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TRAINING MEMBERS AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
OF NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS, IN THE USE OF SPIRITUAL
DISCIPLINES FOR THE MORTIFICATION
OF PERSISTENT SIN

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To my wife, who has carried an unfair share of the family burden
while I have worked on this labor of love.

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PREFACE

This project began as an academic pursuit. My goal was to collect information, add organization, and then layout a presentation that could communicate the biblical data and life-application principles to others. However, something changed in the research and development stage. The books I read to begin my inquiry challenged me in unexpected ways. The writings of John Owen brought personal conviction and challenged me to not only study the mortification of sin but to do it. Going back through Donald Whitney's books on spiritual disciplines put the spotlight on my daily investment in spiritual growth. The study of the Puritans' devotion to the *means of grace* changed what I understood to be the *normal Christian life*, and a deeper study of specific Bible passages opened my eyes to a partnership with the Holy Spirit for the work of sanctification that I did not fully understand before. The dual truth of Romans 6 that I am dead to sin because I have been crucified with Christ, and that I have a responsibility to not let sin reign in me as a believer, confused me, but then it challenged me, and then it comforted. I began to embrace in a greater way the agency of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:13 and the biblical imperatives to discipline my body (1 Cor 9:27), put my earthly nature to death (Col 3:5), and build myself up in the faith (Jude 20).

This project began as an academic pursuit, but it turned into a life-transforming enterprise. The research and organizing of that research has led to real changes, measurable spiritual growth, and incalculable peace and joy in my personal life. It has impacted my family and my church. This project has been a gift from the Lord to me, and hopefully, in some way it will be a gift from the Lord to others as well.

The professors in the doctoral program at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have been invaluable to me in this project. My doctoral supervisor, Donald

Whitney, is one of God's champions for spiritual disciplines today. His insights into both the value of the disciplines and how they can be practiced in today's modern world have served as both the catalyst and the foundation of this project. Joe Harrod has challenged my reading list. With each question, meeting, and email, Dr. Harrod has suggested three more books I should read immediately. Every book has proved profitable. My experience with Southern Seminary has exceeded all expectations, and I am a better pastor, father, husband, and Christian for my connection with that institution.

I am thankful to the Lord for the opportunity to study and write this project. He has blessed me through two wonderful congregations that have both encouraged and supported me. I am thankful for the blessing of having been privileged to pastor First Baptist Heath, Ohio and First Baptist Nacogdoches, Texas, and for their partnership in this project.

I am also very thankful for the support of my wife and family. Often this project took time away from important times I otherwise would have spent with my family. This pursuit was a shared sacrifice. My family was unwavering in their support and encouragement. This endeavor would not have been possible without them.

Charles Noel Dear

Nacogdoches, Texas

May 2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The frustration level is high among many Christians as they struggle with persistent sins. This struggle is a common theme of the Christian life at least as far back as the recipients of Paul's letters to the Corinthians. However, the speed and ease with which these sins can irrevocably destroy lives has never been faster. How many Christians struggle today with the persistent sins of internet pornography, over-eating, over-spending, gossip, procrastination, sloth, and drug and alcohol abuse? For many, the biblical promises of freedom from the power of sin (such as those in John 8:31-36, Rom 6:15-23) seem hollow and misleading. The Bible, however, speaks of a powerful tool for the destruction of the strongholds of persistent sin. This tool is collectively called the spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines can, when energized by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, yield great power over temptation. This project endeavors to lead the people of the First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches, Texas, to use this powerful tool and experience more of the promised freedom that is so earnestly desired.

Context

The First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches, Texas (FBCNac), is a multigenerational Southern Baptist church in deep east Texas. It is a multi-staffed church (nine full-time and thirteen part-time ministry or executive staff) with a pastor-led model of congregational church government. The city of Nacogdoches is a small town with an unusually diverse population. Home to Stephen F. Austin State University with a student enrollment of nearly 14,000, the resident population of Nacogdoches consists of many in the academic field. Because of the large number of ranches and farms in the surrounding

areas, many Nacogdoches residents work in agriculture. Though Nacogdoches is a small town, it is the center of a much larger rural area and consequently has an outsized number of medical professionals. Additionally, Nacogdoches is becoming a retirement destination for many in the Houston and Dallas areas. So, the community and church are made up of roughly equal parts cowboys, doctors (academic and medical), students, and retirees.

The diverse make-up of the area creates an environment where nearly every lifestyle, worldview, addiction, and persistent sin is represented in the local community and often in the church. Yet, the church is filled with maturing believers who have a strong passion to grow deeper in their walk with the Lord and achieve greater consistency in obedience in the presence of sin and temptation. Because of this intersection between the variety of persistent sins and the desire for greater godliness, this project is relevant and timely for the benefit of the congregation and the furtherance of the kingdom of God in the local community.

The ministers of the church recognize the relevancy of this project. They see firsthand that the pervasive statistics about the rampant use of pornography by Christians, the escalating rates of drug and alcohol abuse in the church, and the epidemic rise of many other persistent sins are not merely theoretical problems. On an almost daily basis one or more of the pastors or ministers at FBCNac deal with someone struggling unsuccessfully with some tenacious sin.

Strategies are in place to provide help for those struggling with specific unrelenting sins, but the perceived effectiveness of those strategies is limited. The strategies include weekly Bible teaching in the church's primary worship services, small groups focused on relationships, ministry, and service, and discipleship seminars focused on equipping members for specific ministries or to excel in specific spiritual efforts. Each of these ministries address the issue of persistent sin in a limited fashion, but because each has a broader focus, the approach is often too general to provide real assistance to someone overcome with the burden these sins bring. The opposite situation can also be a problem.

These ministries can sometimes be so specific in their focus on what the Bible teaches about one category of sin that the ministry fails to provide a general framework that can be used to deal with a broader array of stubborn sins.

At FBCNac, no ministry provides a comprehensive and systematic teaching of all the spiritual disciplines and how they can have a synergetic effect on the mortification of sin. Most people involved in the church have little understanding of the spiritual disciplines, how they can be practiced with consistency, and what the Bible teaches about their effect on Christian living.

I anticipated three challenges in addressing the problem of persistent sin and spiritual disciplines at FBCNac. First, as stated, the church had very little familiarity with the spiritual disciplines. While everyone had likely heard admonitions to read the Bible and pray, most church participants were in unfamiliar territory beyond those two basic disciplines. A second challenge was the hard work the spiritual disciplines require. The disciplines do not produce instant spirituality. They must be cultivated with commitment, hard work, and consistency. Some people push back against any approach that requires more of them. The third challenge resulted from a poor grasp of some basic theological principles. Many Christians, and unfortunately this was also true at FBCNac, believed the way to achieve greater godliness and faithfulness was simply to try harder. They did not have a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches about the agency of Christ and the Holy Spirit in bringing about the spiritual fruit of repentance and that of love, joy, peace, patience, etc. Paul's instruction to walk in the Spirit so that one will not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16) is foreign to many of them, as is Christ's announcement that only those who abide in him will possess the sweet fruit of God in their lives (John 15). On the other end of the spectrum, some believe the pathway to holiness and purity is to do nothing (except maybe pray for deliverance) and wait on God to move in their lives and bring change apart from any effort on their part. They do not know the means and method

of actively putting to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13). Each of these three challenges was addressed.

This ministry project sought to overcome these challenges in a manner that provided the people of FBCNac with a reliable, comprehensive, and biblical framework to experience greater freedom from temptation, especially in the area of persistent and stubborn sins.

Rationale

The aim of this project was to help Christians of FBCNac understand the best way to have an abiding relationship with Christ that leads to the mortification of sins is through the spiritual disciplines. Donald S. Whitney, in his seminal book on spiritual disciplines, writes that the disciplines are the key to a Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered pursuit of godliness.¹ In 1 Timothy 4:7, Paul instructs believers to discipline themselves so that they can achieve greater godliness.

There is much variation in lists of spiritual disciplines with some writers including as many as sixty disciplines in their books and articles.² In this project, four core disciplines were taught: Bible-guided meditation, prayer, fasting, and journaling. Each of these disciplines was taught from the perspective of how it strengthens the believer's capacity and motivation for mortification of sin by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

It is not enough to teach the theological connection between the spiritual disciplines and the mortification of sin, nor is it enough to teach the biblical basis and the practice of the individual disciplines. In order to be successful and consistent in the

¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 10.

² For example, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009), includes over sixty spiritual disciplines; Richard Foster *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), includes twelve; and Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, includes ten.

spiritual disciplines, the church must teach specific strategies. This project included the biblical strategies of accountability, fellowship, and habit-forming practices, all of which help the believer experience real progress in sanctification.

Purpose

The purpose of this ministry project was to train members of the First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches, Texas, to use the spiritual disciplines for the mortification of persistent sin.

Goals

Four goals determined the success and effectiveness of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines among select members of FBCNac and to assess how those same individuals reported their struggle with various persistent sins.
2. The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series that taught the practical connection between the spiritual disciplines and the mortification of sin.
3. The third goal was to create an accompanying six-week discussion and discipleship guide to help those who hear the sermons to apply the biblical principles and strengthen consistency and commitment.
4. The fourth goal was to increase knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines and consequently record a positive change in behavior related to struggles with persistent sins by presenting the sermons and the discussion and devotion guides in weekend worship services at FBCNac over a period of six weeks.

Research Methodology

Four goals determined the success and effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess the knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines among select members of FBCNac and to assess how those same individuals reported their struggle with various persistent sins.³ Using an anonymous (coded) questionnaire, FBCNac

³ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

members were surveyed to collect data and establish the correlation.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when at least fifty members completed the questionnaire, the results were compiled, and a correlation between spiritual disciplines and persistent sins had been established that could be used to inform the messages, discussion guides, and daily devotions that were written and presented in this project.

The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series that taught the practical connection between the spiritual disciplines and the mortification of sin. This sermon series included an in-depth study of key Bible passages on sanctification and mortification along with insights from authors such as John Owen, Jerry Bridges, and Donald S. Whitney. This series was evaluated by an expert panel consisting of one former seminary professor and noted expert in systematic theology,⁵ five pastors or former pastors, one discipleship minister, one college minister with education and background in the practice of counseling those who struggle with persistent sins, one business professor with expertise in statistics, and one layperson with a background in discipling women. The panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the messages for biblical faithfulness, scope, relevance, practicality, and usability.⁶ This goal was considered achieved when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded expectations. Should the initial feedback have failed to meet the 90 percent standard, the messages were revised until the standard was met.

The third goal was to create a six-week discussion and discipleship guide to help those who hear the sermons to apply the biblical principles and strengthen consistency and commitment. This guide was used in conjunction with the weekly sermons. The

⁴ See appendix 1 for the Persistent Sin and Spiritual Disciplines Assessment.

⁵ James Leo Garrett, Jr., an active church member at FBCNac, is the Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. (Before the completion of this project, Dr. Garret died on February 5, 2020.)

⁶ See appendix 3 for the Sermon Evaluation rubric.

guide was evaluated by the same expert panel used to evaluate the sermons. Like the sermons, the panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the messages for biblical faithfulness, scope, relevance, practicality, and usability.⁷ This goal was considered achieved when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded expectations. If the initial feedback would have failed to meet the 90 percent standard, the guides would have been revised until the standard was met.

The fourth goal was to increase knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines and consequently record a positive change in behavior related to struggles with persistent sins by presenting the sermons and the discussion and devotion guides in weekend worship services at FBCNac over a period of six weeks. The messages were delivered in the weekend services on six consecutive weeks. Participants were expected to attend all six weeks of messages or view any messages that were missed via video later in the same week the message was preached. Additionally, participants were expected to complete thirty daily devotions during the six-week period using the devotion guides that were provided. Within two weeks following the presentation of the sermons, the survey was re-administered to the members who had previously completed the assessment questionnaire.⁸ Participants were asked to confirm if they had viewed the six messages and completed at least twenty of the thirty devotions. Failure to meet these requirements resulted in exclusion from the follow up survey. The fourth goal was considered successfully achieved when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre and post-course results indicating that the participants both increased their knowledge and positively altered their practice with respect to spiritual disciplines and

⁷ See appendix 4 for the Devotion Guide Evaluation rubric.

⁸ See appendix 2 for the Persistent Sin and Spiritual Disciplines Post-Survey. This survey is similar to the pre-survey but includes a question to determine if participants met the participation requirement and includes a section that asks participants to rate the helpfulness of each message.

persistent sins.⁹ This difference indicated that real, as opposed to perceived, learning and behavior modification occurred.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project.

Mortification. Mortification describes the action of removing the presence of a particular sin from one's life. Puritan scholar John Owen notes that this is a "metaphorical expression."¹⁰ Mortification pictures sin as a living being. To mortify or kill the living being of sin is to "take away the principle of all his strength, vigor, and power, so that he cannot act or exert or put forth any proper actings of his own."¹¹ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* provides a helpful definition but goes one step further than what is meant by the term in this project: "An ecclesiastical term used to describe the action of 'killing' or 'deadening' the lusts of the flesh through spiritual self-denial and the infliction of bodily discomfort."¹² For the purposes of this paper, mortification did not include the ascetic practice of inflicting bodily pain.¹³

Persistent sin. A persistent sin is one a believer has struggled with for an extended time.¹⁴ Systematic theologian Wayne Grudem uses the term to refer to a sin for

⁹ Neil J. Salkind, *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 189-91.

¹⁰ John Owen, "Mortification of Sin . . .," in *Overcoming Sin and Temptation: Three Classic Works by John Owen*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor, Logos electronic ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), chap. 1, sec. 7.

¹¹ Owen, "Mortification of Sin," chap. 1, sec. 7.

¹² F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. "mortification."

¹³ This decision was informed by Col 2:20-23.

¹⁴ For the purposes of this project, "extended time" was defines as one year or longer.

which a Christian has fought and prayed to overcome, perhaps for years.¹⁵ Christian author Jerry Bridges uses the term in a similar way, comparing persistent sin with “besetting sins” or “sinful habits” that a Christian has struggled to overcome.¹⁶ This usage is contrary to the use of similar language in 1 Timothy 5:20, where persistent sin is simply a sin that has continued in the life of a believer, whether or not the believer has actively resisted.¹⁷

Spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines can be defined in very broad terms that include any number of practices considered by some to be helpful in providing means for people to “keep company with Jesus.”¹⁸ Other definitions would be much more restrictive. Scholars D. A. Carson and Robert Plummer limit spiritual disciplines to include only specific commands found in Scripture.¹⁹ Carson asserts spiritual disciplines are “Bible-prescribed activities that are explicitly said to increase our sanctification, our conformity to Christ Jesus, [and] our spiritual maturation.”²⁰ Professor Donald S. Whitney slightly expands Carson’s definition to include activities not specifically prescribed in Scripture but modeled in Scripture, “promote spiritual growth,” and have been “practiced

¹⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 422-23.

¹⁶ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 149.

¹⁷ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Dallas: Word, 2000), 314. Mounce engages in a lengthy discussion of whether “persistent” refers to sins committed prior to the confrontation mentioned in the previous verse or sins committed after the confrontation. In either instance, Mounce portrays persistent sins as simply sins that continue.

¹⁸ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 17.

¹⁹ Robert L. Plummer, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines of ‘Silence and Solitude’ Really Biblical?” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 4 (2006): 3.

²⁰ D. A. Carson, “Editorial: Spiritual Disciplines,” *Themelios* 36, no. 3 (November 2011): 379.

by the people of God since biblical times.”²¹ This project utilized Carson’s definition but also included, from Whitney’s definition, the practice of journaling, which while not specifically commanded in Scripture,²² fits well in the spiritual disciplines category when seen as a tool for “careful self-examination, contrition, thoughtful Bible reading, and honest praying.”²³

Two limitations applied to this project. One limitation involved the accuracy of the survey responses given before and after the messages were preached. The surveys depended upon the honesty and attention-to-detail the participants exercised when completing the assessments. Efforts were made to mitigate this issue by using code numbers instead of names to maintain the anonymity of the participants. The second limitation was that some participants failed to be present for all the sermons. This issue was mitigated in part by providing access to video recordings of the services to those unable to attend and eliminating participants who self-reported that they failed to attend or watch one of the six services.

Three delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project did not address persistent sins with a root in chemical dependency or biological abnormalities. While the scriptural admonitions to abide in Christ and mortify the flesh are advantageous to all Christians regardless of physical health or chemical dependency, it was outside the scope of this project to address persistent sins that are connected to substance abuse or may be somehow connected to medical issues such as bi-polar disorder, post-partum depression, thyroid issues, etc. Second, only four spiritual disciplines were included: Bible-guided

²¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 17.

²² Whitney does note that the Bible contains “many examples of God-inspired journals.” He points to the fact that many of the Psalms are “records of David’s personal spiritual journey with the Lord.” He also highlights the book of Lamentations as the spiritual journal of Jeremiah as he reflected on the fall of Jerusalem. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 206.

²³ Carson, “Editorial: Spiritual Disciplines,” 379.

meditation, prayer, fasting, and journaling. Other spiritual disciplines, such as the disciplines of Bible memorization, worship, giving, and serving, would also be helpful in the mortification of persistent sin but were outside the scope of this project due to the limit of the length of the sermon series and devotional guides being created.²⁴ Finally, the sermon series and devotional guides were limited to six weeks to accommodate participants' busy schedules and weekend travel obligations. It was important that the participants not miss a week's sermon or devotions for the measurement of project results to adequately reflect the impact on the lives of the participants. Six weeks seemed to be a practical limit to the number of weeks many participants could maintain consistent and uninterrupted engagement.

Conclusion

In his first epistle, John presents a shocking word. He says no one born of God will make a practice of sinning (1 John 3:9). In this project, a scriptural pathway to that sometimes elusive goal is detailed. God can carry on the work of sanctification in the lives of believers, and they can mortify much of their sin, and the spiritual disciplines can be a key part of this process. The following chapters explore the biblical and theological basis for the value of the spiritual disciplines for the mortification of persistent sins.

²⁴ For additional ways other spiritual disciplines can be practiced, see Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014).

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE USE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE MORTIFICATION OF PERSISTENT SIN

Introduction

The continued presence of stubborn and persistent sin constitutes the most challenging aspect of living the Christian life. This fact requires some theological explanation. For the child of God, justification marks the beginning of a changed relationship with sin. Even though Christ destroyed the penalty and dominion of sin, the presence of sin, at least a measure of sin, remains. Hence, sanctification—the progressive removal of the presence (or pollution) of sin from a believer’s life—must follow justification.¹ Progressive sanctification, in this context, though, is an “incremental process.”² Theologian Millard Erickson writes that the process requires “an entire lifetime for completion.”³ Thus, incrementally through the process of sanctification, the believer by the agency (active participation) of the Holy Spirit can mortify sins, even persistent sins, through an abiding relationship with Christ strengthened by the use of spiritual disciplines. This chapter examines five New Testament passages that provide a biblical basis for understanding how this sanctification through mortification operates and how it connects to biblical spiritual disciplines. While these passages do not comprise all

¹ Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Zondervan Counterpoints Collection (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 61-62.

² Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, vol. 2, *The Doctrines of Man, Sin, Christ, and the Holy Spirit* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 2347.

³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 982.

of the passages in the Bible that speak to this issue, they form the essential foundation needed for a proper understanding of sanctification, a practical plan to address persistent sins, and discernment to identify biblically-sanctioned approaches to Christian spirituality.

Romans 6:4, 12-14

Romans 6 serves as the Christian's declaration of freedom from the slavery of sin, a spiritual Emancipation.⁴ This chapter of Romans communicates a pair of difficult to synthesize, but key aspects of the believer's relationship with sin. First, according to noted New Testament scholar Douglas Moo, Paul writes about "the indicative of what God has done for us."⁵ He writes, "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin" (Rom 6:6-7).⁶ Paul asserts that the matter is settled—believers no longer live as slaves to sin. However, that declaration is not the end of the believer's relationship with sin. The three verses that begin with Romans 6:12 reveal the imperative aspect of the believer's affiliation with sin. Romans 6:12 says, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires." Although God has emancipated sinners and freed them from their bondage to sin, Christians still play a critical role in the mortification of their personal sin. Moo declares that the connection between these two characteristics, the indicative and the imperative, forms the "heart of Romans 6."⁷

⁴ Kenneth Alan Daughters, "How to Win Over Sin," *Emmaus Journal* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 114.

⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 390.

⁶ All Scriptures references are from the Christian Standard Bible version, unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 366-67.

Four verses in Romans 6 communicate essential truths about the synthesis of what justification has done and what the believer must do concerning sin. Verses 4 and 12-14 demonstrate that since progressive sanctification began at the point of justification, Christians can rise above persistent sin as they present their members to God as instruments of righteousness. An exegesis of these verses will substantiate this claim.

Romans 6:4 begins with the believer's justification: "We were buried with him by baptism into death." This burial symbolizes how the believer participates in Christ's burial.⁸ In other words, burial marks the beginning of salvation. The verse, though, quickly moves from the start of salvation to the Christian life itself. Paul explains that Christians were buried with him by baptism into death so that they are now able to walk in newness of life. In this verse, the author emphasizes that newness of life necessarily follows justification.⁹ According to nineteenth-century Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge, through the words "in order that," Paul essentially says, "Justification is [for the purpose of] sanctification. The two concepts are inseparable."¹⁰

The Greek word behind "newness" (καινότητι) points to a "newness of quality and character."¹¹ This concept differs from what might have been meant had Paul used νέας, which would have emphasized a newness in time but not necessarily in the changed nature of the Christian life.¹² Thus being "buried with him" (v. 4) leads to a qualitatively different life with respect to character, and the reality of the "baptism into death" empowers this "new" life. However, the believer is required to do something to activate

⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 363.

⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 310.

¹⁰ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 195.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Romans*, vol. 1, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 322.

¹² MacArthur, *Romans*, 322.

the new life. Paul outlines that requirement in verses 12-14.

The structure of 12-14 includes an ABBA chiasm.¹³ Recognition of this organization emphasizes the connection between verses 12 and 14. While verse 12 issues the command, “do not allow sin to reign,” verse 14 reminds the believer that he can in fact live in obedience to this command because “sin will not rule” over him. Thus, the command in verse 12 would be impossible without the promise of verse 14.¹⁴ A failure to maintain a proper connection and balance between the indicative of what has been done for believers and the imperative of what believers are commanded to do will lead to interpretive challenges. These challenges though must be met. The first challenge, ignoring the connection between the imperative of God’s command and the indicative, what a believer should do in order to activate a new life, unlinks justification and sanctification. The likely result is moralism or legalism as the believer seeks to achieve holiness apart from the work of God. A second challenge exists. If the distinction between the indicative and the imperative fades and justification and sanctification essentially become synonyms, then the believer feels no obligation to fight the dominion of sin, and he neglects his spiritual growth.¹⁵

The pointed command of “do not let sin reign” communicates two important ideas. First, the real possibility exists for sin to reign in the believer’s life, at least temporarily. Even after the accomplishment of justification, sin remains and continues to harass. Romans 6:12 would have no practical meaning if sin had been eradicated from the Christian’s life.¹⁶ Jerry Bridges, who has written many books concerning the practical side

¹³ John E. Toews, *Romans*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004), 177.

¹⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 381.

¹⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 391.

¹⁶ Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Arthur Pink Anthology* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2005), chap. 25, para. 38, Logos.

of sanctification, explains that while sin is “dethroned as the reigning power over our lives, [it] still seeks to exert a controlling influence in our daily walk.”¹⁷

Interpreters often overlook the second concept, the simple fact that these five words form an imperative. This phrase instructs—commands—the Christian to do something. The obligation is placed squarely on believers to walk in freedom from sin.¹⁸ This command refutes the popular “let go and let God” view of the believer’s role in his own sanctification.¹⁹ Unlike justification, the experience of holy living is not a gift one receives, but something one is commanded to work toward.²⁰ The assignment Paul requires of Christians is not easy. Christian counseling authority Jay Adams confirms, “The battle against the habituated desires of the body is hard.”²¹ The verb translated “reign” reveals some of the difficulty. Paul’s usage of the present active imperative, βασιλευέτω, joined with the negative particle translates to the command of “stop an act already in process.”²² Sin has already begun its work and infiltrated in each person. The very manner of the instruction’s presentation communicates both the difficulty and the possibility of the task.

Paul strives to be practical in his counsel. The command to “not let sin reign” precedes a two-faceted instruction that expands the command with a how-to. On one side,

¹⁷ Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007), 40.

¹⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 754.

¹⁹ Andrew David Naselli, *Let Go and Let God? A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2010), 274.

²⁰ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978), 52.

²¹ Jay E. Adams, “The Use of the Scriptures in Counseling Part IV: Scriptural Counseling Is Spiritual,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (1974): 298.

²² Robert James Utley, *The Gospel according to Paul: Romans*, Study Guide Commentary Series, vol. 5 (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1998), Rom 6:12, Logos.

the instruction coaches the individual to “not offer any parts [of the body] to sin.” On the other side, the instruction coaches Christians to “offer yourselves to God.” Paul then expands on “offer yourselves” by indicating that the command includes “all the parts of yourselves.” Therefore, to what mechanism does Paul refer to as the key to successfully halting sin’s reign?

In verse 12, Paul writes of the “body,” and in the following verse, he writes of the body’s “parts” (CSB) or “members” (ESV). Paul focuses on the “totality of one’s person”²³ and not merely on the physical body. The reference to the “body” and the “members” does not denote actual body parts but natural abilities and capacities.²⁴ The investment of one’s body “parts” in God as “weapons for righteousness” (v. 13) becomes the mechanism that permits sin to “not reign” in the Christian’s life. A kind of momentum is created. The more a believer offers his “parts” to sin, the more that sin will have sway over him. In the same sense, the more the believer offers his members to righteousness, the more his life will be characterized by an increasing practical holiness.²⁵

The message of Romans 6:13 parallels the message in Romans 12:1: “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.” This instruction expressed in both verses exhorts the will to overrule the flesh, the part of man that advocates sin, instead of allowing the flesh to manipulate the will. The continued commitment and recommitment of the body becomes a key part of sanctification. Pastor and professor Andrew Davis describes the believer’s responsibility this way: “A Christian must present himself again and again to his true master, God, by continually

²³ Barclay Moon Newman and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1973), 118.

²⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 384.

²⁵ Simon Ponsonby, *The Pursuit of the Holy: A Divine Invitation* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2010).

presenting the members of the body as instruments of righteousness. If not, then the Christian is really presenting himself/herself to sin as if still its slave, and he is presenting the members of the body as instruments of wickedness.”²⁶ Bridges makes the point that if the flesh rules, it will effectively stifle the believer’s emotional and spiritual life and rob the Christian of spiritual strength.²⁷

The practical counsel of Romans 6:13 seems to imply an element of momentum. As an individual offers parts of his body to sin, this action makes future sin more likely by reinforcing the habit of sinning.²⁸ The good news of 6:13, however, is that the opposite also holds true. When the believer offers the parts of his body to God as weapons for righteousness, he experiences greater and greater momentum leading toward habits of godly living.

Paul concludes this pericope by echoing something he wrote at the end of verse 6. Verse 14 reads, “Sin will not rule over you.” Verse 6 ends with “we may no longer be enslaved to sin.” These statements confuse some believers because the believers do not see this reality reflected in their daily lives. What could explain the disparity? Adams suggests that while the believer possesses freedom from the tyranny of sin, he may not possess the same freedom from the habitual behavior which may have characterized his life for many years. He explains,

The power of habit is great. It is not easy to please God in a body that is still in part habituated to sin. Though he may wish inwardly to cease lying, to control his tongue, to stop losing his temper, or to eliminate scores of other vices, the believer finds that the battle against the habituated desires of the body is hard. There are victories, but they do not come easily. Indeed, in his own strength he will fail to win the struggle. But that is not the dismal conclusion of the matter.²⁹

²⁶ Andrew M. Davis, *An Infinite Journey: Growing toward Christlikeness* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2013), chap. 19, para. 14, Logos.

²⁷ Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 108.

²⁸ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 190.

²⁹ Adams, “The Use of the Scriptures in Counseling,” 298.

Adams continues to write about the agency of the Spirit and how the believer, in order to see real change, must embrace both the Spirit's leading and a commitment to offer one's body to God as a weapon for righteousness in order to see real change. His inference rightly expresses the conclusion drawn by the sequence of this paragraph in Romans, namely that a Christian can, as Moo writes, "live a holy life only as [he] appropriate[s] the benefits of [his] union with Christ,"³⁰ and "put[s] to work the new life God has given."³¹

Romans 8:13

Noted Puritan theologian John Owen wrote in his classic work *On the Mortification of Sin*, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you."³² This pithy statement captures the thrust of Paul's admonition in Romans 8:13: "Because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." This verse complements the lessons of Romans 6 and helps complete a comprehensive picture of sanctification from Paul's point of view.

Paul begins this verse by connecting it to the previous verse with the word γὰρ, sometimes translated "for" (ESV), emphasizing an explanatory relationship between the verses, and sometimes translated "because" (CSB), emphasizing a causal relationship.³³ Commentators disagree on the precise nature of the relationship, but without dispute, the connection between the verses mirrors something seen in Romans 6; namely, according to New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner, Paul "moves from the indicative to the

³⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 391.

³¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 391.

³² John Owen, "Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers," in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1862), 9.

³³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 420.

imperative.”³⁴ Romans 8:12 announces that believers “are not obligated . . . to live according to the flesh.” That declaration speaks to the fact that no believer lives under an obligation to sin. Verse 13 ends with the imperative, “Put to death the deeds of the body.” This verse instructs and commands believers to stop the practice of sinning. Thus, like the pattern in Romans 6, the indicative joins with the imperative. In comparison, Romans 6 focuses primarily on the definitive aspect of sanctification—the all-at-once nature of sanctification, while Romans 8:13 focuses primarily on the progressive aspect—the lifelong process and pursuit of sanctification.³⁵

Romans 8:13 begins with a statement of fact: “If you live according to the flesh, you are going to die.” While this statement sounds simple, confusion exists as to its full effect and relationship with the rest of the message of Romans. In isolation, the phrase plainly says, in Hodge’s view, that any person, “No matter what professions [he] may make or what hopes [he] may indulge in,”³⁶ if he lives according to the flesh, then he will die. Moreover, Paul does not speak simply of physical death, but he speaks of death as the eternal separation from God, in the fullest biblical sense.³⁷ How can believers reconcile Romans 8:1 and other Scriptures that teach the absence of condemnation for those who are in Christ, and how does this phrase agree with the biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? Owen writes, “He will deliver none from destruction that continue in sin; so that while anyone lies under an abiding power of sin, the threats of destruction and everlasting separation from God are to be held out to him.”³⁸ Owen delivers a hard truth. Jesus says the same thing this way, “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and

³⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 420.

³⁵ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 207.

³⁶ Hodge, *Romans*, 264.

³⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 494.

³⁸ Owen, “Mortification of Sin,” 54.

throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (Matt 5:29).

No neat logical argument can finally resolve the tension created by this phrase.³⁹ To be true to Scripture, the interpreter must allow two facts to stand. First, the work of Christ establishes the “sole and final ground” for a believer’s eternal life. Second, holy living stands as an indispensable precondition for attaining eternal life.⁴⁰ Commentator Robert Mounce fuses these facts: “The Christian is one in whom the Spirit is constantly at work through instruction, exhortation, and discipline to bring to an end ‘the misdeeds of the body.’”⁴¹ As the old evangelists used to say, “No change; no Jesus.”

The second half of Romans 8:13, “put to death the deeds of the body,” communicates the converse of the first half. This instruction seems contrary to much spiritual counsel given today to Christians struggling with sins. Believers are often told to simply (and merely) pray that God might deliver them from certain temptations. Pastor and noted author Martyn Lloyd-Jones insists that Bible teachers should never counsel a struggling believer by saying, “I think your only hope is to take [your sin] to Christ and Christ will take it from you.”⁴² He denies the presence of “a single Scripture . . . which tells me to take my sin, the particular thing that gets me down, to God in prayer and ask him to deliver me from it and then trust in faith that he will.”⁴³ Romans 8:13 simply and

³⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 495.

⁴⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 495.

⁴¹ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 181.

⁴² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Sanctified through the Truth: The Assurance of Our Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989), 54.

⁴³ Lloyd-Jones, *Sanctified through the Truth*, 54. Jesus does urge believers to pray that they are not led into temptation (Matt 6:13), and two verses show the Psalmist asking the Lord to not allow sin to rule or dominate him (Pss 19:13, 119:133). However, none of those verses preclude the believer’s responsibility to work to put to death the deeds of the body.

clearly instructs the believer to stop sinning.⁴⁴ This implied command comports with other clear New Testament admonitions. First Peter 2:11 commands believers to “abstain from sinful desires.” First Corinthians 6:18 commands “flee sexual immorality.” Ephesians 4:28 admonishes, “Let the thief no longer steal.” Romans 13:14 warns, “make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires” (ESV).

The responsibility for putting sin to death lands squarely on the believer. This duty cannot be turned over to God.⁴⁵ Colossians 3:5 reinforces this responsibility with similar language: “Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.” Mortification is the assignment and responsibility of all Christians for all their lives.⁴⁶ The force of the verb θανατοῦτε communicates the necessity of continually putting sin to death.⁴⁷ Owen instructs the believer to “cease not a day from this work” of putting sin to death.⁴⁸ Pastor and commentator John MacArthur, asserts that the believer should engage in warfare against sin, and as such, the war “will never be wholly complete before [the believer] is glorified.”⁴⁹

As a metaphorical expression, “put to death” treats sin as if it were a living thing. Owen writes, “To kill a man, or any other living thing, is to take away the principle of all his strength, vigour, and power, so that he cannot act or exert, or put forth any proper

⁴⁴ John MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience* (Dallas: Word, 1994), 158.

⁴⁵ Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 195.

⁴⁶ Ryan M. McGraw, “According to John Owen, What Is the Key to the Mortification of Sin?” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, no. 4 (2016): 117.

⁴⁷ Everett F. Harrison, *Romans*, in vol. 10 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 92.

⁴⁸ Owen, “Mortification of Sin,” 9.

⁴⁹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., “Mortification of Sin,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 5, no. 1 (1994): 13.

actings of his own.”⁵⁰ MacArthur uses equally descriptive language when he writes that Paul instructs the believer to find every way possible to “throttle sin and crush it from their lives, sapping it of its strength, rooting it out, and depriving it of its influence.”⁵¹ Some commentators suggest that Paul likely had in mind the challenge Moses gave the Israelites in Deuteronomy 30:15 and following when he said they had a life or death choice to make about their future obedience to God.⁵²

With the assigned responsibility of putting sins to death, Paul says he accomplishes this duty by the agency of the Holy Spirit “by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). This verse highlights the impossibility of mortifying sins without the work of the Spirit. Owen writes, “A man may easier see without eyes, speak without a tongue, than truly mortify one sin without the Spirit.”⁵³ Rightly understood, this reminder of the Spirit’s role delivers helpful counsel. Wrongly understood, this reminder risks increasing danger. Without the reminder, Christians can easily be guilty of moralism or legalism as they seek to mortify sins in their own strength and by their own devices and charge others to do the same. Again, Owen explains, “Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world.”⁵⁴

On the other hand, the reminder brings danger if read in isolation from the remainder of the verse. Some have failed to honor the full context and have wrongly asserted that the phrase “by the Spirit” means the Christian’s sole responsibility consists of trusting God to work and then waiting for perfection to come. Lay speaker and

⁵⁰ Owen, “Mortification of Sin,” 8.

⁵¹ MacArthur, “Mortification of Sin,” 12.

⁵² James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38A (Dallas: Word, 1998), 449.

⁵³ Owen, “Mortification of Sin,” 34.

⁵⁴ Owen, “Mortification of Sin,” 7.

Holiness author Hannah Whitall Smith, in her widely read book *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life*, makes this error:

Man's part is to trust, and God's part is to work. There is certain *work* to accomplish. We are delivered from the power of sin and are made perfect in every good work to do the will of God. This real labor is worked in us and on us. Besetting sins are conquered, evil habits are overcome, wrong dispositions and feelings are rooted out, and holy tempers and emotions are birthed. A positive transformation takes place.⁵⁵

Smith continues to write about the mechanics of this transformation:

Most of us have tried to do it for ourselves at first and have grievously failed. Then we discover that we are unable to do it. But the Lord Jesus Christ has come on purpose to do it, and He will do it for all who put themselves wholly into His hands and trust Him without reserve. *Plainly the believer can do nothing but trust, while the Lord, in whom he trusts, actually does the work entrusted to Him.*⁵⁶

While Smith and others (many in the Higher Life Movement) contend that the believer “can do nothing but trust,” the full context of Romans 8:13 makes it clear that the believer has the responsibility to put sin to death. The believer must engage his will. According to theologian John Piper, the agency of the Spirit means that the believer has a will “empowered by another will: the will of the Spirit.”⁵⁷

Finally, Romans 8:13 speaks to the subject of the believer's assurance of salvation. The verse begins with the condition “if,” and it ends with the promise, “you will live.” The intervening requirement to “put to death the deeds of the body” raises the question of how a Christian who continues in sin can have an assurance of his salvation. Bridges commends this verse as one of those “sobering passages that calls for healthy but honest self-examination.”⁵⁸ He asks the pointed question raised by this verse: “Does our

⁵⁵ Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life: Personal, Practical, and Powerful—An Invitation to Live Life at Its Most Blessed* (1870; repr., Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 2014), 19, emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, 19-20, emphasis added.

⁵⁷ John Piper, *Sanctification in the Everyday: Three Sermons by John Piper* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2012), 9.

⁵⁸ Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 196.

pursuit of holiness evidence that we have been saved by grace?”⁵⁹ Thankfully, while not diminishing the importance of that question, the following verse does give the true believer comfort and assurance: “For all those led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons” (Rom 8:13). Theologian R. C. Sproul connects this verse with assurance of salvation: “If we want to know if we are in [a] state of grace, if we want to know if we are children of God, we can look [at Romans 8:14] for the answer. The first test we have as to whether we are children of God is whether we are led by the Spirit.”⁶⁰

Colossians 3:1-5

Some call Colossians 3:1-5 the “gospel method of sanctification.”⁶¹ Three succinct and straight forward commands provide believers a path for spiritual growth: “Seek the things above” (3:1), “set your minds on things above” (3:2), and “put to death what belongs to your earthly nature” (3:5). Alongside these instructions, Paul gives “theological incentives” that motivate the believer to action.⁶² These incentives include being raised with Christ (3:1), being hidden with Christ (3:3), and the future appearance with Christ in glory (3:4).

The passage begins with, “If you have been raised with Christ.” This statement implies that believers have previously died with Christ (Rom 6:8).⁶³ Resurrection cannot precede death. The believer’s death severed the links that bound him to the old order, and

⁵⁹ Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*, 196.

⁶⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Romans*, St. Andrew’s Expositional Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 261.

⁶¹ Daniel Wilson, *Expository Lectures on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians* (New York: Protestant Episcopal Society for the Promotion of Evangelical Knowledge, 1859), 266.

⁶² Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 282.

⁶³ Kristopher A. Lyle, *Colossians*, ed. Steven E. Runge, Lexham Discourse Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018), Col 3:1, Logos.

the believer's resurrection established the links that connect him with the new and heavenly order.⁶⁴ These new links are possible because of the believer's new status as "co-resurrected"⁶⁵ (συνηγέρθητε) with Christ at the moment of salvation. The resurrection of 3:1 does not refer to the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christians at the Parousia but to the regeneration that happens at the time of justification.⁶⁶

Because of the believer's status with Christ, Paul gives the parallel instructions, "Seek the things above" (3:1), and "set your mind on things above" (3:2). According to Donald Whitney, these commands form the "basics of biblical spirituality."⁶⁷ Both commands are in the present tense, indicating continuous action and implying "persevering effort."⁶⁸ Thus, the believer should "be constantly seeking" and "be constantly setting his mind." These commands share both similarities and contrasts. The former instruction is moral, and the latter is mental.⁶⁹ To seek the things above refers to one's desires, and since the heart is the seat of desires (Mark 7:15), the NIV inserts the word "heart."⁷⁰ The believer should orient his heart's desire and interests toward things above. The latter command, "to set your mind," focuses less on feeling and more on thinking. Moo indicates this instruction refers to a heavenly "orientation of the will" and

⁶⁴ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1977), 258.

⁶⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Colossians, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 126-27.

⁶⁶ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Church and the Last Things* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 224.

⁶⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life: Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003), 24.

⁶⁸ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 140.

⁶⁹ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 280.

⁷⁰ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 280.

a “habit of the mind.”⁷¹ Professor and author Donald Whitney suggests this command encourages the believer to let his “Scripture-guided imagination wonder what living in that perfect world will be like.”⁷²

With each of these commands, Paul qualifies and specifies the “things above.” In the first command, the “things above” refer to “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” Professor and scholar James Leo Garrett explains, “The ‘right hand’ was the first place of authority under an emperor or king, and God’s ‘right hand’ meant the place or station of authority next to that of God.”⁷³ This imagery, drawn from Daniel 7:9-14,⁷⁴ exalts the power and privilege of Christ and makes Christ the focal point of the believer’s pursuit.⁷⁵ A prohibition accompanies the second command. Believers should set their minds on things above, not on earthly things. Earthly things include the sins listed a few verses later (3:5, 8) but also anything taking the place that should be taken only by things above.⁷⁶ Earthly things includes practices such as immorality, love of money, out-of-control temper, careless speech, indecency, malice, as well as the obsessive pursuit of worldly honor, pleasure, and power.⁷⁷

Following these two commands, Paul gives further motivations for the

⁷¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 248.

⁷² Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*, 124.

⁷³ James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 4th ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 1:709.

⁷⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 204.

⁷⁵ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 281.

⁷⁶ Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians*, in vol. 11 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 210.

⁷⁷ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Philippians*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 182.

believer's obedience. The first additional motivation, that "your life is hidden with Christ in God," can point to two possible applications, both of which may be in Paul's view. The most obvious understanding is that the believer's union with Christ cannot be seen by others and may, in some measure, be hidden even from oneself.⁷⁸ Another possible application of the hidden nature of the believer's life is that of safety. The Greek word κέκρυπται speaks of the act of finding shelter in safe places.⁷⁹ Moo connects this idea with Psalm 27:5, "For he will conceal me in his shelter in the day of adversity; he will hide me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock," and suggests the believer find safety and security in Christ.⁸⁰

The second motivation, the promise that the believer will appear with Christ in glory, points to the return of Christ. The word Paul uses for "appear," φανερωθῇ, points to the visible display of Christ at his coming.⁸¹ English theologian J. B. Lightfoot elaborates on verse 4: "The veil which now shrouds your higher life from others, and even partly from yourselves, will then be withdrawn. The world which persecutes, despises, and ignores now, will then be blinded with the dazzling glory of the revelation."⁸²

The final command of this passage, "put to death what belongs to your earthly nature," echoes the previously discussed command of Romans 8:13. An interesting variance with the previously analyzed passage is the juxtaposition of Paul's assertion in verse 3 that the believer has died. The death in verse 3 refers to the believers dying to the

⁷⁸ P. T. O'Brien, "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity," in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 117.

⁷⁹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 571.

⁸⁰ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 250.

⁸¹ Vaughan, *Colossians*, 210.

⁸² Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 8th ed., *Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 208.

tyranny of sin. In verse 5, the command extends that death from the tyranny to the participation of sin.⁸³ Theologian E. L. Johnson calls this process “negative sanctification”⁸⁴ as opposed to the positive approach in the first two commands in this passage. Commentator Kristopher Lyle connects this command to the previous verses by saying it “only makes sense for [the believer’s] current lifestyle to match the caliber of the new life they have with Christ.”⁸⁵ Paul makes it clear that sanctification involves not just an outlook or an attitude but an active fight with the presence and influence of sin.

In the remainder of verse 5 (and in v. 8), Paul lists specific sins the believer is commanded to kill. While not an exhaustive list, it illustrates the kind of practical application that should follow an understanding of a believer being raised with Christ and embracing the three commands of this passage.⁸⁶

John 15:1-8

Jesus gave his last “I am” saying by declaring, “I am the vine,” and inviting his listeners to “abide in me.”⁸⁷ This simple statement establishes “the *sine qua non* of Christian discipleship.”⁸⁸ When minister and missionary Robert Murray McCheyne wrote a letter giving a list of indispensable spiritual instructions to a young church leader, he concluded his admonition with, “Above all, abide in Christ, and He will abide in you.”⁸⁹

⁸³ MacArthur, *Colossians*, 135.

⁸⁴ E. L. Johnson, “Sanctification,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 1050.

⁸⁵ Lyle, *Colossians*, Col 3:5.

⁸⁶ MacArthur, *Colossians*, 138.

⁸⁷ The Gospel of John is organized around seven statements where Jesus used an analogy to describe himself beginning with the phrase, “I am.”

⁸⁸ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 142.

⁸⁹ Robert Murray McCheyne and Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier, 1894), 237.

Perhaps no spiritual instruction contributes more wisdom and advantage for believers than the one McCheyne highlights from this passage. In this extended parable, Jesus details the role and function of the Father, the Son, and the believer. He explains both the how-to and the why of spiritual fruit bearing. Moreover, he describes the value of God's Word, prayer, and perseverance.

Some commentators, including MacArthur, believe Jesus "presented this analogy to His disciples in the upper room on the night before His death,"⁹⁰ while others, such as Colin Kruse, who wrote the commentary on John in the Tyndale New Testament Commentary series, suggest it may have been "given en route from the Last Supper venue to the Garden where he was betrayed."⁹¹ Either way, this occasion would have been a time of extreme drama. Judas had already revealed himself as a traitor, and Jesus was about to arrive at Gethsemane for a time of agonizing prayer and then arrest by the authorities. In that setting, he claims to be the "true vine." As mentioned, this phrase is the last of Jesus' seven "I am" sayings. However, this statement distinguishes itself from the others by adding "and my Father is the gardener," making this instance the only one, according to Baptist scholar George R. Beasley-Murray, "to which an additional predicate is conjoined."⁹² The dual participation of the Father and the Son contributes significantly to the application of the parable in the lives of the readers.

While Jesus stands as the central figure in this parable, the Father also plays a principal role. Verse 1 designates the Father as the gardener or the vinedresser. Verse 2 describes the functions of the vinedresser: "Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce

⁹⁰ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *John 12–21, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 142.

⁹¹ Colin G. Kruse, *John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 310.

⁹² George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Dallas: Word, 2002), 271.

more fruit.” The first listed responsibility for the Father includes the removal of branches (people) who produce no fruit. To fully interpret the nature of the work of God the Father in this context, the interpreter must determine the identity of those people who produce no fruit. The words “in me” that describe the ones in question make this determination a more difficult determination. Some commentators have suggested this function involves the Father taking away a Christian’s salvation. Theologian Leroy Forlines writes of the one who ceases to abide in Christ: “He would be severed from . . . eternal life.”⁹³

Concerning the loss of salvation, Forlines continues to write, “It will be an act of God the Father as husbandman, as is set forth in John 15:2, and that only on the grounds of not abiding in Christ (Jn. 15:6).”⁹⁴ MacArthur, however, disagrees and asserts, “The phrase ‘in me’ in this case cannot have the Pauline connotation of believers’ union with Christ; it merely describes those who outwardly attach themselves to Him.”⁹⁵ New Testament commentator William Hendriksen concurs with MacArthur. He asserts, “This allegory plainly teaches that the branches which are taken away and burned represent people who never once bore fruit, not even when they were “in” Christ. Hence, they never were true believers; and for them the in-the-vine relationship, though close, was merely outward.”⁹⁶ Andrew Naselli, author of the critique of Keswick theology titled *Let Go and Let God*, adds, “The dominant Reformed view is that *all* believers characteristically abide to some degree and that the concept is nearly synonymous with perseverance.”⁹⁷

⁹³ F. Leroy Forlines, *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Nashville: Randall House, 2011), 311.

⁹⁴ Forlines, *Classical Arminianism*, 351.

⁹⁵ MacArthur, *John 12-21*, 152.

⁹⁶ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to John*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 296.

⁹⁷ Naselli, *Let Go and Let God?*, 236-37, emphasis added.

The identification of those non-abiding branches as those people who have never had a genuine, saving connection with Christ seems to comport with other analogies Jesus shared in the Gospels. In Matthew 13:25, the unsaved and never saved are described as “weeds among the wheat.” In Matthew 13:48, they are called worthless fish among good fish. In Matthew 25:33, they are called goats among sheep. In Matthew 25:2, they are called foolish virgins among wise virgins. Moreover, in Matthew 7:13, they are the ones who think they are going down the right path, but who are heading for destruction on the wide path. Therefore, the preponderance of evidence supports the view that the Father’s first task in verse 2 involves removing those who do not possess genuine salvation. Verse 6 further describes this task: “If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” Other than the reference to destruction by fire, this verse also makes clear the fact that these branches cannot represent people who have never heard the gospel or never professed to believe the gospel, but they must refer to those who appear only superficially to be connected to Jesus but who are not vitally connected to him.⁹⁸

The second task of the Father in verse 2 includes pruning the branches so that they will produce more fruit. Here the analogy of the vine is illustrative. With an unpruned grapevine, there will be much unproductive growth and little fruit. The pruning of the unproductive growth helps the plant use its resources to produce fruit.⁹⁹ The word for prune, καθαίρει, literally means “cleanse.”¹⁰⁰ This work parallels the work described in Hebrews 12:4-11 as the discipline of the Lord. Verse 3 identifies the mechanism for this pruning or cleaning: “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to

⁹⁸ Naselli, *Let Go and Let God?*, 244.

⁹⁹ Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1988), 180.

¹⁰⁰ Robert James Utley, *The Beloved Disciple’s Memoirs and Letters: The Gospel of John, I, II, and III John*, Study Guide Commentary Series, vol. 4 (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 1999), 138.

you.” Naselli asserts that this text points exclusively to God’s Word as the instrument of pruning,¹⁰¹ but others suggest the involvement of a broader perspective. Writer and theology professor Robert Rothwell writes “God’s pruning work often involves suffering.”¹⁰²

Verse 4 states the primary assertion of Jesus’ analogy: “Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me.” This verse enumerates two essential principles. First, the branch does not have life in itself. It fully depends on the vine for life and fruitfulness.¹⁰³ Because of this fact, Jesus states in verse 5, “You can do nothing without me.”

The second principle declares that the branch (the believer) bears the responsibility of remaining in the vine. While the power to remain originates in Christ, the responsibility rests with the individual. Jesus expresses this principle as an imperative. He commands abiding; therefore, he requires action on the part of the believer. Hendriksen writes, “Without exertion there is no salvation.”¹⁰⁴ Verse 7 further details the how-to of this abiding: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you.” Saturation in and obedience to God’s Word are the keys to abiding in Christ. Moreover, to the degree that Christ’s words abide in the believer, Jesus also abides in the believer, and the believer abides in Jesus to the degree that the believer chooses to obey Jesus’s words.¹⁰⁵ One of the indicators of this abiding relationship is effective prayer. Jesus continues verse 7: “Ask

¹⁰¹ Naselli, *Let Go and Let God?*, 242.

¹⁰² Robert Rothwell, “Pruned to Perfection,” *Tabletalk Magazine*, October 2004: John Owen (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2004), 50.

¹⁰³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 516.

¹⁰⁴ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to John*, 299.

¹⁰⁵ Naselli, *Let Go and Let God?*, 247.

whatever you want and it will be done for you.” When a person fully abides in Christ, and his Word abides in him, then there will be an alignment of purpose between the heart of God and the heart of the abiding believer. The prayers, or many of the prayers, the believer prays will be in such concert with Christ’s will that the believer will often experience the promise of verse 7.¹⁰⁶

Jesus teaches that the closer a believer abides in him, the more fruit the believer will produce. He states this promise in verse 5 as “the one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit.” Scholars debate suggested lists of potential fruits that might be in Jesus’s view. Some suggest the fruit of the Spirit.¹⁰⁷ Some suggest the act of praise, sacrificial love, holy living, or evangelistic converts.¹⁰⁸ However, others suggest that all of these kinds of lists are reductionistic, meaning that in their attempt to make a list, they overly simplify and miss the full picture.¹⁰⁹ In John 15:8, Jesus says, “My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.” According to this verse, fruit includes all that glorifies the Father and proves the believer to be a disciple of Christ. This category would certainly include many of the things scholars suggest on the lists of fruits, but this definition keeps the spotlight where Jesus places it. The proper focus holds its gaze not on the fruit but on the glory of the Father. If a believer abides in Christ and Christ’s Word abides in him, then his life will bring glory to the Father.

Colossians 2:20-23

All spiritual disciplines and practices are not created equally. They can have

¹⁰⁶ Naselli, *Let Go and Let God?*, 302.

¹⁰⁷ Kenneth O. Gangel, *John*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 282.

¹⁰⁸ MacArthur, *John 12-21*, 149.

¹⁰⁹ Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, 517.

different origins, purposes, and effects. Paul addresses regulations about special days and festivals, ascetic practices, and the worship of angels in Colossians 2:16-19. He says that the proponents of these activities are “inflated by empty notions of their unspiritual mind[s]” (Col 2:18). According to New Testament scholar Larry Helyer, the practices and disciplines included in these verses “push Christ to the periphery and focus instead on mystical experience as the touchstone of spirituality.”¹¹⁰ In light of the controversies surrounding these practices, Paul proceeds to provide clear guidelines for evaluating the appropriateness of various spiritual disciplines in the four verses that follow.

In Colossians 2:20, Paul asks why a believer would “live as if he still belonged to the world,” considering the fact that the believer has “died with Christ to the elements of this world.” Paul had previously said God united Christians with Christ in Christ’s death (v. 12). Now he uses this theme and applies it to the believer’s specific circumstances. Paul asks, “Why do you submit to regulations” (v. 20)? This question consists of just one word in Greek: δογματίζεσθε. Commentator Richard Melick suggests a more accurate translation: “Why are you coming under the dominion of this dogma?”¹¹¹ Melick proceeds to explain that since the dogma was not Christian, it was “particularly devastating to Christian growth,”¹¹² and it brought slavery rather than freedom. Therefore, Christians should be wary of regulations; however, this instruction does not warn against all rules. In this context, the warning refers to regulations that, according to theologian and scholar N. T. Wright, focus on “physical things only, instead of . . . physical things in their full context.”¹¹³ Paul explains this distinction in the following verses.

¹¹⁰ Larry R. Helyer, “Proclaiming Christ as Lord: Colossians 1:15–20,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 17, no. 3 (2013): 5.

¹¹¹ Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 275.

¹¹² Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 275.

¹¹³ N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 130.

In verse 21, Paul uses the false teacher's own words and disparagingly repeats the injunctions.¹¹⁴ He writes, "Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch." Paul establishes the fact that spiritual growth and sanctification cannot be achieved by merely avoiding certain practices.¹¹⁵

If verse 20 provides the first reason the Colossians should reject the regulations of the false teachers, that their rules focus on "the elements of this world," then verse 22 provides the second reason; namely, that the rules fail to reflect divine teaching and instead substitute human reasoning.¹¹⁶ Paul writes, "All these regulations refer to what is destined to perish by being used up; they are human commands and doctrines" (v. 22). This declaration seems to echo the words of Christ in Matthew 15:9: "They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrines human commands." Additionally, Christ's words seem to echo Isaiah's words: "These people approach me with their speeches to honor me with lip-service—yet their hearts are far from me, and human rules direct their worship of me" (Isa 29:13). This thrice repeated statement establishes the unbending rule that believers should not be subject to outside regulations that do not come from the Lord and are not rooted in the instructions and practices found in the Bible. One common thread that permeated the religious culture of Isaiah's day and of Jesus' audience in Matthew 15 is the belief that some people excelled in manmade religion.¹¹⁷ Paul warns the Christians at Colossae of this same danger.

Verse 23 provides the third reason for the rejection of the regulations of the false teachers: "They are not of any value in curbing self-indulgence." Paul begins by acknowledging the potential for confusion about the value of unbiblical spiritual disciplines

¹¹⁴ Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 200.

¹¹⁵ Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, 131.

¹¹⁶ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 236.

¹¹⁷ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Isaiah* (London: Blackie & Son, 1851), 1:443.

and practices (referred to but not detailed in Colossians 2:20-23) by saying, “These have a reputation for wisdom.” Paul’s word for “reputation” (λόγον) ordinarily communicates a positive meaning.¹¹⁸ Therefore, Paul’s usage here combined with the word “wisdom” (σοφία) suggests that undiscerning believers easily see these regulations as good and advantageous for spiritual growth. Paul quickly states three reasons for these beliefs: these rules promote “self-made religion, false humility, and severe treatment of the body” (v. 23).

“Self-made religion” is difficult to define. Moo suggests a connection between this term ἐθελοθρησκία and the “worship of angels” (v. 18) previously mentioned by Paul. The “reputation for wisdom” (v. 23) held by this spiritual practice comes from the assertion that their angel-worship equaled “worship freely chosen.”¹¹⁹ “False humility” (ταπεινοφροσύνη), an attitude that resembles humility but actually disguises a perverse form of pride, fails because it has the goal of eliciting praise for the one engaged in the spiritual activity.¹²⁰ This assertion complements the motivation Jesus describes when he says, “Whenever you fast, don’t be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward” (Matt 6:16). “Severe treatment of the body” (v. 23) points to some ascetic practice the false teachers encouraged. Asceticism has long held allure as a method for managing sin and finding spiritual enlightenment.¹²¹ This practice and viewpoint permeates many religious systems throughout the world and throughout history.¹²² However, asceticism only serves to gratify the flesh. It is often a futile attempt to appear more spiritual than

¹¹⁸ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 194-95.

¹¹⁹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 240.

¹²⁰ Vaughan, *Colossians*, 208.

¹²¹ Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 242.

¹²² Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 242.

other people.¹²³ Nineteenth-century English pastor Alexander Maclaren famously wrote, “Any asceticism is a great deal more to men’s taste than abandoning self.”¹²⁴

As the third reason Christians should reject the regulations of the false teachers, Colossians states that they “are not of any value in curbing self-indulgence” (v. 23). Whitney stresses that when it comes to any spiritual discipline, the most important feature consists of its practical purpose. The purpose must be godliness, or the discipline misses the mark.¹²⁵ According to Whitney, the rituals and practices taught by these false teachers “may look like marks of true spirituality, but they’re worthless for changing one’s heart or relationship with God.”¹²⁶ Because these rituals and practices are worthless, Christians must reject them. Thus, Paul establishes guidelines and guardrails for the teaching and practice of spiritual disciplines in the life of a believer.

Conclusion

The five New Testament passages discussed in this chapter lay the essential foundation for an understanding of the role sin plays in the life of a believer, the responsibility of the believer in dealing with that sin, the assurance and description of the work of God in the process of sanctification, and the limits to the kind of spiritual disciplines that effectively curb the indulgence of the flesh.

Each of these aspects plays a critical role in living the abundant Christian life. Without understanding the role sin plays in the life of a believer, some will dismiss the continued presence of sin and thus ignore its cancerous effects. Others will view continued sin as a sign they do not possess genuine salvation and live in despair and

¹²³ MacArthur, *Colossians*, 123.

¹²⁴ Alexander Maclaren, quoted in Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Philippians–Colossians* (London: Fleming H. Revell, 1887), 2:160.

¹²⁵ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 17.

¹²⁶ Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*, 24.

personal condemnation. Some others will recognize their sin but fail to work toward change in a vain hope that God will remove their sin without their participation in the process, and thus, they continue in sustained disobedience.

Without understanding the believer's responsibility to mortify sin, the Christian will experience little spiritual growth and no assurance of salvation. Without an understanding of God's role through the agency of his Spirit and the sustenance of his Son, the vine, the Christian will quickly become frustrated with the impossible task of self-sanctification; he will fail to avail himself of the indispensable work of God to bring real and lasting change to his life. Finally, without understanding the biblical limits for spiritual practices and disciplines, the well-meaning Christian may engage in activities that have the appearance of spiritual value but in the end merely puff up the believer and deepen the roots of pride and all manner of sin.

These five New Testament passages both warn and encourage. They provide the believer the hope and assurance as well as the instruction and resources needed for real change, even change with respect to persistent sins.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL/PRACTICAL/HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED
TO THE USE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE
MORTIFICATION OF PERSISTENT SIN

Introduction

The Bible presents clear admonitions about a Christian's responsibility toward sin. Paul writes to the Romans, "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body" (Rom 6:12). He goes on to command, "Put to death the deeds of the body" (Rom 8:13). He instructs young Timothy, "Train yourself in godliness" (1 Tim 4:7). Additionally, Hebrews charges believers to "pursue holiness" (Heb 12:14). In light of these clear commands, how do believers find success in their struggle with sin? What is the mechanism for the Christian's part in the pursuit of holiness? The practice of biblical spiritual disciplines provides one of the answer best answers to these questions. Donald S. Whitney, who has authored multiple books on the subject of spiritual disciplines, writes, "The only road to Christian maturity and godliness . . . passes through the practice of the spiritual disciplines."¹ Richard Foster, author of the widely-read *Celebration of Discipline*, writes similarly that the spiritual disciplines are the means by which believers experience progress in their pursuit of inner righteousness.² Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards, along with others, calls these practices a "means of grace."³

This chapter investigates these "means of grace," with a brief overview of how

¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 16-17.

² Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), 7-8.

³ Kyle C. Strobel, *Formed for the Glory of God: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan Edwards* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 70-72.

spiritual disciplines have been practiced in Christian history—with emphasis on recent times—specifically for spiritual growth and training in godliness. The chapter will continue with a more detailed investigation of four specific personal disciplines: meditation, prayer, fasting, and journaling.⁴ The study will focus on how these practices serve to catalyze the mortification of persistent sin. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a brief look at the role of the interpersonal spiritual disciplines of fellowship and accountability in the local church as a critical element in the proper expression of spiritual disciplines and biblical sanctification.

Spiritual Disciplines in Christian History

Spiritual disciplines have served as a spiritual foundation and a catalyst for spiritual growth in the lives of the children of God as far back as Bible times. An exhaustive study of this subject would involve scores of spiritual practices taught and performed in many different contexts. Due to its limited scope, this survey will look briefly at two time periods and practices: the eleventh-century focus on *lectio divina* and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practice of the spiritual disciplines by the Puritans.

⁴ Many biblical spiritual disciplines could be appropriately considered, but these four have been chosen for three reasons. First, these disciplines seem to be uniquely connected and serve to support and reinforce each other. Meditation and prayer are inseparably linked. Fasting provides greater time and focus for prayer and meditation, and it serves to help eliminate unnecessary distractions. The discipline of journaling ties together each of the other three and provides the believer an avenue of expression that allows him to identify lessons, decisions, and commitments for the mortification of sin. Second, these disciplines have been chosen because they have been classified as some of the primary personal disciplines. Whitney writes, “One approach classifies [spiritual disciplines] as personal and corporate (or congregational) disciplines, meaning some disciplines are practiced in isolation, others are practiced in community. Examples of the former are the private reading of and meditating on Scripture, individual prayer, fasting, solitude, and the keeping of a spiritual journal.” Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose your Spiritual Health* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 93. Further, John Owen identifies prayer, fasting, and meditation as the “instrumental cause” of freedom from sin. John Owen, “A Treatise on the Dominion of Sin and Grace,” in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1965), 7:554. Third, the scope of this project would not allow for a thorough treatment of a larger number of spiritual disciplines. These spiritual disciplines were chosen as those that best support the Rom 12:2 admonition to resist sinful conformation to this age by being transformed by the renewing of the mind.

Both traditions influence and inform contemporary understandings and practices of spiritual disciplines.⁵

Eleventh Century *Lectio Divina*

In the eleventh century, Guigo II wrote a letter, known as the *Scala Paradisi*, to a fellow Carthusian monk, Brother Gervase, that described “a ladder of four rungs by which we may climb to heaven.”⁶ Using the imagery of the Genesis 28 account of Jacob and the ladder to heaven, and leaning on the fifth-century writings of John Cassian, Guigo described four practices or disciplines that promote Christian growth and sanctification:

Reading . . . is busily looking on Holy Scripture with all one's will and wit. Meditation is a studious insearching with the mind to know what was before concealed through desiring proper skill. Prayer is a devout desiring of the heart to get what is good and avoid what is evil. Contemplation is the lifting up of the heart to God tasting somewhat of the heavenly sweetness and savour.⁷

In summary of his four-pronged approach, Guigo declared, “Reading seeks, meditation finds, prayer asks, contemplation feels.”⁸ Not only does he describe each of these spiritual practices in his lengthy letter, but he shows how each rung of the ladder

⁵ Other traditions and practices have also informed contemporary views of spiritual formation. Theologian Christopher Hall notes that ancient Christianity spirituality (AD 100-600) was characterized by spiritual *ascesis*, an approach to spiritual growth that mimicked the disciplined regimen of a Greek athlete. He writes that the primary habits included prayer, meditative reading of Scripture, and fasting. Christopher Hall, “Ancient Christian Spirituality (AD 100-600),” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 103. Liturgical spirituality is another significant organized approach to Christian spirituality. This tradition focuses on the “nourishing value of corporate worship.” John D. Witvliet and Carrie Steenwyk, “Liturgical Spirituality,” in Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 159. Structured worship, church calendars, and written prayers serve to reinforce that spirituality is a shared endeavor, and believers grow spiritually through their corporate participation with other believers. As important as these and other traditions are, this project spotlights the history of the practice of *lectio divina* and the practices of the Puritans because these two traditions specifically emphasized the personal spiritual disciplines that were presented as essential means of grace for the mortification of sin.

⁶ Guigo II, “Scala Paradisi,” accessed January 31, 2019, <https://www.fisheaters.com/guigo.html>.

⁷ Guigo, “Scala Paradisi.”

⁸ Guigo, “Scala Paradisi.”

takes the believer to a higher level: Reading moves the believer across the ground to the right spot. Meditation digs deep into the ground to find the treasure. Because man cannot attain the treasure alone, he prays. Prayer then opens the treasure to expose the believer to the sweetness and delight of the Lord, which leads to contemplative celebration.⁹ Guigo identifies the goal of this spiritual practice at the conclusion of his letter to Gervase: “May he lead us by the aforesaid rungs until we see the God of gods in Sion, where the chosen enjoy the sweetness of divine contemplation, not drop by drop, nor now and then, but where they are ever fulfilled with the torrent of pleasure and have that joy that no one shall take from them, and peace unchangeable, peace in the selfsame.”¹⁰

Collectively, these four elements became known as *lectio divina*, divine reading. The church retained Guigo’s Latin words for the four rungs and refers to these today as *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation).¹¹ The spiritual practice of *lectio* refers, traditionally, to the careful and disciplined reading of the Bible. Devotional writer Eugene Peterson suggests this historical practice is much akin to what modern Bible students call an exegesis of the text.¹² *Meditatio*, according to Peterson, “moves from looking at the words of the text to entering the world of the text.”¹³ This practice involves more than analyzing the text’s meaning and delves into how the meaning of the text finds application in the worshiper’s life. *Oratio* refers to prayer that is spontaneous and responsive as opposed to prayers recited

⁹ Guigo, “Scala Paradisi.”

¹⁰ Guigo, “Scala Paradisi.”

¹¹ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 530.

¹² Eugene H. Peterson, “Spiritual Reading (Lectio Divina),” in Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 769.

¹³ Peterson, “Spiritual Reading (Lectio Divina),” 769.

from memory or read from a prayer book.¹⁴ Through the years, theological traditions have defined *Contemplatio* in diverse ways. Guigo describes *contemplatio* as an experience of ecstasy, something that is “felt,” and received with “sighs mingled with tears.”¹⁵ Peterson says something very different. He writes that *contemplatio* refers to “submitting to the biblical revelation, receiving it within ourselves, and then living it unpretentiously, without fanfare.”¹⁶ These two definitions describe very different experiences and activities. The former focuses on mood and emotion and risks equating one’s own spirit with the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ The latter focuses on God’s Word and grounds the believer in objective truth.¹⁸

Christians of many traditions have continued to embrace these four spiritual practices in various forms for almost 1,000 years. They have served as a foundation and an influence on many other methods for spiritual formation and expressions of spiritual disciplines. One historical example of the impact of *lectio divina* bears mentioning. For the Reformers, the careful and prayerful study of Scripture was, according to theologian Timothy George, a “core conviction.”¹⁹ With a keen awareness of the method of *lectio*

¹⁴ Charles W. Nienkirchen, “Prayer,” in Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 170.

¹⁵ Guigo, “Scala Paradisi.”

¹⁶ Peterson, “Spiritual Reading (Lectio Divina),” 769.

¹⁷ David Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God’s Word Today*, ed. Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 31.

¹⁸ Among the diversity of views with respect to *contemplatio*, Adele Calhoun, writer of a popular book on spiritual disciplines, says the traditional practice was one of quiet rest and waiting as the word of God “sink[s] deeply into your soul.” Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009), 169. New Testament Professor Jerry R. Flora writes that *contemplatio* traditionally consists of a time of “silence in which we neither read nor think nor speak but listen.” Jerry R. Flora, “Reaching One’s Potential in Christ,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 21 (1989): 28.

¹⁹ Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 19.

divina practiced by the monks of their day, many of the reformers developed their own systems for Bible study and prayer. Martin Luther, who himself had a monastic background, developed a three-step plan similar to classic *lectio divina*. His steps were *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*.²⁰ He taught that the study of Scripture should begin with prayer (*oratio*). For Luther, meditation (*meditatio*) involved not just reading Scripture but reading, repeating, and pondering Scripture aloud.²¹ Moreover, *tentatio* involved wrestling with the Scripture and applying it to life for the mortification of sin. Luther rejected the traditional view of *contemplatio*. He believed that when a Christian engaged in prayer and the study of Scripture, the primary experience was not ecstasy but conviction.²² He believed devotional reading brought spiritual war with the flesh and fleshly desires. *Tentatio* (temptation) was the process of moving from conviction to resolution. Luther's plan was just one of many devotional practices through the years that sprang from the original *lectio divina*. With its various forms, some more and some less in line with biblically prescribed methods, in general, according to theologian Gregg Allison, "the rigorous practice of *lectio divina* promoted sanctification."²³

The Puritan Focus on Spiritual Disciplines

Primarily sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestants in England and New England, the Puritans became a loosely organized movement that worked for the purification of the believer, the church, and society.²⁴ Evangelical and Anglican

²⁰ George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 166.

²¹ George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*, 166.

²² Timothy J. Wengert, preface to *Luther's Spirituality*, ed. Philip D. W. Krey, Bernard McGinn, and Peter D. S. Krey, trans. Peter D. S. Krey and Philip D. W. Krey, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), xiv.

²³ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 530.

²⁴ M. A. Noll, "Puritanism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 972.

theologian J. I. Packer writes that the Puritans “sought to glorify God by completing the reformation of English church life, by discipling the nation, and by Christianizing all public life.”²⁵ Founded on a commitment to personal piety and sustained by a commitment to personal Bible study, expository preaching, and disciplined prayer, Puritanism not only impacted its world—in the First Great Awakening, for example—but continues to influence spiritual practices today. This contemporary influence surfaces over and over in some of the most significant contemporary books focused on spiritual disciplines and spiritual growth.²⁶ The fact that Puritans embraced sanctification as one of their primary concerns, and that they had such a high commitment to formal spiritual practices, makes their contribution to the subject of spiritual disciplines an important consideration for this project.²⁷

The Puritans did not use the phrase “spiritual disciplines”; instead, Jonathan Edwards and other Puritans called these practices “means of grace.”²⁸ Their choice of this particular phrase was not without purpose. “Means of grace” links Christian practice with salvation and reminds the believer that the grace of God underpins every part of salvation from justification to sanctification. Without proper care, spiritual disciplines develop into a

²⁵ J. I. Packer, “Puritan Spirituality,” in Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 702.

²⁶ Whitney writes that he stood on the shoulders of the Puritans as he wrote *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 11. Jerry Bridges made a similar claim in the preface of *The Pursuit of Holiness* and in the preface of *The Discipline of Grace*. Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1978), 12; Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God’s Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 8. J. I. Packer introduces *A Quest for Godliness* by listing seven ways Puritanism shaped his life. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 12-15. In *Desiring God*, John Piper concludes the book by listing several steps to further fight for joy and closeness God. One step includes the instruction to read books by the Puritans as they are among “the richest ever written.” John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 363.

²⁷ James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 2:392.

²⁸ Strobel, *Formed for the Glory of God*, 70-72.

self-help program. If someone struggles with a particular sin, then perhaps that person could perform some spiritual activity or find some spiritual discipline that might counteract the temptation and thus remedy the sin problem in the short term. Kyle Strobel, professor of Spiritual Theology and Formation at Talbot School of Theology, recapitulates the view of Jonathan Edwards and says this approach creates a major theological difficulty: “God is totally superfluous to [the] discussion.”²⁹ Further, this approach orients the believer’s focus to himself instead of the Lord. In John 15, Jesus instructed his followers to keep their focus on him, “abide in me,” and he would cause the spiritual fruit to grow in abundance in their lives. Strobel writes, “Holiness is not something you can develop an action plan for. Holiness is not in your power. The means of grace are actions that help us focus more fully on God, recognizing that God is the fountain from which all grace flows.”³⁰

The spiritual disciplines, then, serve as means of grace by leading Christians to a more closely abiding relationship with the vine so the Lord can grow spiritual fruit in the believer’s life. Consequently, the believer experiences spiritual growth and maturity.

The Puritans engaged in many spiritual activities that could fall under the category of spiritual disciplines or means of grace, but arguably the three most prominent practices were meditation, prayer, and conference. Puritan Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686) answered a question about the method for keeping one’s love for God strong by writing, “Use all means for quickening; be much in prayer, meditation, and holy conference.”³¹

Puritan John Preston (1587-1628) identified the same three practices as the key means of

²⁹ Strobel, *Formed for the Glory of God*, 71.

³⁰ Strobel, *Formed for the Glory of God*, 71.

³¹ Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial; The Saint’s Spiritual Delight; The Holy Eucharist; and Other Treatises, The Writings of the Doctrinal Puritans and Divines of the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1846), 111-12.

grace in addition to elements of corporate worship.³² John Owen recognized four practices as keys to escape the entanglements of sin: prayer, meditation, observing the ordinances, and conference.³³ Eighteenth-century Baptist pastor John Gill wrote in the spirit of the Puritans when he said that in addition to Bible reading Christians should devote their most holy days to “prayer, and meditation, and Christian conferences.”³⁴ These three spiritual practices formed the common denominator of what many Puritan leaders prescribed as the essential Christian life.

Puritans and Meditation. For the Puritans, according to Watson, “meditation was a daily duty . . . that enhanced every other duty of the Christian life.”³⁵ Watson described meditation as “a holy exercise of the mind whereby we bring the truths of God to remembrance, and do seriously ponder upon them and apply them to ourselves.”³⁶ While Puritan meditation practices varied widely, six elements—according to contemporary Puritan scholar Joel Beeke—characterized their practice.³⁷

The first element involved prayer and seeking assistance of the Holy Spirit. Next, the believer would read Scripture, then memorize some part of his reading to more clearly direct the focus of his mind. The fourth element consisted of thinking of all the

³² Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 425.

³³ John Owen, “Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers,” in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1862), 618.

³⁴ John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures* (London: Tegg & Company, 1839), 2:728.

³⁵ Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 23.

³⁶ Joel R. Beeke, “Could You Discuss the Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation? How Can We Learn from Them Today?” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 4 (2006): 91.

³⁷ Beeke, “Could You Discuss the Puritan Practice?,” 93.

ways the full testimony of Scripture spoke about the subject at hand and how the matter connected to other biblical doctrines. Fifth, according to Beeke, the believer would “stir up affections, such as love, desire, hope, courage, gratitude, zeal, and joy . . . to glorify God.”³⁸ This element involved thinking through how the Scripture applied to specific situations in the believer’s life. Finally, meditation included the making of firm resolutions to the Lord.

Meditation was a cornerstone of Puritan spirituality. Puritan preacher William Bridge (c. 1600-1670) writes, “[Meditation] is the sister of reading . . . [and] the mother of prayer.”³⁹ Thomas Watson declared, “The reason we come away so cold from reading the word is because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation.”⁴⁰ Richard Baxter, called by some the greatest of all Puritan preachers,⁴¹ taught that meditation constitutes the one key discipline for spiritual prosperity.⁴²

Puritans and prayer. The Puritans viewed meditation-fueled prayer as a primary means of grace. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) connected prayer to meditation: “As meditation is the best preparative for prayer, so prayer is the best issue of meditation.”⁴³ Henry wrote in his diary, “I love prayer. It is that which buckles on all the

³⁸ Beeke, “Could You Discuss the Puritan Practice?,” 93.

³⁹ William Bridge, *The Works of the Reverend William Bridge* (Beaver Falls, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 3:132.

⁴⁰ James Nichols, *Puritan Sermons* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 2:62.

⁴¹ Timothy K. Beougher, “Richard Baxter (1615–1691): A Model of Pastoral Leadership for Evangelism and Church Growth,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6, no. 4 (2002): 3.

⁴² Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 13.

⁴³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 750.

Christian's armour."⁴⁴ The Puritans were passionate and deliberate about prayer. According to Whitney, many Puritans used daily habits such as the ritual of dressing each morning to prompt them to pray for specific items of concern.⁴⁵ A proper study of Puritan spiritual practices could not omit a focus on their passion for and commitment to prayer.

Puritans and conference. *Conference* is not a common word today, at least as it refers to a spiritual discipline or means of grace. However, the Puritans discussed and promoted conferencing with the same frequency and vigor as they promoted prayer and meditation.⁴⁶ Richard Baxter, noted Puritan preacher, used the word *conference* as a verb to describe the practice of meeting with other believers to discuss Scripture and share how God is working in one another's lives.⁴⁷ References to conferencing surface often in the writings of Jonathan Edwards, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, and other Puritan leaders.⁴⁸

Malachi 3:16 established the scriptural foundation for the practice: "At that time those who feared the Lord spoke to one another. The Lord took notice and listened. So a book of remembrance was written before him for those who feared the Lord and had high regard for his name."⁴⁹ Other biblical passages, Old and New Testament, support conference. Psalm 66:16 says, "Come and listen, all who fear God, and I will tell what he

⁴⁴ J. B. Williams, *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 2:210.

⁴⁵ Donald Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2003), 91.

⁴⁶ Joanne J. Jung, *The Lost Discipline of Conversation: Surprising Lessons in Spiritual Formation Drawn from the English Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 32.

⁴⁷ Jung, *The Lost Discipline of Conversation*, 39.

⁴⁸ Jung, *The Lost Discipline of Conversation*, 39-47.

⁴⁹ Jung asserts that the Puritans often cited Mal 3:16 as biblical support of conference. Jung, *The Lost Discipline of Conversation*, 45.

has done for me.” Hebrews 10:24-25 urges believers to meet together to encourage and provoke one another toward love and good works. The apostle Paul says Christians are built up by the words of other believers (Eph 4:15-16, 29).

The practice of conference involved meetings in homes, at places of business, and at churches where believers would discuss the previous week’s sermon or their recent Bible reading. Conference was a practice similar to the way some Christians today practice intentional small groups or accountability partnerships.⁵⁰ Thus, the discipline of conference joined the disciplines of meditation and prayer as the primary path of Christian discipleship for the Puritans.

The eleventh-century practice of *lectio divina* and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practices of the Puritans exercise significant influence on the theology and practice of spiritual disciplines today. While the Word of God establishes the foundation of every proper discipline, the development and application of that foundation through these two historical periods in the life of the church can provide rich examples and helpful models that inform and challenge believers today when those models are faithful to Scripture.

Overview of Key Spiritual Disciplines

Meditation

The first of the four spiritual disciplines focused on in this chapter is meditation. Puritan Thomas Watson writes, “A good Christian is a meditating Christian.”⁵¹ Meditation has stood as a primary duty and practice of the followers of God since early in biblical history. Following the death of Moses, God gave critical instructions to Joshua for the leadership of the nation of Israel. He commanded Joshua to meditate on the Word of God “day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it” (Josh

⁵⁰ Strobel, *Formed for the Glory of God*, 149.

⁵¹ Watson, *A Divine Cordial*, 32.

1:8). The Psalms often speak of meditation, and the book begins with both a warning and a promise concerning the practice: “Instead, [the “happy” man’s] delight is in the LORD’s instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (Ps 1:2-3). Mary, the mother of Jesus, meditated in Luke 2:19. Paul commands all believers to meditate in Philippians 4:8 and Colossians 3:16. Leaders in the early church, such as Chrysostom, Cyprian, and Jerome, commonly promoted meditation.⁵²

The focus on meditation seldom waned. From the seeds of *lectio divina*, through the habits of the Reformers, right into the lives of the Puritans, meditation remained a common practice. Watson writes, “A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools.”⁵³ In the contemporary church’s emphasis on spiritual disciplines, meditation continues as the hub of spirituality.⁵⁴

Definitions for meditation vary widely. Whitney defines the practice as “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”⁵⁵ The strength of Whitney’s definition lies in its emphasis on the role of Scripture in meditation. Foster describes meditation in much broader terms. He includes alongside a focus on Scripture the possibility of contemplative practices, such as “re-collection” or “centering down,” that involve silence, special postures, and imaginative exercises.⁵⁶ The Bible does not prescribe or endorse any of these activities. If the goal of meditation is relaxation,

⁵² Watson, *A Divine Cordial*, 98.

⁵³ Watson, *A Divine Cordial*, 75.

⁵⁴ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 173.

⁵⁵ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 16-17.

⁵⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 30-31.

stress relief, focus, mystical experience, or inner peace and calmness, then extra-biblical methods may be helpful to the meditator. This kind of meditation—focused on neurological effects and therapeutic benefits—is becoming more popular in Christian circles.⁵⁷ However, if the goal of meditation is to draw closer to God and be conformed to his will, then logic demands that the primary instrument of meditation would be Scripture where God has revealed himself. Well-known English writer G. K. Chesterton writes, “The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.”⁵⁸ The revealed truth of Scripture remains the solid food for the Christian seeking to draw nearer to God through meditation. Eugene Peterson writes about the danger of non-Bible centered meditation: “God does not put us in charge of forming our personal spiritualities. We grow in accordance with the revealed word implanted in us by the Spirit.”⁵⁹ Peterson urges the believer who wishes to make progress in his spiritual pursuits to focus on the text of Scripture in “sturdy contrast to the potpourri of religious psychology, self-development, mystical experimentation, and devotional dilettantism that has come to characterize so much of what takes cover under the umbrella of ‘spirituality.’”⁶⁰

For the purpose of this project, it is especially important to observe that meditation plays an essential role in the mortification of sin. Again, quoting Watson, “Meditation is a strong antidote against sin. Most sin is committed for want of meditation.”⁶¹ This statement echoes Psalm 119:11, which says, “I have treasured your

⁵⁷ Maxine Hancock, “Meditation,” in Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 607.

⁵⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography*, in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 16:212.

⁵⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 15.

⁶⁰ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 17.

⁶¹ Watson, *A Divine Cordial*, 95.

word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.”

At least three mechanisms lead to the effectiveness of meditation in the fight against sin. First, Jesus commanded believers to abide in him and allow his words to abide in them. He promised that this activity would lead to the production of much spiritual fruit in the life of the believer (John 15). Paul said something similar when he explained how not to allow sin to reign. He commanded the believer to offer his body to God as a weapon for righteousness (Rom 6:12-14), which includes focused Bible study and meditation. The second mechanism for meditation to lead to the mortification of sin consists of the specific spiritual wisdom that meditation brings to the Christian. God’s Word addresses every possible temptation. A thorough and intimate knowledge of God’s Word will allow it to serve as a lamp to the feet and a light to the path for a believer to flee the enticement to sin (Ps 119:105). Third, God’s Word is the primary tool the Holy Spirit uses for sanctification.⁶² The Bible instructs believers to dwell mentally on whatever is honorable, right, pure, lovely (Phil 4:8); Paul commands believers to let the word of Christ richly dwell in them (Col 3:16); and Ephesians 6:17 speaks of the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit can and will sanctify believers, and he will do it as Christ prayed: “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).

Methods for meditating on Scripture vary widely, though two fundamental principles guide the practice. First, Christian meditation is not about emptying the mind but filling the mind with Scripture and Scripture-directed thoughts of God and self. Second, Christian meditation must involve personal submission to the written Word. Whitney writes, “The outcome of meditation should be application. Like chewing without swallowing, so meditation is incomplete without some type of application.”⁶³ In his recent book on spiritual disciplines, David Mathis begins his chapter on meditation with a

⁶² MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience*, 159.

⁶³ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 59.

declaration of its indispensability for the Christian: “We were made to meditate.”⁶⁴

Meditation is one of the key spiritual disciplines needed to honor God and mortify the flesh.

Prayer

The spiritual discipline of prayer joins meditation as a key component in the believer’s pursuit to put to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13). Jesus established the connection between prayer and overcoming temptation when he urged his disciples to pray: “Do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt 6:13). Jesus teaches in this admonition that the fight against sin is not primarily a matter of willpower; rather, it is the need for shepherding and deliverance.⁶⁵ Whitney says succinctly, “One of the main reasons for a lack of Godliness is prayerlessness.”⁶⁶

Devotional writers such as R. A. Torrey, J. C. Ryle, and Andrew Murray concur with Whitney and clearly identify a link between prayer and the mortification of sin.⁶⁷ E. M. Bounds writes, “Unrighteous conduct is born of prayerlessness; the two go hand-in-hand.”⁶⁸ The reason the association is strong is threefold.

First, prayer calls God to action on behalf of the believer. Puritan author William Gurnall (1616-1679), in his classic book *The Christian in Complete Armour*, points to the cries of Moses and David for the Lord to arise (Num 10:35, Ps 68:1) and

⁶⁴ David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

⁶⁵ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *The Prayer That Turns the World Upside Down: The Lord’s Prayer as a Manifesto for Revolution* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018), chap. 7, para. 11, Logos.

⁶⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 66.

⁶⁷ See Reuben Archer Torrey, *How to Pray* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1900), 26; J. C. Ryle, *A Call to Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 35; Andrew Murray, *Living a Prayerful Life* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2002), chap. 6, para. 9, Logos.

⁶⁸ Edward M. Bounds, *The Necessity of Prayer* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research, 1999), 53.

fight on their behalf: “[Prayer] is the silver trumpet, by the sound of which he is to alarm heaven, and call in God to his succour. The saint’s enemies will not fall till God riseth; and God stays to be raised by his prayers.”⁶⁹ If the fight against sin and temptation is at least in partnership with the Holy Spirit, then prayer becomes an essential starting place as it calls upon the Spirit to engage. The Psalmist set the example for all believers when he prayed, “Keep your servant from willful sins; do not let them rule me. Then I will be blameless and cleansed from blatant rebellion” (Ps 19:13).

Second, prayer draws the believer nearer to the Lord (Jas 4:8) providing both the strength and the focus needed to help insulate the believer from fleshly temptation.⁷⁰ The spiritual strength that results from prayer (or the lack of spiritual strength that comes from prayerlessness) often determines the believer’s response when temptation strikes.⁷¹

Third, prayer creates what Bounds calls “a distaste for sinning.”⁷² Because prayer promotes a clean heart and pure life, the repugnant nature of sin repels the believer. Scottish minister and noted Bible scholar James Hastings writes, “The life that in prayer habitually lets itself be searched by the Divine gaze cannot continue in conscious, deliberate sin.”⁷³ Hastings points out the incompatibility of the heart of a believer immersed in prayer and man’s base nature that is attracted to temptation. Investment of time and energy in the former (prayer) will impede the influence of the latter (the base nature).

⁶⁹ William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 624.

⁷⁰ MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience*, 160.

⁷¹ Ronnie Floyd, *The Power of Prayer and Fasting* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 106.

⁷² Bounds, *The Necessity of Prayer*, 53.

⁷³ James Hastings, *The Christian Doctrine of Prayer* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1915), 268.

Prayer is critical to every aspect of the Christian's life and spiritual journey. Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, emphasizes the importance of prayer: "To fail to pray, then, is not to merely break some religious rule—it is a failure to treat God as God. It is a sin against his glory."⁷⁴ Whitney indicates that Jonathan Edwards held this same view: "Next to a hunger for the Bible, Edwards believed that the most important indicator of a person's relationship to God or, conversely, the absence thereof, was prayer."⁷⁵ Paul writes, "Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving" (Col 4:2). Prayer is a fundamental spiritual discipline for the Christian life.

Fasting

The spiritual discipline of fasting plays a significant role in overcoming temptation and putting to death besetting sins. Jesus demonstrated this truth when he successfully resisted the enemy's repeated temptations in the wilderness encounter at least in part due to the resolution and strength that came through a forty-day fast (Matt 4:1-11).⁷⁶ The Christian must not ignore the sanctifying effect of fasting. Although the primary purpose of fasting is not that God would do something in or for the believer, but rather that the believer might honor or draw nearer to God; Scripture does promise certain benefits.⁷⁷ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus promised a reward for rightly motivated fasting (Matt 6:18). In Matthew 17:21, Jesus asserts that some problems can only be

⁷⁴ Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 26.

⁷⁵ Donald S. Whitney, *Finding God in Solitude: The Personal Piety of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and Its Influence on His Pastoral Ministry* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 83.

⁷⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 212-13.

⁷⁷ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 78.

solved by “prayer and fasting” (AV).⁷⁸ In Isaiah 58:6, God promises to “break the chains of wickedness [and] untie the ropes of the yoke [of sin]” in response to fasting. Biblical fasting makes a difference in the practice of godliness in the lives of faithful Christians.⁷⁹

Fasting contributes to the battle against persistent sins in at least three additional ways. First, fasting strengthens the practice and effect of the other spiritual disciplines. Piper paints a word picture that illustrates the interconnectivity of prayer and fasting and how fasting compliments prayer: “Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand, the one with which we let go of the visible.”⁸⁰ Whitney identifies additional aspects of the relationship between these two disciplines. He says fasting “sharpens the edge of our intercessions and gives passion to our supplications.”⁸¹ Concerning meditation, the most obvious way fasting supports this discipline is by allowing the time that would have been given to eating to now be invested in meditation.

The second way fasting helps the believer put to death stubborn sins is that the practice of fasting becomes a clear declaration that the believer’s base desires and temptations are not in charge of his actions. When the believer refuses to eat even when hunger pangs tempt him to eat, his refusal establishes the fact that he has the ability to deny his bodily desires. The believer is in fact “crucified with Christ” (Rom 6:6). This declaration parallels declarations made by other spiritual disciplines. When the believer prays earnestly, he is declaring that he is powerless apart from the intervening strength of

⁷⁸ New Testament scholar Robert Ultley writes, “Verse 21 is not found in the Greek text of either Siniaticus (Ⲙ) or Vaticanus (B). It seems to have been incorporated by very early copyists from the parallel account in Mark 9:29 where it is included in the original text.” Robert James Utley, *The First Christian Primer: Matthew*, Study Guide Commentary Series, vol. 9 (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 146.

⁷⁹ Elmer L. Towns, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (Ventura, CA: Regal; Gospel Light, 1996), 29.

⁸⁰ Piper, *A Hunger for God*, 197.

⁸¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 200-01.

the Lord. When a believer meditates on Scripture, he declares that he is in need of the Lord's guidance. When a believer gives regularly and sacrificially, he declares that he trusts the Lord to meet his needs. These declarations are valuable to the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification.⁸² The apostle Paul alludes to the usefulness of these declarations (and specifically the one made by the Christian's fast) when he says that believers are to "consider yourselves dead to sin" (Rom 6:11).

The third way fasting helps the believer overcome temptation is by training the believer to rely on God's presence alone for satisfaction and strength. When the believer denies himself the pleasure of food, he can often see more clearly the deceptive nature of temptation. Temptation says that the longings and desires of the body can only be satisfied in one way. Through fasting, the believer discovers that this way of thinking is a lie. It is the Lord who provides true and lasting satisfaction. As the believer learns this lesson through fasting, his strength for the fight against the lusts of the flesh increases and he grows in godliness.⁸³

Journaling

Journaling, like fasting, is a supporting discipline. The regular practice of writing down insights gained from Scripture reading and meditation and how those insights have intersected with the activities of life supports the practice of meditation. Writing down the content of prayers, praises, and confessions elevates the effectiveness of every other spiritual discipline.⁸⁴ As recommended by Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, journaling at the conclusion of daily prayer can lead to a deeper and more focused prayer

⁸² Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us Out* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 90-91.

⁸³ Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness*, 90-91.

⁸⁴ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 128-29.

life. Recording key insights after meditating on Scripture or recording struggles and successes in fasting can lead to greater reward from those spiritual practices.⁸⁵

Most important to the subject of this project, journaling can provide a mechanism for the work of the Holy Spirit so the believer can mortify persistent sins. Whitney writes, “The journal can be a mirror in the hands of the Holy Spirit in which he reveals his perspective on our attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions.”⁸⁶ Then, journaling can further become a practical way to cooperate with the Spirit and labor to mortify the deeds of the body.⁸⁷ Led by English Reformer John Bradford, the Puritans taught this pattern for spiritual growth.⁸⁸ They believed and taught that journaling could be the catalyst to spiritual growth and the instrument to fight against indwelling sin.⁸⁹ In his private diary, David Brainerd, a well-known American missionary to the Native Americans in the middle of the eighteenth century, provides many examples of how journaling can be used to confess transgressions while exploring how a particular sin offends God and his Word. In one typical journal entry, Brainerd wrote with great humility about a careless statement he had made and how the sin of making that statement brought him great grief:

Whereas I have said before several persons, concerning Mr. Whittelsey, one of the tutors of Yale college, that I did not believe he had any more grace than the chair I then leaned upon: I humbly confess, that herein I have sinned against God, and acted contrary to the rules of his word, and have injured Mr. Whittelsey. I had no right to make thus free with his character; and had no just reason to say as I did concerning him. My fault herein was the more aggravated, in that I said this concerning one that

⁸⁵ Richard V. Peace, “Journaling, Spiritual,” in Scorgie, *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 551.

⁸⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 254.

⁸⁷ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 254-66.

⁸⁸ Packer writes, “John Bradford, the Marian martyr . . . pioneered the Puritan discipline of keeping a journal as a kind of private confessional in order to spur himself on in the ‘heart-work’ of self-knowledge, self-watch, daily repentance for daily shortcomings, and methodical praise and prayer.” Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 329.

⁸⁹ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 854.

was so much my superior, and one that I was obliged to treat with special respect and honor, by reason of the relation I stood in to him in the college. Such a manner of behavior, I confess, did not become a Christian; it was taking too much upon me, and did not savor of that humble respect that I ought to have expressed towards Mr. Whittelsey. I have long since been convinced of the falseness of those apprehensions, by which I then justified such a conduct. I have often reflected on this act with grief; I hope, on account of the sin of it: and am willing to lie low, and be abased before God and man for it.⁹⁰

Jeremiah's book of Lamentations and many of David's Psalms provide the most direct biblical support for the discipline of journaling. These books support journaling not by commanding but by modeling the practice. David models this practice by writing in Psalm 86:1-7 his Godward groans about his sin and need for mercy:

Listen, LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Protect my life, for I am faithful. You are my God; save your servant who trusts in you. Be gracious to me, Lord, for I call to you all day long. Bring joy to your servant's life, because I appeal to you, Lord. For you, Lord, are kind and ready to forgive, abounding in faithful love to all who call on you. LORD, hear my prayer; listen to my plea for mercy. I call on you in the day of my distress, for you will answer me.

Keller writes in his major book on prayer that the key to learning to praise the Lord as David does in the Psalms is to journal prayers with a focus on praise. He asserts that the discipline of writing out prayers of praise will develop into a habit that will improve all of the believer's prayers, public and private.⁹¹ Pastor and author Ronnie Floyd also writes about how journaling impacts prayer: "Journaling is powerful because of the release that comes when you write down some of your greatest burdens and know you have given them to God."⁹²

Journaling compliments the spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer, and fasting for the believer to build himself up in faith (Jude 20) and discipline his body to bring it under strict control (1 Cor 9:27). Journaling supports the believer's pursuit to mortify sin.

⁹⁰ David Brainerd, *The Life and Diary of the Rev. David Brainerd, Missionary to the Indians*, ed. Jonathan Edwards (Edinburgh: H. S. Baynes, 1826), 73.

⁹¹ Keller, *Prayer*, 198-99.

⁹² Ronnie Floyd, *How to Pray* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 42.

Fellowship and Accountability

The believer tends to act alone as he exercises the spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and journaling. There may be some connection with a broader community, especially in prayer and fasting, and through the discipline of conferencing, a common Puritan practice addressed earlier in this chapter. Additionally, meditation may touch on a group component, but in large part, the practice of these disciplines is often a solo pursuit. However, the Bible emphasizes the role of community, specifically community within the church, in the struggle for Christian maturity and the fight to overcome besetting sins.

The author of Hebrews writes, “Watch out, brothers and sisters, so that there won’t be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin’s deception” (3:12-13). These verses raise the alarm of urgency and emphasize the critical importance of Christian community in overcoming sin.⁹³ Paul highlights the same community responsibility in Galatians 6:1-2: “Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted. Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” This passage assigns the duty of restoration to the Christian community. Fellow believers should work to restore the one struggling with sin so that he will be complete, spiritually strong, and useful for the work of ministry.⁹⁴ James, the half-brother of Jesus, also makes a connection between the believer’s desire to overcome sin and the role of the community: “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect” (Jas 5:16). As valuable as the practice of

⁹³ Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 223, 529.

⁹⁴ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word, 1998), 273.

spiritual disciplines is to the normal Christian life, the exercise of these spiritual practices in isolation from Christian community will weaken and distort their effect.

Whitney expresses this vital principle as plainly as possible: “Without true fellowship, even the Christian who is ardently practicing the spiritual disciplines will not develop in a spiritually balanced way.”⁹⁵ Personal responsibility and personal obedience are requirements, but these responsibilities do not lessen the importance of the community dynamic. James Wilhoit, professor of Christian formation at Wheaton College, writes, “There must be a both-and emphasis on the individual and the group in spiritual formation.”⁹⁶ Accountability and community are essential elements in the struggle for holy living.⁹⁷ Erwin Lutzer, in his book *Getting to No: How to Break a Stubborn Habit*, uses the illustration of a cut finger. He notes that the body cannot heal a cut finger unless the finger is attached to the body. In the same way, believers cannot find relief from sinful habits without the help of other believers in community.⁹⁸ He goes on to explain,

Secrecy and shame fuel addictions; only when we come to the light of God’s presence and the openness of fellowship with others can we experience the kind of freedom we desire. . . . Through interpersonal relationships and accountability, God honors the humility and faithfulness of those who stand together in overcoming temptations and sins.⁹⁹

A focus on spiritual disciplines to aid in the fight for personal sanctification is essential, but that focus must include the elements of fellowship and accountability. Only the church provides the community where these elements flourish.

⁹⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 295.

⁹⁶ James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 15.

⁹⁷ Heath Lambert, *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 41.

⁹⁸ Erwin W. Lutzer, *Getting to No: How to Break a Stubborn Habit* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 24.

⁹⁹ Lutzer, *Getting to No*, 24-25, 127.

Conclusion

Every believer has the responsibility to cooperate with the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:13), discipline his body (1 Cor 9:27), put the earthly nature to death (Col 3:5), and build himself up in the faith (Jude 20) with the goal of making real progress in the struggle with sin. The tools for this work from Bible times until today are the biblically-mandated and biblically-modeled spiritual disciplines. The four disciplines presented in this chapter and the essential elements of fellowship and accountability have been and will continue to be an avenue for Spirit-fueled sanctification. There are no shortcuts, but there is hope: the Holy Spirit works through the spiritual disciplines to sanctify his children.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

Introduction

The successful completion of this project required the coordination of many elements. This chapter describes those elements by examining the purpose, history, development, and implementation of the project. The purpose of this ministry project was to train members of the First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches, Texas, to use spiritual disciplines for the mortification of persistent sins. Every Christian struggles on some level with stubborn and habitual sins that rob him or her of peace, joy, and effectiveness as a Christian witness. The Bible, though, presents a path for sanctification, growth, and change. The stepping stones of this path are the God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered spiritual disciplines that become “weapons for righteousness” (Rom 6:13). The heart of this project was a six-week sermon series accompanied by discussion guides and devotional material. As these resources pointed people to the truth of Scripture and the partnership with the Holy Spirit, many people at FBCNac experienced measurable improvement in both their knowledge of the doctrine of sanctification and growth in overcoming persistent sins.¹

History

The genesis of this project was twofold. First, years of pastoring taught me how the ongoing frustration of Christians with lingering and besetting sins often deprived them of the abundant life Jesus promised. For too many believers, Jesus’ invitation to “come to

¹ An analysis of the metrics that demonstrate this improvement is the primary focus of chapter 5.

me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28) seemed elusive. My pastoral counseling led me to believe that few Christians in my ministry context really knew how to abide by Paul’s admonition, “Stand firm then and don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1), especially when it came to persistent sins. And I felt ill-equipped to communicate to these believers the fullness of the hope and help the Lord offers in his Word and through the Holy Spirit.

The second impetus for the project was my reading of two books, one new and one old. *Let Go and Let God? A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology* by Andrew David Naselli would not likely have ever made it to my reading list except for the strong recommendation of a seminary professor in my doctoral studies who rightly pointed out my misuse of the word “victory” when discussing the subject of sanctification. Naselli’s book opened my eyes to how little most Christians (and most pastors) know about biblical sanctification and how often we are sloppy when talking about and teaching on the subject. The old book was John Owen’s, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*. In this book, Owen carefully exegetes Romans 8:13 to show both the necessity and method of putting to death the deeds of the body. His writing is both arduous and inspiring at the same time. Owen believed that Christians were being led astray by teachers who were “unacquainted with the mystery of the gospel and the efficacy of the death of Christ”² and who imposed a “yoke of self-wrought-out mortification on the necks of the their disciples.”³ I believe Owen was correct, and the Lord used his work to open my eyes to the urgency of teaching the people I pastor the mystery of the gospel that establishes the path for mortifying persistent sins.

² Owen, “Mortification of Sin,” 3.

³ Owen, “Mortification of Sin,” 3.

Format of the Project

I considered multiple formats for this project. Each format had advantages and disadvantages. One option was to compile and deliver this material in book form. A book format would have allowed Christians in my church and community to consume the information privately and at their own pace. It also would have allowed for broader distribution of the information. However, a book would have limited the number of people in my church and community who would encounter the material and engage with the guides since not everyone in the congregation would read the book in its entirety. I wanted to be mindful that, for this project, the specific goal was to train members of FBCNac in these disciplines. A book did not seem to be the best format to accomplish this purpose in the time frame available.

Another format I considered was a class and workbook. That option would have had the benefit of dealing with these crucial subjects in smaller groups where teaching and discussion would likely be more productive. The small setting of a six- or eight-week class would have served to limit the participants to those with a high motivation to grow and mature in their Christian walk. That environment and the discussions and e Two drawbacks, though, steered me away from this option. First, a limited number of people would benefit from the material, at least in the short term. Second, the smaller group of participants would have made it more difficult to establish a statistically significant change in knowledge and behavior, which was a key aspect of the project goals.

I chose to use the format of a sermon series with discussion guides and daily devotion guides because the benefits of this format would allow the largest number of Christians in my church and community to profit from this teaching in the short term. Additionally, it also provided options for continued education in the years to come such

as discipleship classes in the church or focus study groups on the local university campus.⁴ Through the sermon, all of the regular attenders of FBCNac, as well as those who regularly watch the live stream of the services on the internet and weekly television broadcast, would hear the teaching and have the opportunity to avail themselves of the discussion and devotion guides. Additionally, several small groups in our church and community meet weekly to review the message content and utilize discussion guides to deepen their study and understanding.⁵ These meetings added the benefits of the small group format to those who participated. Further, plans are in place to edit the video recordings of the messages to create material for future small group classes. Each week, the classes will watch edited clips of the message and utilize the discussion guides to deepen their understanding of the material and flesh out the life application principles. For my context and the specific scope of the project goals, I decided the six-week sermon series format with accompanying discussion and devotion guides would be most effective.

I gave careful consideration to the number of weeks for the sermon series and accompanying guides. I knew from experience that, in my church culture, the greater the number of weeks a message series took, the fewer the number of people who would hear the entire series. Additionally, church attendance fluctuates with the schedule of the local university. A large percentage of the church is made up of professors, administrators, and students. For this reason, the university calendar significantly influences the church calendar. When the university takes a break on a Monday, many regular church attendees travel and take a break from church on the Sunday prior. Considering these factors, I concluded that six weeks would be long enough to allow the essential material to be

⁴ The church has plans to edit the message videos and combine clips with expanded discussion guides to facilitate these future classes.

⁵ These discussion groups were a practice at FBCNac for a few months prior to the implementation of this project. It has long been my practice to provide discussion guides and devotion guides for all my sermons. During the implementation of this project, the discussion groups were emphasized.

covered and at the same time would be brief enough to allow the series to be scheduled for maximum participation.

Project Promotion

Message series promotion began on September 18, 2019. All the normal church promotion channels were utilized. Pre-service videos, bulletin announcements, mid-week update videos on social media, web page banners, and newsletters announced both the focus of the sermon series and the October 13, 2019, start date. Additionally, I made pulpit announcements on the two Sundays that preceded the start of the series. I explained both how the series related to my doctoral work and how the series would address struggles with overcoming persistent sins. People were encouraged to invite friends and neighbors.

Assessment of Project Participants

To measure pertinent changes in knowledge and practice with project participants, I administered surveys before and after the six-week sermon series. I developed the assessments to evaluate participants' knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines and to show how these disciplines correlated with the individual's involvement with a sample of persistent sin categories.⁶

The surveys were conducted using an online, commercial tool called SurveyMonkey.⁷ This service allows for the creation of surveys that can be completed by participants using a computer, tablet, or smartphone. I advertised the surveys through the normal communication channels at FBCNac—weekly email, worship guide, website,

⁶ The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary requires that all survey forms be approved by the seminary's ethics committee before conducting the research. I submitted the surveys for approval on August 30, 2019. The committee classified the surveys as low risk and granted approval on September 6, 2019. Consequently, all research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the project.

⁷ www.surveymonkey.com.

blog, and pre-service announcement video—between October 6 and October 13, 2019. By the deadline date of October 13, 165 people had completed the pre-assessment.⁸ SurveyMonkey reported that the average time spent completing the survey was thirteen minutes per participant.

Seventy people completed the post-survey after the sermons were completed and prior to the deadline of November 23, 2019. I asked that only those who had viewed all six sermons complete the post-survey. SurveyMonkey reported that the average time spent completing the post-survey was fourteen minutes per participant. Of the seventy, one survey was eliminated because the participant said he or she was not a Christian, and five surveys were eliminated because the participants could not recall their initial four-digit code and consequently those surveys could not be matched with pre-surveys.⁹ Sixty-four participants had surveys that could be matched pre- and post, and met the other criteria for the study.

Preparation of the Sermons and Discussion and Devotion Guides

Expert Panel

Following the completion of the research found in chapters 2 and 3 of this project, I sent a copy of the ministry project in its unfinalized form to each person on my expert panel.¹⁰ After each of them read the first three chapters of the project, I met with

⁸ Worship attendance averages approximately 700, but some are children and teens, and consequently were not eligible to complete the survey. I believe that the primary reason survey participation was low was that many were unsure that they would be present for the full six weeks.

⁹ Three additional surveys had four-digit codes that did not match any of the four-digit codes given on the pre-surveys, but due to other correlating information in the surveys, these three pre- and post-surveys were able to be matched with a high degree of confidence and were included in the full data analysis.

¹⁰ The expert panel included nine people, eight men and one woman. Each panel member was chosen to provide expertise or help in a specific manner. The panel consisted of one former Southern Baptist seminary professor and noted expert in systematic theology. Additionally, the panel included a retired Southern Baptist pastor who had led and

the panel members individually to share an overview of the messages I planned to preach and get their input and counsel on how to best achieve the project goals. These discussions were helpful and led to modifications and improvements in the sermons, devotion guides, and surveys even before I formally began the process of writing the material.

I considered writing all six messages with the accompanying guides before the project implementation began and asking the panel to review all the material at once.

However, I was advised by more than one member of my panel that I would receive more helpful feedback from both the panel and the church if I submitted the sermons and guides one week at a time as the project was implemented. Therefore, I wrote, reviewed, edited, and preached the sermons according to the following schedule:

Table 1. Review schedule for the expert panel

#	Start of Formal Sermon Prep	Draft Sermon Emailed to Panel for Review	Panel Returns Rubrics for Consideration	Final Sermon Emailed to Panel	Sermon Preached
1	Mon., 9/23	Tue., 10/1	Mon., 10/7	Fri., 10/11	Sun., 10/13
2	Mon., 9/30	Tue., 10/8	Mon., 10/14	Fri., 10/18	Sun., 10/20
3	Mon., 10/7	Tue., 10/15	Mon., 10/21	Fri., 10/25	Sun., 10/27
4	Mon., 10/14	Tue., 10/22	Mon., 10/28	Fri., 11/1	Sun., 11/3
5	Mon., 10/21	Tue., 10/29	Mon., 11/4	Fri., 11/8	Sun., 11/10
6	Mon., 10/28	Tue., 11/5	Mon., 11/11	Fri., 11/15	Sun., 11/17

preached to large churches for many years and consequently had much experience leading Christians to understand and embrace the doctrines and principles involved in this project. The panel also included three other senior pastors: one non-denominational active senior pastor with theology degrees from Dallas Seminary who could evaluate and challenge my teaching from a slightly different theological perspective; one former Southern Baptist senior pastor who is pursuing his DMin and currently working with college students at a Christian college; and one close friend who serves as a senior pastor and is often a person with whom I discuss and debate theological issues. Additionally, there were two other ministers: one discipleship minister with much experience creating and shepherding men's groups focused on helping men deal with common struggles with temptation, and one college minister with education and background in the practice of counseling college students who struggle with persistent sins. I included a college professor who teaches in the fields of business and finance and who also has expertise in statistical measurements. Finally, the expert panel included one layperson with a background in discipling women.

Input from the expert panel was helpful. All evaluations scored on the rubric were either 3s, signifying the sermon or devotion guide sufficiently met the criteria, or were 4s, signifying the material exceeded expectations with regard to the various criteria.¹¹ The most helpful information came in the comment sections of the rubrics and in follow-up phone calls or meetings held with multiple panel members each week. On more than one occasion, panel members made helpful suggestions to improve the clarity of an illustration or explanation. In a couple of messages, panelists identified material that was peripheral to the focus and would have wasted teaching time and served as a distraction when I preached the messages. In those cases, I removed the peripheral material. The only negative comment from the panel came in the second message where I used the word *momentum* to describe the accelerating movement toward sin (“greater and greater lawlessness”) and the accelerating movement toward righteousness (“results in sanctification”) seen in Romans 6:19 (and also Rom 6:13). Other panelists, including James Leo Garrett, a retired, well-known Southern Baptist theology professor, who I leaned on heavily for evaluating the theological precision of the messages, approved of the language. Although I chose not to change the wording, the advice led to me giving a more careful explanation of the text.

The panel also evaluated and gave input into the discussion and devotion guides. The only significant suggestions concerning the guides focused on syntax and clarity. I incorporated their suggestions into the guides.

Daily Devotion Guides

I wrote the daily devotion guides before the series began. These guides included five Scripture reading assignments for each week, with accompanying questions specifically written for each day’s assigned reading, to assist the church in Bible

¹¹ See appendix 3 for the Sermon Evaluation rubric and appendix 4 for the Devotion Guide Evaluation rubric.

meditation, prayer, and journaling. The guides were included as an insert in each Sunday's worship guide (church bulletin) as well as made available on a website¹² and in a weekly email to participants. Each Sunday I urged my church to utilize the guides in their daily devotions.

Sermons

The process of writing the sermons was similar to the process I use to write all of my weekly sermons. First, I prayerfully analyzed the Scripture passage without the use of any resource except the Bible. I created a research document and recorded observations and notes that came from this analysis. Once that step was complete, I turned to my study materials (lexicons, books, commentaries, etc.) to see what experts and scholars had to say about the passage. I copied all helpful and insightful points into the research document (with accompanying citations for later review). With these sermons, I leaned heavily on the research I had done for chapters 2 and 3 of this project. I used both the chapter contents and research notes I made in preparation for writing those chapters as I examined the Scripture passage. After I completed the sermon research document, I read it repeatedly over the next few days, making notes of observations. After gaining a thorough understanding of the text and documenting what I had learned, I wrote the actual sermon outline and illustrated the sermon. This last step usually took six to ten hours. The process was the same for each of the six sermons.

Sermon preached on October 13, 2019. I titled the first sermon, "How to Kill Persistent Sin—First Steps," and preached from Romans 6:1-12. The sermon began by pointing out the Christians' common struggle with persistent sin. I used illustrations from my own life, lessons learned in my pastoral counseling experience, and the life of the apostle Paul. I then explained three ways Christians frequently dealt with persistent sins:

¹² The two websites were used: www.NoelDear.com and www.FBCNac.org.

(1) to simply pray that God would intervene and remove the sinful practice from the person's life;¹³ (2) to make bold declarations to try harder and promise never to sin in the same fashion again; and (3) to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the biblically described work of sanctification. I explained how the first two approaches were unbiblical and ineffective (Gal 3:3). I said this message series would be about learning to embrace the third approach and experiencing real and lasting change. Next, I did a thorough walk-through of Romans 6:1-12 and used a three-point outline to explain what it means that, as Christians, we are dead to sin. I explained how Christ's death on the cross destroyed not only the penalty of sin but also the authority of sin. I spent a significant amount of teaching time explaining the significance of the word "consider" in Romans 6:11, and I pressed the church to be obedient to that command to "consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11). At the end of the message I emphasized the Romans 6:12 admonition to "not let sin reign." I explained how this command pointed both to the lifelong struggle every believer will have with sin and temptation, and how this endeavor is a partnership between the work of the Spirit and one's personal efforts. I emphasized learning more about this partnership in the messages still to come.

Sermon preached on October 20, 2019. I titled the second sermon, "How to Kill Persistent Sin—Battle Lines," and preached from Romans 6:12-20. I began the message by talking about the futility of making over-the-top promises to never sin in certain ways again. I helped the church see that the practical effect in their own lives of those kinds of commitments and promises was never life changing or lasting. This line of reasoning set-up the church's interest in learning the biblical method for real change. So, after a quick review of the previous week's sermon, I read and commented on Romans 6:6-20. I pointed out that while Romans 6:1-11 teaches that Christians are dead to sin,

¹³ I used the "let go and let God" phrase often found in Keswick theology with which many of my listeners had been exposed.

Romans 6:12 reveals that sin can still reign in the life of a believer if he allows it (“do not let sin reign”). I highlighted the personal responsibility of the Christian to be in the daily fight with persistent sin. I demonstrated how Romans 6:12 and many other biblical passages (such as 1 Tim 4:7; Col 3:5) urged this fight. Next, the partnership of the Holy Spirit became the focus. While Romans 6 implies the Holy Spirit’s role, it is explicit in Romans 8:13. I drew the congregation’s attention to that verse. Finally, the heart of the message was on how the partnership with the Holy Spirit works according to Romans 6:13, 19. From these passages, I introduced the subject of spiritual disciplines and defined the disciplines as God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits that lead to real and lasting change with respect to persistent sins. I urged the church to offer their “parts” as “weapons for righteousness” (Rom 6:13) through a commitment to the daily spiritual disciplines so that little by little, their engagement might “result in sanctification” (Rom 6:19). I showed the church how ongoing sin created momentum for greater sin (Rom 6:13a; 2 Pet 2:14), but an ongoing commitment to spiritual disciplines created momentum for righteous living and real change (Rom 6:13b; 1 Tim 4:7b).

Sermon preached on October 27, 2019. I titled the third sermon, “How to Kill Persistent Sin—Meditate on God’s Word,” and preached from Psalm 1:1-3. The first two sermons examined the theological basis for sanctification and explained the hope and partnership involved in the fight to overcome persistent sins. Beginning with the third message, the focus shifted to teaching the church how to embrace specific spiritual disciplines. After reviewing the previous weeks’ sermons, I focused on the discipline of Bible meditation. The first step was to show from Scripture that God has prescribed this discipline as a tool for sanctification. I shared Puritan Thomas Watson’s quote: “Meditation is a strong antidote against sin. Most sin is committed for want of meditation.”¹⁴ Then,

¹⁴ Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial; The Saint’s Spiritual Delight; The Holy Eucharist; and Other Treatises, The Writings of the Doctrinal Puritans and Divines of the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1846), 95.

starting with John 17:17 (“sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth”), I walked through eight Scripture passages that support this assertion. Next, I walked slowly through my primary biblical text of Psalm 1:2-3, teaching the key elements and benefits of Bible meditation. The final section of the sermon focused on practical considerations for meditation and ended with a challenge to be faithful in daily Bible meditation. I explained to the church how they could use the daily devotion guides provided in the weekly worship guides (and online) to facilitate and improve their practice of meditation.

Sermon preached on November 3, 2019. I titled the fourth sermon, “How to Kill Persistent Sin—Supercharged Praying,” and preached from Hebrews 4:14-16. Again, I reviewed the previous messages and the fact that believers are dead to sin and that believers have a partner for sanctification in the Holy Spirit. In this message, the focus was on the spiritual disciplines of prayer and journaling. The message began by considering how the focus passage fit in the broader context of Hebrews 4. I demonstrated the connection between the subject of prayer in Hebrews 4:14-16 and dealing with conviction and temptation with reference to persistent sins in Hebrews 4:12-15. From there, the message focused intently on verse 16 and sought to teach the importance of consistent prayer life to our partnership with the Holy Spirit and the mortification of persistent sins. I quoted J. C. Ryle, a nineteenth century Anglican bishop, who wrote, “What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe the difference, in nineteen cases out of twenty, arises from different habits about private prayer. I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray little, and those who are eminently holy pray much.”¹⁵ I supported the emphasis of this quote with Scripture. The conclusion of the message raised the question of how to excel in prayer and push past a track record of anemic praying that is the story of many, if not most, Christians. I

¹⁵ J. C. Ryle, *A Call to Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 35; Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 82.

presented the spiritual discipline of journaling as the answer to this quandary. I showed the biblical basis and example for journaling and explained how it increased the effectiveness of both the spiritual discipline of prayer and of meditation. I ended the message with a focus on the practical considerations of journaling and a challenge to begin the practice immediately. I discussed how the daily devotion guides could be used to jump-start journaling.

Sermon preached on November 10, 2019. I titled the fifth sermon, “How to Kill Persistent Sin—Spiritual Fasting,” and preached from Matthew 9:14-15. After reviewing the previous week’s messages, I began a focus on biblical fasting. I knew from conversations with church members that most people in my church would be unfamiliar with the subject of fasting. Consequently, I composed a mostly topical message to both introduce the practice from a biblical point of view and to explain how it fits into a partnership with the Holy Spirit for the mortification of persistent sins. I defined fasting as a voluntary abstinence of food for spiritual purposes and then showed from Matthew 9:14-15 how fasting is an expression of longing for the presence of Christ. Next, I examined Matthew 6:16-18 and discussed the proper motivation for fasting and the promise Jesus made that the Father would reward properly motivated fasting. The heart of the message came next as I referenced Isaiah 58:6 and discussed the mechanics of how fasting promotes sanctification and leads to the breaking of the chains of persistent sin. The message ended with some practical considerations and a challenge to embrace the spiritual discipline of fasting on a regular basis.

Sermon preached on November 17, 2019. I titled the last sermon, “How to Kill Persistent Sin—Warnings and Encouragements,” and preached from Hebrews 3:13-14. After reviewing the ground covered thus far in this sermon series, I focused on Hebrews 3:13. This verse (and others) connects practical sanctification to the involvement of the church and the vital connection Christians have with other Christians. I

communicated that the Lord could have made faith a private matter such that spiritual lives and spiritual growth were completely independent of any other person. Yet, the idea of a strictly vertical faith and relationship with God that precludes a close connection with other believers is foreign to the New Testament. I pointed out how common the verses were that supported the theme of Hebrews 3:13, and examined 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 10:24-25, Galatians 6:1-2, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:16. I concluded the message by discussing practical considerations for engaging with others and talked about how both the weekly sermon discussion guides and daily devotion guides could be used to facilitate better partnerships and authentic Christian fellowship with other believers.

Weekly Sermon Discussion Guides

The weekly sermon discussion guides were created to coordinate with each Sunday's message during the sermon writing process. They included thought-provoking questions that would lead small groups through a discussion of the Bible passages used in that week's sermon and of other Bible passages that had the same theme. Depending on the size of the small group, these discussion guides generally took about forty-five minutes to complete. These guides were included as an insert in each Sunday's worship guide (church bulletin) as well as made available on a website and in a weekly email to participants.

Conclusion

The time and effort invested in this project was a labor of love. The anecdotal evidence both from those in attendance at the services and from other pastors on staff reporting what they heard in contacts and counseling contexts has been encouraging. The next chapter includes a thorough examination of the pre- and post-assessment data, but the truth of God's Word is invaluable, and his Word never comes back void (Isa 55:11). The Lord has made a way for believers to excel in their walk with him and experience steady and God-honoring sanctification. He has laid out his plan in the Bible and given

the guidance and agency of the Holy Spirit. These sermons, discussion guides, and devotion guides sought to lay out this plan and link believers in greater partnership with the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 5

MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

This chapter presents a summary of the data collected in the course of this project and evaluates the project's purpose and goals. Every project has strengths and weaknesses (and limitations). I discuss these characteristics from the perspective of the researcher and implementer of the project. Finally, I reflect in this chapter on how I might conduct the project differently if I were to do it again, and on project-related theological insights and personal impressions.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

As stated, the purpose of this ministry project was to train members of the First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches, Texas, to use the selected spiritual disciplines for the mortification of persistent sin. While the church faithfully teaches on all of the theological and practical components involved in sanctification, the teaching and preaching ministry has not included a concise and systematic guide for believers specifically regarding their pursuit to overcome habitual and besetting sins. This project sought to bring together the necessary biblical elements and communicate them in an organized and helpful manner that would lead to real change.

This purpose supports both the mandate found in Scripture and the mission of First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches. In Romans 6:11-12, the Bible gives the dual command to “consider yourselves dead to sin,” and to “not let sin reign.” Paul further commands the believer to “put to death the deeds of the body” by the agency of the Spirit (Rom 8:13). Christians are to discipline their bodies (1 Cor 9:27) and train themselves in godliness (1 Tim 4:7). This comports with the mission of FBCNac, which is to make

disciples. At FBCNac, we define a fully committed follower of Christ as a person for whom four characteristics are true. He or she is someone who is continuing to grow in their love for God, their love for people, their service to the body of Christ (ministry), and their service to the world (missions). Persistent sins are enemies to each of these components of discipleship. A Christian cannot excel in any of these areas while living in constant defeat with respect to sin and temptation. This project addressed this urgent need and problem.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

To achieve the stated purpose, the project focused on four goals critical for success. The first goal was to assess the knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines among select members of FBCNac and to assess how those same individuals reported their struggle with various persistent sins. The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series that taught the practical connection between the selected spiritual disciplines and the mortification of sin. The third goal was to create an accompanying six-week discussion and discipleship guide to help those who hear the sermons to apply the biblical principles and strengthen consistency and commitment. The fourth goal was to increase knowledge and practice of these spiritual disciplines and consequently record a positive and significant change in behavior related to struggles with persistent sins by presenting the sermons and the discussion and devotion guides in weekend worship services at FBCNac over a period of six weeks.

Goal 1: Assess Knowledge and Practice

First, the pre-assessment measured knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines by asking participants how often they engaged in specific disciplines and how confidently they believed they could explain the value and method of those disciplines. Participants were asked to indicate their level of participation in Bible reading, fasting, prayer, meditation, and Christian community by use of a Likert scale with six possible

responses (SD, strongly disagree; D, disagree; DS, disagree somewhat; AS, agree somewhat; A, agree; SA, strongly agree).

Table 2. Pre-assessment survey concerning participation in specific spiritual disciplines

Pre-Survey Question ¹	Likert Scale Responses (1-6)						Likert Scale Average	Total Responses
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA		
12. I read the Bible daily.	2	8	9	15	19	11	4.16	64
13. I fast at least one day per month.	47	15	0	1	1	0	1.34	64
14. I write in a spiritual journal at least three times per week.	30	19	4	6	3	2	2.05	64
15. I spend at least five minutes each day in continual, uninterrupted prayer.	5	9	8	14	18	10	3.95	64
17. I spend ten minutes in uninterrupted meditation on a Bible passage at least three times a week.	16	10	14	10	9	5	3.02	64
18. At least once a week I share and pray with a fellow Christian concerning my struggles with temptation.	24	22	3	7	7	1	2.28	64

The responses to the pre-assessment indicated that participants engaged much more consistently in Bible reading and prayer than they did the disciplines of meditation, journaling, fasting, and intentional community. Forty-five of 64 participants agreed at least somewhat with the statement, “I read the Bible daily” for a Likert scale average of 4.16 which was the highest of these six questions.² Forty-two said the same about spending at least five minutes each day in uninterrupted prayer. While 49 said they did not engage

¹ These questions are from part 2 of the pre-survey.

² To aid in analysis, Likert scale responses were converted to numerical values. “Strongly Disagree” was assigned a value of 1, and “Strongly Agree” was assigned a value of 6. The other responses were assigned values accordingly.

in intentional community; 53 did not journal; and 62 of 64 did not typically fast once in a month (for the lowest Likert scale average of 1.34).³

Additionally, I measured the participants' perceived knowledge and understanding of those same spiritual disciplines by asking if the participants could explain the value and method of Bible meditation, prayer, fasting, and journaling.

Table 3. Pre-assessment survey concerning participants' confidence in explaining spiritual disciplines

Pre-Survey Question ⁴	Likert Scale Responses (1-6)						Likert Scale Average	Total Responses
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA		
19. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of biblical meditation as they are outlined in the Bible.	16	10	14	10	9	5	2.91	64
20. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of prayer as it is outlined in the Bible.	7	10	6	23	14	4	3.61	64
21. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of fasting as it is outlined in the Bible.	16	13	15	13	6	1	2.73	64
22. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of journaling as it is presented in the Bible.	17	18	13	11	4	1	2.53	64

The responses in table 3 show a serious reported deficit in the participants' understanding of spiritual disciplines. Of the four disciplines examined, only for the

³ These numbers corresponded closely with the larger set of participants who completed the pre-assessment survey. In that group of 162 (which included people who were disqualified from being included in the final 64 because they either did not complete the post survey, indicated they were not Christian, or did not view the requisite number of sermons), the Likert average for daily Bible reading (the highest) was 3.91. The Likert average for fasting (the lowest) was 1.50.

⁴ These questions are from part 2 of the pre-survey.

discipline of prayer did a majority of the participants as a whole have any confidence (Likert scale score of 4, 5, or 6) in their ability to explain the discipline's value and method (41 out of 64). The average Likert scale of the remaining 3 was below 3.00 out of 6.00.

This reported lack of understanding was further supported by the responses to the query asking participants to define "spiritual disciplines" in a sentence or leave blank if they were uncertain. Of the 64 participants in the pre-survey, 30 left the answer blank and 10 gave an answer that was not close to correct such as equating spiritual disciplines with the fruit of the Spirit.⁵

From these measurements, I concluded that the perceived knowledge and understanding of spiritual disciplines was low. With the arguable exception of the discipline of prayer, participants were not faithfully engaging in these basic spiritual disciplines and they did not have the knowledge necessary to do so.

Next, the pre-survey examined how those same individuals reported their struggle with various persistent sins (see table 4). Apart from the post-survey analysis, these numbers do not provide very clear insight into the frequency of various persistent sins, but a few observations can be drawn at this point. First, it is clear that the participants did struggle with at least some persistent sin. Though the average of these Likert scales is 3.002, which translates to a typical answer of "disagree somewhat," all but 3 of the 64 participants (95.3 percent) indicated that they at least "agreed somewhat" (Likert score of 4 or greater) that they struggled with at least one of these sins.⁶ Additionally, when participants were asked the generic question, "Do you struggle with any persistent or ongoing, often repeated sins," 47 out of 64 replied with a "yes" (73.4 percent).

⁵ In the post-survey, 59 of 64 attempted to answer the question, and the quality of most answers very closely matched the correct definition.

⁶ With the full 162 people who completed the pre-survey, 157 indicated that they at least "agreed somewhat" (Likert score of 4 or greater) that they struggled with at least one of these sins.

Table 4. Pre-assessment survey of participants' reported struggles with persistent sin

Pre-Survey Question ⁷	Likert Scale Responses (1-6)						Likert Scale Average	Total Responses
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA		
1. I struggle with substance abuse (alcohol, prescription or non-prescription drugs).	58	4	1	1	0	0	1.14	64
2. I struggle with overeating.	11	10	4	18	11	10	3.59	64
3. I struggle with viewing inappropriate sexual images.	44	9	4	3	1	3	1.70	64
4. I struggle with persistent sins of the tongue (gossip, foul language, lying).	7	14	10	24	7	2	3.25	64
5. I regularly struggle with lust.	27	10	6	12	5	4	2.53	64
6. I regularly struggle with pride.	1	11	9	23	13	7	3.89	64
7. I regularly struggle with anger.	8	11	11	19	12	3	3.39	64
8. I regularly struggle with worry.	2	9	8	17	16	12	4.13	64
9. I regularly struggle with laziness.	9	14	12	16	11	2	3.19	64
10. I regularly struggle with materialism, greed, or covetousness.	7	14	19	11	9	4	3.20	64

The first project goal was considered successful as the participants gave clear and measurable indication through the pre-survey of their engagement with spiritual disciplines, understanding of spiritual disciplines, and struggle with persistent sins.

Goal 2: Develop Sermon Series

The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series that taught the practical connection between spiritual disciplines and the mortification of sin. The success of this goal was measured in two ways. First, participants were asked to assess the helpfulness of each of the sermons in a post-survey. Second, the self-reported ability of the participants to explain the spiritual disciplines and the role of both the disciplines and the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification after the six weeks of sermons was compared to how they reported their knowledge of these truths in the pre-survey.

⁷ These questions are from part 2 of the pre-survey.

The post-survey asked participants to assess each of the six sermons that they viewed and rate the sermons on a scale of 1 to 4 (“not helpful,” somewhat helpful,” “helpful,” “very helpful”).

Table 5. Post-assessment survey of participants’ view of the helpfulness of the six individual sermons

Message	Average Rating (1-4)
Message 1: Dead to Sin	3.59
Message 2: Battle Lines	3.59
Message 3: Meditation	3.65
Message 4: Prayer and Journaling	3.68
Message 5: Fasting	3.24
Message 6: Community	3.53

The average rating of all six sermons was 3.55, with the highest rated sermon being the one on meditation, and the lowest rated sermon being fasting. It is difficult to determine why the message on fasting was rated so far below the average of the six sermons except perhaps that participants struggled to understand something that was so new to them.⁸ Overall, the evaluations pointed to the perceived effectiveness of the messages.

To further support the effectiveness of the messages, the participants were asked in both the pre- and post-surveys to rate their confidence in their ability to explain several theological and biblical principles associated with spiritual disciplines and sanctification (see tables 3 and 6). These post-survey results show a substantial change and improvement compared to the pre-survey results (see Table 7). The significance of

⁸ The pre-survey asked about fasting frequency. Fifty-seven of 64 (89.1 percent) said they did not fast even one day per year, and 44 said they had never fasted for spiritual purposes. Anecdotally, many long-time faithful church members reported they could not remember ever hearing a sermon on fasting. Fasting seemed to be a completely new subject to the majority of the church.

the improvement was measured and confirmed with a T-test for dependent samples (see table 9).

Table 6. Post-assessment survey concerning participants' confidence in explaining spiritual disciplines

Post-Survey Question ⁹	Likert Scale Responses (1-6)						Likert Scale Average	Total Responses
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA		
19. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of biblical meditation as they are outlined in the Bible.	1	2	11	25	16	9	4.25	64
20. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of prayer as it is outlined in the Bible.	0	0	8	23	21	12	4.58	64
21. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of fasting as it is outline in the Bible.	4	4	7	24	20	5	4.05	64
22. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of journaling as it is presented in the Bible.	7	8	5	20	16	8	3.84	64

Table 7. Pre- and post-assessment survey concerning participants' confidence in explaining spiritual disciplines

Survey Question	Pre-Survey Likert Average	Post-Survey Likert Average
I could explain to someone the value and the methods of biblical meditation as they are outlined in the Bible.	2.91	4.25
I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of prayer as it is outlined in the Bible.	3.61	4.58
I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of fasting as it is outline in the Bible.	2.73	4.05
I could explain to someone the value and the methods of journaling as it is presented in the Bible.	2.53	3.84

⁹ These questions are from part 2 of the post-survey.

Additionally, two supplemental questions were asked in both the pre- and post-surveys to examine further the change in the participants' perceived ability to explain biblical truths connected with the focus of these six sermons. The survey responses showed a similar improvement in the participants' confidence in discussing these subjects (see table 8).

Table 8. Pre- and post-assessment survey concerning participants' confidence in explaining the role of the Holy Spirit and spiritual disciplines in sanctification

Survey Question	Pre-Survey Likert Average	Post-Survey Likert Average
I could explain to someone the difference in the Holy Spirit's role in removing sin from my life and my role in the process.	3.64	4.95
I could explain to someone the value of spiritual disciplines for overcoming persistent sins.	3.36	4.78

Table 9. T-test for dependent samples comparing pre- and post-survey reports of participants' ability to explain relevant biblical principles

	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Mean	3.13020833	4.40885417
Variance	1.28612765	0.77154293
Observations	64	64
Pearson Correlation	0.13957868	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	63	
t Stat	-7.6679684	
P(T<=t) one-tail	6.7976E-11	
t Critical one-tail	1.66940222	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.3595E-10	
t Critical two-tail	1.99834054	

An analysis (using a t-test for dependent samples) of the data from the pre- and post-surveys of the participants' reported ability to explain spiritual gifts and their role in sanctification as well as the role of the Holy Spirit was done. This analysis showed a statistically significant positive change that was the result of instructional intervention

(the sermons) rather than chance (see table 9).¹⁰ Therefore, the second project goal was successfully accomplished.

Goal 3: Develop Discussion and Discipleship Guides

The third goal was to create an accompanying six-week discussion and discipleship guide to help those who heard the sermons to apply the biblical principles and strengthen consistency and commitment. The discussion and discipleship guides reinforced the effectiveness of the sermons, and the guides supported the increase in knowledge and practice that will be evaluated below with goal 4. Thus, project goal 3 was considered successful due to the success of goals 2 and 4.

Goal 4: Increase Knowledge and Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

The fourth goal was to increase knowledge and practice of specific spiritual disciplines and consequently record a positive change in behavior related to struggles with persistent sins by presenting the sermons and the discussion and devotion guides in weekend worship services over a period of six weeks. This goal was evaluated in two ways. First, the delta in the practice of Bible reading, prayer, and fasting for participants before and after engaging with the sermons and discussion/devotion guides was analyzed. Second, a correlation between increased faithfulness to spiritual disciplines and progress in participants' struggles with persistent sins was confirmed.

¹⁰ The positive statistically significant difference was established by first comparing the mean of the pre-survey (3.13020833) and post-survey (4.40885417) average of the Likert scales. The mean increased 1.27864584, showing improvement in results. Next, the absolute value of the t Stat (-7.6679684) was compared to the t Critical two-tail value (1.99834054), and it was noted that the former was higher than the latter signifying that the improvement was statistically significant. Finally, the P(T<=t) two-tail value (0.00000000013595) was compared to the p=0.05 requirement. Since the P(T<=t) value was less than 0.05, it was determined that the improvement was likely (95 percent confidence) due to the intervention and not due to chance.

The same six questions about the participants' involvement in various spiritual disciplines asked in the pre-survey were asked again in the post-survey. Table 10 shows post-survey responses. A quick comparison of the pre-survey responses (see table 2), shows an increase in the Likert scale average for each of the six questions (see table 11); however only 5 of the 6 increases passed the test for statistical significance.¹¹ To confirm that the overall improvement was significant, I created a composite score for each individual by averaging their Likert scale responses to each of the six questions (see tables 2 and 10). These composite scores were then compared using a t-test for dependent samples (see table 12). The comparison showed a statistically significant positive change that was the result of instructional intervention (the sermons) rather than chance.¹² Consequently, the data showed a significant improvement in the practice of the selected spiritual disciplines.

¹¹ A t-test for dependent samples was performed on the responses to each of the six questions. When the t-Stat was compared to the t-Critical two-tail value for each question, the absolute value of the t-Stat was greater for each of the questions except for the question about spending five minutes in continual, uninterrupted prayer each day. Additionally, the $P(T \leq t)$ two-tail value was less than 0.05 in each t-test except the test on the prayer query. Therefore, the increase in the Likert scale average for the prayer query was not statistically significant.

¹² The positive statistically significant difference was established by first comparing the mean of the pre-survey (2.68526786) and post-survey (3.21428571) average of the Likert scales. The mean increased 0.52901785, showing improvement in results. Next, the absolute value of the t-Stat (-4.6977902) was compared to the t-Critical two-tail value (1.99834054), and it was noted that the former was higher than the latter signifying that the improvement was statistically significant. Finally, the $P(T \leq t)$ two-tail value was compared to the $p=0.05$ requirement. Since the $P(T \leq t)$ value (0.000014708) was less than 0.05, it was determined that the improvement was likely (95 percent confidence) due to the intervention and not due to chance.

Table 10. Post-assessment survey concerning participation in specific spiritual disciplines

Post-Survey Question ¹³	Likert Scale Responses (1-6)						Likert Scale Average	Total Responses
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA		
12. I read the Bible daily.	0	2	4	12	30	16	4.84	64
13. I fast at least one day per month.	36	23	1	2	1	1	1.63	64
14. I write in a spiritual journal at least three times per week.	25	11	6	6	10	6	2.73	64
15. I spend at least five minutes each day in continual, uninterrupted prayer.	7	6	6	11	25	9	4.06	64
17. I spend ten minutes in uninterrupted meditation on a Bible passage at least three times a week.	5	9	8	18	14	10	3.89	64
18. At least once a week I share and pray with a fellow Christian concerning my struggles with temptation.	23	10	10	6	6	9	2.83	64

Table 11. Pre- and post-assessment survey concerning participation in specific spiritual disciplines

Survey Question	Pre-Survey Likert Average	Post-Survey Likert Average
I read the Bible daily.	4.16	4.84
I fast at least one day per month.	1.34	1.63
I write in a spiritual journal at least three times per week.	2.05	2.73
I spend at least five minutes each day in continual, uninterrupted prayer.	3.95	4.06
I spend ten minutes in uninterrupted meditation on a Bible passage at least three times a week.	3.02	3.89
At least once a week I share and pray with a fellow Christian concerning my struggles with temptation.	2.28	2.83

¹³ These questions are from part 2 of the post-survey.

Table 12. T-test for dependent samples comparing pre- and post-survey reports of participants' engagement with select spiritual disciplines

	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Mean	2.68526786	3.21428571
Variance	0.71537395	0.94266278
Observations	64	64
Pearson Correlation	0.51538057	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	63	
t Stat	-4.6977902	
P(T<=t) one-tail	7.354E-06	
t Critical one-tail	1.66940222	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.4708E-05	
t Critical two-tail	1.99834054	

Next, the same ten questions about the participants' struggle with various categories of persistent sin were asked again in the post-survey. Table 13 shows participant post-survey responses. A comparison with table 4, the pre-survey questions, shows an increase in the Likert scale average for each of the 10 questions, however only 5 of the 10 increases passed the test for statistical significance.¹⁴ To confirm that the overall improvement was significant, I created a composite score for each individual by averaging their Likert scale responses to each of the 10 questions (see tables 4 and 13). These composite scores were then compared using a t-test for dependent samples (table 14). The comparison showed a statistically significant positive change that was the result of instructional intervention (the sermons) rather than chance.¹⁵ Therefore, the data

¹⁴ A t-test for dependent samples was performed on the responses to each of the ten questions. It was necessary for the t-Stat to be greater than the t Critical two-tail value and for the P(T<=t) to be less than 0.05 for the noted improvement in with each question to be considered statistically significant. Post-survey questions 2, 5, 7, 9, and 10 (from part 2 of the post-survey) met this requirement. The remainder of the questions did not.

¹⁵ The positive statistically significant difference was established by first comparing the mean of the pre-survey (3.0015625) and post-survey (2.6609375) average of the Likert scales. The mean decreased 0.340625, showing improvement in results. Next, the absolute value of the t-Stat (3.67734213) was compared to the t-Critical two-tail value (1.99834054), and it was noted that the former was higher than the latter

showed that participants reported significant improvement in the struggle with persistent sin related to the categories measured.

Table 13. Post-assessment survey of participants' reported struggles with persistent sin

Post-Survey Question ¹⁶	Likert Scale Responses (1-6)						Likert Scale Average	Total Responses
	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA		
1. I struggle with substance abuse (alcohol, prescription or non-prescription drugs).	62	1	0	1	0	0	1.06	64
2. I struggle with overeating.	14	13	7	14	9	7	3.19	64
3. I struggle with viewing inappropriate sexual images.	50	7	2	3	1	1	1.45	64
4. I struggle with persistent sins of the tongue (gossip, foul language, lying).	8	21	8	14	8	5	3.13	64
5. I regularly struggle with lust.	34	12	9	5	4	0	1.95	64
6. I regularly struggle with pride.	4	9	9	24	11	7	3.78	64
7. I regularly struggle with anger.	11	18	11	14	9	1	2.92	64
8. I regularly struggle with worry.	5	12	10	13	17	7	3.72	64
9. I regularly struggle with laziness.	15	16	14	14	4	1	2.67	64
10. I regularly struggle with materialism, greed, or covetousness.	12	21	11	13	6	1	2.73	64

Consequently, the fourth goal was considered successful because there was both a statistically significant improvement in the participants' overall practice of spiritual disciplines and a statistically significant improvement in their overall reported struggle with persistent sins.

signifying that the improvement was statistically significant. Finally, the $P(T \leq t)$ two-tail value was compared to the $p=.05$ requirement. Since the $P(T \leq t)$ value (0.00048947) was less than 0.05, it was determined that the improvement was likely (95 percent confidence) due to the intervention and not due to chance.

¹⁶ These questions are from part 2 of the post-survey.

Table 14. T-test for dependent samples comparing pre- and post-survey reports of participants' struggle with persistent sin

	<i>Pre-Survey</i>	<i>Post-Survey</i>
Mean	3.0015625	2.6609375
Variance	0.41825149	0.45575149
Observations	64	64
Pearson Correlation	0.37206438	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	63	
t Stat	3.67734213	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.00024473	
t Critical one-tail	1.66940222	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.00048947	
t Critical two-tail	1.99834054	

Strengths of the Project

At least three key strengths contributed to the success of the project. First, the project met an urgent need. Even in the weeks leading up to the start of the message series, as people encountered publicity for the sermons, the church and community showed keen interest. The struggle with persistent sins is so common and so frustrating that many people expressed their fervent desire to find some pathway of spiritual growth and genuine life change. Surprisingly, the two groups of people who seemed most enthusiastic about the subject matter were college students and retired people. It is easy to assume that college students are turned off by the subject of sin and sanctification and to assume that senior adults, after many years in the church, have either mastered many of their persistent sins or come to the place where they have little interest in struggling to change. Both of those assumptions would have been incorrect as these groups were eager for the messages to begin, and people in both age-ranges formed small groups to utilize the discussion guides and further study the truths presented in the messages.

A second strength of the project was that the messages were thoroughly biblical. Several people remarked before the message series began that they had been through many quasi-biblical programs that, in their estimation, involved popular psychological theories

dressed up with a few Bible verses. They characterized those programs with descriptions such as “forty days to victorious living” or “six steps to overcoming sin.” The reports throughout the church were that a thoroughly biblical approach that explained and highlighted the principles of biblical sanctification such as being dead to sin, and a partnership with the Holy Spirit, was refreshing. A corollary to this strength is the fact that the sermons recognized the biblical reality that a believer will not experience full victory over sin on this side of eternity. Approaches that create an expectation of complete victory violate Scripture, induce guilt, and create an unnecessary lack of assurance in the life of the Christian. The bibliocentric nature of these messages gave participants both peace and a hope for growth.

A third strength of the project was that the biblical counsel was sufficiently general enough to find application with almost any persistent sin. While it is often helpful to narrow the scope of a message series to deal with the sin of viewing pornography, overspending, or other specific sins, the greater value is in understanding the broader biblical approach to sanctification and the importance of spiritual disciplines. People reported many different applications that they drew from the messages. Some of these applications could not have been anticipated. People told personal stories of making progress in overcoming frequent outbursts of anger, eliminating persistent problems with lust, improving in the area of overeating, and increasing consistency in witnessing and giving. This more general approach matched the more general approach of Romans 6, John 15, and other passages.

Weaknesses of the Project

While the overall project was successful, significant weaknesses became apparent during implementation. The first weakness was associated with the six-week time constraint for teaching the material. The rationale for choosing six weeks was discussed in chapter 4. However, that rationale notwithstanding, the six-week time frame caused some material to be taught less thoroughly and more quickly than it should have

been. There is a trade-off of consistent participation when longer message series are preached in my college-town context, and those considerations play a big part in setting schedules. Still, a longer format might have increased the long-term effectiveness of the project and brought greater change to people's lives.

An additional weakness was the omission of memorization as a key spiritual discipline for the mortification of persistent sins. The discipline of Scripture memorization often surfaced in the research phase, and strong consideration was given to including the practice in the message series. The Puritans emphasized the discipline. Richard Foster, Donald S. Whitney, Dallas Willard, David Mathis, John Piper, and Adele Calhoun—well-known writers on the spiritual disciplines—all include Scripture memorization as a significant part of their focus on spiritual disciplines.¹⁷ Biblical support for memorization is clear (Ps 119:11). And practically, I knew the vital importance of the practice, but ultimately, I decided to omit the spiritual discipline of memorization due to the limitation imposed by the six-week time frame. This decision was a mistake. In several follow-up encounters and counseling appointments helping people work through the material, memorization was added to the counsel given. This discipline should have been a part of the original foundational messages, and it should have been included in the daily devotional material.

One additional weakness was the short time frame between the initial and follow-up surveys. While it was important to do the follow-up surveys immediately following the message series to accurately match pre- and post-responses to track changes,

¹⁷ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, xvi; Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: Harper Collins), 111; Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 39-45; Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperOne), 150; David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines*, 67-81; John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 154; John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 121; Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, 195.

the observed changes may have been somewhat artificial and preliminary. The responses may have been artificial because many participants were eager to make spiritual progress, and that eagerness may have led, unintentionally, to aspirational rather than accurate responses to some questions. On the other hand, the noted changes may have been preliminary since true spiritual progress is not best measured in weeks, but in months and years. While future data will be largely anecdotal, it will be interesting to hear reports of how spiritual disciplines affect the mortification of persistent sin in the months and years that follow.

What I Would Do Differently

In addition to adding the aforementioned spiritual discipline of Bible memorization to the sermon series and devotion guides, if I had the opportunity to do the project again I would find a way to add at least three messages to the sermon series, even if that meant using three to four Sunday nights to provide added teaching to those interested. One additional sermon would take the subject material of the second sermon and divide it into two messages. The focus on what Colossians 2:20-23 says about spiritual disciplines and warnings about the danger of a pharisaical approach to the disciplines should have been a stand-alone message. The brief treatment of this material likely encouraged some misguided or at least wrongly motivated commitments to be made. The third message (on meditation) would include memorization and more practical instruction, and consequently be broken into two or possibly even three sermons. I would also add to the focus of the fourth message (on prayer and journaling) and make that into two sermons.

The biblical truths and principles taught in these messages should have first been taught to the church ministry staff. If I had the opportunity to do the project again, I would first walk the ministry staff through the material so that they would be better able to answer questions and reinforce the lessons taught in the sermons. It was not the case that the ministry staff did not understand biblical sanctification, but because at times they

used a different vocabulary to discuss and explain the subject, some church members that reached out to ministers experienced unnecessary confusion. This problem could have been avoided by giving the ministry staff a preview of the messages, especially the first two messages on Romans 6 with an emphasis on Colossians 2:20-23.

With an opportunity to repeat this project, I would also more closely involve the small group ministry of my church. While many participants took advantage of small group opportunities throughout the message series, the project would likely have made a greater impact if small group participation had been two or three times higher. The easiest way to facilitate higher small group participation in my ministry context would have been to utilize existing small groups and classes, primarily either Sunday school classes or men's weekday morning discipleship groups.

Finally, if I were to lead a church through this project (or parts of this project) again, I would make some key resources readily available to the church. There is much good literature today on spiritual disciplines, Bible meditation, daily devotions, and even the spiritual practices of the Puritans. Had I asked my staff to set up a bookstore at the church with key volumes on these subjects, many church members would have made purchases, read, and benefited from the books.¹⁸

Theological Reflections

The reading and research required to write chapters 2 and 3 challenged two wrongly held theological views or at least wrongly emphasized theological views on my part. I had developed these views over years of Bible study and Bible teaching that lacked

¹⁸ I would include the following books: Joanne Jung, *The Lost Discipline of Conversation*; Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*; Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness*; Matt Chandler, *Recovering Redemption: A Gospel Saturated Perspective on How to Change*; John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*; J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*; Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*; Donald S. Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life: Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed*; Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible*.

the level of care and precision necessary for this doctoral project. The first wrongly held view was that the connection between spiritual disciplines and righteous living was a simple formula described by Jesus in John 15 when he commanded believers to abide in him and as a result produce much fruit (John 15:5). In my teaching and counseling, I would often quote John 15:7 about allowing Christ's words abiding in you (which I equated with daily devotional reading), and I would tell my church to abide in Christ (which I equated with daily devotional praying). I would often assure my people that these two simple disciplines would, in fact, result in all needed spiritual strength to overcome temptation and experience the fullness of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). To emphasize my assertion, I would refer people to Joshua 1:8, "This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then, you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do."

Through the careful and precise study involved in preparing this project, my understanding of the process of sanctification changed. While I always knew of (and believed in) the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, I did not fully understand the importance of that role. Romans 8:13 clearly says that sanctification happens, at least in part, by the agency of the Spirit. This assertion agrees with Romans 8:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 1:2, and other passages. While the Spirit is not mentioned by name in Romans 6, the process of offering "parts of yourselves" (Rom 6:13) to God so that "sin will not rule over you" (Rom 6:14) speaks clearly to the partnership between the believer and the Holy Spirit to affect sanctification. Further, the glory (credit) for the believer's sanctification belongs to the Lord because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the role of the Spirit should be emphasized and embraced by every believer who wants to make genuine progress in overcoming persistent sins.

The second theological viewpoint that needed adjustment was my failure to appreciate the significance of understanding that Jesus' death on the cross not only

removed the penalty of sin in the life of a Christian but also the authority (or power) of sin in the life of a Christian. Paul presents this truth repeatedly in Romans 6:1-10 and then emphasizes the importance of the truth by urging his readers to “consider” it so in verse 11, to fully embrace this important reality. Further, in the following verses he closely ties the embrace of that truth to overcoming temptations. The fact that believers are dead to sin because of Christ’s death on the cross is an essential doctrine for Christians to understand and embrace in order to experience the fruits of practical sanctification. This doctrine is not typically emphasized sufficiently by many church pastors (including my own pulpit ministry through the years). When I preached this doctrine to my people in the context of this project, many church members said to me that they had never known or even heard that teaching before. These church members were most likely mistaken. The church I serve has had a long history of faithful and excellent Bible teaching and preaching.¹⁹ Still, the church members’ reports of not hearing this doctrine taught illustrate the lack of emphasis I and others have given this valuable Bible truth.

Personal Reflections

I have long practiced the basic spiritual disciplines emphasized in this project, and consequently, I knew much about their value for spiritual growth and authentic change before I began to study and write this material. I read Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* shortly after becoming a Christian in 1985, and my copies of Jerry Bridges’ books *The Pursuit of Holiness* and *The Practice of Godliness*, which someone gave me in the late 1980s, are worn beyond use. Ten years later, I read the first edition of Donald S. Whitney’s *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. In all my ministry assignments, I have been called the “spiritual-disciplines guy” ever since reading my first Whitney

¹⁹ I have served FBCNac as pastor for only three years. Prior to calling me to be pastor, the church had a long-tenured senior pastor (who served the church for approximately thirty-five years) who was highly regarded in east Texas as a thorough and careful Bible expositor.

book.

However, a new fire was lit in my life by two things involved in my pursuit of my DMin and my work on this project. First, I was assigned the reading of the previously mentioned book by John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*. This book is one I would likely have never read on my own, but reading this book changed my life as it added urgency to dealing with some persistent sins that I had learned to accommodate. While I do not believe I learned any new theology from Owen's book, I certainly learned a new perspective on my habitual sin and gained a dissatisfaction with how I conducted some areas of my life.

The second epiphany involved my study of the importance of a believer considering himself dead to sin as a result of being united with the death of Christ (Rom 6:11). Although I believe I could have accurately explained this passage to someone prior to this project, I did not fully understand the great value of obedience to that simple command, "consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." The embrace of that command has energized the spiritual disciplines in my life for mortifying persistent sins.

Conclusion

All measurements and evaluations point to the successful achievement of the goals of this project. However, the real success will be measured in the long-term, gospel-centered changes the project participants will experience over time. I hope to see this both in the church I pastor and in my personal life.

Not only has this project had an impact on my personal life, but it has significantly impacted my preaching and teaching ministry. That ministry has improved because of the theological lessons I have learned through the research and implementation of this project, and because of improvements in my research and writing skills that have been sharpened through this enterprise.

Working on this project has been a privilege afforded by my Lord, my gracious

church, and my patient family. May God be glorified in the fruit it brings.

APPENDIX 1

PERSISTENT SIN AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ASSESSMENT

The following instrument assessed the knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines and how that practice correlates with an individual's involvement with a sample of persistent sin categories among select members of FBCNac.

PERSISTENT SIN AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ASSESSMENT (PRE-SURVEY)

Agreement to Participate

The frustration level is high among many Christians as they struggle with persistent sins. This struggle is a common theme of the Christian life at least as far back as the recipients of Paul's letters to the Corinthians. However, the speed and ease with which these sins can irrevocably destroy lives has never been faster. How many Christians struggle today with the persistent sins of internet pornography, over-eating, over-spending, gossip, procrastination, sloth, and drug and alcohol abuse? For many, the biblical promises of freedom from the power of sin (such as those in John 8:31-36, Rom 6:15-23) seem hollow and misleading. The Bible, however, speaks of a powerful tool for the destruction of the strongholds of persistent sin. This tool is collectively called the spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines can, when energized by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, yield great power over temptation. This project endeavors to lead the people of the First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches, Texas, to use this powerful tool and experience more of the promised freedom that is so earnestly desired.

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge and practice of basic spiritual disciplines and any correlation between the practice of spiritual disciplines and the presence of persistent sins. This research is being conducted by Noel Dear for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer approximately forty questions. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

This is an anonymous survey. You will be asked to create a four-digit code so your answers can be correlated with the answers you provide in a follow-up survey that will be given to those who participate by listening to and viewing the sermons and completing the devotions that will be assigned. You may choose to use the last four digits of your social security number or the last four digits of your phone number or any other four digits. It is important that you remember the code you choose.

Date: _____

Four-digit code: _____

Part 1: General Questions

1. Do you regularly attend worship services at the First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches? _____
2. What is your age? _____

3. What is your gender? _____
4. Are you currently a college student? _____
5. Are you a Christian? _____
6. If yes, how long have you been a Christian? _____
7. Provide a brief definition of “spiritual disciplines.” (If you are not familiar with the phrase, leave blank.)

Part 2: Scale Statements

Directions: Please circle your agreement on the statements based on the following scale.

SD = strongly disagree
D = disagree
DS = disagree somewhat
AS = agree somewhat
A = agree
SA = strongly agree

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I struggle with substance abuse (alcohol, prescription or non-prescription drugs). | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. I struggle with overeating. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I struggle with viewing inappropriate sexual images. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I struggle with persistent sins of the tongue (gossip, foul language, lying). | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. I regularly struggle with lust. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. I regularly struggle with pride. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. I regularly struggle with anger. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I regularly struggle with worry. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. I regularly struggle with laziness. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. I regularly struggle with materialism, greed, or covetousness. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. I regularly struggle with a specific sin that I have fought and prayed to overcome for some time. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. I read the Bible daily. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. I fast at least one day per month. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. I write in a spiritual journal at least three times per week. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

15. I spend at least five minutes each day in continual, uninterrupted prayer.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. I memorize at least one Bible verse per week.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. I spend ten minutes in uninterrupted meditation on a Bible passage at least three times a week.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. At least once a week I share and pray with a fellow Christian concerning my struggles with temptation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of biblical meditation as they are outlined in the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of prayer as it is outlined in the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of fasting as it is outline in the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of journaling as it is presented in the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. I could explain to someone the difference in the Holy Spirit's role in removing sin from my life and my role in the process.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. I could explain to someone the value of spiritual disciplines for overcoming persistent sins.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Part 3: Additional Questions

- Do you struggle with any persistent or ongoing, often repeated sins? ____ yes ____ no
- If you struggle with one or more persistent sins, list the one that frustrates you the most. _____
- How long have you struggled with this persistent sin?
- What is the status of this persistent sin? (Mark one answer.)
 - I am making steady improvement in overcoming this sin.
 - There has been little or no improvement in my struggle with this sin.
 - This sin is becoming a more serious issue in my life.
- Is your family aware of this persistent sin? ____ yes ____ no
- Is there a small group of Christians who you have made aware of this sin?
____ yes ____ no

7. What are one or two things you have done to try to eradicate this sin in your life? (If there are none, please leave blank.)
- _____
- _____
- _____
8. How many days a week do you typically read the Bible? _____
9. When you do read your Bible, typically how many minutes do you spend reading?
- _____
10. How many days a week do you typically pray a prayer that lasts longer than five minutes? _____
11. Have you ever spent a whole day fasting for spiritual purposes? ____ yes ____ no
12. How many days a year do you typically fast?
- a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. 4 to 10
 - f. More than 10
13. Apart from Bible reading, praying, and fasting, what other spiritual disciplines, if any, do you regularly engage? _____

APPENDIX 2

PERSISTENT SIN AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES
POST-ASSESSMENT

The following instrument assessed the knowledge and practice of spiritual disciplines and how that practice correlates with an individual's involvement with a sample of persistent sin categories among select members of FBCNac.

PERSISTENT SIN AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES POST-SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge and practice of basic spiritual disciplines and any correlation between the practice of spiritual disciplines and the presence of persistent sins. This research is being conducted by Noel Dear for purposes of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer approximately forty questions. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

This is an anonymous survey. You will be asked to provide the four-digit code you provided when you took the first survey about two months ago. This code will be used to correlate your answers here with the answers you provided before to track change and progress.

Date: _____

Four-digit code: _____

Part 1: General Questions

1. Do you regularly attend worship services at the First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches?
2. In the six weeks (10/13 – 11/17) of the “Killing Persistent Sin” message series, how many weeks did you hear the sermon (either live or via tv/internet)?
3. Are you a Christian? _____
4. If yes, how long have you been a Christian? _____
5. Provide a brief definition of “spiritual disciplines.” (If you are not familiar with the phrase, leave blank.)

Rate the helpfulness of each message you heard. (NA = “I didn’t view that message.” NH = “Not helpful.” SH = “Somewhat helpful.” H = “Helpful.” VH = “Very Helpful.”)

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|----|----|----|---|----|
| 6. | Message 1: Dead to Sin | NA | NH | SH | H | VH |
| 7. | Message 2: Battle Lines | NA | NH | SH | H | VH |
| 8. | Message 3: Meditation | NA | NH | SH | H | VH |
| 9. | Message 4: Prayer and Journaling | NA | NH | SH | H | VH |
| 10. | Message 5: Fasting | NA | NH | SH | H | VH |
| 11. | Message 6: Community | NA | NH | SH | H | VH |
12. In the six weeks (10/13 – 11/17) of the “Killing Persistent Sin” message series, there were thirty suggested daily devotions, five per week for six weeks. Approximately how many of those thirty devotions did you do? _____
13. What is your age? _____
14. What is your gender? _____
15. Are you a college student? _____
16. Do you regularly (more than half the time) attend a Sunday School class? _____
17. In your own words, provide a brief definition of “spiritual disciplines.” (If you are not familiar with the phrase, please leave answer blank.)

Part 2: Scale Statements

Directions: Please circle your agreement on the statements based on the following scale.

SD = strongly disagree
D = disagree
DS = disagree somewhat
AS = agree somewhat
A = agree
SA = strongly agree

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. | I struggle with substance abuse (alcohol, prescription or non-prescription drugs). | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. | I struggle with overeating. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. | I struggle with viewing inappropriate sexual images. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. | I struggle with persistent sins of the tongue (gossip, foul language, lying). | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. | I regularly struggle with lust. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. | I regularly struggle with pride. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. | I regularly struggle with anger. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

8. I regularly struggle with worry.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. I regularly struggle with laziness.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. I regularly struggle with materialism, greed, or covetousness.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. I regularly struggle with a specific sin that I have fought and prayed to overcome for some time.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
12. I read the Bible daily.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I fast at least one day per month.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I write in a spiritual journal at least three times per week.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. I spend at least five minutes each day in continual, uninterrupted prayer.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. I memorize at least one Bible verse per week.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. I spend ten minutes in uninterrupted meditation on a Bible passage at least three times a week.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. At least once a week I share and pray with a fellow Christian concerning my struggles with temptation.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
19. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of biblical meditation as they are outlined in the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
20. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of prayer as it is outlined in the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of the spiritual discipline of fasting as it is outline in the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. I could explain to someone the value and the methods of journaling as it is presented in the Bible.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. I could explain to someone the difference in the Holy Spirit's role in removing sin from my life and my role in the process.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. I could explain to someone the value of spiritual disciplines for overcoming persistent sins.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25. I believe I am more sensitive to the presence of sin in my life today than I was before I listened to these messages.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Part 3: Additional Questions

1. Do you struggle with any persistent or ongoing, often repeated sins? ____ yes ____ no
2. If you struggle with one or more persistent sins, list the one that frustrates you the most. _____

3. How long have you struggled with this persistent sin?
4. What is the status of this persistent sin? (Mark one answer.)
 - a. I am making steady improvement in overcoming this sin.
 - b. There has been little or no improvement in my struggle with this sin.
 - c. This sin is becoming a more serious issue in my life.
5. Is your family aware of this persistent sin? ____ yes ____ no
6. Is there a small group of Christians who you have made aware of this sin?
____ yes ____ no
7. What are one or two things you have done to try to eradicate this sin in your life? (If there are none, please leave blank.)

8. How many days a week do you typically read the Bible? _____
9. When you do read your Bible, typically how many minutes do you spend reading?

10. How many days a week do you typically pray a prayer that lasts longer than five minutes? _____
11. Have you ever spent a whole day fasting for spiritual purposes? ____ yes ____ no
12. How many days a year do you typically fast?
 - a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. 4 to 10
 - f. More than 10
13. Apart from Bible reading, praying, and fasting, what other spiritual disciplines, if any, do you regularly engage? _____

APPENDIX 3

SERMON EVALUATION

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel of one former seminary professor and noted expert in systematic theology,¹ four pastors or former pastors, one discipleship minister, one college minister with education and background in the practice of counseling those who struggle with persistent sins, and one layperson with a background in discipling women. The panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the sermons for biblical faithfulness, scope, relevance, and practicality.

¹ James Leo Garrett, Jr., an active church member at FBCNac, is the Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Spiritual Disciplines Sermon Evaluation Rubric					
1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exceeds expectations					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The content of the sermons is hermeneutically sound. All Scripture is properly interpreted, explained, and applied.					
The content of the sermons is theologically sound.					
Scope					
The sermon sufficiently covers the basics of the subjects for which it is designed to address.					
Relevance and Practicality					
The sermon addresses issues relevant to common persistent sins.					
The sermon provides practical instructions for individuals struggling with persistent sins.					
The sermon is accessible by Christians of all maturity levels.					

Additional notes or comments:

Name of evaluator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX 4

DISCUSSION AND DEVOTION GUIDE EVALUATION

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel of one former seminary professor and noted expert in systematic theology,¹ four pastors or former pastors, one discipleship minister, one college minister with education and background in the practice of counseling those who struggle with persistent sins, and one layperson with a background in discipling women. The panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the discussion and devotion guides for biblical faithfulness, practicality, and usability.

¹ James Leo Garrett, Jr., an active church member at FBCNac, is the Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Discussion and Devotion Guide Evaluation Rubric					
1 = insufficient; 2 = requires attention; 3 = sufficient; 4 = exceeds expectations					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Faithfulness					
The content of the guide is hermeneutically sound. All Scripture is properly interpreted, explained, and applied.					
The content of the guide is theologically sound.					
Practicality					
The discussion guide provides sufficient practical guidance and content to facilitate group discussions that will support the sermon and help participants apply the counsel of Scripture to their lives.					
The devotion guide provides sufficient practical guidance and content to lead the participants to apply the lessons of the sermons by having a daily devotion.					
Usability					
The curriculum is accessible by Christians of all maturity levels.					

Additional notes or comments:

Name of evaluator: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 5

SERMON: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS— THE FIRST STEPS

Next is the sermon outline for message 1 in the six-week series. This message was preached on Sunday, October 13, 2019.

How to Kill Persistent Sin – First Steps – Romans 6:1-12

FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, October 13, 2019 – A.M. Message

Message Description

We all have persistent sins that we have fought for years. We all have weaknesses and temptations that have taken us to our knees over and over again. So, what should we do? Is this how we are supposed to live? Is there something wrong with me? Is there something broken in my relationship with God? Is there any hope? In this message we will discover hope. And we will learn the first steps to the real, God-honoring change we so badly desire.

Introduction

— I’ve come to the place in my life (and I think I’ve always been in this place but maybe haven’t been humble enough to recognize it until now) where my biggest frustration is...

— Not...

— The circumstances of my life...

— Health

— Money

— Family

— Career

— The actions of others...

— Aggravating or hurtful people...

— The sins of others...

— My biggest source of frustration is *myself*.

— My sin...

— My inadequacies...

— My struggles with temptation...

— Persistent sins that seem to hound me without mercy...

— I identify way too much with Paul’s self-description...

— Romans 7:15 | *For I do not understand what I am doing, because I do not practice what I want to do, but I do what I hate.* (CSB)

— Romans 7:18 | *For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it.* (CSB)

— Romans 7:19 | *For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do.* (CSB)

— Romans 7:22–23 | *For in my inner self I delight in God’s law, but I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body.* (CSB)

— Romans 7:24 | *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* (CSB)

— And frankly, I don’t always find the Bible encouraging in this matter...

— It seems to imply that I should be having way more success in my fight against temptation.

— Romans 6:22a | *... You have been set free from sin...* (CSB)

— 1 John 3:9 | *Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because his seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God.* (CSB)

— Romans 6:6 | *We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.* (NLT)

- So, I feel guilty, and I try harder...
 - Romans 6:12a | ... *do not let sin reign in your mortal body...* (CSB)
 - 1 Corinthians 9:27 | ... *discipline [your] body and bring it under strict control...* (CSB)
 - 1 Timothy 4:7b | ... *train yourself in godliness.* (CSB)
 - Colossians 3:5a | *Put to death what belongs to your earthly nature...* (CSB)
 - 2 Corinthians 7:1b | ... *cleanse [y]ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* (CSB)
- But I continue to struggle with persistent (besetting) sins.
 - Why is this so hard?
 - How can Jesus say...
 - Matthew 11:28 | *Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.* (CSB)
 - Matthew 11:30 | *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* (CSB)
 - Am I missing something?
 - And if you have been confessing some of the same sins for years, are YOU missing something?
- Let me describe an all-too-common conversation I have with people as their pastor...
 - Pastor...
 - I'm so frustrated. I'm really struggling with...
 - Anger
 - Or overeating
 - Or pornography
 - Or lust
 - Or laziness
 - Or gossip
 - I know this is displeasing to the Lord.
 - I know this is hurting my relationship with the Lord and my relationship with others.
 - I want to change!
 - I've prayed for change.
 - I've promised to change.
 - But I'm stuck! I keep repeating this sin.
 - Help me!
 - What do you say to that person?
 - What do you say to the person who asks...
 - “Why is it that despite praying, yielding to God, and reading my Bible—why can't I quit no matter how hard I try?”
 - I used to believe/say...
 - If a person really wanted to stop/change, they would change.
 - He or she just need to try harder!
 - But, I have learned from God's word, there is a better plan.
 - An easier way...
 - A more successful way...
 - A more biblical way...
 - A Spirit-empowered way...
- In this six-week series, I want to explain this better way.
 - I want us to learn what really happened/changed when we trusted

- Christ and, according to Scripture, we “*died to sin*” (Romans 6:2, 11).
- I want us to learn what is our part and what is God’s part in our struggle with sin.
 - I want us to learn how to really obey the biblical command to “*not let sin reign*” (Romans 6:12).
 - We are going to get started in some pretty high weeds...
 - We will have to put on our thinking caps...
 - But this is important!
 - One of the biggest reasons we fail to overcome persistent sins is that we too quickly move past the theology and dive into the to-dos.
 - *We start doing something before we know something.*
 - We have three options (though they are not all valid options) in our attempt to overcome persistent sins...
 - Options...
 - A. Let go and let God...**
 - We could just not care about holy living or persistent sin.
 - We could go against dozens of direct commands in the New Testament and passively wait for God to change us.
 - B. Try harder...**
 - We could try to do this in our own strength.
 - We could follow the error of the Christians in Galatia...
 - Galatians 3:3 | *Are you so foolish? After beginning by the Spirit, are you now finishing by the flesh?* (CSB)
 - C. Partner with the Holy Spirit’s work...**
 - We could learn what God has already done for us...
 - And we could learn how God is continuing to work in us...
 - And we could partner with him!
 - I can tell you as...
 - A student of Scripture
 - As an experienced pastor/counselor
 - And as a sinner...
 - The first two options are worthless.
 - But in the third option, there is HOPE.
 - Philippians 1:6 | *I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* (CSB)
 - And while we will never have complete victory over sin in this lifetime...
 - No person is completely without sin...
 - 1 John 1:8 | *If we say, “We have no sin,” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* (CSB)
 - The Bible indicates that we will have a need to continually confess sins...
 - 1 John 1:9 | *If we confess our sins, he is*

faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (CSB)

— Matthew 6:12 | *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (CSB)*

— And the Bible indicates there will always be a tension between our living by the flesh and our living in dependence on the Spirit...

— Galatians 5:16–18 | *I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (CSB)*

— And there will always be a need to flee sin and pursue righteousness...

— 2 Timothy 2:22 | *Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (CSB)*

— We can experience real growth (practical sanctification)!

— As we will learn this week and next from the second half of Romans 6.

— 2 Corinthians 3:18 | *We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit. (CSB)*

— 2 Corinthians 7:1 | *Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And **let us work toward complete holiness** because we fear God. (NLT)*

— The series plan...

— We are going to learn how to kill persistent sin!

— Today and next week we will look at Romans 6 and discover what we have to know before this successful journey can begin.

— In the following four weeks, we will focus on walking the path of sanctification and killing persistent sins.

— Romans 8:13 instructs us to “*put to death*” or “*mortify*” the deeds of the body.

— We will learn the strategies and the weapons the Lord provides us to cooperate with the Spirit and do this very thing.

— Read Romans 6:1-12.

— Romans 6:1

— The writer, Paul, had just written (Romans 5:20) that where there was more sin (*sin multiplied*) there would be more grace (*grace multiplied*).

— So, should we just continue to sin in order to experience greater and greater grace?

— Romans 6:2

— The answer to the previous question is a resounding, “No!”

- Notice the phrase, “*died to sin.*”
 - Key phrase.
 - Notice it describes something that...
 - Has already happened (for the believer).
 - It is past tense.
 - Has fully happened (for the believer).
 - It is not an ongoing or a partial thing.
 - The death is completed.
- Romans 6:3-5
 - Of course, Jesus died and was resurrected.
 - Our salvation experience mirrors what happened to Christ.
 - And our baptism is a picture of what happened when we were saved.
 - Going back into the water pictures the old person dying.
 - Coming out of the water pictures the new person being born (reborn).
 - So...
 - We have “*died to sin.*”
 - And we have been resurrected to “*newness of life.*”
- Romans 6:6-7
 - Before we were born-again, we were slaves to sin.
 - That meant sin was the master, and you were the slave.
 - We don’t have to fully understand what that means right now as long as we observe that now that we are saved, we have a DIFFERENT relationship with sin than we did before.
- Romans 6:8-11
 - Key word in 6:11 is “*consider.*”
 - *Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*
 - The KJV says, “*reckon.*”
 - Good word.
 - The word, λογίζομαι, is an accounting term.
 - It means to note something on the chart of accounts in a way that makes it so.
 - To credit an account...
- Romans 6:12
 - If you are no longer a slave to sin, then sin should not reign!
 - But, ***as we can see by the imperative, this is not automatic.***
 - We must do something.
 - We shall see what...
- These are some of the most difficult to understand yet foundational verses in the Bible for living out the Christian life.
 - These verses provide the first steps to overcoming persistent sins.
 - Let’s see if we can identify these first steps...
 - Preview...
 - We must know something...
 - We must embrace something...
 - We must dethrone something...

The First Steps to Overcoming Persistent Sins

I. Know something: You were crucified with Christ.

- Romans 6:6 | *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin.* (CSB)
- When you became a child of God, the death of Christ was applied to your life.
 - To pay the penalty for sin.
 - But also, something more...
 - It meant that you have died to sin.
 - What does that mean?
 - We did not just die to the penalty of sin.
 - We also died to the authority of sin!
- Before you were saved, sin was your master.
 - It isn't just that you sinned from time to time.
 - You were a SINNER.
 - Sin was bound up in you.
 - Your nature was that of a sinner.
 - It was who you were.
 - You were a slave to sin (Romans 6:6b).
 - Consequently, before you were saved, you had no real power to refuse the influence of sin in your life.
 - That is what slavery means.
 - It is true that unsaved people...
 - *Can have better seasons and worse seasons of sin...*
 - *Can disguise and hide their sin at times...*
 - *Can sometimes exchange one sin for another sin...*
 - But unsaved people are under the absolute authority of sin.
 - That is why the success rates for worldly programs of behavior modification are so poor.
 - Whether it is a program to get young people to not take drugs or abuse alcohol...
 - Remember the old, well-intentioned, government anti-drug program...
 - “*Just say no!*”
 - Experts have studied the effectiveness of that campaign and discovered that it was a miserable failure.
 - The problem was nobody “*just said no.*”
 - Or whether it is a secular counselor trying to get an unsaved husband to change his ways and remain faithful to his wife...
 - Or whether it is an unsaved man making a New Year's Resolution to stop looking at pornography...
 - Apart from Christ: People don't change much, or for long.
 - And they can't.
 - They are slaves to sin.
 - Hopeless!
- So how can a person ever get out from under the power/authority/jurisdiction of sin?
 - Well one way, the only way... **The sinner could die!**
 - In pre-Civil War America, a slave couldn't do anything to obtain his freedom except one thing...
 - He could die.
 - Once a slave died, his master no longer had authority over him.

- The slave master could yell all he wanted at the dead slave with no effect.
- That is exactly what happened when we were identified with the death of Christ.
 - We died to our master: sin.
 - Romans 6:6 | *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, (CSB)*
 - Romans 6:7 | *since **a person who has died is freed from sin.** (CSB)*
- But there is more...
 - If the pre-Civil War slave died, he was free of his master, but he was also DEAD.
 - But we have not only died with Christ, we have been raised with him!
 - Romans 6:4–5 | *Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, **just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.** For if we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection. (CSB)*
 - There is a newness to our lives.
 - Instead of being connected with the authority of sin which slowly kills...
 - We are connected in a relationship with God which gives life.
 - More on this “*newness of life*” as we move forward in this series.
- Isn’t that the best news!
- Let’s take a different look at the same truth...
 - The first ten verses of Romans 6 teach us this truth:
 - **Your relationship with sin is different now than it was before you were saved!**
 - And your new relationship with sin is a fact.
 - *It doesn’t change things that you may not have known this good news.*
 - *This emancipation...*
 - *It doesn’t change things that you may not fully understand.*
 - *It doesn’t change things that you may **not feel** differently toward sin.*
- Before we were saved, moral instruction was largely an exercise in frustration.
 - Like telling a drowning man to breath...
 - Like telling a burning man to cool down...
 - Like telling a weak man to lift a thousand pounds...
- But now...
 - You are dead to sin.
 - Sin has no authority over you.
 - You do not have to give in to temptation.
 - This is such good news!
 - And your death to sin is final.
 - It doesn’t need to be repeated.
 - Just like Jesus’s death was “*once for all time*,” so is

ours.

— Romans 6:10 | *For the death he died, he died to sin once for all time; but the life he lives, he lives to God.* (CSB)

- So, the first step to overcoming persistent, besetting sin is to know something:
 - You have been crucified with Christ.
 - You are dead to sin!

II. Embrace something: You really are dead to sin.

- Let's look at Romans 6:11 again...
 - Romans 6:11 | *So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* (CSB)
- The first ten verses clearly establish the FACT that we are “dead to sin.”
 - So, why does it say here to “consider” or “reckon” ourselves “dead to sin?”
 - At first glance this command seems superfluous, but note...
 - Because even the people who KNOW they are “dead to sin,” generally DO NOT EMBRACE that truth.
- What does it mean to “consider?”
 - *Consider yourselves dead to sin...*
 - The Greek word (λογίζομαι) is used nineteen times in Romans.
 - And some consider it the most important word to understanding the book of Romans.¹
 - The word is an accounting word.
 - It means to put something down into one's account.
 - If you deposit \$100 cash at the bank, they put it on your account.
 - And when they put it on your account, your account increases by \$100.
 - Once the money is in your account, then it is there.
 - It doesn't matter whether you feel the money is in your account...
 - It doesn't matter what someone else may say about where the money is...
 - So, we can take it to the bank...
 - We can...
 - Count on it...
 - Be assured of it...
 - Rely on it...
 - We are dead to sin.
 - On the days we feel like it...
 - And on the days we don't.
 - When we don't hear the **bullhorn** of temptation ringing in our ears...
 - And when we do hear the **bullhorn** of temptation.
 - How do we “consider?”
 - A. We consider ourselves dead to sin by faith.**
 - This is something that we must choose to believe.
 - *We say, “I have faith that it is true that I am dead to*

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 125.

sin.”

— We say, “I am confident of the reality described in Romans 6 that I am no longer a slave to sin.”

— We say, “I firmly believe I am able to say no to temptation because my old sin master no longer has authority over me.”

— Don’t let the idea that this is by faith throw you for a loop.

— We accept the fact that Jesus died for our sins by faith.

— I have faith that my sins have been paid for by the death of Christ.

— So, in the same way, we must have faith that we died with Christ and are dead to sin.

— Think about it this way...

— What would you tell a Christian who continues to feel guilty because of past sin?

— You would say, “Have faith that Christ died for your sins and you are forgiven.”

— So, what should you say to yourself when you feel the strong pull of temptation?

— “Listen self! You must have faith that you were crucified with Christ, and you are dead to sin’s power.”

— Romans 6:6–7 | *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be rendered powerless so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin.* (CSB)

— To “consider ourselves dead to sin” (Romans 6:11) is an act (choice) of faith.

— Not feeling...

— But faith.

B. We consider ourselves dead to sin over and over and over.

— Let me give you a little Greek language lesson...

— In Romans 6:6 we learn that we have been “*crucified with him.*”

— “*Crucified*” is an **aorist**, passive, third-person, indicative, singular verb.

— That (aorist tense) tells us that this describes a once-for-all event.

— Our death has already happened.

— It is complete.

— It is finished.

— There is nothing more to do.

— In Romans 6:11 we learn that we are to “*consider ourselves dead to sin.*”

— “*Consider*” is a **present** middle imperative, second-person, plural verb.

— That (present tense) tells us that this describes an ongoing command.

— We are to re-consider ourselves dead to sin over and over and over.

— How often are we “*crucified with Christ?*”

— Once.

— How often do we “*consider ourselves dead to sin?*”

- Every time we are tempted.
- Every time sin tries to boss us around.
- Every time we feel the false authority of sin pressure us to compromise.
- Over and over and over...
- This story illustrates what it means to “*consider yourself dead to sin.*”
 - I read a story about a U.S. Marine who had served under a very demanding sergeant major.
 - He said he didn’t realize how much control the sergeant major had in his life until he ran into him after he was out of the Marines.
 - He said he saw him at a college football game.
 - He was in a crowd of people. The sergeant was walking toward him...
 - As soon as he saw his former sergeant, he instantly, without thinking, stopped walking. Stood straight up. Hands by his sides. Eyes forward. Face stern.
 - Then he thought...
 - What am I doing?
 - I’m not in the Marines.
 - As many times as this sergeant has gotten in my face and shouted and intimidated me...
 - All of that is in the past.
 - The sergeant may still be alive, but I am no longer subject to him!²
 - Sin barks commands at us all the time.
 - Sin tries to intimidate us.
 - Sin lies and commands our obedience.
 - But, we are dead to sin, and we must embrace that!
- Embracing this truth is hard.
 - It takes an entirely different mindset.
 - It is unnatural...
 - A few years ago, I went snorkeling.
 - The hardest part was putting my face in the water and breathing.
 - It is so unnatural because your body screams, “If you breath, you will drown!”
 - But I had to declare to myself...
 - There is another reality.
 - Things aren’t what they seem.
 - Because of the snorkel, I’m not subject to the water going into my lungs.
 - We must do the same when it comes to sin.
 - It may seem like sin can still boss me around.
 - But there is a new reality.
 - I am no longer the subject (under the authority) of sin!
- So, how do we overcome persistent sins?
 - We have to know something.
 - We were crucified with Christ.
 - We have to embrace something.
 - We really are dead to sin!
 - And one more thing...

² D. Stuart Briscoe and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Romans*, The Preacher’s Commentary Series, vol. 29 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 134-35.

III. Dethrone something: Do not let sin reign.

- Now, this last point will take five weeks...
 - But I want you to see where it is in our journey through Romans 6.
 - Romans 6:12 | *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires.* (CSB)
- There is some valuable instruction about this here in Romans 6, and we will unpack that next week.
 - But there are two things we need to see to make today's message complete.
- Dethroning sin...
 - A. Overcoming persistent sin is a shared task.**
 - Without the work of Christ on the cross and the influence and power of the Holy Spirit, it would be impossible to overcome sin.
 - This cannot just be a try-harder approach.
 - You cannot do this alone.
 - You do not have the moral strength to change.
 - That is why we identify with what Paul said in the last half of Romans 7.
 - But you have a role in overcoming sin.
 - Romans 6:12 is a command!
 - And though some dismiss the believer's active role in overcoming sin, the Bible makes it clear (over and over again).
 - The New Testament is filled with similar commands.
 - There are two ways to *fail* at overcoming sins...
 1. Try to do it by just trying harder.
 2. Turning it all over to the Lord.
 - We are learning to address this problem a third way.
 - B. Overcoming persistent sin is a lifelong struggle.**
 - Every honest Christian will testify that becoming a believer does not erase the tendency to sin. He still derives pleasure from sin. He still struggles with sinful habits.
 - As we saw earlier, the Bible clearly indicates that we will continue to wrestle with sin throughout our lives.
 - No person is completely without sin...
 - 1 John 1:8 | *If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* (CSB)
 - The Bible indicates that we will have a need to continually confess sins...
 - Matthew 6:12 | *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* (CSB)
 - 1 John 1:9 | *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (CSB)
 - And the Bible indicates there will always be a tension between our living by the flesh and our living in dependence on the Spirit...
 - Galatians 5:16–18 | *I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you*

- don't do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (CSB)*
- And there will always be a need to flee sin and pursue righteousness...
 - 2 Timothy 2:22 | *Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (CSB)*
 - But it should be our expectation that we can and will be transformed.
 - 2 Corinthians 3:18 | *We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit. (CSB)*

Conclusion

- The fight with sin is a long and difficult battle.
 - 1 Corinthians 9:24–27 | *Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified. (NLT)*
- But you can experience growth...
 - You can enjoy some real victories.
- Some of us have persistent sins that have been live-in house-guests way too long.
 - It is time to kill (Romans 8:13) those sins.
 - That may sound like harsh language, but as we will see next week, that is exactly the language the Bible uses.
- I have about four hours' worth of good news to show you.
 - It will take us six weeks.
 - But that extended time is good.
 - We need to practice some of this along the way for it to have the desired impact.
- Are you ready to kill some persistent sins in your life?
 - Are you ready to experience some victory over some besetting sins?
- Alright...
 - We are going to do this!
 - How do we begin?
 - Know something...
 - Embrace something...
 - Dethrone something...
 - We haven't learned how to do this yet.
 - Starting next week...
 - I know this feels like we are stopping in the middle and we are...
- Step #1:
 - Make a mental list of persistent sins that you must kill.
 - Walk through the three "first steps."
 - Affirm that through Christ you have died both to the penalty and the authority of that sin!
 - Utilize the Daily devotions found in your worship guide and

online at www.NoelDear.com.

— Utilize the discussion guide found in your worship guide and online at www.NoelDear.com.

APPENDIX 6

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS—THE FIRST STEPS

Next is the sermon discussion guide for message 1 in the six-week series.

How to Kill Persistent Sin – First Steps – Romans 6:1-12
FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, October 13, 2019 – A.M. Message

Sermon Discussion Guide

Connect

- Why do you think it is so hard for people to make real changes in their habits or lifestyles?

Discover

- Which statement or experience stood out to you from the worship service?
- Read Romans 6:6-7.
 - In what ways were we slaves to sin before we became children of God (before we were saved)?
 - How has Jesus' death and our identity with his death changed our status as slaves to sin? Why are we no longer slaves to sin?
 - What does it mean that we are now freed from sin?
- Read Romans 6:11-12.
 - If Romans 6:6-7 says we are dead to sin, why does verse 11 command us to "consider ourselves dead?" Why is this command necessary?
 - What is the connection between the verse 11 command to "consider yourself dead" and the verse 12 command to "not let sin reign?" Why is the first command vital to the possibility of following the second command?
- Read Matthew 11:28-30.
 - What does Jesus mean when he describes the Christian life as resting and says that the demands of living the Christian life are easy and light?
 - Why do most Christians disagree (even if they wouldn't admit it) with Jesus on this issue?
 - How would you counsel a Christian who says that living the Christian life is hard and frustrating?
- Read 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Philippians 1:6.
 - What does it mean that the Lord will finish the work he has started to do in you (Philippians 1:6)? How does that bring strength and encouragement to you?
 - What does it mean that you are being "transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18)? How does this give you hope even as you think about your besetting sins?

Respond

- How did our relationship with sin change when we were saved? What real difference does it make in our lives to really understand this change?
- How would you counsel someone who says they have a particular persistent sin that is impossible for them to overcome?

Bonus for Thinkers

- Romans 6:12 commands Christians to not let sin reign so that you "obey its desires." What does the writer mean when he says sin has desires? When we sin, are we following our desires or are we following sin's desires? Why does this matter?

APPENDIX 7

SERMON: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS— BATTLE LINES

Next is the sermon outline for message 2 in the six-week series. This message was preached on Sunday, October 20, 2019.

How to Kill Persistent Sin – Battle Lines – Romans 6:12-14

FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, October 20, 2019 – A.M. Message

Message Description

We've all made giant, over-the-top promises to never sin a certain way again. And... we've all failed spectacularly. So, what is wrong? If Christians are no longer enslaved by sin, why can't I just stop my persistent sins? What if it turns out that we have been going about this all wrong? What if there is a completely different way to overcome sins? What if our dramatic promises and bold commitments were just not the biblical way at all? In this message we will learn the surprising secret to experiencing real change.

Introduction

- How can we overcome persistent sins?
 - Is there hope?
 - Is there a path to success?
- We learned last week...
 - As children of God, we *can* enjoy real growth in freedom from persistent sins.
 - To find this freedom, we must...
 - **Know something: You were crucified with Christ.**
 - **Embrace something: You really are dead to sin.**
 - **Dethrone something: Do not let sin reign.**
 - Sin has lost its authority, but it will stay seated on the throne in your life as long as you allow it to sit there.
 - It will reign even if its reign is not legitimate.
 - We focused on the first two critical steps last week.
 - Today and for the next four weeks, we will focus on the last step.
- Let's turn to Romans 6.
 - Read Romans 6:6-7.
 - What does it mean that we are dead to sin?
 - Read Romans 6:11.
 - How do we embrace (consider) that we are dead to sin?
 - Read Romans 6:12-14.
 - Therefore...
 - Since we are dead to sin...
 - Notice the focus changes here from what has happened (past tense) to what should happen (present tense).
 - Also notice the military image used in these verses...
 - The Bible presents our struggle with sin as a violent battle.
 - 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 | *For although we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh, since the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments (CSB)*
 - 1 Timothy 6:12 | *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of eternal life to which you were called and about which you have made a good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (CSB)*
 - 2 Timothy 4:7 | *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (CSB)*
- Mortal bodies...

- We still live with the presence of sin in our mortal bodies.
 - That is the bad news.
 - But the implied good news is that one day we will be given immortal bodies!
 - And we will no longer fight with the presence of sin and temptation.
- “*Do not let sin reign*” (6:12a) seems...
 - A. Obvious...**
 - B. Yet impossible...**
 - If this were just a matter of deciding not to sin, we would have overcome our sin long ago.
 - C. But hopeful...**
 - The Lord would not give us this command if we couldn’t obey it.
 - Here sin is pictured as a **monarch** or a **master**...
 - But the monarch has been dethroned.
 - The master has been stripped of his authority (Romans 6:6-7).
 - D. Though unrealized...**
 - But we aren’t there yet.
 - What must we do to get there?
 - How can we experience greater success in our battle with persistent sins?
- Let’s learn four truths from this passage...

Battle Intelligence

I. Sin can still beat you.

- As Christians, we are dead to sin because of the work of Christ on the cross.
 - That is an established and unchangeable fact.
 - We are “*no longer enslaved to sin*” (Romans 6:6).
- Yet, sin still has the potential to reign if it is allowed to reign (at least temporarily).
 - That is implied in the Romans 6:12 command to refuse to allow it to reign.
 - Romans 6:12 | *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires.* (CSB)
 - Romans 6:12 would have no practical meaning if sin had been eradicated from the Christian’s life.
 - Sin can reign in a believer’s life.
- As we noted before, sin is pictured as a dethroned monarch.
 - That monarch has no authority.
 - But he does have a bullhorn!
- If you choose to listen/follow/obey, you can practically nullify the freedom that Christ purchased for you through his death on the cross.
 - You can allow sin to reign.
 - You can allow yourself to be controlled by sin.
 - You can allow sin to fester and metastasize in your life.
 - You can allow sin to take away what Jesus has done for you in providing freedom from the tyranny of sin.
- As a believer, my relationship with sin has changed.
 - Sin is no longer my master. I am no longer its slave.
 - But...

- The real possibility exists that I will be the dog that returns to its vomit...
 - Proverbs 26:11 | *As a dog returns to its vomit, so also a fool repeats his foolishness.* (CSB)
- The strong possibility exists that I will sign back up for slavery.
- And any of could do it, and have in many ways done it.
- Early in my ministry, I brought in a preacher I knew and trusted to preach some weekend services at my church.
 - The last night of the weekend of meetings, he preached from Hebrews 10:26-27.
 - Hebrews 10:26–27 | *For if we deliberately go on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire about to consume the adversaries.* (CSB)
- It was a powerful sermon...
 - But he wept uncontrollably through most of the message.
- A year later, I learned he was involved in an affair during that time period.
 - It shook me to the core as a young pastor who could not imagine the hypocrisy.
 - I knew this man to be a follower of the Lord.
 - I couldn't imagine how he could do what he was doing.
 - And, of course, I still don't know all there is to know about his situation.
 - But I know this...
 - The most ardent follower of Christ can still sign back up for slavery.

II. You must battle sin.

- Through the death of Christ, we have been freed from the tyranny of sin, yet the possibility (tendency) remains that we would voluntarily resubmit to sin's mastery.
 - So, what are we going to do?
 - What should we do?
 - Should we...
 - Just sit back and leave this issue up to the Lord?
 - Just not worry about sin?
 - No! Quite the opposite!
- The biblical expectations are clear.
 - Romans 6:12a | ... *Do not let sin reign in your mortal body...* (CSB)
 - Romans 8:13b | ... *Put to death the deeds of the body...* (CSB)
 - 1 Timothy 4:7b | ... *Train yourself in godliness.* (CSB)
 - 2 Corinthians 7:1b | ... *Let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* (CSB)
- John Owen, noted Puritan preacher, wrote one of the best books ever written on this subject.
 - Book: *The Mortification of Sin*, 1656
 - In his book, Owen famously paraphrased Romans 8:13, “*Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.*”
 - In fact, Owen points out, this passage teaches us that one of the signs of authentic salvation is that we are in the battle with sin.
 - Romans 8:13 | ... *If you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the*

- body, you will live. (CSB)*
- While we are focused on this verse, notice the strong language Paul uses to describe our actions and attitude toward sin.
 - He says to KILL SIN.
 - The CSB and most modern translations put it a little nicer: “*Put to death.*”
 - I like how the old KJV translates it...
 - Romans 8:13 | *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (KJV 1900)*
 - We often make two errors when it comes to persistent sins...
 - A. We ignore the presence of sin.**
 - And consequently...
 - We surrender the ground that Christ has fought for.
 - We allow sin to rob us of life...
 - Weaken the soul and deprive it of its vigor.
 - Darken the soul and deprive it of its comfort and peace.
 - This is the *unspiritual* sounding error (and it is unspiritual).
 - B. We give our practice of sin to the Lord.**
 - This is the *spiritual* sounding error.
 - We go to the Lord in prayer and ask him to deliver us from the sin, and then trust in faith that he will do so.
 - The Bible never counsels a struggling believer by saying, “I think your only hope is to take [your sin] to Christ and Christ will take it from you.”
 - Jesus does instruct us to pray to avoid temptation...
 - Matthew 6:13 | *And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (CSB)*
 - But, the responsibility for putting sin to death lands squarely on the believer. This duty cannot be turned over to God.
 - This is unmistakably what the Bible teaches.
 - How does the Bible counsel the person who struggles with a persistent sin of stealing?
 - Ephesians 4:28a | *Let the thief no longer steal... (CSB)*
 - He should stop stealing!
 - Not pray about it...
 - But STOP.
 - Colossians 3:5a | *... Put to death what belongs to your earthly nature... (CSB)*
 - 1 Corinthians 9:26–27a | *... I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control... (CSB)*
 - You are commanded to actively battle sin!
 - I’m going to tell you about a *partner* in the battle in a moment.
 - And I’m going to begin to give you the *battle tactics* in a moment.
 - But first, you must **own** this responsibility.
 - You are dead to sin.
 - You are no longer under the control of sin.
 - But something is expected of you.
 - Romans 6:12a | *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body... (CSB)*

III. The Holy Spirit is your fellow soldier.

- Let's look back at the "Kill your sin" verse...
 - Romans 8:13 | ... *If you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* (CSB)
- Paul says that we kill our persistent sin by the agency of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.
 - He writes, "*by the Spirit...*"
 - Owen writes, "*A man may easier see without eyes, speak without a tongue, than truly mortify one sin without the Spirit.*"¹
 - The Holy Spirit works in us to enable us to live lives pleasing to God. He does not do the work for us; rather, He enables us to do the work.
 - Human activity in the process of sanctification is clearly necessary; but that activity is never apart from, nor finally distinct from, the activity of God's Spirit.²
- So, the good news in our battle with sin...
 - We do not fight alone!
- The question is: How does the Holy Spirit partner with us in this battle?
 - This question will be best answered when we get into the details of fighting the battle in the weeks to come.
- But it is important to know going into the battle that we are not alone!

IV. The Battle is won through momentum.

- Next to learning what it means to be dead to sin, this is the most important lesson in this entire sermon series.
- Scripture support for the momentum of sanctification...
 - Read Romans 6:12-13.
 - Romans 6:13 | *And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness.* (CSB)
 - You can yield your "parts" (time, thoughts, energy, body, habits, words, etc.) to sin and they will become weapons for unrighteousness.
 - Those sins will themselves become enemies that will further destroy and take you further into sin.
 - It is like being in a battle and your enemy runs out of bullets and you say, "here, use some of mine!"
 - Or you can yield your "parts" to God and those activities/thoughts will be tools to bring you even closer to the Lord.
 - Do you see the momentum?
 - We could all give examples of this phenomena.
 - If you begin to flirt with one sin, that sin opens up opportunities and arouses interests

¹ John Owen, "Mortification of Sin . . .," in *Overcoming Sin and Temptation: Three Classic Works by John Owen*, by John Owen, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor, Logos electronic ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 34.

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 496.

in another sin, and that sin creates a lust and desire for another sin, and that sin blinds you from the truth and drowns out the conviction of the Lord which leads to further sin, and that sin separates you from those who care about you and could help you, and without their support and encouragement, you go further into sin.

— Read Romans 6:19.

— Romans 6:19 | *I am using a human analogy because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you offered the parts of yourselves as slaves to impurity, and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness, which results in sanctification.* (CSB)

— Sin leads to slavery and greater and greater lawlessness.

— The momentum...

— But if we offer our “parts” to the Lord, that will lead to sanctification.

— Sanctification is the process by which the character of Christ is formed in you.

— We do not overcome sin by making some giant commitment to try harder.

— The problem with the old-fashioned “revival-approach” to sanctification...

— Twice a year we would go hear a persuasive preacher at a “revival service.”

— We would feel really bad about our sins.

— The preacher would call us to make some grand decisions.

— We would promise to change.

— We would try really hard.

— We would be just as bad or worse in three months.

— We can also see the ineffectiveness of this kind of crisis-moment sanctification when someone gets caught in sin.

— Story...

— Someone gets caught in some catastrophic sin...

— He or she promises everyone who will listen that this sin will never happen again...

— The guilty person genuinely believes the earnest promise will stick...

— Real change never comes from this kind of “repentance.”

— So, what went wrong?

— Did the person not really mean it?

— No. He meant it.

— But that is just not how sanctification works.

— That method is all about what you can do for yourself.

— Sanctification involves partnering with the Holy Spirit and forming the momentum-giving, life-giving, Holy Spirit-enabled habits that bring real and lasting change.

— Real change happens when we...

— Declare that we are free of the tyranny of sin because we died with Christ.

— We partner with the Holy Spirit.

— We start off offering our parts to righteousness.

- And the Holy Spirit enabled habits bring sanctification.
- So, what are these Holy Spirit enabled habits?
 - Just wait. We will get there.
- Look at this reality this way...
 - Each sin we commit reinforces the habit of sinning and makes it easier to give in to that temptation and others next time we encounter the temptation.
 - We train ourselves in the *wrong direction*.
 - We train ourselves to sin *better*, more...
 - Just like you can train yourself to be better at a job, skill, sport...
 - Just like you can train yourself to be stronger...
 - When we engage in sin, we train ourselves to sin.
 - Until we become EXPERTS at sin.
- Look at an odd phrase in this verse...
 - 2 Peter 2:14 | *They have eyes full of adultery that never stop looking for sin. They seduce unstable people and have hearts trained in greed. Children under a curse!* (CSB)
 - Look at how it reads in another translation...
 - 2 Peter 2:14 | *With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!* (NIV11)
 - Little by little, we can become expert sinners.
 - How many are experts in...
 - Greed
 - Gossip
 - Lust
 - Gluttony
 - Pornography
 - Materialism
 - Anger
 - Paul writes...
 - 1 Timothy 4:7b | ... *Train yourself in godliness.* (CSB)
 - But how many of us have trained/disciplined ourselves in the wrong direction?
- So, as expert sinners, we have some work to do.
 - We have some training to do in a different direction.
- The way forward is not to make some over-the-top decision to never sin in some way again.
 - Let's figure out what these God-endorsed, Holy Spirit-enabled habits are that build the momentum that leads to sanctification.
 - Let's offer our parts to God in those things (Romans 6:13b) ...
 - Let's offer ourselves as slaves to these righteous habits (Romans 6:19b)
- ...
- So, what are those sacred habits?
 - Well, we must be careful as we identify these habits for two reasons.
 - A. We must not embrace mere human commands.**
 - Scripture
 - Colossians 2:20–21 | *If you died with Christ to the elements of this world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations: "Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch"?* (CSB)
 - Colossians 2:22 | *All these regulations refer to*

what is destined to perish by being used up; they are human commands and doctrines. (CSB)

— Colossians 2:23 | *Although these have a reputation for wisdom by promoting self-made religion, false humility, and severe treatment of the body, they are not of any value in curbing self-indulgence. (CSB)*

— The habits we embrace must come to us from the instructions of Scripture and be said to lead to holiness.

B. We must not become white-washed tombs.

— Scripture

— Matthew 23:27 | *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity. (CSB)*

— Matthew 23:28 | *In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (CSB)*

— These habits cannot be for show.

— They must be for change.

— And for the glory of the Lord.

— There are at least four habits the Bible says are tools the Holy Spirit uses to bring change and lead us to godliness.

— It is still the Lord, by his grace, that changes us.

— But these four practices are, as the Puritans would say, the *means of grace*.

— Our four focus spiritual disciplines...

A. Bible meditation

B. Daily prayer

C. Intentional Fasting

D. Community

— We call these spiritual disciplines...

— A spiritual discipline is a holy habit that enables the Holy Spirit to build the momentum of change in our lives.

— In the next four weeks, we are going to learn how to embrace each of these.

— In the next four weeks, we are going to learn how to change, not by some big, crisis-moment decision, but through the biblically prescribed, Holy Spirit-enabled method that is God’s gift to us.

Conclusion

— So, what do we do now?

— Last week, I shared a couple verses with you that people often reject because they do not seem to match reality.

— Matthew 11:28 | *Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. (CSB)*

— Matthew 11:30 | *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (CSB)*

— What do these verses say?

— *Living the Christian life, walking faithfully with the Lord is restful and easy, and the burden is light.*

— That doesn’t seem possible!

— Let’s go back and look at the verse in between...

— Matthew 11:29 | *Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am*

- lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (CSB)*
- He says...
 - *If I will take his yoke (do what he commands), we will learn (grow, begin to change) ...*
 - This isn't the only time Jesus says to *take something up* to follow him.
 - Luke 9:23 | *Then he said to them all, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me. (CSB)*
 - Here he emphasizes that we must do this obedience (take up yoke/cross) daily.
 - Would you today just commit to doing one of these four habits every day this week?
 - We will learn why and how in the weeks to come, but you can get started this week...

APPENDIX 8

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS—BATTLE LINES

Next is the sermon discussion guide for message 2 in the six-week series.

How to Kill Persistent Sin – Battle Lines – Romans 6:12-14
FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, October 20, 2019 – A.M. Message

Sermon Discussion Guide

Connect

- What seems to have a bigger impact on what kind a person we become, the bold promises we make or the steady habits we embrace? Why?

Discover

- Which statement or experience stood out to you from the worship service?
- Read Romans 6:12.
 - What specific truth or truths does the “therefore” refer to? How does that truth or those truths make it possible to not let sin reign?
 - Why would it be impossible to follow the command in verse 12 without the facts of the previous eleven verses?
 - When the Bible commands us to do something like “do not let sin reign,” what two facts does that imply? 1. It is possible that sin _____. 2. It is possible that we can _____.
- Read Romans 6:13, 19.
 - What does the passage mean when it says we have a choice whether to offer our “parts” as weapons for unrighteousness or as weapons for righteousness?
 - In 6:19, Paul says that parts offered to impurity will lead to “greater and greater lawlessness.” What does this phrase teach about the negative momentum of sin?
 - How does the end of verse 19 speak of the momentum of righteousness? What does that mean?
- Read Romans 8:12-14.
 - How would you put verse 13 in your own words?
 - What responsibility is assigned to the Holy Spirit in these verses?
 - What responsibility is assigned to the believer in these verses?
 - According to these three verses, what will be an authentic Christian’s attitude toward sin?
- Read Matthew 23:27-28.
 - The scribes and Pharisees seemed to do so many spiritual things well. Where did they go wrong?
 - How can we raise our game when it comes to spiritual disciplines and at the same time not become modern day Pharisees?

Respond

- If you had a friend who got caught in some grievous sin or shared with you that he felt very convicted about some major and persistent sin, but had promised with all his heart he would never do it again... He said he would swear on a stack of Bibles that he would never ever do that again... How would you counsel him to make a change that would be real?
- How would you be different today if you would have developed the habits of daily Bible meditation and pray ten years ago? What are some specific holy habits you could embrace now that the Lord would use to change your life?

Bonus for Thinkers

- Romans 6:14 says that sin will not rule over believers because they are not under the law but under grace? What does that mean? Why is that important?

APPENDIX 9

SERMON: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS— MEDITATE ON GOD’S WORD

Next is the sermon outline for message 3 in the six-week series. This message was preached on Sunday, October 27, 2019.

How to Kill Persistent Sin – Meditate on God’s Word – Psalm 1:1-3

FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, October 27, 2019 – A.M. Message

Message Description

How can we kill persistent sin? Theologian Thomas Watson summed up the counsel of Scripture when he wrote, “Meditation is a strong antidote against sin. *Most sin is committed for want of meditation.*” In this third part of our series on how to kill persistent sin (Romans 8:13), we will learn the value and the practical how-to’s of Bible meditation. We will discover the motivation that can help us embrace this spiritual discipline for real life change for the glory of God.

Introduction

- Do you remember the old sci-fi movies (space movies) where a spaceship would get caught in an enemy’s tractor beam?
 - No matter what the captured ship would do, the irresistible force of the tractor beam would pull the ship in...
 - Star Wars IV moment...
 - That is what temptation can seem like...
 - It seems to take over...
 - We do what we don’t want to do...
 - Romans 7:18b–19 | ... *For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do.* (CSB)
 - Especially with a few persistent sins...
- So, how do we escape the pull of this tractor beam of temptation?
 - We are spending six weeks digging in God’s Word to discover the answer.
 - We have learned some important, if not surprising truths so far...
 - A. We are dead to sin.**
 - Romans 6:11 | *So, you too consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.* (CSB)
 - B. Yet sin can still sit on the throne of our lives if we allow it.**
 - Romans 6:12 | *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires.* (CSB)
 - C. But we can embrace Holy Spirit-empowered habits that will create the momentum of real change.**
 - Scripture support...
 - Romans 6:13 | *And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness.* (CSB)
 - Romans 6:19 | *I am using a human analogy because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you offered the parts of yourselves as slaves to impurity, and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness, which results in sanctification.* (CSB)
- This is not a...
 - Try harder approach...
 - Make a giant dramatic promise approach...
- This is partnership with the Holy Spirit of God where over time the character of Christ is formed in you.
 - Galatians 4:19 | *My children, I am again*

suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you. (CSB)

— Galatians 5:16 | *I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. (CSB)*

— The assignment that remains is to discover in God's word what these Holy Spirit-empowered habits are and how to do them.

— We will look at the first one today.

— We will look at three more in the next three weeks.

— Together, these four will form the basis for our active partnership and engagement with the Holy Spirit to put to death the deeds of the flesh.

— Romans 8:13 | *because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (CSB)*

— The first Spirit-empowered habit is meditation on God's Word.

— We need to establish three things about meditation...

A. Is it really a tool for sanctification?

B. If so, then what is meditation?

C. What are some practical steps for meditating on God's word?

— Is the word of God and meditating on the word of God a tool for sanctification?

— Let's begin with Jesus' high priestly prayer...

— John 17:17 | *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (CSB)*

— Here Jesus says that one of the tools used to bring sanctification is the truth, the word of God.

— Another clear reference from Jesus is found in John 8:31-36.

— Jesus said...

— John 8:31-32 | *Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (CSB)*

— What kind of freedom comes from continuing in the word?

— John 8:34 | *Jesus responded, "Truly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. (CSB)*

— John 8:36 | *So if the Son sets you free, you really will be free. (CSB)*

— Jesus says that his children we were slaves to sin but because of they are now children of God they can experience freedom from the slavery of sin through continuing in the word.

— In the ESV the phrase is "*If you **abide** in my word...*"

— John 8:31 | *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, (ESV)*

— What other verses support and expand on this assertion?

Verse	Assignment	Result
— Romans 12:2 <i>Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. (CSB)</i>	We should renew the mind with God's word...	Transformed to a godly disposition instead of conformed to a worldly disposition.
— Joshua 1:8 <i>This book of instruction</i>	We should meditate	Careful to observe

<i>must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. (CSB)</i>	on God's word day and night...	God's word.
— Psalm 119:11 <i>I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you. (CSB)</i>	We should treasure God's word in the heart...	Not sin against God.
— Deuteronomy 17:18–19 <i>When he is seated on his royal throne, he is to write a copy of this instruction for himself on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It is to remain with him, and he is to read from it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to observe all the words of this instruction, and to do these statutes. (CSB)</i>	We should read God's word daily...	Fear God and observe God's instructions.
— Ephesians 5:26 <i>to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word. (CSB)</i>	We should connect with God's word...	Washed (in the sense of sanctification).
— 2 Timothy 3:16 <i>All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, (CSB)</i>	We should connect with God's word...	Trained in righteousness.

- The conclusion is that God's word including meditating on God's word is clearly a tool for sanctification.
- Now, what do we mean by meditating on God's word?
 - Bible meditation is not speaking of simply forming the sounds of the words in our mouths or even in our minds.
 - There is little or no benefit from that alone.
 - Meditate...
 - Definition...
 - Whitney defines the practice as “deep thinking on the truths and spiritual realities revealed in Scripture, or upon life from a scriptural perspective, for the purposes of understanding, application, and prayer.”¹
 - Some Old Testament references...
 - Joshua said to the people...
 - Joshua 1:8 | *This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. (CSB)*

¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 16-17.

- Psalm 77:12 | *I will reflect on all you have done and meditate on your actions.* (CSB)
- Psalm 119:15–16 | *I will meditate on your precepts and think about your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.* (CSB)
- Psalm 119:97 | *How I love your instruction! It is my meditation all day long.* (CSB)
- Some New Testament references...
 - Philippians 4:8 | *Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy— dwell on these things.* (CSB)
 - Colossians 3:16 | *Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.* (CSB)
- Let's focus on Psalm 1:1-3.
 - Read passage.
 - We see three key characteristics in this picture and description of meditation.

What does Meditation Involve?

I. Delight

- Psalm 1:2b | *... his delight is in the LORD's instruction...* (CSB)
 - The word for “*delight*” is translated “*desire*” in Proverbs 3:15.
 - Proverbs 3:15 | *She is more precious than jewels; nothing you desire can equal her.* (CSB)
 - It is translated “*precious*” in Isaiah 54:12.
 - Isaiah 54:12 | *I will make your fortifications out of rubies, your gates out of sparkling stones, and all your walls out of precious stones.* (CSB)
- What does it mean to delight in God's word?
 - It means to cherish, adore, treasure...
 - But it also means to enjoy and be satisfied by...
 - Examples...
 - Young love...
 - New toy
 - Car, cell phone, kid's toy, hunting rifle, new house...
 - Passion
 - Hunting
 - Reading magazines, websites
 - Talking with others...
 - Spending money on new toys...
 - Gardening
 - Sports team
- So how can we delight in God's word? And what should we do if we don't delight in God's word?
 - First, understand that the word delight has two meanings...
 - **It describes a condition...**
 - *I was delighted by the weather, the win, the gift, the meal...*
 - **It also describes an action...**

- I will delight in some activity...
- This involves a choice.
 - *I will choose to delight, to celebrate, to eagerly invest my energy, time, and focus in God's word.*
- The way the word is phrased in this passage, while it is a noun, it can be said to have either or more likely, both of those usages.
 - We should experience delight when we spend time with God's word.
 - But we should also choose to delight and eagerly invest our time, energy, and focus in God's word.
- What if I can't or don't delight in God's word?
 - *But, you might say, I've heard a thousand encouragements and admonitions to read the Bible every day, yet I just can't get into it.*
 - *Honestly, pastor, I don't enjoy it enough or get enough out of it to motivate me to adjust my schedule to do it consistently.*
 - *I don't really delight in God's word.*
 - *It is drudgery to me.*
- There are a number of things I could tell you to do to increase your delight...
 1. **Invest enough time that you learn to do it well.**
 - No one enjoys golf the first time or two they play.
 - Because you are terrible at it.
 - But the better you get (which comes with practice/investment), the more you enjoy golf.
 - Bible meditation is more enjoyable the better you get at it.
 2. **Share what you are reading and learning with others.**
 - Add a social component to it.
 - We will talk more about this in a later message.
 3. **Have the right tools, space, and schedule to take away the frustration of getting started each day.**
 - Reduce or remove as much friction as possible.
 4. **Meditate on God's word.**
 - You will only delight in God's word when you meditate on it.
 - Notice the Hebrews parallelism between "delight" and "meditate" in Psalm 1:2...
 - Hebrew poetry is often written where one line will state a truth and the next line will either...
 - Restate the same truth
 - Expand slightly on the first truth
 - Express a complimentary truth
 - So, the first statement is clarified by the connection with the second truth.
 - In Psalm 1:2, the parallel words are "*delight*" and "*meditates*."
- But the most important key to begin to delight in God's word is a simple, repeated prayer...
 - **Pray for God to create a hunger (and increase a hunger) in you for God's word.**
 - Listen to David's prayer about delighting in God's word...
 - Psalm 119:18 | *Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction.* (CSB)
 - If you don't delight in God's word, this may be the most important prayer you ever pray apart from that prayer when you trusted Christ as your Savior.
 - This should be the top of the list prayer every day!
 - Never stop praying this prayer!

- You know that some foods are an acquired taste.
 - You have to eat them repeatedly before you like them.
 - Like coffee.
- Well, meditation is both an acquired and a conferred taste.
 - Repetition
 - And the gift of God...
- Ask the Lord to convince you of the value and joy of God's word.
 - Look at something else David wrote about desiring and delighting in God's word...
 - Psalm 19:10 | *They [God's word] are more desirable than gold— than an abundance of pure gold; and sweeter than honey dripping from a honeycomb. (CSB)*
 - We should pray often that God will help us see God's word like David saw God's word.
 - David compared God's word to gold and honey...
 - I want to give you a unique Bible bookmark this morning...
 - It is a tube of golden honey...
 - I wanted to give you a stick of gold but Jeff, our church administrator, said I didn't have the budget for it.
 - Put this in your Bible.
 - When you see it, you can think two things...
 - This bookmark is the color of gold, and it reminds me that the word of God I am about to read is as valuable as gold.
 - If you had a stick of pure gold with the same volume as this stick, it would be worth approximately \$15,000.
 - This bookmark is made of the sweetest honey, and it reminds me that the word of God I am about to read is as sweet and satisfying to my soul as this honey is to my taste buds.
- Let's practice this prayer...
 - First, I will walk us through the prayer.
 - Heavenly Father,
 - I know and believe your word is valuable.
 - Psalm 119:105 | *Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path. (CSB)*
 - I know and believe your word is sweet and satisfying.

- Psalm 119:103 | *How sweet your word is to my taste— sweeter than honey in my mouth. (CSB)*
- I know and believe your word reveals my heart to me.
 - Hebrews 4:12 | *For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (CSB)*
- I know and believe your word reveals the glory of God.
 - Psalm 100:5 | *For the LORD is good, and his faithful love endures forever; his faithfulness, through all generations. (CSB)*
- So...
 - Psalm 119:18 | *Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction. (CSB)*
- And give me a heart that delights in your word!
 - Give me **taste buds** for God's word on my heart...
- Now, let's pray...
 - Heavenly Father,
 - *I know and believe your word is valuable.*
 - *I know and believe your word is sweet and satisfying.*
 - *I know and believe your word reveals my heart to me.*
 - *I know and believe your word reveals the glory of God.*
 - So...
 - Psalm 119:18 | *Open my eyes so that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction. (CSB)*
 - *And give me a heart that delights in your word!*

II. Reflect

- Psalm 1:2c | *... and he meditates on it...* (CSB)
 - Meditate is a confusing word in our culture, so for now, I'll use "reflect."
- What does it mean to meditate or reflect on God's word?
 - We get this wrong more than we get this right.
 - What it does **NOT** mean...
 - Emptying the mind...
 - Seeking to become one with God and the universe...
 - The goal of Eastern religion and Eastern meditation is to help you see you and God are the same.
 - Whereas the goal of Christian meditation is to show you that you and God are utterly different.
 - Imagining...
 - Unplugging from Scripture and imagining what God might say...
 - Just reading the Bible...
- The Hebrew word for meditate in Psalm 1:2 is *hāgāh* (הָגָה).
 - It is an onomatopoeia, meaning it gets its meaning from the sound of the word.
 - The word is pronounced with a very guttural sound.
 - The word had three very descriptive usages in ancient Hebrew times...

A. It referred to the act of murmuring or to mumbling to oneself.

— With Bible meditation this would refer to speaking the Scriptures aloud and repeating phrases to yourself as you ponder their meaning.

B. It referred to what an animal did when it growled over its food.

— Isaiah 31:4 | *For this is what the LORD said to me: As a lion or young lion growls over its prey when a band of shepherds is called out against it, and is not terrified by their shouting or subdued by their noise, so the LORD of Armies will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill.* (CSB)

— Imagine your dog chewing and gnawing on a bone...

— Merlin getting a chicken wing...

— With Bible meditation this would refer to spending time reading and rereading and enjoying/savoring the satisfaction of the word.

C. It referred to a cow chewing its cud.

— The cow constantly re-digests, constantly goes over and re-digests his food until it completely works itself into the physical system.

— With Bible meditation this would refer to rehearsing the message over and over until all the meaning is extracted from the words.

— So, when it comes to the Bible, read like a cow!

— So, meditation is so much more than just reading...

— There is a completely different Hebrew word for reading

— Hebrew for reading: קרא

— The lemma translated “meditate” (הִתְחַלֵּץ), is never translated “read.”

— In the CSB this Hebrew word appears (in various manuscript forms) 25 times and is translated...

— Meditate, moan, utter, mutter, growl, morn, make a sound, plot, proclaim, reflect, think, plan, and tell.

— But never: read.

— Definition

— Meditating on Scripture is a slow, repetitive walk through a passage in the Bible where we savor every word and extract every nuance and learn what that word says about the Lord and about and to us.

— Definition one phrase at a time...

— On Scripture...

— Even if meditating on the greatness of God as seen in the stars, that greatness is as described in Scripture.

— Slow...

— Can’t meditate with a microwave mentality...

— Repetitive...

— Savor every word...

— Extract every nuance...

— Extract every meaning...

— Learn what the word says about the Lord...

— Learn what the word says about and to us...

- What about the role of the Holy Spirit in this?
 - We learned that to change we have to...
 - A. Embrace the fact that we are dead to sin.
 - B. Partner with the Holy Spirit in God-endorsed habits to experience the momentum of change (sanctification).
 - We said we would talk of the role of the Holy Spirit as we worked through these holy habits.
 - So, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in Bible meditation?
 - The Holy Spirit uses Bible meditation to help us win spiritual battles against temptation.
 - Ephesians 6:17 | *Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit—which is the word of God.* (CSB)
 - The Holy Spirit uses Bible meditation to unhide things that have been hidden to us.
 - 1 Corinthians 2:10 | *Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.* (CSB)
 - 1 Corinthians 2:13 | *We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.* (CSB)
 - The Holy Spirit uses Bible meditation to guide our path.
 - Ezekiel 36:27 | *I will place my Spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.* (CSB)
 - Isaiah 30:21 | *Whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear this command behind you: “This is the way. Walk in it.”* (CSB)
- The Bible often uses the analogy of savoring food as a picture of meditation.
 - Scripture...
 - Psalm 119:103 | *How sweet your word is to my taste— sweeter than honey in my mouth.* (CSB)
 - Jeremiah 15:16 | *Your words were found, and I ate them. Your words became a delight to me and the joy of my heart, for I bear your name, LORD God of Armies.* (CSB)
 - Ezekiel 3:1–3 | *He said to me: “Son of man, eat what you find here. Eat this scroll, then go and speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he fed me the scroll. “Son of man,” he said to me, “feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll I am giving you.” So I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth.* (CSB)
 - Revelation 10:9–10 | *So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take and eat it; it will be bitter in your stomach, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.” Then I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It was as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I ate it, my stomach became bitter.* (CSB)
 - Compare eating a food ration bar (a survival bar made for preppers) to enjoying one of my wife’s famous orange-cranberry sweet rolls...
 - They both have basically the same ingredients and the same calories.
 - But...
 - One you just choke down to survive...
 - One you savor and stretch out the pleasure as long as possible...

- We are to feast/savor God’s word.
 - That is meditation!
- One writer I read this past week said...
 - If reading the Bible can be compared to cruising the width of a clear, sparkling lake in a motorboat, studying the Bible is like slowly crossing that same lake in a glass-bottomed boat.²

III. Supplant

- Psalm 1:2 begins with an important word...
 - Psalm 1:2a | *Instead...* (CSB)
- “*Instead...*”
 - This refers back to Psalm 1:1.
 - Psalm 1:1 | *How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers!* (CSB)
 - Meditation doesn’t just involve adding something to your life.
 - It involves subtracting and then adding.
 - People often say (and I am guilty of this) that they don’t have enough time to meditate on Scripture.
 - When we say that, we don’t really mean what we say.
 - Sure, we have plenty of time to meditate.
 - What we mean is that we have chosen to meditate on things other than the Bible.
 - Examples...
 - Sometimes we meditate on television...
 - Sometimes we meditate on social media...
 - Sometimes we meditate on the news...
 - Sometimes we meditate on books...
 - And none of those things are necessarily wrong, but in order to meditate on God’s word, we are going to have to say, “**INSTEAD**” to some time we are investing in those things.
 - Have you ever tried to talk with someone who was wearing ear buds?
 - They were looking at you, but you could see it in their eyes...
 - They were more focused on whatever was coming through the ear buds than what was coming out of your mouth.
 - Have you ever said, “Take those ear buds out and listen to what I am saying!”
 - That is what the Lord is saying in the first word of Psalm 1:2.
 - The word *instead* reminds us that there is a subtraction that is involved in the addition of this spiritual discipline.
 - So, when you make plans to ADD meditation, include plans to SUBTRACT something from our worldly focus.
 - And, by the way, this isn’t just a time issue (or even primarily a time issue).
 - Even if you have the time...
 - Twenty minutes of meditating in the Scripture and sixty minutes of meditating on “Dancing with

² Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 35.

the Stars” is not going to help you overcome the sin of lust.

— Twenty minutes of meditating in the Scripture and sixty minutes of browsing fashion websites is not going to help you overcome the sin of materialism or overspending.

— There must be an INSTEAD in our commitment to meditate.

— The New Testament doesn’t use the word *meditate* for this practice of Scripture reflection.

— Instead it uses a few different words (*treasure, consider, practice, etc...*)

— One of the richest words is “*dwell*.”

— Philippians 4:8 | *Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.* (CSB)

— Dwell means to focus on something to the exclusion of everything else.

— Illustration of how this happens...

— Imagine a cup of black coffee...

— You begin to pour water into the coffee.

— The cup fills and begins to overflow.

— You continue to pour water into the coffee.

— The water mixes with the remaining coffee and the excess mixture spills over the side.

— The mixed liquid in the cup gets lighter and lighter as you continue to pour more water.

— Eventually the dark and cloudy consistency disappears.

— You have clean clear water.

— When we dwell on God’s word, the same thing happens in us.

— When our meditation is an INSTEAD (it is displacing the black coffee), then we will be cleansed, cleared, changed by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

— Meditation involves SUPPLANTING the influence of the world with the influence of the word.

Conclusion

— Meditation and overcoming sin...

— Thomas Watson

— Last week we talked a little about John Owen’s famous book on Romans 8:13, *On the Mortification of Sin*.

— Another famous book on Romans was written almost 400 years ago by Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial*.

— Watson wrote, “Meditation is a strong antidote against sin. Most sin is committed for want [lack] of meditation.”³

³ Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial; The Saint’s Spiritual Delight; The Holy Eucharist; and Other Treatises, The Writings of the Doctrinal Puritans and Divines of the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1846), 95.

- He also wrote, “A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools.”⁴
- Richard Baxter
 - Richard Baxter, called by some the greatest of all Puritan preachers,⁵ taught that meditation constitutes the one key discipline for spiritual prosperity.⁶
 - One noted writer on this subject rightly said meditation is the “hub of spirituality.”⁷
- So, how exactly do we meditate on God’s word?
 - Five Keys
 - 1. Read less to meditate more.**⁸
 - It is great to read the Bible through in a year.
 - I commend that.
 - But that is not the same as meditating on Scripture!
 - Better to read one chapter and meditate afterward than to read several chapters and not to meditate.⁹
 - Talk about the daily Bible reading assignments in our weekly worship guide...
 - 2. Read for application.**
 - Mirror illustration in James...
 - James 1:22 | *But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* (CSB)
 - James 1:23 | *Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror.* (CSB)
 - James 1:24 | *For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was.* (CSB)
 - James 1:25 | *But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does.* (CSB)
 - Talk about the discussion guide questions and the devotion questions provided in the weekly worship guide...

⁴ Watson, *A Divine Cordial*, 75.

⁵ Timothy K. Beougher, “Richard Baxter (1615–1691): A Model of Pastoral Leadership for Evangelism and Church Growth,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6, no. 4 (2002): 3.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 13.

⁷ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009), 173.

⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose your Spiritual Health*, Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 38.

⁹ Peter Toon, *From Mind to Heart: Christian Meditation Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 93.

3. Read aloud.

— When the reformer Martin Luther taught the first protestants how to meditate, he said they must read, repeat, and ponder the Scripture aloud.¹⁰

— The biggest reason “out-loud” helps is it slows you down.

— “Out loud” also allows you to emphasize words one at a time.

— Romans 6:12a

— ***Therefore*** do not let sin reign in your mortal body... (CSB)

— What was just said that makes this possible or needful?

— ***Therefore do not*** let sin reign in your mortal body... (CSB)

— This is a command.

— The Lord is expecting something of me here.

— ***Therefore do not let*** sin reign in your mortal body... (CSB)

— Sin will reign.

— Sin wants to reign.

— There must be a tendency to stand aside and let it reign.

— ***Therefore do not let sin*** reign in your mortal body... (CSB)

— It is SIN that wants to reign.

— SIN is looking for a way to get back on the throne of my life.

— ***Therefore do not let sin reign*** in your mortal body... (CSB)

— Sin wants to be in charge.

— Sin wants to boss me around.

— ***Therefore do not let sin reign in your*** mortal body... (CSB)

— This is personal.

— ***Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body***... (CSB)

— One day I will have a different body and sin will not be able to reign.

— But the concern right now is my mortal body.

4. Roleplay “tell-a-friend.”

— Paraphrase each verse.

— If you had to explain this verse to a friend in one sentence, what would you say?

5. Quiz the passage.

— Ask the passage two questions...

A. How can I praise God on the basis of this verse?

¹⁰ Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 166.

- B. What difference does this truth make to my life today?
- What will happen if you meditate on God's word?
 - Back to the passage we started with...
 - Psalm 1:3 | *He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.* (CSB)
 - What does this tell us?
 - A. You will be nourished and satisfied by the cool, clean, refreshing water of God.**
 - B. You will be fruitful, mature, growing.**
 - C. You will not fade or fall away from God's peace and sustaining power.**
 - D. You will be a valuable tool in the hand and plan of God.**

APPENDIX 10

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS—MEDITATE ON GOD’S WORD

Next is the sermon discussion guide for message 3 in the six-week series.

How to Kill Persistent Sin – Meditate on God’s Word – Psalm 1:1-3

FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, October 27, 2019 – A.M. Message

Sermon Discussion Guide

Connect

- We often say we have something (song, movie, experience, words of others) *stuck in our head*. When have you experienced this lately? What causes something to get *stuck in our head*?

Discover

- Which statement or experience stood out to you from the worship service?
- Read Psalm 1:1-2.
 - What specific associations is the writer warning us against when he says to not “walk in the advice of the wicked,” “stand in the pathway with sinners,” or “sit in the company of mockers?”
 - Looking closely at verse 2, what strategies should a believer employ to avoid the damaging associations mentioned in verse 1?
 - How can we increase our “delight” in God’s word?
 - What separates Christian meditation from the practices of non-Christian meditation?
- Read Psalm 1:3.
 - What does it mean that a regularly meditating Christian will be like a tree planted beside flowing streams? What would the opposite of that look like?
 - What does it mean that a regularly meditating Christian will be like a tree that bears its fruit in its season? What would the opposite of that look like?
 - What does it mean that a regularly meditating Christian will be like a tree whose leaf does not wither? What would the opposite of that look like?
- Read Joshua 1:8 and Deuteronomy 17:18-19.
 - According to these two passages, how often should a believer meditate on God’s word? What does that frequency of meditation look like in our world today?
 - What do these two passages suggest about a link between meditating on God’s word and overcoming persistent sin? Is this link an automatic connection? What else is involved for meditation to lead to sanctification (overcoming persistent sin)?
- Read Romans 12:2.
 - What danger is the author of Romans pointing to when he says, “Do not be conformed to this age?” How does that conformation take place? Why is it so bad?
 - What does this passage say is the key to knowing (and living) the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God?
 - What are the key elements or steps to having a renewed mind?

Respond

- How would you counsel a friend who said he or she just couldn’t stay faithful reading and meditating on God’s word? What if they said that honestly, reading God’s word was just drudgery to them, that it was an arduous chore? How can a person “delight” in God’s word?
- What are some key differences between reading God’s word and meditating on God’s word? What are some methods of Bible meditation you think are most helpful?

Bonus for Thinkers

- Passages such as Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2-3, and Deuteronomy 17:18-20 connect Bible meditation with success in life. What is the connection between the two? Why would the Lord have it written in the Bible like it is written? How far can that connection be pushed while at the same time being faithful to the whole counsel of God's word?

APPENDIX 11

SERMON: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS— SUPERCHARGED PRAYING

Next is the sermon outline for message 4 in the six-week series. This message was preached on Sunday, November 3, 2019.

How to Kill Persistent Sin — Supercharged Praying — Hebrews 4:14-16

FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, November 3, 2019 – A.M. Message

Message Description

Why do we struggle so in our attempts to kill persistent sin? The noted 19th century theologian J. C. Ryle summed up the Bible answer by saying that nineteen out of twenty times the reason Christians struggle with persistent sins is that they have a weak or nonexistent prayer life. As we continue our message series focused on this question, we will learn about the connection between killing sin and praying. And we will learn how to supercharge our prayer life when we feel distracted, distant, or unengaged with the Lord.

Introduction

- We all struggle with persistent sins...
 - We have prayed about these sins.
 - *“Please remove this sin...”*
 - We have made promises about these sins.
 - *“I will never again...”*
 - But we have made little progress with these sins.
 - And so, we continue to struggle...
- There must be another way...
 - A better way.
- How do we overcome persistent sins?
 - Know and embrace that we are dead to sin.
 - Partner with the Holy Spirit by regularly engaging in God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits that lead to sanctification.
 - Romans 6:16 | *Don't you know that if you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of that one you obey— either of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness?* (CSB)
- What are some of those habits (or spiritual disciplines) that the Bible says will lead to the mortification of sin?
 - (We hear the phrase “Spiritual Disciplines” often. A spiritual discipline is simply a God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habit that leads to sanctification.)
 - Bible meditation
 - Daily prayer
 - Intentional fasting
 - Community
- Last week we learned about Bible meditation...
 - Today, our focus is on prayer.
 - Quote from J. C. Ryle (1816-1900), English evangelical Anglican bishop and the first Anglican bishop of Liverpool.
 - “What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe the difference, in nineteen cases out of twenty, arises from different habits about private prayer. I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray *little*, and those who are eminently holy pray *much*.”¹

¹ J. C. Ryle, *A Call to Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 35; Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 82.

- Read Hebrews 4:14-16.
 - The heart of this passage is in verse 16...
 - “*Let us approach the throne...*”
 - That is a reference to prayer.
 - But a closer look at this passage reveals that the context of this praying is in reference to stubborn and persistent sin.
 - Scripture
 - Hebrews 4:12 speaks of the convicting power of God through his word.
 - Hebrews 4:12 | *For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* (CSB)
 - Hebrews 4:13 speaks of the fact that we must give an account of our sin.
 - Hebrews 4:13 | *No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.* (CSB)
 - Hebrews 4:15a speaks to our inherent weakness when it comes to resisting temptation.
 - Hebrews 4:15 | *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses...* (CSB)
 - So, those are scary thoughts!
 - What should we do?
 - Thus, the prayer instructions in Hebrews 4:16...
- Let’s begin analyzing this passage by asking...
 - **Why should we pray?**
 - A. Because we are weak when it comes to temptation.**
 - Hebrews 4:15b | *... sympathize with our weaknesses...* (CSB)
 - B. Because Jesus is qualified as our advocate and counselor.**
 - Hebrews 4:15 | *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.* (CSB)
 - He is...
 - An advocate because of his death on the cross.
 - [SHARE GOSPEL]
 - A counselor because he can sympathize with our weakness, yet he did not sin.
- Hebrews 4:16 has a sister verse...
 - James 4:8a | *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you...* (CSB)
 - By the way, that verse is also in the context of overcoming persistent sins. Just look at what appears right before and after...
 - James 4:7 | *Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* (CSB)
 - James 4:8b-9 | *... Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.* (CSB)
- So, how do approach (Hebrews 4:16a) or draw near (James 4:8a) the Lord? Let’s look at the focus verse more closely...
 - Hebrews 4:16 | *Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with*

boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. (CSB)

— My paraphrase...

— ***Therefore (because Christ has done what he has done), pray, unhindered, and find undeserved help at the perfect time.***

— Let's look at each part of this instruction...

How to Approach the Lord?

I. Pray

— Sometimes people ask if the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are the same.

— People suggest that it seems the descriptions of God in the testaments differ.

— The descriptions of the God of the Old Testament seem focused on his holy standard, his wrath, and his justice.

— I'm thinking of the description in Exodus 19 where the people stood before Mount Sinai...

— Exodus 19:16–19 | *On the third day, when morning came, there was thunder and lightning, a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people in the camp shuddered. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke because the LORD came down on it in fire. Its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in the thunder. (CSB)*

— Exodus 19:21 | *The LORD directed Moses, "Go down and warn the people not to break through to see the LORD; otherwise many of them will die. (CSB)*

— The descriptions of the God of the New Testament seem focused on his love, mercy and grace.

— John 3:16 | *For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (CSB)*

— However, on closer inspection, the Old and New Testaments don't describe a different character of God.

— The difference is in our access to God.

— Before Christ, there was no direct access to God.

— Access to God was limited.

— His throne was a throne of judgment.

— Now, because of the work of Christ...

— Access to God is no longer through a priest...

— Access to God is no longer limited to a place or a time...

— And while his throne is still a throne of justice and judgment, we are invited to see that it is also a *throne of grace*.

— That brings us to maybe the most important word in Hebrews 4:16...

- “Us...”
- Who can come before the throne of God?
 - Any of US can!
 - We are priests with the privilege of access.
- Access to God is...
 - One of God’s greatest miracles...
 - One of God’s greatest gifts...
- How do we access the throne? How do we approach?
 - Not physically...
 - But in prayer!
- We must be careful visualizing something that isn’t described in Scripture.
 - *Because that is how people really get off track into mystical heresies, however, we can go as far as Scripture allows...*
 - So, when you pray, imagine that you are entering into the presence of God.
 - How would you enter into the presence of God?
 - Psalm 100:4 | *Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless his name. (CSB)*
 - Don’t try to visualize God (*we don’t know about his appearance*), but focus on the things we do know about...
 - He is eager to help us (Hebrews 4:16b).
 - He sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).
 - He feels compassion toward us (Matthew 9:36, James 5:11).
 - He desires to give comfort to us (2 Corinthians 1:3).
 - He is patient with you (2 Peter 3:9).
 - He is eager to forgive (1 John 1:9).
 - He is ready to give wisdom and guidance (James 1:5).
- **One of the primary God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits that lead to practical sanctification is prayer.**
 - How does the Holy Spirit use our prayer to help us overcome persistent sin?

A. Prayer calls on God to work on our behalf in overcoming persistent sin.

- Matthew 6:13 | *Do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (CSB)*
- Psalm 19:13 | *Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins; do not let them rule me. Then I will be blameless and cleansed from blatant rebellion. (CSB)*
- Psalm 119:133 | *Make my steps steady through your promise; don’t let any sin dominate me. (CSB)*

B. Prayer changes our focus from the things of the world to the things of God.

- Romans 12:2b | *...be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. (CSB)*
- James 4:8a | *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you... (CSB)*
- It lessens the desire for sin by satisfying us with the presence of God...

- If you are starving, then you will eat anything.
- But if you have been satisfied by some good, healthy food, you can say no to other desires.

C. Prayer is a conduit for the strength of God to flow into our

lives.

— Psalm 138:2–3 | *I will bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your constant love and truth. You have exalted your name and your promise above everything else. On the day I called, you answered me; you increased strength within me.* (CSB)

D. Prayer begins the flow of wisdom that leads us away from temptation.

— Psalm 139:23–24 | *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.* (CSB)

— Psalm 23:3 | *He renews my life; he leads me along the right paths for his name's sake.* (CSB)

— The biggest problem with sin is that we don't see the ultimate consequences...

— If we could just see the end result of every decision...

— What if the consequences of eating a donut were immediate?

— What if the consequences of looking at porn were immediate?

— What if the consequences of overspending were immediate?

— What if the consequences of gossip were immediate?

— Prayer opens our eyes to the wisdom of God on these issues.

— We have spiritual insight that connects the sin with the consequences.

— If we are going to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to overcome persistent sins, we must engage in regular prayer.

II. Unhindered

— What does it mean to “*come boldly*” (Hebrews 4:16)?

— It can't mean to come rudely.

— It can't mean to come arrogantly.

— It doesn't mean to make bold requests.

— Though that is taught in other passages.

— That is not the context of this passage.

— I think the best way to understand “*come boldly*” is to look to two odd stories (parables) Jesus told about prayer.

— Luke 11:5–8 | *He also said to them: “Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I don’t have anything to offer him.’ Then he will answer from inside and say, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I have gone to bed. I can’t get up to give you anything.’ I tell you, even though he won’t get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his friend’s shameless boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs.* (CSB)

— **Don’t be hindered** by thinking God doesn’t care or won’t want to help.

— Luke 18:1–8 | *Now he told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not give up. “There was a judge in a certain town who didn’t*

fear God or respect people. And a widow in that town kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' "For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or respect people, yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice, so that she doesn't wear me out by her persistent coming.' " Then the Lord said, *"Listen to what the unjust judge says. Will not God grant justice to his elect who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay helping them? I tell you that he will swiftly grant them justice. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"* (CSB)

— **Don't be hindered** by the fact that you have already prayed about an issue.

— God honors persistence and perseverance.

— *Let us come boldly...*

— Because, if we are going to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to overcome persistent sins, we must engage in bold, unhindered prayer.

III. Find undeserved help

— Prayer is not a one-way street.

— When we say the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, that is a one-way activity.

— We love our country.

— It is good and proper to give our country the respect and honor it is due.

— But, nothing happens back when you say the pledge.

— Prayer is not like that.

— **Something happens back!**

— Things change when we pray.

— We change when we pray.

— If you are consistent and persistent in your prayers, God will honor that.

— You will *"receive mercy and find help."*

— God has designed your life such that some things will only work out by prayer.

— Tell the story of the demon possessed boy in Mark 9:14-27...

— Mark 9:28 | *After he had gone into the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"* (CSB)

— Mark 9:29 | *And he told them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer."* (CSB)

— Maybe the reason the Lord allows you to continue to struggle with some persistent sin is to teach you to pray!

— Max Lucado once wrote...

— God would rather you limp into heaven than to strut into hell.

— Maybe the only way you will overcome this sin is by elevating your prayer life and living more dependently on the Lord.

— If we are going to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to overcome persistent sins, we must engage in regular prayer.

IV. At the perfect time

— Notice, the verse doesn't say to pray at the perfect time, rather it says to pray and then at the perfect time, help will come.

— Way too often, we have a Walmart-Prayer-Strategy!

— No one goes to Walmart just to enjoy the scenery.

— You don't even go to Walmart to window shop.

— We only go to Walmart if we need something specific.

- What is a Walmart-Prayer-Strategy?
 - Pray only when there is a specific need.
- Now certainly, you should pray when you have a need.
 - But the primary biblical model for prayer is that you pray and then when there is a need, the Lord is there for you.
 - **Let the need or crisis find you already on your knees.**
- Two ways to think about this...
 - Do you really want God to have to teach you to pray by allowing difficulties to invade your life?
 - I've heard people say that a tragedy or a difficult time was how they finally learned to pray.
 - I don't know about you, but I don't want God to have to give me a difficult time to teach me to pray!
 - What if your kids only called when they needed something?
 - You want your kids to reach out if they need something.
 - But you are offended if that is the only time they reach out.
- Prayer is the fabric of a relationship not an order slip you fill out when you have a need.
- If we are going to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to overcome persistent sins, we must engage in regular and consistent prayer.

Conclusion

- So, how can I supercharge my prayer life?
 - For many or most, the message so far has been a good reminder, but it has not been new information.
 - Why do we struggle to pray?
 - Why do we struggle to pray consistently?
 - There is one thing most people who really excel in praying do that most who do not excel do not do...
 - Journaling...
 - The biblical model...
 - Although the practice of journaling is not commanded in Scripture, it is modeled.²
 - And God has blessed the use of journals since Bible times.³
 - Many of the Psalms are records of David writing down his prayers in a spiritual journal.⁴
 - Read Psalm 13:1-6.
 - Psalm 13:1 | *How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?* (CSB)
 - Psalm 13:2 | *How long will I store up anxious concerns within me, agony in my mind every day? How long will my enemy dominate me?*

² Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 205.

³ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 205.

⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 205.

(CSB)

— Psalm 13:3 | *Consider me and answer, LORD my God. Restore brightness to my eyes; otherwise, I will sleep in death.* (CSB)

— Psalm 13:4 | *My enemy will say, "I have triumphed over him," and my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.* (CSB)

— Psalm 13:5 | *But I have trusted in your faithful love; my heart will rejoice in your deliverance.* (CSB)

— Psalm 13:6 | *I will sing to the LORD because he has treated me generously.* (CSB)

— Read Psalm 63:1-8.

— Psalm 63:1 | *God, you are my God; I eagerly seek you. I thirst for you; my body faints for you in a land that is dry, desolate, and without water.* (CSB)

— Psalm 63:2 | *So I gaze on you in the sanctuary to see your strength and your glory.* (CSB)

— Psalm 63:3 | *My lips will glorify you because your faithful love is better than life.* (CSB)

— Psalm 63:4 | *So I will bless you as long as I live; at your name, I will lift up my hands.* (CSB)

— Psalm 63:5 | *You satisfy me as with rich food; my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.* (CSB)

— Psalm 63:6 | *When I think of you as I lie on my bed, I meditate on you during the night watches* (CSB)

— Psalm 63:7 | *because you are my helper; I will rejoice in the shadow of your wings.* (CSB)

— Psalm 63:8 | *I follow close to you; your right hand holds on to me.* (CSB)

— The book of Lamentations is the spiritual journal of the prophet Jeremiah.

— Lamentations 3:19–21 | *The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:* (NLT)

— Lamentations 3:22–24 | *The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, "The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!"* (NLT)

- Lamentations 3:25–26 | *The LORD is good to those who depend on him, to those who search for him. So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the LORD.* (NLT)
- The testimony of strong Christians...
 - When you read about some of the Christian men and women through the history of the church who were known for their strong prayer lives, you find that many if not most of them practiced some form of prayer journaling.
 - Much of what we know of the Church Fathers, the Reformers, and the Puritans we know because we have read their spiritual journals.
 - I often read in a book, Valley of Vision...
 - This is a collection of writings from Puritan prayer journals.
- Why should we do a prayer journal?
 - A. Slow you down...**
 - Prayer is not about quickly moving through a list.
 - When we write, we slow down and get intentional.
 - B. Eliminate distractions...**
 - Have you ever started praying and ended up with your mind wandering to a completely different topic?
 - Writing down some or all of our prayers will keep us focused.
 - Writing will add some formality and structure to your time with the Lord...
 - C. Provide a history to review for reminders of God's faithfulness...**
 - I love when Facebook or Apple Photos shows me a memory of some special event that happened a year or five years ago.
 - Our prayer journals can serve the same way as a spiritual encouragement.
- How to do a prayer journal?
 - No one-right-way.
 - Suggestions...
 - The simplest way is to make lists...
 - Lists of prayer requests...
 - Lists of blessings you are thankful for...
 - Lists of things that are praiseworthy about the Lord...
 - Lists of things you learned in your Bible meditation today...
 - The final step is free-handed prayer...
 - This is therapeutic for me...
 - Mine starts as full sentences and ends in random words...
- What I do in each devotion right now...
 - List of what I've learned and wrestled

- with in the Word...
 - One praise...
 - At least one item of thanksgiving...
 - A list of my most urgent personal needs...
 - Others I'm praying for...
- How do people try to change?
 - Bold declarations...
 - Emotional decisions...
 - New Year's resolutions...
- What is God's plan?
 - Know something
 - Embrace something
 - Dethrone something
 - One lady in our church emailed me this week to say she had turned this into an acronym to help her remember and to teach this to her grandchildren.
 - KEDS:
 - Know something...
 - Embrace something...
 - Dethrone something...
 - Are the keys to Sanctification.
 - God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits...
 - Bible meditation
 - Supercharged prayer

APPENDIX 12

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS—SUPERCHARGED PRAYING

Next is the sermon discussion guide for message 4 in the six-week series.

How to Kill Persistent Sin — Supercharged Praying — Hebrews 4:14-16
FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, November 3, 2019 – A.M. Message

Sermon Discussion Guide

Connect

- We have all heard some unusual public prayers through the years. What is one of the oddest public prayers you have ever heard? How are public prayers different from personal prayers?

Discover

- Which statement or experience stood out to you from the worship service?
- Read Hebrews 4:13-15.
 - How do verses 14 and 15 provide comfort and peace following the very scary thought communicated in verse 13?
 - How is Jesus able to sympathize with our weaknesses?
 - How was Jesus' temptation similar to ours? How was it different?
 - How does it comfort or strengthen us to go to Christ knowing he has been tempted in every way as we are tempted, yet without sin?
- Read Hebrews 4:16 and James 4:8.
 - According to both of these verses, what does God do when we approach or draw near to him?
 - What did the author of Hebrews mean when he wrote, "throne of grace?" How might that have been a surprising characterization of a "throne" in biblical times?
 - What would be the opposite of coming "boldly" before the throne? In your own words, how should someone come before the throne of God?
- Read Psalm 100:4 and Psalm 139:23-24.
 - What elements does Psalm 100:4 suggest should always be included in our prayer time? What are some ways we can be more consistent to always include those elements?
 - What elements does Psalm 139:23-24 suggest should always be included in our prayer time? What are some ways we can be more consistent to always include those elements?
 - What other elements should we regularly include in our prayer time?
- Read Luke 11:5-8 and Luke 18:1-8.
 - What does the Luke 11 passage teach us about prayer?
 - This parable (Luke 11:5-8) addresses one common objection people often have to excuse their lack of consistent prayer. What is that common objection?
 - What does the Luke 18 passage teach us about prayer?
 - Why do people so often fail to be consistent in prayer? What does Luke 18:1-8 say to those people?

Respond

- How does the Holy Spirit use the habit of consistent prayer to help us overcome persistent sins?
- Why do you think the people with the most consistent prayer lives tend to journal their prayers in the same sense as David and Jeremiah? What do you think is the connection between consistent prayer lives and journaling? How could you use journaling to supercharge your prayer life?

Bonus for Thinkers

- What does Hebrews 4:15 mean when it calls Jesus our high priest? What qualifies him as such? What are the duties of a high priest? Why do we need a high priest?

APPENDIX 13

SERMON: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS— SPIRITUAL FASTING

Next is the sermon outline for the message 5 in the six-week series. This message was preached on Sunday, November 10, 2019.

How to Kill Persistent Sin — Spiritual Fasting — Matthew 9:14-15

FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, November 10, 2019 – A.M. Message

Message Description

What a misfortune it would be if a Christian never enjoyed the sweetness of prayer. What if a Christian never knew the joy of worshiping the Lord through singing? Those are essential and valuable elements in the Christian walk. What if there were another element that was just as essential, valuable, and needed? In this message, we will take a no-guilt look at the biblical practice of fasting, and we will discover that many of us are missing out on something as valuable as prayer and worship in our regular Christian life.

Introduction

- What would the Christian life (Christian experience) be like without...
 - Prayer...
 - Worship...
 - Access to God's word (meditation)
- Our Christian faith could still be real and meaningful without any one or all of those ways of relating to him, but it would not be as rich.
 - It would be sorely lacking.
 - We would be missing a valuable piece.
- Well, what if we ARE missing a valuable piece?
 - What if there is another part of living out the Christian life that is just as essential, just as rewarding, and just as life changing as prayer, worship, and Bible meditation...
 - Jesus says, there is just such a piece, just such a spiritual discipline...
 - Matthew 9:14–15 | *Then John's disciples came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. (CSB)*
- This morning let us to investigate what the Bible says about the discipline of fasting.
 - This isn't a subject that comes up often in today's church.
 - This isn't an activity people typically show much interest in.
 - But I want you to see that it was a central element in living out the Christian life in biblical times and especially in the life of the early church.
 - And I want you to see that when we ignore fasting, we ignore one of the most valuable avenues available to walk closely with the Lord and enjoy his presence.
- We are talking about fasting in the context of our war with persistent sins...
 - How can we kill persistent sins?
 - Know something: Crucified with Christ.
 - Embrace something: Dead to sin.
 - Dethrone something: Partner with the Holy Spirit by engaging in God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits that lead to the momentum of real change (sanctification).
 - One lady in our church emailed me two weeks ago to say she had turned this into an acronym to help her remember and to teach this to her grandchildren.
 - KEDS:
 - Know something...
 - Embrace something...
 - Dethrone something...
 - Are the keys to Sanctification.

- What are these habits (spiritual disciplines)?
 - Bible meditation
 - Supercharged prayer
 - Number three is fasting.
 - We will learn how fasting dethrones sin as we walk through our Bible discovery.
- This will be a topical message, and we will walk through a number of Bible passages.
 - Not the way I ordinarily preach...
 - But the nature of how the Scripture explains fasting requires this approach.

What is Fasting?

I. Fasting is a voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.

- Fasting is mentioned hundreds of times in the Old and New Testaments, and every time it is the voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes.
 - Look at this brief note on a forty day fast by Jesus...
 - Matthew 4:2 | *After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.* (CSB)
- So, let's start our study of fasting by digging into this definition that makes up our first point...

A. Spiritual fasting is not a weight loss diet or a strategy for better health.

- You may fast for weight loss or improved health.
 - Ask your doctor if that is a good idea.
- But fasting for those purposes is not the same as fasting for spiritual purposes.
 - A biblical fast is established in part by its purpose.
 - Let's be careful that we do not confuse the two.

B. Spiritual fasting involves abstaining from food (and sometimes drink).

- Today you often hear people talking about fasting from television, chocolate, social media, etc.
 - Those aren't bad things to do.
 - Abstaining from television or social media for a period of time would probably improve our walk with the Lord and many other areas of life.
 - But those are not biblical fasts.
- If you read much about "fasting" in modern literature today, people say that fasting is about denying yourself of something meaningful for a period of time.
 - The problem with that definition is that it is just made up.
 - It is not biblical.
 - There is much confusion about this.
 - People are reading way too much into the Bible.
 - There is no social media fast in the Bible.
 - There is no chocolate fast in the Bible.
 - There is no "Daniel fast" in the Bible!

- Despite the number of Christian books written on the subject.
- Every fast in the Bible is about going without food and sometimes food and water for a period of time.
 - Daniel 1:12, Isaiah 58, 1 Corinthians 7:5 notwithstanding.
 - Daniel 1:12 | *Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. (CSB)*
 - Isaiah 58:5–7 | *Will the fast I choose be like this: A day for a person to deny himself, to bow his head like a reed, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to the LORD? Isn't this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the poor and homeless into your house, to clothe the naked when you see him, and not to ignore your own flesh and blood? (CSB)*
 - 1 Corinthians 7:5 | *Do not deprive one another—except when you agree for a time, to devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again; otherwise, Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (CSB)*
- Why is fasting always associated with not eating?
 - **Perhaps it is because eating is a basic necessity of life and this parallels our need for the Lord...**
 - You can survive without chocolate and social media but not without food.
 - Matthew 4:4 | *He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." (CSB)*
 - **Perhaps it is because the first sin was associated with eating...**
 - Genesis 3:6 | *The woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (CSB)*
 - **Perhaps it is because there is some fundamental connection between our hunger for food and our hunger for the Lord and the things of God...**
 - Matthew 5:6 | *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (CSB)*
 - Psalm 63:5 | *You satisfy me as with rich food; my mouth will praise you with joyful lips. (CSB)*
 - John 4:34 | *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work," Jesus told them.*

- (CSB)
 — John 6:48 | *I am the bread of life.* (CSB)
 — Psalm 119:103 | *How sweet your word is to my taste— sweeter than honey in my mouth.* (CSB)
 — **Perhaps it is because Jesus fasted for forty days...**
 — Matthew 4:2 | *After he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.* (CSB)
 — So, if the Spirit directs you to give up Netflix, social media, or coffee for some time, then by all means follow the Lord.
 — If you want to give up something for Lent, by all means, go ahead.
 — I commend those practices.
 — But know that is not biblical fasting.
 — Fasting is a whole different category!
 — Let those “disciplines” be in addition to the Bible-described, God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered discipline of fasting.

II. Fasting is an expression of our longing for the presence of Christ.

- I read Matthew 9:14-15 earlier, but let’s look at it again and see if we can discern the motivation for fasting.
 — Matthew 9:14–15 | *Then John’s disciples came to him, saying, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests be sad while the groom is with them? The time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.* (CSB)
 — What do we learn about fasting from this passage?
 A. **It is proper to have a longing to be closer to the Lord, and one way we express that is through fasting.**
 — What is a normal way (biblically normal) to express your longing for the Lord?
 — Fasting!
 — The hunger we feel reminds us of the longing we have for the Lord.
 B. **When we hunger for food in a fast, we are reminded that our ultimate satisfaction will be found in the Lord.**
 — We know something is missing...
 — We are hungry.
 — We need something to be full, content, satisfied...
 — This reminds us that we also need the closeness of the Lord to be satisfied!

III. Fasting is way to seek the reward of the Father.

- Matthew 6:16–18 | *“Whenever you fast, don’t be gloomy like the hypocrites. For they make their faces unattractive so that their fasting is obvious to people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting isn’t obvious to others but to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* (CSB)
 — The first thing to notice about this passage is that fasting is put on equal footing with...
 — Giving (Matthew 6:1-4)
 — Praying (Matthew 6:5-8)
 — What do we learn about fasting from this passage?

- The Lord rewards properly motivated fasting!
- Proper motivation is the key.
 - What is the proper motivation for fasting?
 - Fasting is for the Lord to see, not for those around you to see.
 - That doesn't mean that all fasting has to be secret.
 - As we will see in a moment, there are many examples of corporate fasting in the New Testament.
 - Additionally...
 - Notice that Jesus begins this section of his sermon by saying it is wrong to do any spiritual service for the purpose of being seen by others.
 - Matthew 6:1 | *Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others **to be seen by them**. Otherwise, you have no reward with your Father in heaven. (CSB)*
 - It is good for others to sometimes see, but the purpose must be to honor the Lord.
 - Matthew 5:16 | *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (CSB)*
- What is the reward for properly motivated fasting?
 - Protection
 - Ezra 8:21–23 | *I proclaimed a fast by the Ahava River, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us, our dependents, and all our possessions. I did this because I was ashamed to ask the king for infantry and cavalry to protect us from enemies during the journey, since we had told him, "The hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his fierce anger is against all who abandon him." So we fasted and pleaded with our God about this, and he was receptive to our prayer. (CSB)*
 - Esther 4:16 | *"Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king even if it is against the law. If I perish, I perish." (CSB)*
 - Strength to face temptation
 - Isaiah 58:6 | *Isn't this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? (CSB)*
 - Answered prayer
 - 2 Chronicles 20:1–25
 - Daniel 6:16–18 | *So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you continually serve, rescue you!" A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing in regard to Daniel could be changed. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and he could not sleep. (CSB)*
 - Preparation for ministry
 - Acts 13:2–3 | *As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after they had fasted, prayed,*

- *and laid hands on them, they sent them off. (CSB)*
- Acts 14:23 | *When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (CSB)*
- Relief from the consequences of sin
 - Jonah 3:5 | *Then the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth—from the greatest of them to the least. (CSB)*
 - Jonah 3:10 | *God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it. (CSB)*
- Revival and renewal
 - Joel 2:12–14 | *Even now— this is the LORD’s declaration— turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your hearts, not just your clothes, and return to the LORD your God. For he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and he relents from sending disaster. Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, so you can offer grain and wine to the LORD your God. (CSB)*
- And more...

IV. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that can lead to the breaking of the chains of persistent sin.

- Isaiah 58:6 | *Isn’t this the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke? (CSB)*
- How does the Holy Spirit use our fasting to help us overcome persistent sins?
 - A. Fasting strengthens other spiritual disciplines.**
 - The most obvious way is that it frees up time for Bible meditation and prayer.
 - But it also sharpens both of those disciplines.
 - B. Fasting reveals what controls us.**
 - When fasting, we will have a greater awareness of the things in our lives that control us.
 - When fasting, it is easier to see our sinful dependency on...
 - The approval of others...
 - Getting our selfish preferences met...
 - Etc.
 - C. Fasting teaches us that our ultimate satisfaction is only found in the Lord.**
 - The satisfaction of food is only temporary.
 - The satisfaction of the Lord is complete.
 - D. Fasting stretches the spiritual muscles we use to discipline our bodies.**
 - You are dead to sin, yet it still feels like sin is master at times.
 - You feel like you have to eat, but you do not.
 - The act of telling your body that it is lying to you when it says you are starving to death, reminds you that sin lies in the same way when it seeks to climb back onto the throne of your life.
 - Romans 6:12 | *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. (CSB)*
 - This is true of all God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered

habits (spiritual disciplines) ...

— When we say no to hunger, we are declaring that our base desires are not in charge of us.

— When we give sacrificially, we are declaring that we trust the Lord to meet our needs and take care of us.

— When we pray earnestly, we are declaring that we are powerless apart from the strength of the Lord.

— When we meditate on Scripture, we are declaring that we need the Lord's guidance and direction to supplant our own.

V. Fasting serves to unite believers in prayer and worship.

— Acts 13:2–3 | *As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.* (CSB)

— Acts 14:23 | *When they had appointed elders for them in every church and prayed with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.* (CSB)

— We will look a little more at this next week.

Conclusion

— Practical instructions...

— So, how do we fast?

1. Begin with mostly private fasting.

— Only tell those that will be impacted by your fast (spouse) or those you really need to be in the prayer loop for your fast and its purpose.

2. Determine the purpose of your fasting.

— But be open to the Lord's direction.

— Your purpose will determine if this is a periodic fast (like one day a week for a period of time or until something occurs) or a one-time fast.

3. Make a plan.

— Remember that the Bible does not give specific instructions about a plan.

— Many plans are modeled in the Bible but not commanded.

— So, no judgment and no bragging...

— Decide how long you will fast.

— Be smart with your health.

— If you have real health issues, don't do anything that would be unhealthy.

— If you don't know what that means for you, ask your doctor.

— I usually advise people who have restrictive diet requirements to do shorter fasts not non-fasts...

— *But honestly most scholars and Bible teachers who have written on this subject in the last few years, disagree with me on that point.*

— Most people should begin with a 24-hour fast from after supper to a later supper the following

day.

- The most rewarding fasts will be longer.
- Most healthy people can go 40 days with a couple glasses of juice a day without a problem, but no one should start there.

- Decide how restrictive your fast is going to be.
 - During most fasts, most people just drink water.
 - In fasts approaching a week or longer, I have had some fruit or vegetable juice in order to have the strength to keep working.

4. Commit to using the time you free up for prayer and Bible meditation.

- Fasting is not just about denying yourself and wrestling with hunger.

- Fasting is about connecting with the Lord.

- Use your available time for that connection...

- You can pray without fasting, but you cannot fast without praying.

- Use your hunger pangs for that connection...

- Let's take a step back and see where we are...

- Because of the death of Christ on the cross the penalty of sin can be destroyed...

- [Gospel presentation.]

- Because of the death of Christ on the cross the authority of sin is destroyed...

- We are dead to sin.

- But sin can still reign if we allow it.

- Romans 6:12

- But we can gradually overcome our persistent sin if we offer our parts to righteousness.

- Romans 6:13

- We offer our parts to God through God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits (or spiritual disciplines).

- Those habits are...

- Bible meditation

- Daily prayer

- Fasting...

APPENDIX 14

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS—SPIRITUAL FASTING

Next is the sermon discussion guide for the message 5 in the six-week series.

How to Kill Persistent Sin — Spiritual Fasting — Matthew 9:14-15
FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, November 10, 2019 – A.M. Message

Sermon Discussion Guide

Connect

- What was the time you were the hungriest or the thirstiest in your entire life? Why?

Discover

- Which statement or experience stood out to you from the worship service?
- Read Matthew 9:14-17.
 - How do you think John's disciples thought Jesus would answer their question in 9:14?
 - In your own words, why did the disciples of Christ not fast? What did Jesus say would trigger them to begin fasting?
 - There are many biblical reasons to fast, but the words of Jesus in this passage point to very important reason Christians should fast today. What is that reason?
- Read Matthew 6:1-5, 6:16-18.
 - How is fasting just like giving and prayer? What are some reasons Jesus lumps these three spiritual activities together? What danger do they all share?
 - According to 6:16-17, does Jesus expect his followers to fast? How does he indicate this?
 - What are some ways Christians often violate the spirit of Jesus's commands the face (oiling and washing)?
 - What does 6:1 tell us about our motives when we fast, give or pray?
 - What do you think the "rewards" are that Jesus spoke of in verse 18?
- Read Ezra 8:21-23, Jonah 3:5, 10.
 - What was the motivation for fasting in the Ezra passage? What about the Jonah passage?
 - What are some lessons or principles we can learn about fasting in these two passages?
- Read Isaiah 58:6, Joel 2:12-14.
 - What are some additional benefits to fasting found in these two passages?

Respond

- How can fasting help Christians overcome persistent sins?
- What are some of the reasons Christians fail to fast consistently?

Bonus for Thinkers

- Of all the activities the Lord could have given us to do to draw nearer to him, why do you think he chose fasting (abstaining from food for a time)?

APPENDIX 15

SERMON: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS— WARNINGS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS

Next is the sermon outline for the message 6 in the six-week series. This message was preached on Sunday, November 17, 2019.

How to Kill Persistent Sin — Warnings and Encouragements — Hebrews 3:13-14

FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, November 17, 2019 – A.M. Message

Message Description

The Bible talks of strongholds of sin that can exist in the life of a believer. Some Christians have fought against these strongholds for years. Is there any real hope of real change? In this final message in our series, “How to Kill Persistent Sin,” we will learn of one final biblical tool that the Lord promises to use to form the character of Christ in us. The Holy Spirit has not given up on us. There is a way to grow and change, and we will learn about this divine resource in Hebrews 3:13.

Introduction

- Ever heard of the “Seven Deadly Sins?”
 - Not the manga cartoon on Netflix, but the list of the seven temptations and sins that are common to all those who seek to live a godly life.
 - This isn’t a list you find in the Bible per se...
 - Although the Bible has much to say about each of these sins.
 - The list began with a Christian monk who lived in the latter half of the fourth century AD, Evagrius Ponticus (345–399 AD).
 - Evagrius came up with a list of eight sins that he believed described the common struggle for all believers.
 - Two-hundred years later Gregory the Great shrunk the list to seven.
 - Aren’t you glad!
 - You don’t want me to mention the one he left off.
 - It would just make some of you mad and start an unnecessary debate.
 - Just trust your pastor on this one.
 - This list has become so well known that even the evangelist Billy Graham wrote a book on the Seven Deadly Sins...
 - Graham, Billy. *Freedom from the Seven Deadly Sins*. London: Lakeland, 1972.
 - The Seven Deadly Sins...
 - Pride
 - Greed
 - Lust
 - Envy
 - Gluttony
 - Anger (wrath)
 - Sloth
 - **Here is what is interesting about that:**
 - **The list of persistent sins Christians struggle with hasn’t change in sixteen centuries!**
- When I think through the list and my pastoral counseling or even my own life, I see these reoccurring themes.
 - Even though we as Christians are dead to sin (Romans 6:11), we still struggle with persistent sins.
 - I read this week that between one half and two thirds of men in the church struggle with pornography.
 - Lust is a major factor in the slow deterioration of so many marriages.
 - Many of us couldn’t deny the sin of gluttony if we tried.
 - Pride and anger are daily battles for many.
 - Greed and envy often drive us to do things we know to be unwise and ungodly.
 - While we have developed clever ways to disguise it, sloth or

- laziness often keeps us from serving the Lord and others like we could and should.
- I think about that great 18th century hymn: *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing...* (Robert Robinson)
 - The first verse is about the grace of God that saves us.
 - *Come, Thou Fount of every blessing...*
 - *Streams of mercy, never ceasing...*
 - *Jesus sought me when a stranger...*
 - The second verse is about the wonderful forgiveness of God.
 - *Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter, Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee...*
 - Then the third verse...
 - *Prone to wander, Lord I feel it...*
 - *Prone to leave the God I love...*
- We are prone to wander!
 - So, what do we do?
 - How can we rise above the Seven Deadly Sins?
 - How can we live like strangers and exiles in this world of sin and abstain from the sinful desires that wage war against the soul?
 - 1 Peter 2:11 | *Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul.* (CSB)
- In this message series, we have searched the Scriptures for hope.
 - We've learned that the process of sanctification is not simply to...
 - Pray more
 - Promise more
 - Push harder
 - We've learned the life changing truth that we are dead to sin.
 - We've learned the value of God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits.
 - And we've learned some practical steps for engaging in the spiritual disciplines (habits) of...
 - Meditation
 - Prayer
 - Fasting
 - Today...
 - I want us to wrap all of this up with a focus on Hebrews 3:13.
 - Hebrews 3:13 | *But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception.* (CSB)
 - Here we find some warnings and encouragements that provide the final piece of the puzzle of practical sanctification and real change.
 - There are three parts to this verse...

Warnings and Encouragements

I. Sin is a big dangerous deal.

- Hebrews 3:13b | *... hardened by sin's deception.* (CSB)
- Why do we need to spend so much time and energy focused on overcoming persistent sins?
 - Reasons we cite when we ignore persistent sins...
 - Many of these sins seem so small and insignificant...
 - Many of these sins seem so common and accepted in our culture...

- We are saved and forgiven anyway!
- **This verse provides two reminders of the danger of persistent sin...**
 - A. Sin deceives.**
 - Hebrews 3:13c | ... *sin's deception*. (CSB)
 - Sin is tricky.
 - It seldom appears as it really is.
 - As Adrian Rogers famously said...
 - Sin will take you farther than you want to go.
 - Sin will keep you longer than you want to stay.
 - Sin will cost you more than you want to pay.
 - Joseph Exell writes...
 - Sin is deceitful...
 - In its appearances.
 - In its promises.
 - In its influences.
 - Romans 6 says we are dead to sin. It doesn't say that we gained mastery over sin.
 - Your sin (and my sin) is deceptive.
 - We are not smart enough or strong enough to manage sin.
 - Every sin is a foothold of the devil in our lives and given enough time, he will use his foothold to gain more and more ground.
 - How many conversations have I had with men and women who that began with...
 - I never meant...
 - I never thought...
 - I never wanted...
 - B. Every day matters.**
 - Hebrews 3:13a | *Encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened...* (CSB)
 - There is an urgency to this...
 - *Daily* means we should deal with sin habitually.
 - This should be a constant battle we fight.
 - 1 Timothy 4:7b | ... *train yourself in godliness*. (CSB)
 - Training is a daily endeavor.
 - “*While it is still called today*” adds urgency.
 - Time is pressing...
 - We don't have an infinite amount of time to do this...
 - Why? Three reasons...
 1. The honor of the Lord deserves our urgency.
 2. The gospel of the Lord should be heralded.
 3. Sin hardens us.
 - Our hearts can become as calloused as our hands...
 - Sins that used to horrify us, after a short time don't seem to bother us at all.
 - That is the process of hardening.
 - And when a person becomes spiritually hardened, he is rarely aware of it.
 - That is the tragedy and the danger.

— It's like the old fable about boiling a frog...
 — The premise is that if a frog is put suddenly into boiling water, it will jump out, but if the frog is put in tepid water which is then brought to a boil slowly, it will not perceive the danger and will be cooked to death.

C. Perseverance confirms.

- Hebrews 3:14 | *For we have become participants in Christ if we hold firmly until the end the reality that we had at the start.* (CSB)
- We must not be casual toward sin!
 - We must have the attitude of the apostle Paul...
 - 1 Corinthians 9:27 | *Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.* (CSB)
 - We must embrace the clear and urgent commands of Scripture...
 - Romans 6:12a | *... Do not let sin reign in your mortal body...* (CSB)
 - Romans 8:13b | *... Put to death the deeds of the body...* (CSB)
 - 1 Timothy 4:7b | *... Train yourself in godliness.* (CSB)
 - 2 Corinthians 7:1b | *... Let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* (CSB)
 - In fact, a contrary attitude would call into question the very authenticity of our faith.
 - Romans 8:13 | *... If you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* (CSB)

II. The Holy Spirit is ready, willing, and able to help you with persistent sin.

- Hebrews 3:13a | *But encourage each other daily...* (CSB)
 - We will get to this specific command to encourage one another in a few minutes.
 - But first, I want you to see an interesting word connection in the original language.
 - This isn't obvious to us as we read the English translation of the Scripture, but it would have been obvious to the Christians who heard the words of Hebrews 3:13 when it was written.
 - The Greek lemma translated encourage in Hebrews 3:13 is παρακαλέω.
 - The Greek lemma translated counselor and referring to the Holy Spirit in John 14:16 is παράκλητος.
 - John 14:16 | *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.* (CSB)
 - This is essentially the noun form of the verb found in Hebrews 3:13.
 - When the original audience heard the command to encourage in

- Hebrews 3:13 they would have not only seen the command to encourage but also the allusion to the work of the Holy Spirit to also keep believers from being “*hardened by sin’s deception.*”
- We’ve talked much about the Holy Spirit in this message series, so let’s take this opportunity for a quick review.
 - You will never change by your own strength, determination, and willpower.
 - All the dramatic promises of “I WILL NEVER” will not amount to much in the long run.
 - But that is OK.
 - The Lord never meant for this to be all on you.
 - If you could change yourself, then there would have been no need for Jesus.
 - If you could change yourself, then the praise would go to you and not to the Lord.
 - The Holy Spirit is God’s agent to bring real change.
 - Romans 8:13 | ... *If you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.* (CSB)
 - So, our part in sanctification is partnering with the Holy Spirit.
 - To get in step with the Holy Spirit...
 - To cooperate with the Holy Spirit...
 - Let me introduce a new verse we’ve not yet looked at in this study...
 - Galatians 5:16 | *I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh.* (CSB)
 - First, notice the Holy Spirit’s essential role in sanctification.
 - You cannot do this alone.
 - You were not meant to do this alone.
 - Now notice our part in the work of the Holy Spirit...
 - We are to WALK by the Spirit.
 - The Spirit does not operate automatically in a believer’s heart.
 - He waits to be depended on.
 - How do we *walk by the Spirit*?
 - God-prescribed, Holy Spirit-empowered habits (spiritual disciplines)
 - Romans 6:13 | *And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness.* (CSB)
 - Romans 6:19 | *I am using a human analogy because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you offered the parts of yourselves as slaves to impurity, and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness, which results in sanctification.* (CSB)
 - So, change is not by...
 - Pray more

- And passively let God worry about our sanctification apart from our efforts...
- Promise more
- Push harder
- It is possible because we are dead to sin and because we partner with the Holy Spirit.
- But there is one more resource the Lord has provided us for real change...

III. The other half of the requisite encouragement comes from the church.

- Hebrews 3:13a | *But encourage each other daily...* (CSB)
- The Lord could have made faith a private matter.
 - Simply a vertical relationship between us and the Father...
 - And in fact, that is how many (or most) people in America view the Christian faith...
 - But he did not!
- The Christian faith (and every part of the Christian faith) is inescapably bound up in our connections to each other.
 - Hence, the church, the body of Christ...
 - Hence, the dozens of “one-another” commands in the New Testament...
- But let’s look specifically at our struggle with persistent sin...
 - Is this a private matter that you need to work out with the Lord?
 - Or is this something that REQUIRES the help of others?
 - No question.
 - It is the latter.
- Let’s start with the connection we see in Hebrews 3:13.
 - Hebrews 3:13 | *But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin’s deception.* (CSB)
- Is this just a one-off instruction in the New Testament?
 - No! This is the theme of the New Testament!
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:11 | *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.* (CSB)
 - Hebrews 10:24–25 | *And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.* (CSB)
 - Galatians 6:1–2 | *Brothers and sisters, if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won’t be tempted. Carry one another’s burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.* (CSB)
 - Colossians 3:16 | *Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.* (CSB)
 - James 5:16 | *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.* (CSB)
 - Have you ever realized that the promise that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective is in the context of praying for a fellow Christian who has confessed his sins to you as you pray for him to overcome those sins?
- What does this mean practically as we struggle to overcome persistent sins? How do we “*encourage each other daily*?”

A. You need to be in worship, Sunday School, and have a place of service.

— This is the space, and these are the connections the Lord will bless and use for your sanctification.

— For your profit...

— For the benefit of others...

B. You need to have partners in your Christian walk.

— Discussing your Bible reading and Bible study...

— Sharing prayer burdens...

— Confession...

C. You need to be investing in the lives of a few people.

— Our church is filled with seasoned Christians.

— You have a role, an important role!

— Find some way to invest in others.

— You and I will not know the fullness of what the Lord wants to do to change, mature, and sanctify us as long as we are treating our faith like a solo sport.

Conclusion

— The apostle Paul talked about *strongholds* of sin that can exist in our lives (2 Corinthians 10:4).

— That doesn't have to be true of us.

— Jesus has destroyed the authority of sin.

— God has made a way for us to make real progress in overcoming the presence of sin and the existence of strongholds of sin.

— Paul said of the some of the Christians in Corinth that they were carnal and spiritual babies.

— 1 Corinthians 3:1 | *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. (NKJV)*

— 1 Corinthians 3:1 | *For my part, brothers and sisters, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ. (CSB)*

— Let's see the character of Christ formed in us (Galatians 4:19)!

APPENDIX 16

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE: HOW TO KILL PERSISTENT SINS—WARNINGS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS

Next is the sermon discussion guide for message 6 in the six-week series.

How to Kill Persistent Sin — Warnings and Encouragements — Hebrews 3:13-14
FBC Nacogdoches – Sunday, November 17, 2019 – A.M. Message

Discussion Guide

Connect

- What persistent sins do you think form the most common struggles among Christians today? How is this different from one age group to another?

Discover

- Which statement or experience stood out to you from the worship service?
- Read 1 Peter 2:11 and Hebrews 3:13.
 - What are the two or three reasons these verses give that we should be urgent in our battle against persistent sins?
 - How is sin deceptive?
 - What does it mean that sin can harden a person? How does sin harden a person? Why is it hard for a Christian to tell whether he has been hardened by sin?
- Read Romans 8:13 and Galatians 5:16.
 - According to these verses, what is the role of the Holy Spirit with respect to overcoming persistent sins?
 - Galatians 5:16 commands Christians to “walk by the Spirit.” What does this mean? How do we do this?
 - What is the promise in Galatians 5:16?
 - How does Romans 8:13 connect our attitude toward sin with the assurance of the genuineness of our faith?
- Read Galatians 6:1-2, Colossians 3:16, and Hebrews 10:24-25.
 - What do the Galatians and Colossians passages say our responsibility is toward our fellow believers?
 - What important element does the Hebrews passage add to how we encourage other believers?
- Read James 5:16.
 - Why does James encourage Christians to confess sins to other people and not just to the Lord?
 - How can this confession happen from a practical standpoint?

Respond

- Why do Christians so often view their faith and walk with the Lord as a private matter? According to Scripture, what are Christians missing out on when they fail to foster close spiritual connections with other believers?
- What are some practical ways believers can connect with other believers and live the Christian life together? What are the most common obstacles we face? How can we overcome those obstacles?

Bonus for Thinkers

What hints does the Bible give for why the Father established our faith such that we need the assistance of other believers to experience the fullness of the Christian life and of the sanctifying work of the Spirit?

APPENDIX 17

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Next are the daily devotions completed by the church in conjunction with the weekly messages.

Devotions to publish on 10/13

Monday (10/14) — Romans 6:1-12

- Review the “Respond” questions on the reverse side of this devotion guide.
 - How did our relationship with sin change when we were saved? What real difference does it make in our lives to really understand this change?
 - How would you counsel someone who says they have a particular persistent sin that is impossible for them to overcome?

Tuesday (10/15) — John 6:35-59

- In the ancient world, bread was the staple food people ate every day. It was a critical commodity because it did four things: Gave life, sustained life, satisfied hunger, and provided strength. In today’s passage, Jesus says that he is the bread. Write down two or three ways Jesus satisfies our hunger or provides strength. In light of these things, what can you do to embrace Jesus more today?
- In John 6:47-51 Jesus makes essentially the same promise three times (in 47, 50, 51). Write that promise down in your own words. Spend a minute thanking the Lord for that promise and for his faithfulness to honor it.
- In John 6:49-50 Jesus makes a distinction between temporary physical blessings (like manna which was bread God sent to the hungry Israelites during the exodus) and eternal spiritual blessings (like life which never ends). Of course, both kinds of blessings are good, but which is Jesus suggesting is better? What is one thing you could spend extra time praying about today to help keep your focus on the spiritual/eternal blessings you seek instead of entirely on the physical/temporary ones?

Wednesday (10/16) — John 6:60 – 7:24

- In John 7:3-4, the disciples were trying to convince Jesus that the time is right for him to go to Jerusalem and take a more public role as a national religious leader. Jesus refused in verses 6-8 because it wasn’t the right time. Jesus was sensitive to doing things at the right time. Write down one decision or change you have been thinking about. Pray and ask the Lord how you will know not just the right thing to do, but the right time to do it. Talk to the Lord about this long enough that you can write down one or two markers that will indicate it is the right time.
- Twice in this passage the people marveled at Jesus. In verse 15 they marveled at his teaching. In verse 21 Jesus said they marveled at his miracle working. But it is clear from the whole passage that they did not love or follow Jesus. So, there is a difference between admiration (marveling at his intellect and power) and adoration (loving him for who he is). What are some of the differences? How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? Is it more admiration or adoration?
- In John 7:23-24 Jesus points out how mixed up the people’s sense of right and wrong had become. They celebrated Sabbath day circumcision but railed against Sabbath day healing. Spend a couple minutes and think of things our culture calls wrong, but from a Biblical point of view are not wrong at all. Write those down. Ask the Lord to teach you to (as we are commanded in verse 24) see all things from a true, biblical perspective.

Thursday (10/17) — John 7:25-52

- In 7:30 we see that they tried to arrest Jesus, but they couldn’t because it wasn’t his time. One lesson in this is that when God sends us on a mission, he protects and provides the whole way. So we should be boldly obedient to charge forth and do whatever the Lord is leading us to do with full confidence of his protection.

What big thing would you do in your life this year if you knew the Lord would give you success? Write it down. Ask the Lord to show you clearly if this is from him. If it is then charge ahead with confidence.

- In John 7:37 Jesus makes a short and simple statement that has great meaning. There are three verbs in the sentence (only about ten words all total). These three verbs outline how a person can become a child of God. Write them down. Think through how you could use these three words to tell someone how to experience salvation.
- We see a very brave stand in John 7:50. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and had a reputation and career to protect. But even though it was a very unpopular and even dangerous thing to do in his position, he stood up for Jesus. He boldly stood up to the religious and society leaders, regardless of what it might cost him. Write down two ways you could stand more boldly for the things of God in your workplace, home or school.

Friday (10/18) — John 7:53 – 8:30

- In John 8:8, Jesus wrote something on the ground that when the woman's accusers read it, they each decided it was best to close their accusing mouths and walk away. The speculation is that Jesus wrote something that reminded each man of his own unconfessed, undealt with sin. Spend a minute and ask the Lord if there is any unconfessed, undealt with sin in your life. Make some notes. Spend some time talking with God about these sins.
- Jesus made a startling statement in John 8:7 that says something about the kind of attitude we should have toward those caught in sin. What are the first things that run through your heart and mind when you hear someone has been caught in sin? Write down a few words describing those thoughts. How do those match up with what Jesus teaches here?
- What great news we see in John 8:11! The Lord doesn't condemn her. That is great news because it reminds us that the Lord doesn't condemn us. But the end of the verse says the Lord expected that she would stop the sin. Think of a sin you repeatedly engage in. Write it down. Thank the Lord that he does not condemn you for that, then ask the Lord to show you how you can stop committing that sin.

Devotions to publish on 10/20

Monday (10/21) — Romans 6:12-23

- Review the “Respond” questions on the reverse side of this devotion guide.
 - If you had a friend who got caught in some grievous sin or shared with you that he felt very convicted about some major and persistent sin, but had promised with all his heart he would never do it again... He said he would swear on a stack of Bibles that he would never ever do that again... How would you counsel him to make a change that would be real?
 - How would you be different today if you would have developed the habits of daily Bible meditation and pray ten years ago? What are some specific holy-habits you could embrace now that the Lord would use to change your life?

Tuesday (10/22) — John 8:31-59

- John 8:31 says one sign of being a genuine disciple of Christ is that we do what? Write it down. What are two or three ways you can do that more this coming week? Pray that the Lord will help you be faithful in these areas.
- When Jesus challenged the Jews’ spirituality, they responded by talking about their past (descendants of Abraham). Jesus pointed out that while that was true, it was also true that they were trying to kill him. Jesus tried to keep their focus on the present. Without referring to some long past event, what will be some indications this week that you love Jesus?
- In 8:44 Jesus says the devil is the father of lies. What are a couple of lies you think the devil whispers into your heart and mind? Write them down. Ask God to always remind you of the truth.
- Life can be pretty hectic, sometimes frustrating, and occasionally fear-filled, but Jesus sorts it all out in one short sentence about eternal life in 8:51. Re-read the sentence. Write down a word or two about how that truth should change your priorities and clear some of your frustrations.

Wednesday (10/23) — John 9:1-17

- It is hard to understand, but Jesus said this man’s blindness existed so that the works of God might be displayed in him. Think about some hardship or stress point in your life. Could it be that you have that so that in relying on God, he could be honored in the situation changing or in you overcoming it? Write down your biggest hardship. Pray and ask God to be honored in how that is handled.
- In 9:4 Jesus recognized the urgency of his work. There are some things the Lord wants us to do that have deadlines. Write down a couple things you feel the Lord is urging you to do soon. Pray and ask God to give you a sense of urgency about those things.
- In 9:6 Jesus made mud and then made new eyes. It is impossible to know exactly how this happened other than to just stand amazed at the power of God. The Bible instructs us to be persistent in asking God in prayer for big things. What are a couple of big needs, desires or dreams you have? Write them down. Ask God to do great things in those things.

Thursday (10/24) — John 9:18-41

- The parents of the formerly blind man failed to testify about Jesus because they were afraid of what others might think or do. Are there some situations (at work, with family, with friends) where you are reluctant to speak up for Jesus? Write those down. Ask the Lord to show you how to be more bold for him in the two or three days to come.

- In 9:38, the formerly blind man professed his belief and faith in Jesus. This is the point at which he becomes a child of God. According to 9:38, what was the very next thing he did? Worship should be the passion of every believer. There are many ways we can worship God (Singing, praying, serving, telling others about him, etc.). Write down three specific ways you can worship him today. Ask God to help you be a worshipper in these ways all day long.

Friday (10/25) — John 10:1-21

- The “abundant” life in 10:10 refers to the added blessings of life that are ours because we are children of God. Write down three blessings that are yours because Jesus has come into your life. Then spend a little time in prayer thanking him for these, and ask the Lord how you can tell someone today about how blessed you are because of Christ.
- The good shepherd does many things for the sheep. He protects them from danger, he feeds them, he guides them to the right place, he tends to their wounds and illnesses, he keeps them from straying, he rescues them when they are lost, and more. Of these things, which are you most in need of from the Lord right now? Write it down. Ask the Lord to do that in your life.
- When Jesus says he is the door (10:7, 9) he is talking about how he is the way to salvation, but also something else. At the end of 10:9 he says that as the door he allows sheep to go in and out. They go out for pasture (food). They go in for safety. Let’s focus on safety. Write down some ways that following Jesus helps us be safe in this life. What is one area of your life where you need to follow more closely for more safety?

Devotions to publish on 10/27

Monday (10/28) — Psalm 1, Psalm 19

- Review the “Respond” questions on the reverse side of this devotion guide.
 - How would you counsel a friend who said he or she just couldn’t stay faithful reading and meditating on God’s word? What if they said that honestly, reading God’s word was just drudgery to them, that it was an arduous chore? How can a person “delight” in God’s word?
 - What are some key differences between reading God’s word and meditating on God’s word? What are some methods of Bible meditation you think are most helpful?

Tuesday (10/29) — John 10:22-42

- In 10:28-29 Jesus declares that both he and the Father are in total control. He says that we, as his children, are in his hand and his ultimate protection. Because of this we can turn all our fears over to him. Write down a couple things that tempt you to be fearful. What is something you worry about? Then ask God to remind you that you are in the protection of his hand.
- In 10:35, Jesus says the Scripture cannot be broken or set-aside. This means that if you believe in Jesus, then you must also believe in the Scripture, because he believed in the Scripture. So, if we know the Scripture is reliable then that means the promises can be banked on and the warnings must be followed. Write down one promise from the Bible that gives you encouragement. Write down one warning or prohibition that you need to give more careful attention to.

Wednesday (10/30) — John 11:1-27

- Sometimes it is easy to forget the humanity of Jesus. But notice throughout this account there is evidence that Jesus was often in and out of the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. In 11:11, Jesus called Lazarus a friend. So, there were some normal things in Jesus’ life. In what ways does it encourage us to know that Jesus is a real person who lived a somewhat normal life?
- In 11:22, 24 we see the incredible faith of Martha. She never doubted that whether in this life or in eternity, Jesus would come through for Lazarus. The Bible tells us that God is pleased by our faith and trust. Write down a couple areas of your life where you need more faith. Ask the Lord to help you.
- In 11:23, we see Jesus’ confidence. Raising Lazarus was not even going to be a challenge for him. Do you know that nothing is too hard for the Lord? Write down something you desire the Lord to do for you or others. Pray for God’s power to be expressed in that need.

Thursday (10/31) — John 11:28-57

- In 11:35, it simply says, “Jesus wept.” In those two words we see something of how much Jesus loves individuals. It is not some detached, academic or feeling love. He really cares. Take a minute and think about Jesus loving you enough to cry over your hurts. Write down two or three ways that encourages or inspires you.
- Jesus gives Martha an instruction in 11:39 that did not make sense to her. She questioned Jesus. Jesus responded by essentially saying just trust and obey. Is there something the Lord has told you to do that you don’t understand why? Ask the Lord to help you trust and obey especially in that matter.
- What happens in 11:45-47 amazes me. Even after seeing and admitting to the validity of Jesus’ miracle of resurrecting Lazarus, many still didn’t believe and even opposed Jesus. This teaches us that believing in Jesus is not a matter of the

mind. It is a matter of the heart. Who do you know who despite all evidence still refuses to believe and surrender? Write down some names. Pray that God will change their hearts.

Friday (10/1) — John 12:1-26

- In 12:3, we seen an extravagant expression of Mary's love and worship of the Lord. This isn't something we can do every day, but occasionally we should go over the top and declare our love for Him. Write down some ways you have done this in the past and one way you could do this in the near future.
- Judas criticized Mary's worship, and his criticism said more about him than it did about her. Think about the last time you criticized some else's worship practice, style or attitude. Write down what your criticism may say about your own heart, motives and insecurities.
- 12:13 describes the people of Jerusalem praising Jesus by waving palm branches and crying out the name and title of Jesus. This pleases the Lord. Write down three ways, big or small, you could praise the Lord today and bring attention to something great about him before your family, friends or co-workers.

Devotions to publish on 11/3

Monday (11/4) — Luke 11:5-8, Luke 18:1-8

- Review the “Respond” questions on the reverse side of this devotion guide.
 - How does the Holy Spirit use the habit of consistent prayer to help us overcome persistent sins?
 - Why do you think the people with the most consistent prayer lives tend to journal their prayers in the same sense as David and Jeremiah? What do you think is the connection between consistent prayer lives and journaling? How could you use journaling to supercharge your prayer life?

Tuesday (11/5) — John 12:27-50

- In 12:27, Jesus is talking about how he is dreading the crucifixion. But he says the more important thing is not his troubled heart, but it is the purpose for which he has come. How about us? Is there something you dread doing but you know it is what the Lord has directed you to do? Write it down. Ask for wisdom and courage.
- Notice what Jesus does not pray for in 12:27. He does not ask the Father to rescue him from going to the cross! Notice that in all of Jesus’ prayers about the cross he only asks for two things: (1) He would have the strength to do the Father’s will. (2) The Father’s name would be glorified (12:27). Think about some of the most difficult things in your life today or in your future. How should you pray about those things?
- In 12:42, we learn that many people believed in Jesus but kept their beliefs secret. According to 12:43, why did they keep it secret? Write that down. Pray and ask the Lord to show you areas in your life where you may be guilty of the same thing.

Wednesday (11/6) — John 13:1-20

- What verse in today’s Bible reading most stood out to you? What lesson has the Lord taught you in your Bible reading today?
- Jesus did the unexpected in 13:4-5. He washed the disciple’s feet. This is a model for the kind of love and service we should show to those around us (13:14). Ask the Lord to give you some guidance and then write down names and some ways you could go above and beyond and serve each of these people this week:
 - Your family or someone in your family...
 - A close friend...
 - A neighbor...
 - Someone at work/school...
 - Someone you are not close to, someone it is hard to love...

Thursday (11/7) — John 13:21-38

- None of us have betrayed Jesus in the manner Judas betrayed him, but we have all let him down and refused to boldly stand for him. Spend a moment and think of a recent time you have failed to stand with Jesus and his Word. Write that down as a confession. Ask for help for more boldness and consistency.
- In 13:34, Jesus says we are to love other just like he loved us. Think about how he loved us. Write down some ways you can model Jesus’s love as you love others.
- In 13:37-38, Peter made a bold promise about his future commitment to the Lord, but he failed to count the cost of serving and following the Lord that day. This got him into some trouble. Too often we are boldly making commitments for how we can sacrifice and serve the Lord in the distant future, when the Lord just wants us to commit to serve, obey and follow him today. What are you going to do today

to walk with Jesus? Sacrifice for and serve Jesus? Obey Jesus?

Friday (11/8) — John 14:1-31

- Jesus' promise in 14:2-3 is meant to give us strength and encouragement today. How can knowing that he has "prepared a place for you" help you be strong in your faith today?
- In 14:15, Jesus equates loving him with keeping his commandments. So how could you love him more this week and weekend by better keeping his commandments? Write down a couple of specific ways.
- Jesus says (in 14:27) that the peace he gives is different from the peace the world gives. In what ways do you think it is different? Spend a minute or two thanking the Lord for the peace he has given to you.

Devotions to publish on 11/10

Monday (11/11) — Matthew 6:1-18, Matthew 9:14-15

- Review the “Respond” questions on the reverse side of this devotion guide.
 - How can fasting help Christians overcome persistent sins?
 - What are some of the reasons Christians fail to fast consistently?

Tuesday (11/12) — John 15:1-17

- We learn in these verses that it is important that we “bear fruit” for the Lord. Fruit can include things such as the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience...), the fruit of serving the Lord, and the fruit of leading others to faith in the Lord. What kind of fruit is your life bearing for the Lord? Write some down. How pleased is the Lord with the fruit harvest in your life?
- According to 15:4-6, what is the secret to bearing more fruit? How would that look in your life if you did more of that?
- According to 15:5-6, what is the consequence of not abiding in Christ?

Wednesday (11/13) — John 15:18 – 16:15

- In 15:18-20 we are reminded that when we live for Jesus we will be persecuted and hated. Write down two or three ways you have been mistreated because of your strong stand for Jesus and his word. Ask Jesus to make you bolder every day.
- In today’s passage Jesus describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit. See if you can identify the following things about the Holy Spirit and fill in the blanks:
 - The Holy Spirit is describe with one word. He is a _____. (15:26a)
 - The Holy Spirit will bear witness of and tell about who? _____ (15:26b)
 - The Holy Spirit is sent to _____. (16:7)
 - The Holy Spirit will convict the world of _____. (16:8)
 - The Holy Spirit will _____ you into all truth. (16:13a)
 - The Holy Spirit will tell you about what is yet to _____. (16:13b)
 - Who will the Holy Spirit glorify? _____ (16:14)
- In 16:7 Jesus says it is better for him to leave so that the Holy Spirit, who he calls the Helper, can come. Why do you think it is so good for us to have the Holy Spirit? Spend a minute or two and thank the Father for the ministry of the Spirit.

Thursday (11/14) — John 16:16-33

- Many people are confused about the heavenly Father. They think of him as an angry judge who would like nothing more than to vent his wrath on mankind were it not for the intervention of the loving Jesus. That is a wrong view. Reread 16:27. Write the answer to these questions:
 - What does the Father think toward us?
 - What are the two things the Father wants us to do?
 - Take a few moments and thank the Father for the answer to the first question, and talk to him about your response to the second question.
- In this passage Jesus speaks of his crucifixion and resurrection. In 16:33 he says the reason he is telling them of his ultimate victory over death is so that they will be able to take heart in difficult times. Write down two or three ways the knowledge of Jesus’ resurrection can help you take heart when things are hard.

Friday (11/15) — John 17:1-26

- Perhaps the most significant thing about this prayer is that it happened at all. Write down three reasons you believe Jesus was committed to pray to the Father.

Write down five reasons you are committed to pray to the Father.

- In 17:3, Jesus says eternal life is about knowing (having a personal relationship with) the Lord. That is our chief objective from today through eternity. What are three things you can do in the next seven days to seek to know him more?
- Beginning in 17:20, Jesus prays for us, believers in Christ who live today! The Bible teaches that he continues to pray for us (Hebrews 7:25). Write down three reasons it is encouraging to know that Jesus is praying to the Father for you today.
- (Extra Question | Don't include in email.) In 17:15-17 Jesus admits that this world is filled with sin and temptation, yet he doesn't pray that we would be taken out of the world, but that we would learn to live in the midst of this sin. Why would Jesus want us to learn to live in it rather than just taking us to heaven today?

Devotions to publish on 11/17

Monday (11/18) — Hebrews 13:12-14, Galatians 6:1-10

- Review the “Respond” questions on the reverse side of this devotion guide.
 - Why do Christians so often view their faith and walk with the Lord as a private matter? According to Scripture, what are Christians missing out on when they fail to foster close spiritual connections with other believers?
 - What are some practical ways believers can connect with other believers and live the Christian life together? What are the most common obstacles we face? How can we overcome those obstacles?

Tuesday (11/19) — John 18:1-18

- In 18:10, Peter acts without thinking or asking for wisdom. In 18:11, Peter is admonished by Jesus. Write down a couple ways you have acted hastily and regretted your actions. Talk with the Lord about how you can make sure those kinds of hasty decisions or words do not happen again.
- In 18:17, Peter denied being a follower of Jesus. See if you can write down three reasons he might have done that. Look back at your three reasons. Is there a lesson for you to learn in each of those? Talk to God about how you can be more consistent in your witness for Jesus.

Wednesday (11/20) — John 18:19-40

- In 18:25-27 we see Peter’s second and third denial of Jesus. This reminds us that it is easy for one sin to turn into a string of sins. When Peter denied Jesus the first time (18:17) and certainly felt the pain of guilt, what are a few things he should have done to keep that from turning into the beginning of a long slide into sin?
- In 18:28, the Jews who were trying to kill Jesus for no reason were extremely concerned that they did not break some silly law about ceremonial cleansing. If that were not so sad, it would be funny. But we often do something similar. We often make big deals out of really minor things and excuse some major errors and sins. Take a minute or two and ask the Lord to help you see if there are areas like that in your life.
- Barabbas was a robber in prison waiting to be executed. In 18:40, he learns that Jesus is going to take his place on the cross. Barabbas, the guilty one, is to be freed while Jesus, the innocent one, is going to take his place on the cross! Write three sentences describing how you think Barabbas must have felt and what he must have thought when he got the news. Then thank the Lord that he had done the same thing for you.

Thursday (11/21) — John 19:1-27

- Pilate believed that Jesus did not deserve to be executed and he wanted to release him, but he was pressured by the Jews to order Jesus crucifixion anyway (19:12). Peer pressure is as old as the Bible. Write down some instances in the last two weeks you have felt pressured to do something you knew was wrong. Talk with God about how you responded.
- The account of the trial and crucifixion might make someone believe God had lost control of the whole situation. But the minor fulfilled prophecy we see in 19:24 concerning the garments is a reminder that God had planned all of this out and was in complete control. Is there some area of your life that seems out of control? Write that down. Ask God to help you remember that nothing catches him by surprise. Ask God to remind you that he is wise, strong, and capable of getting you through any difficulty.
- It is a touching thing to see Jesus in the height of his agony still concerned about

the welfare of his mother (19:26-27). What can you do before the week is over to show your closest family members that you love and care for them?

Friday (11/22) — John 19:28 – 20:10

- In 19:30, Jesus said, “It is finished.” Write down a couple sentences about what you think Jesus was saying. Why did Jesus not say, “I am finished?” Spend a minute or two thanking him for this wonderful sacrifice.
- We see the actions of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus in 19:38-40. These men appeared to be secret followers of Jesus. They kept their faith hidden. While they did a very good deed of service in these verses, the Bible teaches us that we should not be secret followers, but rather bold, public followers. Write down three ways you are a secret follower. Talk to the Lord about each of these and how you can be more bold for your faith.
- We can see how excited/fearful/confused/grieved Peter and John were by reading of their foot race to the tomb in 20:3-4. What do you think was their primary emotion? Why were they racing to the tomb? How did their emotions change when they finally realized that Jesus had risen from the grave? What kind of emotions does knowledge of the resurrection stir in you?

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ABSTRACT

TRAINING MEMBERS AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS, IN THE USE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR THE MORTIFICATION OF PERSISTENT SIN

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This project is designed to train members at the First Baptist Church of Nacogdoches, Texas, in the use of select spiritual disciplines for the mortification of persistent sin. The process will begin with an assessment to determine the members' engagement with spiritual disciplines and their struggle with persistent sin. A six-week message series with accompanying devotions and discussion guides will be created and taught to increase their knowledge and impact their behavior in respect to the spiritual disciplines and persistent sin.

Chapter 1 introduces the project by reviewing the ministry context of FBCNac and exploring the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodology, definitions, and delimitations of the project. The next chapter provides the biblical and theological basis for sanctification, mortification and the spiritual disciplines. Chapter 3 addresses the specific approaches pastors and authors have utilized through the years to connect mortification and the spiritual disciplines. Chapter 4 outlines the project. Chapter 5 includes an evaluation of the project with suggestions for further development. Appendices include surveys, sermon outlines, evaluation rubrics, and a bibliography.

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