildoer. The presence of wrath indicates the absence of the settled faith we are to daily embrace. Meekness is being still before the Lord in this present, wicked age. In that stillness, the communion, peace, gentleness, and mercy of Christ overtake us, not wrath.

“Meekness begins when we put our trust in God. Then, because we trust him, we commit our way to him. We roll onto him our anxieties, our frustrations, our plans, our relationships, our jobs, our health. And then we wait patiently for the Lord. We trust his timing and his power and his grace to work things out in the best way for his glory and our good. The result of trusting God, and the rolling of our anxieties onto God, and waiting patiently for him is that we don’t give way to quick and fretful anger.” – John Piper,

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-meekness>

Apply

Let your political discourse be marked by meekness and honor.

Followers of Christ should reject the mocking and chiding that marks the rhetoric surrounding politics in America—the same rhetoric espoused on news networks like Fox News and CNN. This rhetoric does not reflect the meekness and mercy of Christ. Followers of Christ should honor those in public office, even when we disagree with them or think them despicable. The context of 1 Peter 2:17-25 is Emperor Nero, who committed grave injustices against humanity. It is the very emperor who had Peter executed. Nevertheless, the command to honor the emperor remains.

Think before you post.

“The vexation of a fool is known at once.” When we immediately rant on Facebook or Twitter or toward our friends, we reveal ourselves to be fools. Think about each post and ask: “Does this post embody the meekness and mercy of Christ?”

Embrace meekness in the workplace and the home.

Discuss this application and list out what this would look like, either in the workplace, the home, or both.

What actions do you need to do, or what goals do you need to set?

Generosity

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 ESV | February 16th, 2020

Last week Randy discussed the sin of greed, let's look at Proverbs 11:24-26 to see what the path of wisdom looks like in contrast to greed:

²⁴ *One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.*

²⁵ *Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.*

²⁶ *The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.*
(Proverbs 11:24-26 ESV)

Wisdom teaches that it is the generous who reap reward, enrichment, and honor, not the greedy. What does the prevailing culture of the world teach about money?

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

How do I need to better love God?

How does my life need to be altered?

R: Respond to the Text

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
(John 3:16 ESV)

Look to Christ

Generosity is at the heart of the gospel. The Father gave his Son to be crucified, and the Son willingly gave his life in the place of sinners. This generosity, however, did not result in want. Instead, it multiplied the blessing and honor and glory of God into the lives of all Christ's followers. Jesus gave freely and grew all the richer. The Father exalted Jesus and enthroned him upon the praises of those purchased with his blood.

⁶ *The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."*

¹⁰ *He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴ while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵ Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift! (2 Corinthians 9:6-15 ESV)*

In this section of Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians, Paul was writing the church about a gift they had promised for the aid of the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Paul wanted to give the Corinthians a head's up as to when they would be coming to collect that gift. He sought to prepare them so that the church would not be humiliated and have to gather at the last minute by compelling people to give in order to save face. Paul and the Lord desired for them to give generously and cheerfully out of the overflow of their hearts. Cheerful giving reflects the image of Christ revealed in the gospels and creation, and helps one overcome the vice of greed. So, what makes a cheerful giver? How can one overcome the sin of greed and give with a laughable generosity? Here are three ways from this passage.

A cheerful giver focuses on the eternal reward.

When a believer gives to the ministry of the Kingdom, he is sowing seeds that will reap an eternal reward. In the end, the final harvest will be abundant and produce an increased joy for the disciple to the glory of Christ. False teachers have hijacked this principle to present a formulaic and manipulative view of how God operates with his people. These teachers teach that if you give to their ministry, then God will make you healthy, wealthy, and prosperous. However, this verse does not guarantee that God will make you richer in this life if you give more. Some might give and see their resources replenished to a more considerable measure than before, but this is not necessarily true for all people in this life. Such people, who experience a more significant replenishment in this life, experience a foretaste of the New Heaven and New Earth--a reality that will be experienced by all disciples. This foretaste, however, comes with great responsibility, for God replenishes so generosity and good works may abound even more, not greed.

Those who overcome greed by embodying the generous nature of Christ are able to look past this life and focus on the eternal harvest to be reaped at Christ's return. A cheerful giver's hope is not on money or possessions but on God, who richly provides everything for us. This shifting of hope from the temporary to the eternal allows one to lay hold of true life. They store up treasures where they will last forever, not on earth, where they will all pass away.

17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19 ESV)

What distracts you from thinking with an eternal perspective about money and giving?

As a group, list the ways you are distracted and discuss how to refocus those distractions.

“Once they are liberated from the magnet of pride, and once their hope is set on God, not money, there is only one thing that can happen: their money will flow freely to multiply the manifold ministries of Christ.”
– John Piper

A cheerful giver is moved by the all-sufficient grace of God to use their resources to abound in every good work.

“having all sufficiency in all things at all times” This is the result of God's grace in our lives. In every area, at every point in time, the grace of God revealed to us in the gospel is sufficient. This sufficiency found only in the grace of God releases us from the grip of greed and empowers us to give generously, using our resources to further the Kingdom of Christ.

Spend some time discussing how the grace of God moves believers to give generously:

- *What does it mean for the grace of God to be sufficient? (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9-10)*
- *In which areas of life or during which seasons is it most difficult to trust the sufficiency of God's grace?*
- *How can we overcome this lack of faith? Read 1 Cor. 9:9-11 and discuss what it is saying.*
- *How can your Life Group give generously to support the good works being done through MeadowBrook or one of her partners?*

A cheerful giver understands the gospel and is overcome with thanksgiving.

Simply put, a cheerful giver understands the profound generosity revealed to them in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their confession leads to their submission shown through their giving and overflowing attitude of thanksgiving toward God. One way to continually apply the gospel to your life is to give freely and to practice thanksgiving regularly.

How does the New Testament model of giving surpass the Old Testament model of the tithe?

Apply

- **Read what the Bible has to say about Heaven.** Look at Revelation 21-22 and what the major and minor prophets have to say about our eternal destination. Read a book on Heaven that examines the Scriptures' teaching. (I recommend Heaven by Randy Alcorn). Let this pursuit prompt you to meditate on eternity so that eternity, not the temporary, guide your decision making and living.
- **Plan to give.** Cheerful giving does not mean giving spontaneously, though it certainly can be that way at times. Paul wanted the Corinthians to have time to think about their giving. Planning your giving helps you to prayerfully and joyfully make the sacrifices needed and still provide for the needs of your family. This planning will lead to more joyful and more abundant giving than only giving spontaneously.
- **Make gratitude a daily practice.** Each morning, each meal, and each evening seek to make gratitude a part of your routine.

What actions do you need to do, or what goals do you need to set in order to aid you as you live out your new, pure identity in Christ?



**Don't stop now!
Make your pursuit
of renewal a daily
pursuit throughout
the years to come!**

Diligence

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 | February 23rd, 2020

Last week Randy discussed the sin of sluggishness, let's look at Proverbs 6:6-11 to see what the path of wisdom looks like in contrast to sluggishness:

- 6 *Go to the ant, you sluggard;
consider its ways and be wise!*
7 *It has no commander,
no overseer or ruler,
8 yet it stores its provisions in summer
and gathers its food at harvest.*
9 *How long will you lie there, you sluggard?
When will you get up from your sleep?*
10 *A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest—
11 and poverty will come on you like a thief
and scarcity like an armed man.*

Wisdom teaches that diligence leads to fruitfulness. How does the prevailing culture glorify laziness and tear down diligent work?

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-13, ESV)

H: Highlight

E: Explain the Text

What do we learn about God?

What do we learn about ourselves?

What is the good news of this text?

A: Apply the Text

How do I need to better love God?

How does my life need to be altered?

R: Respond to the Text

Look to Christ

Jesus is our model for diligently fulfilling all that God had given him, even to the point of death. The amount of suffering, exhaustion, pain, and heartache experienced by Jesus throughout his earthly ministry was great; however, the glory received and the joy of bringing others into eternal life was greater. To Jesus, the future reward far outweighed the present cost, leading him to endure the temptation to be lazy. As we will see reflected in Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13, diligence, not idleness, is the way of Christ.

What are the biggest enemies to Christlike diligence?

How did Jesus overcome those obstacles in his life?

Right before this passage, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to follow, obey, and seek after their faithful Lord. As we pursue God and his nature, our lives begin to resemble that of the one we seek. It's interesting that the verse right before Paul's exhortation against idleness or laziness, he says, May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ (2 Thess. 3:5). Because of God's love for us and the tenacity with which Christ lived, we should not tolerate idleness.

God so loved the world that he sent his only Son as a ransom for the debt we owed, and Jesus carried out his mission with diligence. In his careful obedience to the will of his Father, Christ endured much suffering and pain, never once slipping into idle ways. Therefore, as we are being transformed into the image of Christ, idleness begins to fade in our lives. The time is past for laziness, sluggishness, or idleness. This transformation affects our choices, our patterns, and who we allow to influence us, and we begin to grow in steadfastness.

However, we cannot do this on our own. Verse 3 says, But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. Do not let this lesson become a list of things you need to change to gain more of God's favor. Because of God's great love for us and his steadfastness, He will establish, and he will guard us against the evil one. He enables us to grow as we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. God's grace and diligence go hand in hand—all to the glory of God.

Keep away from the idle.

Paul urges the Thessalonians to keep away from any believer who lives in idleness. Someone who walks in idleness is not willing to put in the hard work, often meddling in other people's business rather than take care of their own. These are the busybodies. Paul conveyed this same message to the Galatians:

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:7-10)

This passage gives greater insight into why we should not associate with idle believers. Those who are idle are sowing to their flesh, and, as Scripture says, they will reap corruption. If we allow this person to be an influencer in our lives, then their idleness and their corruption will become our own. On the other hand, if our close friends are people who are sowing to the Spirit—meaning they seek after Christ, deny their flesh, and pursue holiness—then they will challenge us to fight the good fight and bring glory and honor to God with our lives.

Would you consider yourself a disciplined person? Are you lazy in your work? Do you meddle in the business of others?

Are you one who relies on the wealth or diligence of others to provide for your needs/wants out of laziness?

Evaluate your close friendships. Is there anyone in your circle of friends who would be considered idle or a meddler?

Christ came to serve, not to be served.

As we look to Christ as our chief example, we see that he came not to be served, but to serve. We read in Luke 4:38-44 how Jesus ministered to people throughout the night and into the morning. In his exhaustion, Jesus soon left that town and continued to minister wherever he went. He was able to fulfill all God had commanded him to do because he knew why God had sent him. Knowing his purpose empowered him to endure. In the gospel of John, we see Jesus choose to serve his disciples on the night of his arrest by washing their feet—even the feet of Judas, his betrayer.

Jesus disciplined himself and fulfilled every prophecy and every task with utter perfection. Whether you are at work or in the home or parenting your kids or studying for school or supporting your friends, do all things diligently for the glory of God. Strive for excellence. Leverage your downtime for the building up of the saints. Place the interests of others over your own interests. When you get home from work after a strenuous day, endure your exhaustion and invest in your family. When you feel like you're at the end of yourself and you want to give up, do not grow weary of doing good and continue to labor in the power of Christ as you look to his reward.

The church is meant to edify and build one another up.

We have been given spiritual gifts to serve the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-7), meet the needs of others (Acts 4:32-37), seek out the interest of others (Phil 2:3-4) and carry one another's burdens (Gal 6:2). If we are lazily taking advantage of others or meddling in their lives to avoid dealing with our sin, then we are not building up the body of Christ, nor are we representing Christ in an honoring way (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11-12). However, if we are diligent to work hard and mind our own affairs, we will honor the Lord by encouraging and building up the saints. Your hard work will result in you gaining the respect of the community.

¹² "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:12-13 ESV)



Are you still seeking to make healthy choices, develop your spiritual life, and live for the glory of God? 40 Days may end but the pursuit should not.

Apply

Spend time often in God's Word. Through the Scriptures, we learn of God's character, are convicted of sin, and are empowered by the Spirit to grow into the image of Christ. We must be diligent to regularly spend time in the word of God and develop an intimate relationship with our Creator.

Work diligently. Honor God in everything you do: working, managing the household, parenting, studying, playing sports, etc. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men (Col. 3:23)

Pray. When you're exhausted, pray to the God who upholds the universe and ask him to give you endurance and joy amid your exhaustion.

What actions do you need to do, or what goals do you need to set?



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