

THE
UNSHAKABLE
LIFE

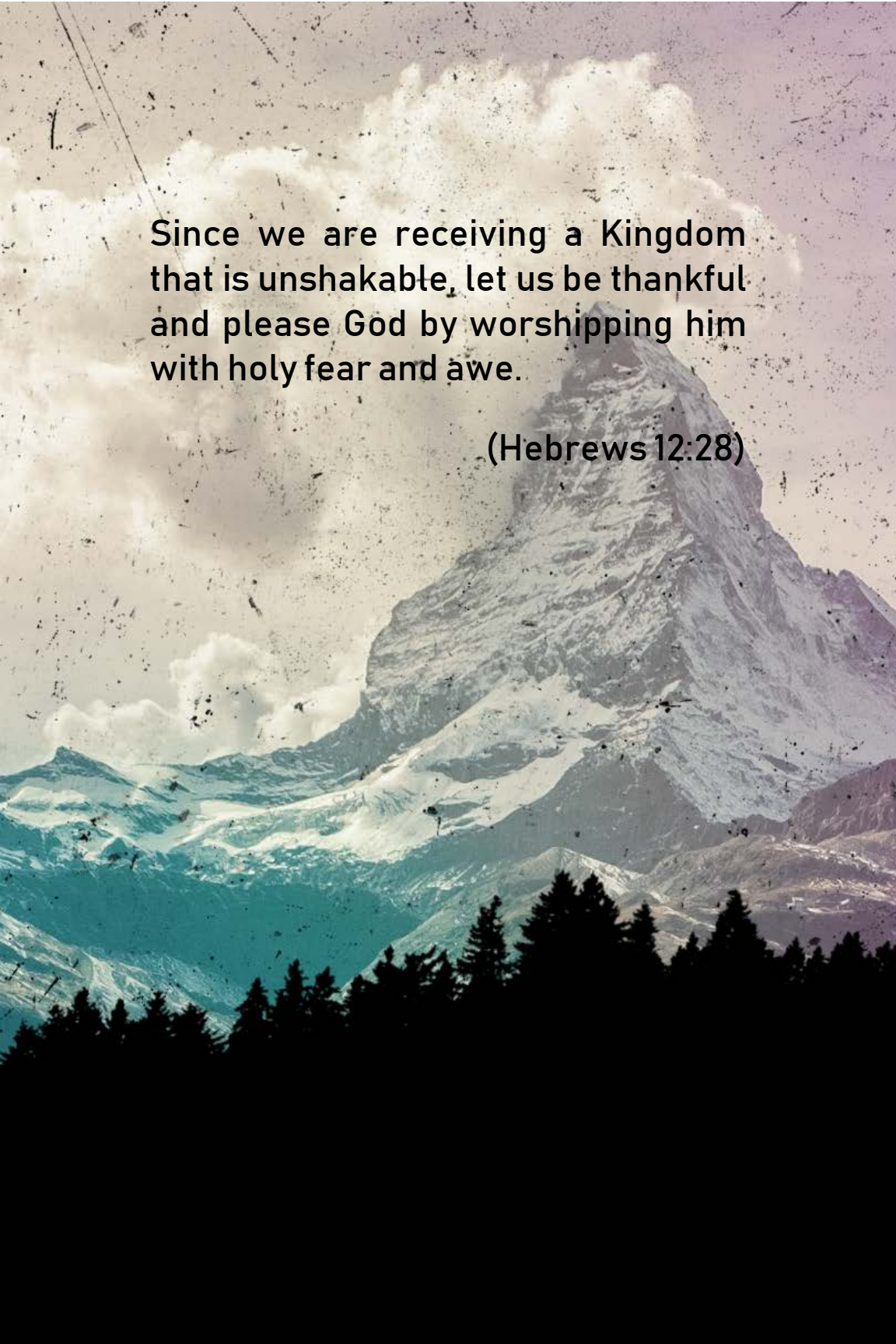
JAN 7TH - FEB 10TH
A Waite Park Church Focus Season

THIS BOOK BELONGS TO:

7



Waite Park
WESLEYAN CHURCH



Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshipping him with holy fear and awe.

(Hebrews 12:28)

YOUR GUIDE TO THE UNSHAKABLE LIFE

from Waite Park Church

During this upcoming five week season our church will be focused on developing the Christlike character that undergirds an unshakable life.

Sermon Notes: Use this portion of the booklet to take notes during the sermon. You can watch a livestream online at <http://www.waiteparkchurch.org/live-stream/> or use our sermon page or YouTube channel to stay caught up on messages.

Small Group Questions: Respond to each question before you meet so that you can be prepared to share when the time comes. In doing so, you won't be caught off guard and you'll be able to offer thoughtful responses.

Family Devotion: Take one night a week in which your family can share and reflect on what we're training for as a church. These are mostly geared towards young children but can still be useful for all.

Soul Training: We've created some weekly activities and daily devotions that correlate with the sermon. These provide an opportunity for you to put into practice what was preached about on Sunday. These are best read in the morning. Be sure to read the scripture reading from a Bible or app – it's usually longer than the selection provided.

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Week 1

Why Character Matters

In the Calvin and Hobbes comics, Calvin's father can often be found telling his son that certain things build character: eating food that tastes bad, shoveling snow, diarrhea, bug bites, camping, and learning to ride a bicycle.

As our culture seems to be increasingly polarized on ethical stances and moral choices it may cause us to shy away from conversations about character. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that he looked forward to the day when all Americans would be judged solely "by the content of their character." It doesn't look like that day is coming anytime soon.

Calvin's father seemed to be always on the lookout for opportunities to build Calvin's character. Maybe our Heavenly Father is too. Of course, (despite what Calvin's father would like to think) having diarrhea or getting eaten alive by mosquitos probably won't make you more like Jesus. But what is character? How do we build it? And perhaps the most pressing question for our culture today is: why should we care?

Join us this week as we explore these questions in our sermon, in our devotions, and in our small groups and start walking on the path of the Unshakable Life.

Character traits and definitions

- **Humility** – putting others first, thinking of yourself less, & having an accurate idea of yourself.
- **Truthfulness** - accurately representing your internal states, intentions, commitments, and past. In public and in private.
- **Love** – three types: romantic love, gracious love as in kindness and compassion, and familial affection.
- **Selflessness** - deferring your own wants and needs to the wants or needs of others.
- **Courage** - the ability to do the right thing in the face of fear, risk, and uncertainty.
- **Sober-mindedness** - not being unduly influenced by substances or falsehoods.
- **Self-control** - controlling your actions, impulses or emotions when tempted or facing difficulty.
- **Integrity** - acting the same in private or public, in different contexts or with different people.
- **Faithfulness** - remaining loyal to a promise or commitment or person, to be reliable.
- **Perseverance** - steadfastness in doing something over a long period of time despite difficulties.
- **Generosity** - the quality of being unattached to material possession to the degree that you give freely for the good of others.
- **Gentleness** - a compassionate approach toward other's weaknesses or limitations.

This list is not exhaustive. Most of the character traits listed here can be considered “building blocks” that other character traits might be composed of. For example, “responsible” might be considered a combination of self-control and integrity. We have also focused on moral character rather than traits like “appreciation of beauty” or “leadership.”

Week 1
01/07/18

SERMON NOTES

Why Character Matters

GROUP QUESTIONS

Why Character Matters

3. Read 2 Peter 1:1-11. What do you think Peter means when he writes, “By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life.” What exactly has God given us? What does “everything we need” specifically entail?
4. In your day-to-day life, do you find that you WANT to develop godly character? (Answer honestly). What do you anticipate will be difficult about this sermon series? What are you looking forward to about it?

FAMILY DEVOTION

Character Isn't Just Taught, It's Caught.

Read Proverbs 13:20

*Whoever spends time with wise people will become wise.
But whoever makes friends with fools will suffer.*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:33

Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character."

(We suggest the NIRV or the ICB or the NLT for young children)

The Bible teaches us that who we spend time with can shape us and make us wiser or make us more foolish. It can make us into good people or bad people. Our friends and the people we spend time with will affect how we behave, how we talk, how we listen, how we react, and even how we think. Talk about these questions as a family:

- 1) What is wisdom? How is wisdom different from knowledge?
- 2) Who do you know that is wise? Which of your friends and family members do you think is wise?
- 3) Who in your life would you like to be more like?
- 4) Who in your life should you spend more time with? Is there someone in your life that you should spend less time with?

Evaluate

Romans 12: 3

01/08/18

Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.

Step 1: Using the character trait list from page six, write down your top 3 character traits:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 2: Write down what you think are your three weakest character traits from the list:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 3: Send the list to two friends and ask them what they think are your three best character traits and your three weakest ones. Also ask them what character traits they think you have that didn't make the list.

Pray for a moment and ask God to be with you and the church as we embark on this 5-week FOCUS season and together seek to build unshakable lives.

It Was Grace That Taught 01/09/18

Read: Titus 2:11-14

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹²It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

It’s easy for us to think that God’s grace refers to forgiveness and sometimes when people confess to us we might say, “there’s grace for that” or when someone’s holding a grudge we might counsel them by saying, “show that person grace.”

But the scriptures don’t limit grace to forgiveness and salvation. Here Paul tells us that grace offers salvation AND it *teaches* us to live self-controlled godly lives and to say “no” to sin. And Paul specifies “in this present age” – in other words, we don’t have to wait until Heaven.

In this passage, Paul doesn’t separate “saving grace” from “sanctifying grace.” The same grace does both. If you’ve been forgiven, then God will also be teaching you to say “no” to sin.

Pray and ask God for one of the following:

- Awareness of sin
- Desire to be freed from sin
- Strength to be freed from sin
- An eagerness to do good

No Neutral Zone

Read Galatians 5:13-26

01/10/18

16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. *17* For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Paul says here (and elsewhere) that the Spirit and the flesh both have desires. Paul also says that we have a choice. Even though we're called to be free, we can still choose to gratify our sinful desires.

Perhaps the most challenging thing that Paul says is that "you are not to do whatever you want." Why? Because the Spirit and the flesh are in conflict with one another. They're opposed to one another. You can't please both. You can't gratify both. You can't have both! This is a civil war and you have to pick a side. There's no "bipartisan" stance, if you will.

Paul's answer to the dilemma is simple: Pick a side. I suggest you pick the side that will win. In order to do this though, you'll have to come to grips with the idea that you can't "do whatever you want." Which is in direct opposition to the wisdom of the world and the current thrust of our culture.

If you were to ask your closest friends to look at your life, which would they say you've chosen – to gratify your flesh or to gratify the Spirit?

Slaughter the Flesh

01/11/18

Read Galatians 5:24

²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

There was a youth event at my last church where students would write their sin on a sticky note and put the sticky note on a cross as a symbol of their confession and their desire to submit to Christ's will for their lives. Such tangible worship expressions aren't uncommon in the church. Sometimes we use actual nails or sometimes we write our names on a cross with a marker.

While helpful and often times sacred - these creative expressions of worship seem soft and mild compared to what scripture is really asking of us. An unshakable life isn't just one that avoids sin halfheartedly while pursuing God. Paul uses this term, "crucify" and it brings to mind intense pain and suffering. The Latin word for "crucifixion" is where we get the word "excruciating" from.

What would it look like to experience intense pain and suffering in our efforts to rid ourselves of sin, to build our Christlike character, and to live an unshakable life? Do you crucify your sinful desires? Or do you entertain them? Do you get as close as you can without crossing a line or going too deep? Do you give in too easily? Do you give up too early? Do you make excuses for why accountability and confession aren't taking place? Reflect on these questions in prayer with God.

Noble Character

01/12/18

Read Acts 17:1-15

¹¹ Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

In the early part of Acts 17 we see that there are a group of Jews who feel threatened by Paul's teaching, by the popularity of his message, and by having their faith challenged. When they're threatened, they resort to violence, lying, stirring up trouble, and ultimately by kicking Paul and his companions out of the city.

The Berean Jews on the other hand are said to be people of "noble character" because they listened and examined the scriptures daily to see if what Paul was saying was true.

Here's a quick litmus test for good character and an unshakable life. Do you listen to opposing views? Can you respect those who disagree with you? Are you someone who examines the scriptures daily in an effort to make your beliefs consistent with the Bible? Or do you have a tendency to complain, to stir up trouble, to stubbornly resist ideas that are new to you and to blindly cling to beliefs that you were raised with?

Pray: God, help me to be like the Berean Jews – to bring all my beliefs in line with your Word.

Just As We Are Hebrews 4:15

01/13/18

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

According to a Barna survey done in 2015: 92% of Americans believe that Jesus was a real person. 62% have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important to them today. 56% believe that Jesus was God. And only 31% of Americans believe that Jesus lived without sin.

This means there are some who believe that even though Jesus was God, he also sinned. Of course, if God himself can't avoid sin - how could we? It's true that instead of looking more like Jesus, it's easier to make Jesus look more like us.

What if we really believe that Jesus was real, that He was fully God and fully man, that He lived in and experienced our weakness, that He was tempted in every way *just as we are* and yet He did not sin? Jesus became a man not just to save us but also to show us how to become like God.

Pray: God, thank you that Jesus became just as we are, that He was weak just as we are, that He was tempted just as we are and thank you for his example and encouragement that we can live in obedience to you, just as we are.

Week 2

Humility

There's a story about George Washington that goes something like this: He was out riding horses with some friends when one of the horses knocked a few stones off a farmer's wall. Washington said, "we better replace them." But his friends protested, "Oh, let the farmer do it." When the riding party was over, Washington found the wall and carefully replaced each of the stones. Seeing this, his friend rode over and said, "You're too big to do that." Washington responded, "On the contrary, I'm just the right size." John Ortberg refers to humility as "appropriate smallness." Evidently Washington had it.

Benjamin Franklin had a list of 13 virtues that he committed to over his life. Humility was last on the list and contained this short description "Imitate Jesus."

We usually think of humility as something we're morally responsible to learn about and grow in. For those who have endeavored seriously to grow in humility – they find out that the rewards that come with it are better than the rewards that come with pride. Franklin said that he was more likeable, more teachable, more able to lead, more able to accept when he was wrong, and others were more receptive to his ideas when he was right. May we grow in humility and may we see every way that it enriches our lives and the lives of those around us. May we see the Unshakable Life it leads to.

Week 2
01/14/18

SERMON NOTES

Humility

3. Read Romans 12:1-8. Why does Paul begin this passage with “therefore, in view of God’s mercy...”?
4. How can you view yourself with “sober judgement” as Paul commands? How does serving in the church help with this process? What other things can we do to see ourselves clearly?
5. What kind of “mud” do you see when you look at yourself with sober judgment? What traits/habits/gifts reveal that you are God’s masterpiece?

FAMILY DEVOTION

Read Psalm 25:8-9

⁸The LORD is good and does what is right; he shows the proper path to those who go astray.⁹ He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way.

(We suggest the NIRV or the ICB or the NLT for young children)

The Bible tells us that God is good and always makes the best decisions. The Bible also tells us that even though we aren't always good and we don't always make the best decisions, God helps us. There's a lot that we can learn from this passage. We learn that God who is great, perfect, strong, and powerful wants to help those who are smaller than him. We learn that God loves us and wants what's best for us. And we also learn that God likes humble people. Humble people are people who are willing to learn, people who are willing to accept help, and people who can admit when they've made a bad choice. Talk about these questions as a family:

- 1) When was the last time you did something you shouldn't have done?
- 2) How can God help us make better decisions?
- 3) What are some ways that we can practice being humble?

Take a moment to pray about your responses as a family.

Weekly Soul Training Exercises

For Developing Humility

Choose one or two activities from this list to focus on this week. Choose activities that resonate with you and are doable based on your schedule.

1. Write down three things that you're thankful for every day.
2. Practice the Spiritual Discipline of Examen. Review your day every night with God. Think about every moment from morning till night. Ask forgiveness for the things you wish you'd done better and offer thanks for every blessing you identify.
3. Ask for help. It's likely that there are things on your "to do list" that won't get done unless you ask for help. When we ask for help we recognize the value and dignity of other people. When we ask for help we confess our need for community.
4. Practice Secrecy. Serve people in secret. Don't tell anyone when you do something well or perform well. Resist boasting and showing off. Let your work speak for itself. Take notice of others when they do well and show off the accomplishments of others.
5. Practice Listening. Notice if you're speaking more than others. Don't try to formulate your best response and don't simply wait your turn to speak but really listen and value the opinions and the voice of others.

It's Your Fault

01/15/18

Read James 4:1-12

² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight....

Pastor Andy Stanley preached on this passage once and he had one main point: Anytime you're upset it's because you're not getting what you want.

At the heart of any conflict is the fact that something isn't going your way. If you can pause at any point while you're upset and say out loud, "I'm not getting what I want and that's why I'm upset" it will dissipate your anger. It takes humility to admit when we're at fault even if we're only taking 10% of the blame. It takes humility to recognize that it takes two to tango.

The next time you're in an argument – over something silly or something serious, the next time you're experiencing conflict pause and say to yourself, "I'm upset because I'm not getting what I want." Take a moment to take some responsibility and see how that exercise of humility changes your point of view.

Notice just how many times this week your conflicts can boil down to one simple truth: I'm upset because I'm not getting what I want. Keep a mental list this week of how often that's true.

Pride Kills

01/16/18

Read Proverbs 16:18

⁸Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Sometimes to be funny someone will say “pride comes before the fall” if someone gets hurt while they’re trying to show off. Other times people will say, “pride comes before the fall” as a superstition that too much bragging will lead to bad luck.

The truth of this statement is both more simple and more profound than that. Pride makes us overconfident, makes us take unnecessary risk, makes us too stubborn and too fixated on ourselves. Pride makes us unwilling to change our minds, to admit when we’re wrong, and to take a break when we need rest. Pride makes us unwilling to ask for help and it makes us take other people for granted. That’s a recipe for destruction. Pride doesn’t just precede destruction, it causes it.

Again we see that being humble isn’t just a moral obligation – it’s advantageous to living a full and abundant life.

Ask God: Will you help me to truly believe in the value of humility? Help me to not see humility as a loss but as a gain. Not a burden but a blessing. Help me to practice humility this week and to endeavor to grow in humility for the rest of my life. I admit that I need your help, your grace, and your wisdom in this effort.

Unworthy

01/17/18

Read Luke 17:7-10

¹⁰So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty."

Christianity asks us to hold a lot in tension. It's why I like C.S. Lewis' summary of what it means to be a man. He once put it this way, "You are a son of Adam and that is honor enough to lift the head of the poorest beggar and shame enough to bow the head of the greatest emperor on earth."

Angels rejoice when we come to know Jesus. God knit us together in our mother's womb and He numbers the hairs on our head. The fact of the matter is, we're not worthy of any of it. Jesus took on flesh and died for you and considered you to be worth it. Yet our response is to be, "I'm unworthy."

God chooses to love us – not because we're irresistible and loveable but because He is Love.

Spiritual works, sacrifices, Christian duty, obedience, evangelism, missions, serving... we don't get to pat ourselves on the back and say, "look at all I'm accomplishing for God, where would He be without me?"

Perhaps the biggest question here is a simple one: When's the last time you truly considered it an honor to serve God? When's the last time you actually felt unworthy? Pray for this heart change.

Less is More

01/18/18

Read John 3:22-36

³⁰He must become greater; I must become less.

John the Baptist was born under unusual circumstances. His mom was well past child bearing years. His father was struck mute while serving as a priest in God's temple during the pregnancy. When John is born, the neighbors are filled with awe and Luke tells us "Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him."

As John grew up he ate locusts and honey and lived in the wilderness. Large crowds came to see him and to be baptized by him. He had amassed a fairly large following and even had his own disciples. To this day, there is still a small cult in the Middle East that worships John the Baptist.

All this to say, he was a really big deal. Being a really big deal isn't something we let go of easily but John always knew his life wasn't his and he always knew the purpose of his life wasn't self-preservation or self-exaltation. John came to point others to Jesus. And he was quick to say, "He must become greater; I must become less."

Ask yourself: Am I humble enough to recognize that my life is all about pointing people to Jesus? How would I live differently if I truly believed that? Am I quick to give God credit or do I often want the glory for ourselves?

Disguising Pride

Read Colossians 2:16-23

01/19/18

18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you.

Paul is speaking about a specific context that we aren't familiar with and it makes it difficult for us to fully grasp this passage of scripture. Yet we can wrap our minds around false humility. Paul hints at its meaning and we've seen it in our own time.

Paul seems to be talking about people who enforce and follow strict religious practices in order to appear more spiritual. He also hints at religious practice which seems to excessively seek after mystical spiritual experiences. Paul says such people have lost connection with Christ and are unable to grow (v.19).

Here's the thing: Practicing humility and taking on a humble posture or humble attitude will only help you grow in humility if your heart is in it. It's possible to appear humble but never grow in humility. Heart is what makes the difference between practice and pretense.

Appearing humble in order to be admired by others is still pride.

Pray: God, help me to be clothed with humility but not disguised. Help me to genuinely want humility instead of the admiration that may come with it. Point out in me my false humility.

Humble Prayers

01/20/18

Read 1 Kings 8:22-53

³⁰May you hear the humble and earnest requests from me and your people Israel when we pray toward this place. Yes, hear us from heaven where you live, and when you hear, forgive.

When Solomon finishes building God's temple he offers a beautiful and detailed prayer of dedication. You can see the humility in Solomon's prayer even at the start. He recognizes that there is no one like God. He recognizes that nothing can contain God, not the highest heavens, and certainly not the temple made by man. But he prays, nevertheless, that God would hear him.

How do my prayers start out? Not like that. As a matter of fact, I have often caught myself telling God what to do. "God, bless me today. God, help my friend with this concern. God, do this and this and this and this. In Jesus' name, amen."

Asking God for help is humility and it may sound exactly like telling God what to do: "God, help me to serve my spouse well today." So again we see the importance of our intent. Am I asking God for help from a place of humility and earnestness or am I telling God my list of things I need him to do today? Is He my Almighty Father or is he my cosmic butler?

Pay attention to your prayers – your words *and* your attitude. Practice a humble prayer now.

Week 3

Self-Control

Self-control gets a bad rap in some Christian circles. We're afraid of doing too much "out of our own strength" and self-control can feel a lot like "human effort." So, we end up wondering... if it feels too hard then are we doing something wrong?

Not to mention, it's just unpopular to talk about. Self-control usually means sacrifice, discipline, submission, and not partaking in the things we enjoy. That's not a positive notion for most of America.

The word itself even reveals a particular worldview. Are we willing to accept that our "self" has thoughts, desires, and inclinations that need to be controlled? Are we ready to admit that there are parts of us that ought not be listened to? If so, can we take it a step further and commit to developing self-control? It's one thing to recognize a need for it and a whole other thing for us to respond accordingly.

Jesus once cautioned that if our right eye were to cause us to sin, we should be willing to gouge it out. He reasoned that it'd be better to enter Heaven with one eye than to lose our whole body to Hell.

For Jesus, self-control is right, it's necessary, and it's worth the fight.

Do we feel the same?

Week 3
01/21/18

SERMON NOTES

Self-Control

GROUP QUESTIONS

Self-Control

3. Read 2 Timothy 1:6-14. What does verses 6-7 tell us about self-discipline? How do you think we can “fan into flame” the gift of self-discipline?

4. Look at the list below – in which of these areas do you need to “fan into flames” the gift of self-control? How will you do it?

Speech, sexual sin, pornography, internet use, social media, eating, alcohol, anger, retaliation, jealousy, selfish comforts, imagination, desires, the past, missed opportunities, worries, concerns, fears.

FAMILY DEVOTION

Read Proverbs 16:32

(We suggest the NIRV or the ICB or the NLT for young children)

*³²Better to be patient than powerful;
better to have self-control than to conquer a city.*

What good is strength and power if you can't control it?
How strong are you if you can't even control yourself?

Here's a great principle for life:
Short term gain, long term pain.
Short term pain, long term gain.

When we make decisions based on what we're able to gain in the moment, we often end up hurting ourselves. On the other hand, when we make decisions based on what's best for us in the long run, we often have to be willing to lose out in the short term. Think of things like doing your homework, going to bed on time, and brushing your teeth. All of these things require us to experience some short term loss but they mean we'll be much better off in the future. This kind of strength is better than superpowers. Talk about these questions as a family:

1. What's one superpower you wish you could have?
2. Can you think of a time when you were willing to experience short term pain for the sake of long term gain?

Weekly Soul Training Exercises

For Developing Self-Control

Choose one or two activities from this list to focus on this week. Choose activities that resonate with you and are doable based on your schedule.

1. Identify an area of your life where you struggle with practicing self-control (speech, diet, sexual sin, finances, social media) and fast from that sin/gratification this week.
2. Create specific but achievable goals for the week. Be intentional about what you want to accomplish this week.
3. Self-Monitor. Pick an area of your life that you need self-control in and monitor it. Create a food diary, a spending diary, a critical speech diary, or even a swear jar.
4. Avoid, Avoid, Avoid. Self-Control takes willpower and although we can grow our supply of willpower, it's nonetheless a limited supply. If we want to be self-controlled then we need to take away temptations so that our willpower isn't depleted by Noon. Delete apps on your phone, don't keep junk food in the house, go to sleep on time, etc. Find a way to limit your temptations and keep your willpower reserves high.

Exercise every day. Short exercise increases energy, brain function, and mood. When your body is disciplined, your mind is too. Physical exercise translates into holistic self-control.

Fruit not Futility

01/22/18

Read Galatians 5

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Some people are quick to think that self-control is a work of the flesh and that all works of the flesh are futile.

If we do appreciate the value of self-control then it's often seen as something we do in addition to spiritual work. When Nehemiah wanted to protect his people he prayed and he posted a guard. He did both a spiritual work and a physical work. But Paul here says self-control *is* the Spirit's work. So self-control isn't opposed to the Spirit, nor is it something in addition to the Spirit but rather it's a work from the Spirit.

Bottom line: We need to lose the notion that self-control is in anyway bad, humanistic, or offensive to God. Just like love, joy, and peace, self-control is from God and honors God. This means that self-control is a spiritual exercise. It's an act of worship and it's a time for us to ask for God's help to empower us.

Pray: God, help me to turn to you for strength during times when I'm exercising self-control. And help me to see self-control as something that comes from your hand and is pleasing to you.

Blood, Sweat, and Prayers 01/23/18

Read Hebrews 12:1-11

⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

When you read this verse in context it appears that Paul is talking about persecution. The Christians that he is writing to haven't struggled against the sin of the world to the point that they're undergoing extreme physical suffering.

It didn't take long though for Christians to read and understand a second allusion. You see, it could be that Paul is referring to Christ's time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. As Jesus prayed for God's will to be done, he sweat drops of blood. In more ways than one Jesus resisted sin to the point of shedding his blood.

How would you describe your struggle against sin? Have you ever resisted temptation to the point of crying out in prayer? How often do we truly *struggle* against sin? How many of us throw in the towel too soon and succumb to temptation without putting up much of a fight?

Pray that God would help you increase your desire for holiness and that He would supply you with the inner strength to struggle against sin to the point of shedding your blood (if it ever needed to come to that).

Walls, Not Bars

01/24/18

Read Proverbs 25:28

²⁸Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.

It's good to be vulnerable - when it comes to relationships but *not* when it comes to sin. Proverbs says that a person who lacks self-control is a city whose walls are broken *through* (not just broken but broken *through*). In other words - a lack of self-control means we've already lost the siege. We're under attack and there's nothing we can do but accept our fate. We're at the mercy of whatever comes our way.

Sometimes we think of self-control as prison bars, keeping us from doing the things we want to do. Proverbs teaches us that self-control isn't the iron bars of a prison but in reality self-control is the powerful wall of a city protecting what's precious and preventing hostile forces from pillaging, plundering, and enslaving.

Ultimately it's the high wall of self-control that preserves our freedom (rather than restricting it). Those who are wise, who value their freedom, who value their life, and who are soberly aware of the dangers of sin will learn to develop and embrace self-control.

Ask God to give you the right perspective on the relationship between self-control and freedom.

Bear it, Endure it

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

01/25/18

13 No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

This passage is straightforward and clear cut. There's no avoiding or confusing what's being said here.

You're a human and everything you're tempted by is something that someone else has been tempted by. Do not think that your temptations are extraordinary. They are ordinary. Do not think that you cannot bear it. You can. Do not think that you cannot endure it, you are told to. And God is there supplying all the help you need.

So we are without excuse. We are accountable for every sin, every failure of conscience, every moment of moral weakness. It wasn't that we were too tired, too unaware, too stressed, too swept up in the moment, or too distracted. Through God, you always have everything you need to overcome any temptation that comes your way.

Pray: Heavenly Father, help me to have an awareness of your grace for every temptation. Help me to not make excuses, to not give in, and to use everything at my disposal in pursuit of a righteous, self-controlled life.

Agonizomai

Read Luke 13:22-30

01/26/18

²⁴Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

Some translations use the phrase “strive” some use “make every effort” and some use “keep on struggling.” The word is: “Agonizomai” and if you think you can spot the word, “agonize” you’d be right. This isn’t the only time Jesus will say something like this. In another place He will tell a group of would-be followers to work for good that endures to eternal life rather than food that spoils.

For Jesus, the spiritual life (the Christian life) will be difficult at times. It will require work and it will require struggle. But this isn’t a discouragement! It isn’t always struggle and it’s not always difficult but it is always worth it.

If you find that Christianity is hard for you, it’s not a sign that you’re doing something wrong. There’s a good chance that you’re doing something right. And if you find that Christianity has never been difficult, never been inconvenient, and never been a “struggle” then chances are it’s not Christ that you’re following.

Contemplate with God: What has been a point of struggle for my faith in the past? What is currently an area of struggle for me? Will you help me to Agonizomai my way to Heaven?

Mind Control

01/27/18

Read Philippians 4:8-9

⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

When we think of self-control, when we think of over-indulgence, when we think of gratification we often think of actions. Theologians debate at which point Adam and Eve sinned – was it when they were attracted to the fruit? Was it when they thought about eating the fruit? Was it when they decided to eat the fruit? Or was it when they ate the fruit?

Regardless of where you land on that debate – one thing is true – we’re in control of more than just our actions and we’re held accountable for more than just our actions.

If you’re taking this week seriously then perhaps you’re feeling that this is hard. It is. It’s tiring. Sometimes it’s exhausting. Keep this in mind though – it’s not about trying and failing. It’s about training. The more you practice self-control, the more of it you’ll have. The more you have, the easier it will become. Do not grow weary in doing good. Ask God for the diligence and the energy to guard your heart and mind. Ask for encouragement for the days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

Week 4

COURAGE

Secular author Evan Currie once wrote that: "The difference between courage and stupidity is measured by success and survival."

We've all heard a similar platitude that goes something like: "There's a fine line between courage and stupidity." What if that's wrong? What if there's an enormous gulf between the two? Are we too quick to accept this cliché? What if courage is a valuable and essential character trait that can be honed and ought to be easily differentiated from stupidity?

The Creator of the Universe repeatedly told Joshua "Be Strong and courageous." And it was a phrase that was learned and passed down. Joshua said it to the Israelites. The Psalmist says it to God's worshippers. King David said it to his son Solomon. David's nephew Joab said it to the army he commanded. King Hezekiah said it to his people in the midst of threats from Assyria. Paul said it to the Corinthian Church.

Imagine if the phrase had been, "Be strong and stupid." It's hard to imagine that such a battle cry would've had the same impact and would've been passed down from generation to generation. There must be a world of difference between stupidity and courage and the more we explore it, the more we'll be able to cultivate a Christ-like character and live out an Unshakable Life.

Week 4
01/28/18

SERMON NOTES

Courage

FAMILY DEVOTION

Read Psalm 31:24

*So be strong and courageous,
all you who put your hope in the Lord!*

(We suggest the NIRV or the ICB or the NLT for young children)

Isn't it interesting that we're commanded to be strong and courageous? Most people think that courage and strength are something that we're born with: either we have it, or we don't. Over and over again the Bible teaches that inner strength and courage are a choice. In other words, we can choose to be brave. Here we're told that whoever puts their hope God should act with bravery.

What does it mean to put our hope in God? It means to make God our friend, our ally, and our leader. When we put our hope in God we're saying that we want what God wants. When we put our hope in God, we're trusting that God's way is the best way. Everyone who does this ought to be brave because you're on the winning side – God's side AND because following God often takes courage.

- 1) What are you afraid of? When in your life have you had to be brave?
- 2) What are some things we can do to be brave when we're scared or worried?
- 3) When does following God take courage?

Weekly Soul Training Exercises

For Developing Courage

Choose one or two activities from this list to focus on this week. Choose activities that resonate with you and are doable based on your schedule.

1. Identify someone from the history of Christianity that displayed great courage and read their biographies. Study their lives. (Hudson Taylor, MLK Jr, Corrie Ten Boom).
2. Practice small acts of courage. Face your smaller fears as they come in preparation for bigger troubles.
3. Take hold of your thought life. Remind yourself, whenever fearful or anxious thoughts creep in, that when God is with you, nothing can stand against you.
4. Honor your own courageous stories. Don't downplay past acts of courage by saying, "I just did what anyone would have done." Recognize bravery when it happens.
5. Practice assertive grace. Pursue reconciliation in a relationship that is hurt. Be quick to ask for forgiveness, to take ownership for your part in the conflict, and be quick to show love. Allow yourself to be vulnerable and take risks.

Lions Aren't Paranoid

01/29/18

Read Proverbs 28:1

¹The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Why do the wicked flee? When we wrong people, when we cheat, when we lie, when we look out for our own interests at the expense of everyone else we become fearful for three reasons:

1. We suspect that we've made enemies and that people will come looking for revenge. We're afraid that our sin will be found out.
2. We become suspicious of others. It's hard for people who put themselves first to imagine that everyone else isn't doing the same. If we know we'd cheat and lie and steal and hurt others – we expect that everyone else will do the same.
3. We don't have the comfort of being on the side of God and we often feel very alone.

Righteousness has the opposite effect. We make friends more quickly, we become less suspicious of others, and we know that no matter what – God is for us, so who can be against us? God is at the top of the food chain. While the wicked might seem dangerous, it's the righteous who have security and peace – not because we're strong and worthy to be feared but because God is.

Pray: God, is there sin in my life that causes me to be paranoid? Help me to be righteous and bold.

A King's BBQ

Read Daniel 3:1-18

01/30/18

17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us... *18* But even if he doesn't... we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were given a clear choice: worship the king as god or be burned alive. For them, the right choice seemed clear – being burned alive was the lesser consequence.

There are three things about courage that we learn right away from this passage.

Courageous people (1) dare to hope for the best (2) are willing to face the worst, (3) and value God above all else.

Daring to hope for the best takes vulnerability and voicing those hopes can often make us look foolish. Yet it's a sign of courageous faith. But courage isn't about ignoring the possibility of pain, loss, suffering, etc. Shadrach and his friends knew that God might not show up and they accepted that possibility. Underlying their courage was a love, trust, and zeal for God that allowed them to be fully surrendered.

Pray: God, help me to love you more. Help me to trust you more. Help me to be so in love with you that I value you more than my very breath. Give me the courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Weak Bodybuilder

01/31/18

Read Proverbs 24:10

¹⁰If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.

This short proverb packs a punch. It doesn't matter how strong you are or how much power you have if you fail to stand your ground when trouble comes. This is true in every facet of life – not just our physical strength. Strength then, doesn't depend on how much you have but whether or not you use it when it matters.

This principle rings true for every Christian. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is in you and yet that power doesn't amount to anything if you aren't willing to exercise it in the face of hardship or suffering or temptation. Christians have supernatural power but it doesn't matter if they never put it to use. Power to pray, power to share the gospel, power to transform lives, power to overcome sin, power to trust in God, power to be content no matter our context, power to patiently endure adversity, power to wage war with Satan, power to influence and encourage and strengthen and reconcile. The list goes on and on and on.

Here's the question: Will you be ready to act courageously? None of us knows what tomorrow will bring but we can each decide today how we're going to face it.

Fishy Boldness

02/01/18

Read Acts 4:1-22

¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.

Peter and John spoke with power, conviction, and boldness. Where did this come from? These were common people - uneducated fisherman. Who talks like that?

Peter and John weren't blowing smoke. They didn't have a halfhearted mission. They weren't trying to con people into believing in a fictitious person. They weren't thoroughly trained in religious studies, debate, and apologetics. No, they spoke like people who were truly convinced of what they had seen, heard, and experienced. Notice that it's not the healing that catches people off guard but rather, it's the boldness of Peter and John and it's the words they speak.

We too have spent time with the risen Christ and the longer we spend time with Him the more we can speak about his goodness, his work, his faithfulness, his provision, his love, and his power.

Pray: God, help me to be courageous and to speak the truth with boldness in a way that astonishes people and causes them to recognize that I have been with you.

Sheepish

Read Psalm 23

02/02/18

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Shepherds used to (and some still do today) use two sticks to care for their sheep. One was a longer and lighter staff with a curved end that was used for guiding the sheep and extracting the sheep from dangerous situations. This thinner staff with a curved end would've broken too easily if used against predators.

The other stick was a shorter and heavier rod that was used for protecting the sheep from predators and disciplining the sheep when they misbehaved.

David says that even though he's walking in darkness and potentially in life threatening danger, he fears nothing. Why? Because God is with him – his rod and staff bring David comfort.

Courage comes from knowing that God is with us and recognizing that he protects us from ourselves as well as from others. God cares for you with his rod by protecting you and disciplining you and He cares for you with his staff by leading and guiding and rescuing you.

Pray: God, thank you for your rod and staff. Thank you for loving me, for caring for me, and for shepherding me. Help me to trust you more.

Not Born This Way Ephesians 6:18-20

02/03/18

19 And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike... So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.

It's easy to imagine that things came naturally for Paul and other believers in the New Testament. Paul was an enormous force for the early church yet it's not uncommon for Paul to ask for prayer.

All of us have desires, all of us have an instinct for self-preservation, and all of us are made for community. This means that boldness doesn't come naturally. Courage is something that must be instilled, nurtured, and built up. Paul didn't rely on his personality or even on his ability to muster his willpower instead he asked for God's power to be at work in him.

How often do we as Christians ask God for a boldness to share our faith? Seriously, how many times have you prayed that prayer this week or this month or this year? How many times have you presented that as a prayer request to others?

It's not too late to start. God, help me to be courageous and to share the Good News with others. Give me opportunities this week and help me to trust in you for the words to say.

Week 5

Faithfulness

Faithfulness is a composite trait – it's the mixture of many traits summed up into one. Faithfulness happens when we have self-control, humility, love, perseverance, and integrity working all at once.

Faithfulness is also deeply relational. While you might be able to find a courageous, self-controlled, and humble hermit – it takes community for faithfulness to be practiced and tested.

The Holman Bible Dictionary defines faithfulness this way: "The faithful person is steadfast, unchanging, and thoroughly grounded in relation to the other. This sort of fidelity, or faithfulness, is used (in Scripture) ... to describe the quality of relationship that Israel and Christians are called upon to have with God and with one another."

Proverbs 20:6 reminds us: "Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?"

Someone once said that "Faithfulness is something we want other people to have." Faithfulness requires sacrifice and so it's easy to expect it from others but to find reason, in the moment, to excuse ourselves from it and justify what we know to be sin.

When Jesus calls us to be salt and light, he's calling us to be a consistent and dependable force for good. He's calling us to a life of faithfulness. Are we willing to do what it takes?

Week 5
02/04/18

SERMON NOTES

Faithfulness

FAMILY DEVOTION

Read Psalm 119:34-36

³⁴ Help me understand, so I can obey your teachings.

I will obey them with all my heart.

³⁵ Help me obey your commands

because that makes me happy.

³⁶ Help me want to obey your rules

instead of selfishly wanting riches.

(We suggest the NIRV or the ICB or the NLT for young children)

Jesus once said, “If you love me, you will obey me.” For God, the most loving thing we can do is follow His instructions and desires. The Bible also says that following God’s commands will make us happy. God doesn’t just want us to obey rules for the sake of having rules – God knows what’s best for us and wants what’s best for us so He gives us rules that are for our own good.

- 1) What are some difficult rules that God has?
- 2) What does it mean to obey with our hearts?
- 3) How can rules make us happy?
- 4) What can we do to better understand and follow God’s rules?

Weekly Soul Training Exercises

For Developing Faithfulness

Choose one or two categories to focus on this week:

1. Faithful Employee. Jesus says that those who are faithful with little will be faithful with much. The workplace is a great place to practice everyday faithfulness. Show up to work on time, don't get distracted, keep your breaks to a minimum, don't get on your phone, and don't get on social media, be faithful in the small moments.
2. Faithful Spouse. Pray for your spouse daily. Respect your spouse in word and deed in public and in private. Be faithful emotionally, mentally, and physically. Honor your housework and family management commitments. Look for opportunities to act with love. Do something romantic. Hold marriage and your spouse in high regard.
3. Faithful friend. Don't cancel plans. Confide in someone. Keep a secret. Never gossip. Never slander. Never enjoy someone's misfortune. Choose a friend or two to pray daily for. Seek reconciliation with someone who you have hurt or who has hurt you.

Faithful parent. Don't yell, putdown, or physically overpower your kids. Find healthy ways to disperse your anger/frustration/annoyance. Keep your promises. Be consistent with discipline. Don't be dismissive of your child's wants – listen attentively. Apologize whenever you fall short. Pray with and for your children every day.

Never Too Late

Read 1 Samuel 12

02/05/18

²⁴But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.

The Israelites have rejected God as their king and have asked for an earthly king (so that they can be like the other nations). God has consented and their prophet Samuel informs them of their evil hearts, their poor judgment, and their sinful decision.

Yet neither God nor Samuel have given up on the Israelites. Samuel encourages them to be faithful. HE vows to pray for them and to continue to teach them. And his advice is clear: Fear God, serve God, be wholehearted, and remember God's works.

That's the thing about faithfulness... it's a holistic activity. It's not just about outward obedience but it also engages our attitudes, our thoughts, and our feelings. AND it's never too late to start. Samuel is addressing a nation that has failed to be faithful, that has a long track record of not being faithful, and yet he doesn't think it's beyond them.

Pray this: God, help me to be faithful to you not just in action but also with my heart. May my love for you be genuine. May my faith be real. May my heart be fully engaged this week as I seek to develop faithfulness in my character. May your Holy Spirit empower me to do so.

Can't Trust This

Proverbs 3:5

02/06/18

⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

The world's wisdom would encourage you to trust your instincts, go with your gut, and never second guess yourself. The issue, of course, is that we get things wrong. We've all be wrong and done wrong. In order to be faithful we need something outside of ourselves to guide ourselves. We need a visible and unchanging reference point.

Pilots sometimes suffer from spatial disorientation which happens if they lose their reference point (the horizon). In order to know whether they're flying towards the sky or towards the ground, they need a reference point. So every aircraft is equipped with an artificial horizon indicator. Shockingly, some pilots claim to have found themselves to unknowingly be flying upside down. Some pilots have flown themselves into the ground when their artificial horizon stops working and all they have is their senses.

Faithfulness means allowing God to be our reference point. Allowing God to dictate whether we're going the right way or the wrong way. Faithfulness requires us to stop trusting ourselves and start trusting God.

Pray: God, help me to trust in you even when I don't understand. You alone know the way.

Prove It

02/07/18

Read Luke 16:1-15

¹⁰ "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹ So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?"

We often allow ourselves small sins and small acts of disobedience based on their smallness. It's easy to forget the seriousness of sin, the great price that was paid for our sin, and God's love for holiness. We get distracted, grow complacent, or we simply forget how perfect God is and wants us to be.

Jesus' parable in this passage has three straightforward principles:

- Use money for the sake of God's kingdom
- Show yourself to be trustworthy with your time and resources on earth so that when eternity comes you can receive even more.
- Your little sins reveal a lot about you and what you're capable of.

We see the role that faithfulness plays in our faith in each of these principles.

Pray: God help me to be faithful with my money, faithful with all that I'm entrusted with, and help me to be faithful in small acts of obedience. Please give me grace that my desire for holiness might grow and that I would continue to develop faithfulness in character.

Old Testament iPad Proverbs 3:3

02/08/18

³Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.

Words like these from Deuteronomy 6 caused some Jews to wear phylacteries – leather boxes containing scripture passages on parchment paper would be tied to the forehead and left arm. At one point Jesus even criticizes the Pharisees for making their scripture boxes extra wide in order to be seen by others.

The purpose was simple – to remember God’s law and to serve God in all that they think, feel, and do.

Jesus doesn’t criticize the Pharisees for this practice but simply for the wrong motive they had in doing this. Proverbs 3:3 teaches us that faithfulness requires daily reminders. This is significant. As the song goes, we’re “prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.” We’re also very physical beings and while proverbs is clearly using figurative language, the idea remains the same – we need daily reminders.

How can you encourage yourself daily to be faithful and pursue holiness? Can you pray each morning as your day starts? Write a passage of scripture on your mirror? Put a sticky note on your dashboard? Add a scripture passage wallpaper to your phone? Think of a practical way that works for you.

Prove It

02/09/18

Read Hebrews 12:1-19

¹³But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

The writer of Hebrews encourages the church to "see to it" that none of them would have a sinful heart that turns away from God. To prevent this, he says, "encourage one another daily." Why? Because sin's deceitfulness can harden our hearts without daily encouragement from one another.

So far we've learned that it's never too late for us to pursue faithfulness, that we can't trust ourselves to decide what true faithfulness is, that faithfulness requires attention to detail, and that faithfulness needs daily reminders. Here we learn that faithfulness can only be achieved with the help of community.

Not only do we need to be faithful to God and to one another but we also need God's help and help from one another in order to be faithful. This begs the question... Do you have people that can speak to you this way? Do you speak to others this way? Are you actively pursuing and cultivating genuine godly relationships that produce faithfulness?

Who are your people? Pray for them now. Who could be your people? Pray for those possible relationships now. Who do you need to encourage? Do so now.

Until The End of Time

02/10/18

Revelation 14:12

¹² This means that God's holy people must endure persecution patiently, obeying his commands and maintaining their faith in Jesus.

When God begins to set in motion his plan to create a special people set apart for Him – the Bride of Christ, God covenants with Abraham and tells him about the countless descendants He will give him. God asks Abraham, during this moment, in Genesis 17 to serve Him faithfully and live a blameless life. When we get to the end of the Bible in Revelation we see that this “faithfulness” is still a priority for the Bride of Christ.

From beginning to end God's people are asked to be faithful. Here we see that faithfulness requires three things:

1. Longsuffering (patient endurance in the face of suffering)
2. Obedience to Christ's commands.
3. Faith in Jesus

Lifelong faith isn't a guarantee. There are many who start out strong but do not finish or do not finish well. We must never take our faith for granted, assume that we can coast, or allow ourselves to grow complacent. As we've said before when other Focus seasons end – this can't be the end but has to be the beginning. Pray for Waite Park Church – that we would each continue to pursue and live out an Unshakable Life.





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