



Ears Up-Part 4

The Chronic Noise of the World

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Well, I dropped my cell phone this week. I've only dropped it about four times. I've had it for three days. No, that's not true. I've had it for about a year actually. And I do pretty well with cell phones. They usually go the duration for me, but I did drop it this week, which is always a frightening experience. But with my cat-like reflexes, I, you know, sometimes I try to kick it like a hacky sack, thinking maybe that'll break the fall. And I did get—I did get a bit of my shoe leather on the one I dropped this week, my phone—and it ends up crashing down face-down on the ground.

And I leaned over to pick it up. And you know how that is, like, oh, what am I gonna find? Turn it over—there it is, it's fine. It lights up, no cracks, you know, a little scuffed up here and there, but works just great. And so I'm happy. I do pretty well with my phones. They usually go the duration. They haven't every time; I've had a phone or two that they—they kind of slowly start to freak out. If you've had a phone like that, things just don't start working right; it does funny things. It freezes, it stops. Buttons don't work; you push one thing, something else happens.

And I thought about the way cell phones die. And I thought to myself, I'd much rather have a catastrophic death of a cell phone. I'd rather drop it, have it break, and then—bam—it's over. I need a new one. This one's no good anymore. I don't like it when they slowly die because it's frustrating. I never know: Is it not working, or am I not working it right? You know? Is this failing, is this not gonna make it, or is there something I did wrong, or maybe I hit the wrong button? I don't like it when it dies slowly because it's very, very confusing.

Now, with that in mind, I'd like you to turn to Luke chapter 8. What in the world does that have to do with Luke 8? I'll show you. Luke 8: we've been dealing with the parable of the four soils, and in the parable of the four soils we have Jesus talking about people who reject the word and those who receive the word. He puts it in terms of hearing—those who hear, have ears to hear, and those that don't have ears to hear. And I'm thinking to myself, well, then this should be the parable of the two soils. That's what I think: those who hear, those who don't hear it; those who accept it, those who reject it; those who get it, those who don't get it. Like, that's the two-soil parable.

But that's not the parable that Jesus tells. And last week, we looked at the second soil. A couple weeks ago—last time we were together—we looked at the second soil, and we said, well, here's the reason



there's more than two soils: because there are some soils—some people—that seem to hear it, they seem to get it. They don't reject it; they embrace it. But apparently they don't hear all of it; they don't embrace it rightly; they don't really get it. They have this—to put it in biblical terms—this faith, but it's not faith, as James talked about—James—that goes the duration. It's not faith that's real. It's not God-implanted faith. It's this artificial, human-derived faith. And so, in the end, it doesn't work out.

And we saw in soil two that some people's faith dies a catastrophic death. They hit the impact of some kind of trial or suffering, and quickly they fall away—immediately they're gone. Well then, it should be the parable of the three soils. Well, there's a different kind of artificial-faith death—when the faith starts to die slowly, when the defection takes place over time. That's why we have four soils: because while the rejecter is clear—they don't get it—you've got the acceptor, the one who hears it—that's the good soil bearing fruit. But then you've got two artificial kinds of person that sit in a church, hear the message; sit out there in the world, hear the gospel; come into the church and they embrace it. Some are with us until their faith is tested, and when it's tested, they're gone. Then there's that third soil that we're gonna look at today, verse number 14: they hear it, they're with us, and slowly they defect—slowly they take off—because of some chronic, ongoing pressures and temptations of the world.

Let's read it. Verse 14—Jesus explains his parable of the third soil, the one that fell among the thorns—and he says, “As for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear.” Okay, they seem to get it. They're embracing it, just like the second soil. “But as they go on their way”—from that point they get it, they embrace it, but they're living their lives—“they are choked by”—now he lists three things—“the cares and riches and pleasures of life.” Now, the syntax of this—you have to trust me on this—the grammar “of life” encompasses all three of those. So you could read it—it'd be a bit wordy—“the cares of life, the riches of life, and the pleasures of life.” Because as they go on their way, they're living in the real world. They're living their lives. And the problem is, this acceptance, this hearing, this faith—it gets choked out, because it's not genuine faith. It's artificial faith that eventually defects slowly because of cares, riches, and pleasures. We realize it's not real because it doesn't bear fruit; their fruit does not mature. There's no lasting fruit; they're not genuine Christians.

That triad of chronic pressures—cares, riches, and pleasures—are things that both church attenders who seem to hear the word, who have artificial faith, encounter; and they're things that real Christians with real faith (the fourth soil) encounter too, because we live in a world with cares, riches, and pleasures. So the question is: Is my faith genuine, saving faith? I may have even weathered some storms; I may feel like I came through some tests of my faith, and I'm still here; I think I'm gonna go the duration in this thing. Well, the difference will be, in the long run, how you deal with the chronic pressures and temptations of cares, riches, and pleasures.



Because Jesus gave us these three buckets, I want to look at these one at a time—each point derived from each word: cares, riches, and pleasures. And I'd like to take these and turn them, in some prescriptive way, into saying, "Let's make sure, if we're those of real faith"—and I'll word it this way—that you respond to cares, riches, and pleasures in a way that actually strengthens your faith and draws you to God, and does not instigate the slow defection of those with artificial faith. Did you follow that?

So let's look at each one of these, and you'll see as I word them, I want to word them in a way as though I hope—and I'm hopeful—that I'm speaking to many here this morning that have genuine, saving faith—the God-implanted, God-derived faith; not the artificial, human faith that defects in time, but the real, saving faith that James talks about, that bears fruit, that works and works on to the end, as Hebrews 2:14 says—it continues on.

Now, let's take these one at a time. "Cares." That's the word. You should know a little etymology here: it's the word in Greek that translates elsewhere where the word "anxiety" often is translated—"anxiety" or "anxieties," the "cares" (plural) of the world. There are things that—*merimna* is the noun here—and that is derived from a Greek verb *merimnaō*. And *rhizō* means to cut or divide. It has to do with our minds—*merimna*. And the idea is that my mind is split. The word I like to use for it is the "scatterbrain." I'm concerned about all these things. I'm not focused. And as you'll see as we look at a couple of passages, the antonym to this is a mind that is sincere and focused and single-minded. The anxious person, the worried person, is concerned about all these things because the pressure they feel in the world is: they gotta deal with that, and they gotta fix that, and they need a defense for that—I need an alarm system for that, I need a monitor for that—and I gotta have things in order because this is a dangerous world that I live in. And there's a lot of threats here. So I've got to take care of things. I need to have securities and defenses, and what I'll call safeguards.

Now, Jesus knew he was sending real disciples out into the real world. It's filled with threats and dangers and problems. But what he calls people to do, when we as people of real faith encounter those, is—he says, you need to learn, number one on your outline, to trust me. Trust me. You've got to learn to trust God, not safeguards, because all kinds of things in this world will tempt you to say, "If I just have this, then I'll be okay. I need this protection, and I'm worried about my safety here and my kids here and the finances here, so I need all of these safeguards in place, and then I'll be okay." It's about where your trust is. The scatterbrained—the *merimna*—those who have minds that are split and scattered everywhere, they're the anxious and worried people. And that anxious and worried temptation will reveal that some of you five years from now, ten years from now, fifteen years from now didn't have real faith—because you're gone—because we're gathering together talking about trusting in Christ, putting our confidence in God, and eventually you're gonna go, "These people are living on cloud nine, they're 'pie in the sky.' They don't get it. We live in the real world. There are problems and issues here."



As I said, Jesus often addressed the disciples saying, “You’re going to enter into the world, and when you enter into the world, it’s going to be a scary place. And there’s gonna be a lot of danger there.” I want to look at two passages in the same chapter—in Luke chapter 12—that deal with this: the instruction from Christ regarding how real disciples should view the threats and problems in the world.

And as you’re turning to Luke chapter 12, I’d like you to remember that whenever Jesus speaks of faith, he’s got a kind of faith in mind that he analogizes from time to time with the faith of children. Now, I know I’ve illustrated this to death, but the bottom line is, when my kids were little and we said, “Time to get in the van, we’re leaving,” they never asked me about how much gas I have in the tank. “Is my insurance paid up? Is your navigation system working? Do you know where you’re going? Are you sure you turned right on that street or should you have turned left?” They never asked me. They were just like, “Okay.” Why? Because they’re children. And they know Mom and Dad—they’re Mom and Dad—and if they’re driving, they’re okay. Now, if I sent them with someone else—oof—but if they’re going with Mom and Dad, it’s okay. I trust them. Jesus says, if you trust me, it’s like the trust of a child. That’s what the word faith means—trust—*pustule*—the idea of real confidence in Dad.

Now, there are a lot of threats in the world, but as it’s put poetically in Psalm 23, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” and because of faith, “I will fear no evil,” because God is with me. Real Christian faith learns to not fear in the face of threats because we understand what it is to entrust ourselves to God.

Luke chapter 12—very dramatic passage—starting in verse 4, when he says, “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body.” Now, that seems absurd to me. “Don’t fear the one that can kill”—what? What? Of course I’m going to fear the one who can kill the body. I could send you to places in the world right now, and you would be afraid because people can kill you. Now, this is not speaking of the kind of, you know, sensation that you get when you turn down the wrong street in some urban area, or you go to someplace in another country and there are threats and they see you and you’re an American; you got money and they’re going—oh, I understand. It’s like getting on the top rung of a ladder as you’re painting in your living room. Clearly there are some natural concerns about your safety. I get that. What we’re talking about here is the real, profound problem of anxiety and worry that says, “Now wait a minute, what is your real concern here?” He says, if you think about even those who can kill your body—which certainly would put you on edge—I want you to know that real, profound fear, you shouldn’t have that, because after they kill you, there’s nothing else they can do.



Now, this is a contrast—by comparison, by the magnitude of the comparison—there’s no reason to fear because even if I get mugged this afternoon and parceled out and they take pieces of my body in different directions and I die a horrific death today, after they’re done with that, they’re done. There’s nothing else they can do. Now, that doesn’t sound very comforting. But in light of this, in verse 5, he says there’s something worse to fear: “I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed”—and he has the power and authority to do that—“also has the power and authority to cast you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.” Jesus—no one ever posts that kind of stuff. These are not, you know, Facebook status updates this afternoon: “Hey, I got a great verse from Jesus, right? Fear the one who can kill you and throw you into hell—yes, I tell you, fear him.” But that, though, is the very forthright—I mean, bold—Christ, who says, if you just want to get your life in perspective, get this in perspective: God holds all that authority.

Now, here’s the thing: if he were my enemy right now, I would be in a perpetual state of fear regarding being cast into hell. But the next verse reminds me the whole purpose of the coming of Christ is to make peace with God. Now he says, it’s like five sparrows sold for two pennies. You want to talk about hard contrast in literature? I’ve just thought about the fires of hell and being afraid of... now I’m talking about birds—five sparrows sold for two pennies. Not one of them is forgotten. What are you doing to my emotions here, Christ? Well, here’s the thing: the only one you should fear is the one who has sent his Son to die for you. And what he’s done is taken away the threat of eternal punishment. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ” (quote Romans 8:1). Therefore, I have a completely different mindset about this world. If not one little sparrow is forgotten before God, and his providence and his oversight, his administration goes over even the little birds, then—man—look at my life. He must care for me more than he does even the hairs on my head are all numbered. He’s catalogued my whole life. “Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

If I were to put you on a plane this afternoon and we fly to, you know, the Bagram air base in Afghanistan, and I say, “Hey, a little Sunday afternoon field trip.” You got in the plane; you didn’t know where I was taking you, obviously. So we get to Afghanistan, and I said, “Oh, it’s really heating up right now. We’re gonna get out on the tarmac here; we’re gonna get in a Jeep, and I got this gunnery sergeant—he’s gonna take us into a really hostile area in Afghanistan. So let’s go.” Well, you wouldn’t be very keen on that. But you would feel, I trust—I mean poetically—like David walking through the valley of the shadow of death. And the question is: do you trust your instinctive ideas about “I think it’d be safe if we went here... you know, that looks like a safe place to go; I want to go there. I’m a little concerned about what might happen to me, so I think we ought to do this”? Or would you look at the gunnery sergeant and say, “You tell me what we ought to do. I’ll trust your leadership”?

If I send you into hostile territory and I’ve got a qualified, strong, intelligent guide, I don’t want you to trust your instincts. I don’t want you to worry about what you think would make you safe. I want you to trust in your guide. Now, the guide—Christ in our case—is never going to call us to be careless, stupid,



foolish. He certainly wants prudence in your life. But there are things that this world does in caring for their own safety and their own protection—and I’m not just talking about violence, physical; but think of all the things that make people a worried, scatterbrained mess. And the Bible says, trust me.

Let’s get down to those kinds of things. Drop down to verse 22—you’re in Luke 12. He addresses the everyday concerns of life. He says to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be”—there’s our word in the verbal form—“anxious.” Same word that we have over there in Luke chapter 8, verse 14. Don’t be anxious; don’t be scatterbrained about your life. Don’t be concerned and anxious about what you’re going to eat, about your body, what you’re going to put on. Those things are important; you’ve got to have those. But life is more than food and the body more than clothing. “Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they don’t have storehouses to store things up, and yet God feeds them. Now how much more value are you than the birds?” Now that—remind you, verse 7—talking about birds again. They seem to be flitting about mindlessly. God doesn’t want you to be a mindless bird. But if you want to make a comparison about how the birds are taken care of by the providence of God, then what are you worrying about if you understand how important, as a child of God, you are? Trust your Dad. Trust him.

The world is scurrying about to have every safeguard put in place so they will be okay. And the Bible says, those concerns that life is going to present you—if you’ve got a choice to make: “Do I try to fortify my life with the safeguards, or do I take reasonable precautions and trust God?” Trust God, the Bible says. Because verse 25: anxiety is not helpful. Here’s our word again: being concerned or anxious doesn’t help; it doesn’t add a single hour to the span of your life. “If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?”

Now, I don’t have time for a sidebar on the sovereignty of God. But you do understand God’s sovereign provision in your life is so absolute that the day of your death, as it says in Psalm 139, has already been established. And as I like to say, you are immortal until that day. Does that give you license to be careless, flippant, testing the Lord? No, absolutely not. We’re not gonna throw ourselves off the pinnacle of the temple. But there’s no reason to fear. If it makes sense to bring the gospel to Guatemala, then don’t talk to me about what kind of safeguards and concerns I should have and how foolish I am as an Orange County parent to send a kid down there. See what I’m saying? Stop with that. I don’t worry about that. My kid is immortal until God has his number called, and if it’s not now, he can walk around, pass out Bibles in Iran, and be okay. Do you understand what I’m saying? We need to—we need to trust God with our lives. You need to believe that God is a God who has not forgotten a single sparrow and doesn’t forget you. And if that’s the case, the troubles of life, the concerns of life, the things that make you say, “I need another safeguard in place”—God’s saying, “Gotta trust me. Learn to trust me.”



Now again, I hope in the discussion questions this week, you'll see that it's never a license for folly—for testing the Lord. But obviously, anxiety is not the answer. God wants a single-minded trust in him. I love the comparison as he continues—the lilies of the field, the comparison between the world and us. But he talks first about the lilies: if you look at them, they are growing; they don't toil, they don't spin; they don't sit in front of mirrors, right? But Solomon, even with all his regalia as the king in the heyday, the golden era of Israel, was not arrayed like one of these. "If God so clothes the grass that's alive today in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you"—here's the key—"of little faith." What are you worrying about?

Now, here's the comparison I want to talk about. I want to talk about the difference between the orphans in the world and the adopted children of God. I understand non-Christians trying to grab every safeguard, protection, and security they can get. I get it. They don't have a Dad like we do. I understand that. But I'm not an orphan. And he speaks about it. He says we should not be seeking—and that's a strong word, *zēteō*—to strive, to aim at, to fixate on. I'm not going to fixate on whether or not I'm going to have enough to eat or if I'm going to have something to drink. I'm not going to be worried. "For all the nations of the world seek"—same word—"they strive, they aim, they fixate on these things, and your Father knows you need them." And he knows what you need. "Instead"—you want to focus and strive and aim and fixate on something?—"fixate on this": here's the single-minded concern of the Christian—"his kingdom." And all these other things you're concerned about—that the world is concerned about—that God's gonna take care of, they'll be added to you. "Fear not, little flock"—now that great picture, "The Lord is my shepherd," little flock—"it's God's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." That's what he's concerned about. I want to focus on God and his kingdom. I'm gonna focus on God and his agenda on the planet. I want to be concerned about it. If that takes me to Guatemala, if it takes me to Amman, Jordan, if it takes me to Compton—if it takes me anywhere in this world—I'm going to realize this: I will be prudent, I will be thoughtful, I will take reasonable precautions, and I will do it without fear. And I will live in this life for the glory of God because I'm learning to trust God and not scurry about as the world does for all their safeguards.

I've got to turn you to this text—as though I had time—2 Chronicles 16. And just to illustrate this real quickly with Asa—now, I don't want to throw Asa under the bus (speaking of throwing people under the bus) because I may meet him one day, I don't know—but it looks a lot like the third soil in Jesus's parable. King Asa—the third king of the divided kingdom in the south, okay? That's the lineage of Christ from David in the south—was the third king of the divided kingdom. And he starts good. He's got all these reforms. He seems to trust God, but he doesn't end well. The worries, concerns of the world start to overpower this guy.

Now, I've told this story before, but it's been a while. So this is a key, pivotal chapter here for Asa. Obviously Asa's the king of the south. The king of the north starts to wage war against Asa in the south—right? You know, Israel split in half. War is raging there, and Asa decides to call his buddy—



not his buddy—foreign king, King Ben-Hadad, of Damascus in Syria. And he says, “Listen, I know you’ve got a peace treaty with the northern king and the northern tribes of Israel, but I’d like you to break it. How about I send over a Porsche?” He basically bribes the king of Syria to break the treaty that he has. Now, that’s underhanded; that’s slimy; that’s not good. That’s under-the-table politics. But he does it so that the pressure on his kingdom will be relieved because he’s afraid the northern tribes may take over the southern kingdom. He’s afraid. The cares and concerns of his life—he feels threatened.

God sends in the prophet Hanani—verse 7, 2 Chronicles 16:7—“At that time Hanani the seer”—that’s the old term for the prophet in the Old Testament—“came to Asa king of Judah, and he said to him, ‘Because you have’”—now here’s the word that can be translated trust, faith—“‘relied’”—you’ve trusted in, you’ve put your confidence—“‘on the king of Syria, and you did not rely on the Lord your God, here’s the thing: the army of the king of Syria has escaped you. It’s gone. I mean, you could have spread your leadership, but you’re not going to. Think back in your résumé: the Ethiopians, the Libyans—they were a huge army with great chariots and horsemen, and yet because you relied on the Lord, the Lord took care of you. He made peace; he let you win.’” And—trust me—three times the word “relied”: you didn’t rely on me, you used to rely on me, you should have relied on me. Where’s your trust?

Drop down to verse 12. It wasn’t just the threats of his life; it was the physical body that he lived in—scared him, like a lot of you facing health concerns. “In the thirty-ninth year of the reign of Asa he was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe.” Oh, doesn’t that scare—“Doctor says it’s getting worse. The last test was better than this one. Man, it’s really—it’s looking severe.” “Yet even in his disease, he did not”—another way to say it—“didn’t rely on the Lord; he didn’t seek the Lord; he didn’t put his trust in the Lord. He didn’t rely on the Lord, but he sought help from the physicians.”

Now, are alliances with foreign kings an okay thing to do to help bolster your army to defeat an enemy? Nothing wrong with that, right? Nothing wrong with that. The problem is that Asa went out and trusted in those alliances. In this case, he showed that he wasn’t trusting in God, because that alliance should not have been formed because he had to bribe the king to break his promise. That wasn’t good. In this case, though—nothing wrong with seeing the physician. We’re studying a gospel by Dr. Luke—a physician. Clearly in the Bible we see people going to physicians, and there’s nothing wrong with doctors. But in this text, it says Asa, when he got scared, “Oh, I know the doctors can help me.” That’s an expression of his trust. He relied on, he sought them, he put his confidence in them. Nothing wrong with calling your doctor when your tests come back and they’re bad. It’s just—you better turn first to put your trust in God before you pick up the phone to call the doctor. If the doctor is helpful in restoring your health, he is a tool in God’s good providence in your life. And you need to see it that way. Because he didn’t seek God, he didn’t trust God, he didn’t rely on God; he sought the



physicians, he trusted the physicians, he relied on the physicians. Didn't end well. This euphemism sounds so nice: "He slept with his fathers"—he died—"dying in the forty-first year of his reign."

Take a lesson from King Asa. Your Christian life may have started well with lots of songs and good feelings about trusting in God, but when the trials and troubles and difficulties and threats and problems of life keep pressuring you, the question is: are you going to trust God, or reach out and grasp the human, worldly safeguards and say, "That'll fix it, that'll help me, that'll protect me"?

We skipped over verse 9—it's probably the most familiar verse in all of 2 Chronicles—and Hanani, in the middle of... between these two crises, says this: "You know, Asa, the eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth"—here's this anthropomorphic statement regarding God—doesn't have eyes that are darting back and forth, but it's like a computer scanning the files. He's looking at the people of the earth "to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him." What is that in the context? Relying on him, seeking him, confidence in him. It's the singularity of that idea—that my trust is in God. Yeah, when the shells are firing over the, you know, the open Jeep that we're driving in and we're in hostile territory, I understand the reasonable concern for your safety, your health, whatever it might be. But our trust is in our Captain, our Shepherd. "Don't fear, little flock." Where we're headed—the kingdom—God has seen fit to grant that to us. Stop being worried and anxious. It can reveal your faith is artificial.

The second word Jesus uses is "riches," which, by the way, is the world's biggest safeguard of all, right? I don't know what you're worried about, but if you have ten trillion dollars in the bank, I guess you would worry a little bit less, because whatever the problem is, I can buy something—a defense shield, monitor, an alarm system, a toll gate, I don't know. I can have all the best medicines in the world; I can see the best doctors. But just like all the other safeguards in life, money is really futile when it comes to this. Money—much like Psalm 127 says—you can have all the safeguards, the watchman can stay awake and watch the city, but unless the Lord watches the city, they stay awake in vain. All the money in the bank can never provide you the security that your relationship with God can provide you because he is sovereign. He's in charge, and unless he watches your life, it's futile.

Money. Now, riches are intoxicating. They're not only motivated by the sense of my security; they're also nice to have because they give me a lot of nice things that feel good and things that I'd prefer. And you're not ever going to be out of the realm of money; you're going to need it—whether it's paying the bill in your nursing home at the end of your life, or taking your family out to lunch today. You're going to need money. And God has called you to solve the problem of not having any money—to go to work. "If a man doesn't work, he shouldn't eat." You gotta work. That is your calling. So we all have to go out and do something to make money. That's our lives. Christians have to do that.



The problem is, our artificial faith can be choked out, and it can be proved that I really don't love God, when I interface with this stuff called money—finances. But I'm always interacting with it. I'm spending all these hours a week getting a paycheck. So I have to earn a paycheck, and I have to work to get a paycheck. But the Bible says here: wait; be careful, because the riches of this world can choke out faith—artificial faith—but it can choke it out. So how do I interact with money? How do I deal with my job, my career? I've got an opportunity for advancement. I can work at this place; they pay more. I can do this over here, and that'll give me another client—that'd be good for my family's financial... I get all that. How do we deal with it? Because we've got to earn money, but I'm not supposed to be choked out by money. What does that look like?

Number two on your outline: let's put it this way—and then I'll prove it to you from Colossians 3—you realize that God would have us work at faithfulness, not at finances. Work at faithfulness, not finances. My work, your work—whether you're a missionary, Bible translator, architect, you know, sanitation department engineer (whatever they called "trash man")—doesn't matter what you do. The Bible says your work should be with a focus on faithfulness. And we can fill in the object of this—faithfulness to God in my work. They will give me a paycheck for doing that, but that's my focus. As soon as my focus shifts to money, I've got a serious problem.

Let me show you this from Colossians chapter 3. Now, if you really know your Bible, you think, "Oh, he's gonna go to verse 22." I'm not gonna go to verse 22. I'm gonna go to verse 5. I want you to look at verse 5, Colossians chapter 3, verse 5. I want to show you how subtle this is. Paul lists these things that are to be put to death in our lives. "Put to death therefore whatever is earthly in you." These things—they run rampant in the lives of people that don't have citizenship in heaven; they are not children of the King. These are the kinds of things we've got to restrain—so much so, the verb is "kill it," put it to death—things like what? Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the last one here in this verse, "covetousness." Covetousness—Paul takes the time to add a comparison of what is at the heart of covetousness. He calls it "idolatry," which, if you were raised in Sabbath School, the very first thing that you learned, I would think, would be the Ten Commandments. And at the top of that list, in Exodus 20, is "You shall have no other gods before me." Can't make those graven images. You can't have idols. You cannot serve and worship and pursue and fixate on anything but your Creator. The God of the universe needs to be your God. You have no other gods before the real God. He says covetousness is idolatry.

Now, wait a minute—all these other things are bad too. They are. But it gets to the heart of what it means to relate to the living God—for you to be covetous. Now, that's an old-style word. I wish the ESV translators maybe chose a different word. Some translations use the word "greed": put to death greed in your life, which is idolatry. The idea is that in my heart, when I fix my heart and my focus on



finances—when I think, “I need that money and all the stuff that that money buys,” and my focus becomes that—the Bible says you’re actually serving that, and when you’re serving something other than God, you’re in idolatry.

Now, he elaborates on this—I think this is the elaboration—in verse 22. Okay, I’m going to go to verse 22 now. In Colossians 3, this passage right here is an unpacking of that simple phrase that covetousness is idolatry. Notice what he now says: “Bondservants”—even if you’re conscripted (which is not American slavery; Greco-Roman first-century slavery much different—there were dentists and lawyers and professors that were slaves). The point is, you’re completely indentured, and you’re a part of this organization, or you’re owned by this person or this conglomerate, and you work for them; they house you, they feed you—that is your job. If you’re a bondservant—you’re, you know, you don’t have freedom—“obey them in your work,” because you’re always conscripted for a reason; you’ve got some talent or some gift or some ability or strength at least. Now they’re going to tell you what to do, because you have signed up to be this slave. So “obey them in everything”—those that are your earthly masters. Now, this is the problem: I’m working for a boss, and there’s a paycheck attached. I get that. But when you work for your master, and he says, “Do this,” and you do it, don’t do it, by the way, “by way of eye-service”—right? When they’re looking at you, “Okay, I’ll do it. Now look busy; boss comes along”—or as “people-pleasers.” “Well, I want my boss to really like me.” But do it with—now here’s the idea again; you’ll see it throughout the study—“sincerity of heart,” that singularity, the focus on what’s important. It’s kind of a—it’s the difference between the scatterbrain (“I need to be fearing the Lord”—the fear that’s cast out, the fear of condemnation that we looked at in Luke chapter 12). This is different. Now I am a child of God, and he loves me; he supports me. My fear—it’s a different kind of fear. As Bunyan says in his *Treatise on Fear*, which is a great book you should buy on Kindle for 99 cents and read—what’s the point? I fear him as though he’s my Dad. I’m not fearing he’s going to cast me into hell; I fear, though, that as a worker for God, that I serve and worship him, that he’s pleased with my performance, with my behavior, with how I live—now “fear him” in your job. Architect, I don’t care what you do—doesn’t matter what it is, whether it looks “godly” or not—the point is, do your work, fearing the Lord.

“And whatever you do”—verse 23—“work heartily”—there’s our Christian work ethic—“as for the Lord”—now I’ve got to work; I’ve got to earn a paycheck. God says I can’t eat unless I work. So I’ve got to work to get a paycheck. Now when I get that paycheck, I realize I’m really not working for the paycheck. I’m not working for the boss. I’m not even working to please the boss at the end. I’m working to serve the Lord, not for men, “knowing that from the Lord you will receive”—now, you put this in capital letters—“THE INHERITANCE as your reward.” He’s—the ultimate paycheck’s—coming from him. “You are serving the Lord Christ.” Now, in the first century, you would call your boss the *kyrios*—the Greek word for “lord”; that’s the word here. And we don’t get it today because it’s an old English—it’s some medieval word, “lord.” But the idea is, it rings in their ears as “the boss”: the Boss, the Messiah; the Boss, Christ. Your boss is Christ.



I've said this to my kids from the time they were little: listen, your work ethic consists of this—going in and doing whatever it is that you do, doing it well, doing it hard, working hard at it as though you're serving Christ. Now, if you're doing some illegal work, you're going to get fired, because you're gonna realize working for Christ may come in conflict with your job, and you may lose your job—that's great, no problem. But if you're doing honest, virtuous work of some kind, and it's not illegal or immoral, you're going to serve Christ in your work, and you probably will be a valued employee; you probably will be promoted; you probably will earn a bigger paycheck—because your boss is above your boss, and you see him when you go to work. And you focus on that. Do you follow me on this? Will that create bigger paychecks? Probably. Maybe. I don't know—depends on your industry or whatever. Now you're gonna interact with money—yeah, you're gonna get a paycheck and probably get some bonuses, and you're gonna have to invest those; you're gonna have to work in trying to buy a house and all that and pay your utilities—I get all that. But you're never working for the paycheck. You're not even really working for the boss. You recognize that you work for them and obey them because you're working for the Lord.

I like to spell that out with that one word that I put in that point: “faithfulness.” I want to, in my work—I want you to, in your work, whatever your work is—aim at being faithful to Christ. And he wants me to work hard, and work well, and to do it excellently. And then the finances—that's just the byproduct, and that pays the rent. Fantastic. It's never my master.

Now, if I had time, I would take you to some classic texts like Luke chapter 12, verses 13–21—that'd be a good homework assignment. But I think maybe—on the back of the worksheet—I may have already put this one in: Ecclesiastes 5:10–20—a great text. Those would be homework assignments, because we're out of time for the rest of what I wrote down here.

I should mention this: don't—Ecclesiastes 5:10—the problem with you ever running into an intoxication with money is that it will be like a drunkard—you'll never get enough. That's how that text starts. Which, by the way, I should always, always quote this classic text, but I figure you already know it: 1 Timothy chapter 6. 1 Timothy chapter 6 talks about “the love of money being the root of all evil.” Some, for craving for it, “have wandered away from the faith.” Here's the faith—here's where the real faith is—here's where the faith is taught. They split. As 1 John 2 says, “They went out from us because they were not really of us. If they would have been of us, they would have remained with us.” What's the point? There are some people, because of this craving for finances—they're not focusing on faithfulness to Christ in their work; they're working for a pile of money. That leads them away—as the third soil is trying to illustrate.



Well, cares and riches—safeguards and finances—sometimes both of those are the pursuit of something else. Oftentimes, they’re a means to an end. The third word Jesus uses—which really can encompass all the things often that drive people away in their defection from Christ—he uses the word “pleasures.” Pleasures. Talk about that, lastly, for just a minute.

Pleasures. If you did take time to read Ecclesiastes 5 at some point this week—my wish that you would—you’ll see that in that text it warns us against being in love with a paycheck, loving money and the things that money buys. And it says this: if you can learn to be content in your work—just to quote the words here—to “accept your lot in life,” to accept your lot, and rejoice in your toil, and God gives you the power to enjoy it—this is a gift from God. So, let me just say this: enjoyment—gift from God. God against pleasure? No, he’s not against pleasure. The problem in all these things—just like finances; he’s not against finances, and he’s not against prudence, taking reasonable precautions—it’s just when those become our fixated focus, they draw us away from Christ. And when it comes to finances and when it comes to pleasure, I’ve got to recognize those are simply byproducts. They may or may not come. They certainly are not the focus of my life. I do not—as the verb says at the beginning of verse 31—I do not “seek” them.

Now, that may seem harsh, but the reason I don’t pursue them—as the end of Ecclesiastes says—is because the answer for all things is in the One who created us. The end of the whole story is: I learn to fear God; I serve him; I know I’m going to give an account to him. My focus is on him.

Now, let me think of a particular way in which I focus on him, and I’ll explain this in a minute. Let’s use the word “worship.” That needs to be my pursuit. Number three: let’s word it that way, then I’ll try to explain it—pursue more worship, not more fun. Oof—that doesn’t sound very American—“pursuit of happiness.” Listen, here’s the problem: you pursue happiness, you pursue fun, you pursue even joy—it’s an elusive thing. You’ll never get it. It’ll all be temporary. If you know your book of Ecclesiastes—chapter 5 talks about money; chapter 2 talks about pleasure. He starts with that, and he lists all these things that bring people pleasure. He says, “I just went after it. I did not withhold myself anything that I thought would bring me pleasure.” And, in the end, the reprise of the song: “Vanity, vanity, chasing after the wind—all of it’s vanity.”

I understand for those of us that don’t have opportunity for those pleasures, you think, “Well, let me try them.” It’s like the guy who gives his testimony—I often say—he wins the lottery, drives the Porsche, and he’s got two Ferraris in his garage. And he says, “You know, I had all that, and I was, you know, a Major League Baseball star, and you know what? None of it satisfied me.” And I think, “Well, let me try. Give me all your stuff, then.” I think it’d make me a little happier than I am right now. But the



point is—as I often say—at some place in our lives we need to start listening to the testimonies and believing: this is the universal expression of the world. It really doesn't do what it promises to do.

It's like the Pike in Long Beach—old-timers, smile at me if you remember the Pike in Long Beach. Now, they destroyed it when I was a kid, but I remember going to the Pike. And, of course, we were a blue-collar family; we knew the value of a dollar. And I'd always see a little carnival guy—"C'mon, step right there"—and I always wanted to get into my pocket to get the money to do this thing. And my dad never let me do it. A terrible dad, I know. "What are you doing? This is never going to be what you think it is." It never provides what you think it will—especially at the Pike at the end of the Pike's lifecycle. It was not—it was a seedy place. Not a great place. They finally tore it down in '79, I think it was. What's the point? The world's constantly doing that as you go on your way. Here's these carnival guys: "Hey, right down here—come do this." You're always going to be beckoned. The constant, chronic pressure and temptation is: "This will feel good; this will be exciting; this will make you happy. Come down here." Amen? Happiness—you won't get it. Not in fun, really. You'll have it maybe for a season, but then it goes away.

You can't even aim at joy. The Bible doesn't want us to aim at joy. It wants us to aim at the thing that will bring us joy. And the thing that brings us joy in the Bible is our focus on God. Now, I use the word "worship." Why? Because that is a basic, fundamental expression of humanity—to go before our Creator and give him worship. What does that mean in the Bible? Here's another word in Hebrew—well, the English translation of it—is the word "to ascribe" or "to credit." Worship is ascribing to God the things that are true—crediting God with who he is. Now, here's the thing about those who are rightly related to him: he is our Father. We start talking about the greatness of God; we start thanking God for his provisions and all that he does give us. We start now wanting what we have, and we stop sitting there saying, "I don't have the things I want," and we start to experience joy. That was kind of profound—did you catch what I just said there? That idea of recognizing that in worship, I celebrate the God who is—the God that I have as my Father. I have him right now, in a long-distance relationship, albeit—I mean that because I'm seeing through a glass dimly, one day face to face—and my faith will one day be sight. But for now, I have a relationship. And in that relationship, I can express to him all that is true about who he is. And in that comes something that reminds me that what I have is worth celebrating—that's what worship is. And I start to realize that what I have really starts to overshadow all the hurts and pangs of what I don't have. And I can begin to enjoy what I do have.

A classic example of this is in Acts chapter 16, verse 25—when (and you can really start in verse 23) we have the expression of that text showing that Paul and Silas had been beaten with rods, the mob had just attacked them; they get put in stocks because they said, "Do not let these two guys go," and they're in the basement, if you will, of the prison in Philippi, in stocks, having been beaten with many blows. And around midnight—though—it describes them as what? You know the verse: "singing praises to God." They chose worship—worship in a place where they don't have a good night's sleep; they don't



have their favorite pillow; they don't have a blanket; they don't have freedom to, you know, roll over—they're in stocks; they're nursing their wounds. They don't have a lot of things that they want. But they're celebrating and increasing the want of the things that they have. And what they have in that situation is the God of the universe, who says, "I am your Father." And you know what? The guy next to you in stocks—Silas—he's your brother. And even in that there's a gift that Paul knows he's experiencing that he could have been deprived of. And there's real, genuine worship. Joy becomes the byproduct of focusing on the God who is, and all the good that he is, and all the good that he provides—though he doesn't provide a nice hotel room for you right now. He's given you Silas. And you sit there with a relationship with the living God that the guys around you don't have, and the people that beat you don't have.

More worship can change everything about our disposition. Maybe one last text—let's turn to this one: Psalm 16. Psalm 16. David—you can see in the superscription of this psalm it's a Davidic psalm. And remember, so many of the psalms written by David when he was running as a fugitive—or they were written in light of that season of his life—when he talks about refuge and all that. Well, if you're the king and you're marching around on red carpet—well then, you know—"Wow, what's that all about?" Well, you don't sing those kinds of songs, perhaps, then—or you do only in remembrance of a time when you ran from Saul, hiding in caves, and your face was plastered on all the walls of the post offices in Jerusalem. Why? Because you're hated by society and you're hated by the king, and you've got a bounty on your head; you're going to be killed. You can see a lot of that peeking through the verbiage of this text when he says in verse 1, "Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge." Take refuge in hard times. "I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.'"

Now, that's true whether you're the king or a fugitive. "As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight." I think Paul—strapped in this bar over his feet next to Silas—there had to be some joy in that, even in the midst of his trial and his pain. "The sorrows of those who run after another god"—small "g"—"shall multiply." They may be doing all right now—the guys that are oppressing us—they may seem to be doing a lot better than us. But their sorrows are going to increase exponentially. "Their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out, or take their names"—of their false gods—"on my lips." "The Lord is my"—like, this is the focused mindset of the psalmist here, David—"chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places." If this indeed was a thought harkening back to fugitive days, when David was a fugitive, you think to yourself, "You don't have any property." I understand that. "But what I do have is really good. The lot lines have fallen in nice places for me." Why? Because what you have—currently, not what I'm going to have—"indeed I have a beautiful inheritance."

"I bless the Lord"—his worship—"who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me." Here, again, the focus: "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken." Now again, that's a picture that begs the idea of him being hunted down—but he's



firm; he's okay. "Therefore my heart is glad"—there's the byproduct. It's "therefore"—you see, it's not the focus; it's not the purpose. He's not trying to have a glad heart; he's focusing on God, "and therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure." Well, when we read 1 Samuel, it didn't look that way. But that is what happened. God preserved him. "For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your Holy One see corruption." Now, of course, this is applied messianically in the New Testament in Peter's preaching, but you do understand he had the anointing oil as the king poured on his head; he had a future inheritance that was coming. He, during this fugitive period for over a decade, recognized that God was not going to give up on him; he was going to survive, and he would one day have God's promise through Samuel fulfilled. "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." And often we read this—perhaps stretching the text too far—to think eschatologically: "Oh, when we get there, it'll be great." But he's already said, did he not earlier, that God is—verse 8—at his right hand right now. You know what? There's where my pleasure is. There's where I have fulfillment.

Is God against you having a great week? No. Feeling good feelings, no happiness, no joy? Of course not. But we need to aim at the right things and see joy as the byproduct of the pursuit of your Creator. Pursue more worship in your life, not more fun. When the carnival acts say, "Come down here—this will be great," you need to see that the pursuit of pleasure is always a loser. It's always a rip-off. It's always deception. It's the pursuit of God that allows that byproduct.

Now, as I wrap up the service, I will send you from the chapel down the hall to the dining hall. We will all eat lunch there; we'll dismiss; then you'll go back to your monastic dormitories. You can spend time reading the Bible; we'll gather for afternoon vespers—prayers. We'll gather real briefly; I'll have a few of the pastors read you some spiritual insights from church history. Then you'll go to dinner, and then we'll retire in our monastic dormitories, for tomorrow morning we'll wake up and have devotions, and I'll lead those in the morning.

Oh—no, that's right. This isn't a monastery. You're not a monk. That was weird, Mike. No, follow me. Listen: like Christ, I'm sending you on your way. We're not monastic; we're not in a monastery; you're not a monk. Those are not biblical concepts. Those are unbiblical concepts. You hear the word; you receive it, I hope, with a God-endowed faith. Now you're going to go Monday through Saturday, and you're going to encounter the cares of the world; you're going to be entwined with the riches of the world; you're going to be beckoned to enjoy the pleasures of the world. And the question is: are those going to take your life and cause some slow defection, and your love and devotion to God will dissipate? Or are those—as I've tried to word in these points—going to drive you to trust God more, to be more faithful, to worship him more? I want them to be the catalyst for the latter. And if they are, it'll be evidence of genuine faith in your life.



No monasteries. This is the design of God: for us to gather, to encourage one another, to try and stir one another up to love and good deeds—and then you go on your way. Those with real faith will go the duration. And that’s our hope and our trust, and we want there to be clarity in your own heart about that.

Why don’t you stand with me, and I’ll let you go. Pray with me, please.

God, cares of this world will always be a factor. They will always be a chronic pressure point. As I put it, we’re always going to have things that threaten us and our well-being. We’re going to have medical issues that will probably only get worse throughout our lives, that will try to incite and engender fear and anxiety. But what we want to learn to do—no matter what the problem is—is we want to learn to trust you. It may not be some catastrophic storm like we looked at last time, but it could just be that constant dripping, daily grind of life, and it’s going to test our faith.

Of course, money is always a problem—always an issue. It’s always trying to entice us: “If we just had more money, things would be better. If we just had more money, it would work out better.” But of course, we need to be good workers—faithful workers—with a Christian work ethic. But help us to see that as an act of worship—being faithful to you—and not grubbing for and chasing after and seeking, or—as it’s put in the parallel text—running after all these things like the pagans do.

And lastly, God, the idea of pleasure—always harkening us to compromise your truth. Let us realize that in this world we’ve got a much more profound and lasting truth. As Augustine said—that idea that our hearts in ourselves were made for you, and we’re going to be restless till our hearts find rest in you. And as Lewis rightly echoed in his rendition of that in *Mere Christianity*, we’ve got to realize these desires will never be fulfilled in this world. It simply reminds us that we were made for another. All the joys of this earthly life are just echoes and mirages—as he said—of that ultimate fulfillment. And so for us, God, we want in our own hearts and thinking to constantly put our focus on you—to set the Lord continually before us—that we might worship and thank you for the things that you do, helping to create and boost and nourish that love for all the things we already have, and quelling all those desires for all the things we think we want.

Give us a much more holistic relationship with you. And by that I mean, may the whole Christian life that we experience be a kind of Christian life that sees the world as less and less important, because the cares of this world and the love of this world and the desires of this world—they’re all passing away. But the one who endures forever—as 1 John 2 says—is the one who does the will of God. So keep us



fixated on that this week, God, and give—give us—grant us great success in that by the power of your Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.