



## **Devoted & Useful – Part 2**

### **Clarifying Our Identity**

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Well, being human as we are, all of us, I trust. We like to be liked. And that's nothing new. That's as old as time. People like to be liked. The problem, though I would say today with Christians wanting to be liked they seem to want to be liked so badly that they'll do just about anything to be liked. They want to fit in. And I mean, you just watch this all around us, fit in with their coworkers, fit in with their neighbors, fit in with their friends, their classmates, whatever it might be. And I hope even saying that out loud kind of sets up for where all that can go. Sadly, it can be something devastating. I know that when Christians achieve some moderate success at fitting in, they like to call it balance, but God has a different word for it. He calls a compromise, and we need to be very careful that we don't fall into that. Because when churches do and it starts, of course, with individuals and usually the tone starts to shift. And, you know, there's a shift in emphasis and people start to think, well, you know, we're just being kinder and gentler and nicer and more loving. Eventually the conviction is gone, and the heyday is a long time in the back rearview mirror, and the numbers start to dwindle. And eventually churches that once thrived standing on the truth start wondering when to kind of box the whole thing up and sell the property, or figure out how to sell off parts of their property. And then it's like over. And then there's the death of another church that used to have a great heritage.

Well, we need to be careful that we don't fall into that. Of course, it starts with individuals. And the Apostle Paul was concerned about the church at Corinth, very concerned in the sixth chapter of the second letter to the Corinthians that we have in our Bibles. And he says you guys need to be careful. It's not about your desire to be liked and wanting to fit in. It's about something that we have called the title of this series that we started last week. It's about being devoted and being devoted then we're going to be useful. And when a church is useful and individual Christians are useful, now you watch the impact that they have and you watch those churches thrive and you watch them grow, you watch them make a difference in the world. So even for the sake of our own church and its future I sure hope that we take passages like this seriously, because if we will, it will be a safeguard, and not only for your own spiritual life and your sanctification, but it'll be a safeguard for us corporately.

So let's take a look at these three verses and see if we can't take where we started last week and move it just a bit further to understand who we are from God's perspective as Christians. So turn with me to Second Corinthians Chapter 6 verses 16, 17 and 18. And as I say that you might remember we stopped in the middle of verse 16 because I wanted to save some of these allusions and quotations from the Old Testament starting in Leviticus Chapter 26 for our discussion today. We're already, if you just glanced back up, started with his unequally yoked concept. There's nothing to do with eggs as you might remember. This is about us being partnered up in chummy relationships that end up being a source of compromise to us.

But then he settled in on this phrase in verse 16 calling us the temple of God. So what does the temple of God have to do with idols? And he says we are the temple of the living God.

And then he starts quoting Old Testament texts. He's quoting and some loose allusions but all these concepts are buried in the Old Testament and even his deft reality of being able to skillfully think through these concepts biblically. It's so helpful for us to learn our need for God's Word and to master it. But he starts here by saying let's just think back to what is said in Scripture. Let me read it for you, verses 16b through 18. He says, "As God has said, 'I will make my dwelling among them.'" Now this is a quote from Leviticus 26 which I'm sure your Bible's footnotes will say, if you're looking at it, verses 11 and 12, "I'll make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and will be their God, and they shall be my people." Now, I already saw this in terms of the Exodus. We're taking God's people out of Egypt. They're under Moses' leadership and then there's this concept of them knowing, as I quoted Moses last week, well I'm not even going to go if your presence isn't going to go with us. And God makes statements like this throughout the Pentateuch, throughout these first five books of the Bible. No, I will be with you. I'm going to be with you. I'm going to dwell among you. And then this even strange verbiage, I'll walk among you. But here's the relationship. "I'll be your God, and you will be my people." And from the very beginning this is the concept. In Deuteronomy, since I've chosen this group of people to have my special relationship with. And that's the focus. But it has to do with this concept of identity, right? You're my people and I'll be your God.

Then this very clear allusion to Isaiah 52 verse 11, which takes us forward from 1445 B.C. Now we're looking at the sixth century B.C. when they'd already gone into exile 900 years later, and they're coming out of exile. Remember Nebuchadnezzar comes in and destroys Jerusalem, and the southern tribes of Israel are going to go back under Ezra and Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, these three leaders take them back. And the statements made here in Isaiah before it happens. But saying, when you go back, I just need you to "go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing," and then here's the condition, "I will welcome you." Now, one thing we're going to note throughout this message you need to distinguish between the fact that when you became a Christian you entered into this relationship with God. If you are a genuine Christian, you repented of your sins, you put your trust in Christ and here is this commitment, this covenant the Bible calls it, where you're in this covenant relationship with God. And he says, I'm going to be your God, and my Son is going to be your Redeemer, your Savior, and the Holy Spirit's going to dwell with you and be with you. Right? That sense of indwelling, it's a relationship, it's a concept. It's a spatial analogy about indwelling you.

But here God says you're going to be my people in that sense. And then you might go away saying well I'm a Christian or a son of God, a child of God. Well, that's great, right? But this is something different because the picture is you're already my redeemed people coming out of Egypt, and then later you're already the righteous remnant looking to me. But I want you to come out from that society you've been in, much like they came out 900 years earlier from Egypt. I want you to come out and I want you to "touch no unclean thing." I need you to double down on your exclusive relationship, your devotion to me. And he says and "then I'll welcome you." Well, I thought you welcomed me into this covenant relationship. Well, I did welcome you. I mean, God is in covenant with his people in the Old Testament and certainly in our case, in the New Testament, we're in covenant with God. And if you're a Christian, I



mean, he's made promises to you about never leaving, never forsaking you. That's true. He's written your name in the Lamb's Book of Life. All that's true. But there's something here relational. This is something different. And I'll prove it to you here in this next verse. "And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." This is an interesting way to put it. If you go through the Bible looking for the sonship concept or the child concept you'll see that particularly in the New Covenant, even in the Old Testament, particularly in the New Testament references to your relationship with God, it's very important that you consider yourself a son of God, whether you're a male or a female, because the concept is heir, you're the heir. And the picture of this world in the Old Testament saying the heir, the son, the firstborn, the, as it's put in New Testament Greek, the "Monogenēs" or the "Prototokos," it's the firstborn, the one who gets the inheritance, you need to be identified with him. You need to be "in Christ" you need to be "in the Son."

So we really lean heavily in the New Testament on you being a son of God, regardless of your gender. But when you start talking about sons and daughters, that's more rare and we're not talking about covenant inheritance. It's not about you earning heaven because Christ earned it for you. This is about relationship. And there are a lot of themes in the Bible that underscore that. But when you start seeing words like sons and daughters, as is echoing Isaiah 43 verses 6 and 7, you'll be sons and daughters to me. We're talking about intimacy, we're talking about closeness. That's why the word "devotion" is a good title word for our series that we're in the middle of. Right? What we want is for you to be a Christian. And yeah, it's not like getting an insurance policy in your back pocket. Yeah, I have my ticket to heaven. I'm all good. I'm forgiven. And that is good. Trust me, it's the most important thing you could ever do. But in your sanctification what God is looking for is for you to be tight with God, to use the vernacular. For you to be in a relationship where you feel like there is this connection with me and God, and we are all good. As it's put in First John, you need to "walk in the light, as he is in the light," and then you're going to have this great fellowship with his Son, and you'll have great fellowship with the Father. There's something more than just saying, I know I'm a Christian and I know when I die I'll be okay because I'm not going to be condemned for my sin. "No condemnation for those who are in Christ," in Christ, in the Son, inheritor of the Kingdom. Great. Critical. But this series is about us being "Devoted and Useful." And I think you know there are some Christians who are not as devoted as they need to be. And maybe that's how you're feeling this morning. I know that's true, and I may not be that useful even in this world. Just like churches cease to be useful when they seek to be liked and they want to be accepted and they want to fit in, they get increasingly less useful because they're not devoted. And so this is the kind of relative connection as opposed to the absolute connection being a child of God. Do you follow all that? Okay. That's a helpful kind of a parameter for this text.

Well, let's make some sense of it. I'll just again two weeks in a row, don't applaud but this is just going to follow verses 16, 17 and 18, points 1, 2, 3. I mean this is almost like I know what I'm doing. (audience laughing) Verse 16, second half, "I'll make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I'll be their God, and they shall be my people." What is it about being God to these people or us being the people that relate to this God? He's our God and God looks at us. Well, the connection in this passage that reflects Leviticus 26 back when they



were leaving out of Egypt is I'm going to be with you. More than with you, I'm going to walk among you. Okay. The presence of God. So let's start there this morning. If you're taking notes and I wish that you would jot this down, number one, the first thing we need to get from this text is we think about being devoted and useful is we need to "Constantly Ponder His Presence." Now that's the word I want to start with even though I want to back off to the lowest common denominator.

So let's start with that. We need to ponder regularly, constantly, habitually ponder his presence. I need to think about the fact that God, I'm living before the "face of God." And as long as we're using analogies maybe we can use this one. Some less, just less than 30 times in the Bible we hear this phrase, "the eyes of the Lord," the eyes of the Lord. Now, let me ask you the question if we're talking about the Father here. Does the Father have eyes? Answer? Well, what color are they? No, he doesn't have eyes. Does he have ears? No. They have wings. No, he doesn't have any of that. God is spirit, John Chapter 4. So this is the condescending language, the kind of anthropomorphic language we call it, of God using words that we make sense of. Because if you want to perceive something, you use your eyes along with your ears, but your eyes are like, I mean, I'd much rather be able to see what's going on and I get a level of perception. I get to know what's going on when I see it. So, for instance, let's just quote Proverbs 15. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." Okay. And "watch," we get that, "eyes," we get that.

And here's the first thing. Let's just start with this as a sub-point, right? You are living in the complete awareness of God. God is aware of everything. Think about the world that we live in right now. They say there are over a billion cameras publicly planted out there in the world, worldwide, watching what people do. Of course, we saw this in, you know, the UK was big at it at first, where there were cameras at every corner. But now, I don't know if you've noticed, but there are cameras pretty much everywhere in our world, right? Go through traffic intersections, there are cameras, you go into stores there are all these security cameras. You walk down your street, you're walking your dog, you're passing all these houses, they have their Ring doorbell cameras, you're being recorded, you know that, all the time every day. We have cameras out here right now. There's a camera on me, cameras everywhere. So we're often out being recorded. That bothers, you know, some people and I get that. But we often know, well I can ditch into, you know, the closet of my home and I know there's no camera there.

Just a great verse for us to start with. Proverbs Chapter 15 verse 3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good." So let's just start with perception. God is perceiving everything about you, not just when you come to church. You think, well, okay, God's kind of seeing my worship. He's looking at how I respond to sermons and all that. No, God is perceiving everything about you. Everything. Your life is lived in complete, utter openness to God. As it's put in Hebrews or when it comes to your life everything is laid naked and bare before God, the God with whom we have to do everything... God "sees" he's watching everything, which is more than just the perception of where you went. Right? Or even if you try to head fake him by saying something and meaning somebody else, he's seeing and perceiving even your thoughts. He knows it all. It's all about him perceiving you.



So I need us to start with that. And you're non-Christian, this is true of your non-Christian neighbor as well. But you leave this place and you go on about your business this week, just on Thursday afternoon at 2:57, you need to think I'm being absolutely perceived, 100% perceived, in my actions, my thoughts, my behavior, my raised eyebrow, my thinking, my imagination is all open before God. God sees it all.

So let's just start with if you could just do yourself a favor to really think about where we're headed and that is living as though I live before God, let's just start with that. Remember his always 24/7 perception of you. It is as though the pastors put cameras all over your house, God forbid, but let's just think about that. They were watching everything you do. Your argument with your wife, the way you got mad at the dog or whatever it is, they were watching it all. I mean, that would probably raise your concern about how you live. Let's just start with this, God sees it all. And just because God sees it all don't think he thinks, well, I understand that you do what you do, right? Because he's called you to a certain level of living to be devoted to him. But he sees it all. Start with his perception.

I've never been impressed with birdwatchers. Have you been birdwatching? Like you need a life. Go do something else. Unless you're teaching it at the college or something. Like what? What what? You're buying expensive binoculars just to go watch birds. Go with me to Matthew Chapter 10. I take it all back because God is a bird watcher. Let's just start with that. God says this to try and make a point about his perception of us which is more than perception because this moves from perception, let's go a little deeper now, to his full involvement, to his complete involvement. And it starts with this in Matthew Chapter 10 verse 29. Matthew Chapter 10 verse 29 says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?" Well, not today, but back then if you're going into the Temple Mount, maybe you're traveling on a pilgrimage feast and you came and you had to have your sacrifice. Well, God was clear in the law. You can bring money, that's fine and exchange it for a sacrifice when you get there on the pilgrimage feast if you're going to travel from Bethlehem or wherever, or Nazareth, wherever you're from. Okay, well, great. They're cheap, but the cheapest thing you could buy in the courts outside of the temple. But he says they're just the lowest level of sacrifice you could bring. "And not one of them will fall to the ground." Now, there's no verb here, really, as it relates to what he's doing. There are the words sovereign control but it's not there, but "fall to the ground apart from your Father." And there's not a single bird that falls to the ground that is somehow, not just out of the purview of God, but the involvement of God.

Now, is it a good thing or a bad thing when birds die? Well, it depends on what you think about birds. But let's just be nice for a moment. That's a bad thing. Death is a bad thing. Just as a general concept, death is a bad thing. And here we are saying that the bad thing doesn't happen to the bird because the bird now croaks, falls over dead from the nest and you see it on your driveway, which apparently maybe you have or you've done. You think, oh, that's sad. There's that little bird. That bird did not fall to the ground this text says from the resurrected one, right? He teaches this to us, that there's not a bird that falls to his death apart from the oversight, the sovereign control outside of the purview and the direction, the involvement. Just to now quote Acts 17 as Paul said to the Athenian professors at the university, he says, "in him we live and move and have our being." Then he goes on to say, "he himself gives



everyone life and breath and everything else." So God is actively involved. Now this is the distinction point one or I should say sub-point "A" and sub-point "B" is the difference between the Founding Fathers' kind of religion, many of them were Deists and I hope what you are, a biblical-believing Christian. The Deists said, oh, we believe God sees all. Even their images about the eye over everything watching us. They believed in a watching God. They just didn't believe in a God who was involved in anything. He kind of wound it up and let it go. You've heard of this before, right? That's why Jefferson could take his Exacto knife to the Bible and take out all the things that might involve a god in time and space. Certainly all the miracles he cut out of his Bible. It's called the Jefferson Bible. Have you looked that one up lately, the Jefferson Bible? He cut out all of that because in his deistic view of the universe, yes, God may see everything, but he's not getting involved in stuff here.

And the Bible is very different as Paul writes to the Colossians. Right? He says, In Christ all things consist, I think is the English Standard Version translation of that word. "All things hold together." Nothing keeps itself going unless, to quote again the Apostle Paul in Athens, unless he is giving "life and breath and everything else," even down to the birds. That's what it starts with. So God, if you live in his presence, here's what you need to know. Not only does he see you like there's a bunch of CCTV cameras in your house, right? He's now actively involved, giving you life and breath. And if you were to croak and die, that's within the purview of God's involvement. You don't stay alive without God. Read the next verse now. Matthew Chapter 10 verse 30, "But even the hairs of your head are all numbered." Now I'm sad when I see the hair go down the drain in the morning. And I think that's sad. There they go. My poor dying hairs. I have a little funeral for them. Say a few kind words and they swirl around the drain and go, the hairs. God is saying this, there's not a bird that falls out of the nest, and there's not a hair on your head that you find on your bathroom floor that God is not completely involved in. He has their number. He knows what's happening and he's involved in all of this. None of that happens apart from your Father. And then he makes the application, verse 31, "Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

And let's put it in the terms that we're dealing with here. Fear not. What does that mean? God's not distant. God's not apart from you. God's involved in your Thursday activities, right? God is here. He's watching, perceiving, and actually involved in every molecule of your body. The reality of the actions within, you know, the electrons of every part of who you are, God is the one giving life and breath and everything else. That's a good place for us to start. If we could only perpetually ponder it, if we could only constantly consider it, if we could just keep this in our mind that we live before the face of God, so to speak, which is more than the eyes of God, it's the hands of God. He's involved in all of this.

Let me make this more practical for Christians because all of that is true of every Christian and non-Christian. At the pinnacle of creation your next-door neighbor certainly is more valuable than many sparrows. And God gives him "life and breath and everything" else. Paul was saying that to a bunch of pagan philosophers at that time. Well, let's consider this now for Christians. Go to Hebrews Chapter 13 real quick. There's something different. When you think about the best, most heavily armed protection that can be given to a person, I suppose it would be, you know, our presidents, 24/7 and yet how imperfect. All I have to say is, you



know, Butler, Pennsylvania or Trump International Golf Course or maybe that hunting stand if you read about that, that was in the line of shot to the steps getting on at Palm Beach Airport for our president. You think I don't care how good you think your security is, right? It's still imperfect, right? Even though they're around him all the time, I sometimes think what it would be like to be the president. I mean, you have, like, no privacy it seems like we lock you in the vault of your White House bedroom. But here's the deal, right? There's nothing like the ever-present, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God.

Take a look at this text, Hebrews Chapter 13 verse 5. Hey, you don't have a lot of money in your pocket. Well, "keep your life free from the love of money." I know you need it to quote Matthew 6:32 and 33. Pagans chasing after more money. I get that. Anyway, God knows you need these things that money buys, but "be content with what you have, for he has said," let's talk about his presence now, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Now these are words that are starting to shift from the kind of relationship that God has with every creature, down to the birds and the follicles of the hair of your next-door neighbor's non-Christian head. But now down to the place where he says, I have a relationship with you. I am, "we can confidently say," now he's quoting in verse 6 which is a quotation from Psalm 118 to the covenant people of the Old Testament, "the Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" It's one thing because even if I'm the president I'm going to duck getting on to Air Force One thinking I don't know if these guys do their job today. And I'm thinking of the reality of the fact that here is God saying, really think about it, I am your helper. That word, by the way, the word that was used translated into English, "helper," in the Upper Room Discourse. "I will not leave you as orphans," right? I'm going to bring the "Paráklētos" meaning "the helper," the one who's going to come alongside literally, the paráklētos, the one who comes next to you. He's going to be "with you always, to the end of the age."

So the third person of the triune, omnipotent Godhead says, I'm dispatching the best secret service you could ever have. You want a presidential detail that is really going to protect you. Here is the God who says I'm protecting you until, of course, you fall from the nest and croak because nothing happens apart from my oversight. All your days are numbered, by the way, you realize that. In everything, every auto accident, every cancer cell, every economic downturn, every recession, whatever, all of that was in the purview of God but God says this of Christians, I'm your helper. I'm there. Right? You live in the presence of God. I "will never leave you." That's a spatial analogy. I'm so focused now on you like the covenant people coming out of Egypt, I'm going to be with you. "I will walk among you." "You're my people, and I'm your God."

So for Christians let's just go in that progression. Can you every day this week, on Tuesday morning say I know I live within the "eyes of the Lord are on me all the time," and that he is empowering every cell in my body and every follicle on my head. And not only is he sustaining me and viewing me and seeing me, but am I open and exposed to the God with whom I have to do, as it's put in Hebrews 6? But not only that, he now has said you're my people. You're my special people. If you're a Christian here today that's what he said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Because there is a time, by the way, when God says to your non-Christian neighbor away from me into outer darkness, or as is put in Second



Thessalonians Chapter 1, "Away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." He'll never say that to Christians. He'll never say, "depart from me." But he will say that to non-Christians. So this is a special category for Christians to see this verse and say you want to talk about living in the presence of God, you should ponder that kind of presence. It's like you're his. It's like he has a ring on your finger in your mind and he's never going to forsake you. There will never be a divorce with God. Think that through. And he says, I'll be there. And if that's the case, what should that do to you? Well, number one, I should never be, you know, freaked out about my bank account, verse 5, I should never be afraid of what people can do to me, verse 6. It should change everything.

Now, where are we heading in this series? Well, we've been talking about not being partnered up, cozied up with relationships that are going to pull me away from being devoted to Christ. And if we want to kind of put that layer over the top of it, it's not the layer here in Hebrews Chapter 13, but the presence of God seeing, not only that enlivening, but now also love, commitment, connection. I will be with you. I'm going to be your Redeemer, your God. You'll never hear from me "depart from me." Ever. Okay, now all of a sudden I want to think about my life and what kind of life should that be? What should the relationship be with sin and compromise? How willing should I be to try and get the approval of people so that they'll like me at the expense of me taking a step away from my commitment to the righteousness of Christ? I would hope that would be unthinkable. So this is a good kind of a medicinal, if you will, a corrective for us. If you just constantly ponder the presence of God who is going to walk among us. Now, that's a corporate sense. We're the temple of God. I said this last week, First Corinthians Chapter 3, corporately. And I hope he's here happy with this group that it's not compromised, changing its tone, softening up, just making sure that the world likes us. Now we care about what God thinks. And he's here actively involved with us objectively before we ever get to what's coming next, he'd like to welcome us. That's what's coming next. But there's something about the connection, sees, enlivens, and is committed to us as his children. That's big. But it gets more intense.

Back to our passage. Second Corinthians Chapter 6 verse 17. Second Corinthians Chapter 6 verse 17. Now we have these commands. "Go out from their midst, and be separate from them ... touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you." Okay, here's a condition of something different. This is not the condition of hey, repent of your sins, put your trust in me, you won't reach any condemnation for your sin, Christ is going to absorb the penalty. That's the covenant relationship of you being a son of God, the heir, you're "in his Son." You're heirs of the kingdom because of what he's done. Okay, that's substitutionary atonement. That's connection in Christ, that's being placed into "Baptismos," into Christ by his Son. Okay, great. Now we're doing something conditional to this church at Corinth that claims the name of Christ. And he's saying, I want you to be welcomed by God. I want the devotion to be such that God is having a different thought about you. And he unpacks that in the last verse, verse 18. But for now, let's just think about what he's calling them to. How do you get this welcome? Well, you have to go out. You have to be separate. You have to not touch the unclean. Well, that's where we started last week. Don't yoke up in relationships that are going to compromise your Christian life.



So let's just put it that way. Simply number two on your outline if you're taking notes. Number two, we need to "Diligently Pursue Godly Purity." I want to be more like Christ, who was fully pleasing, right? "This is my beloved Son, with whom I'm well pleased." I'd like to be like him where I really don't care even as his critics came and said we know you don't care about what people think. We know you just care about what God thinks. That's what I would like to be. I'd like our church to be that. We don't really care ultimately what they think. As Paul said in Galatians 1, "If I were still trying to please man, I wouldn't be a servant of Christ." I have to be a servant of Christ by saying, I want Christ's character and devotion to be ours. And that is, I care what he thinks and I'm willing to be zealously committed to him even if it costs me likes and relationships with other people. I just have to go there. So I'm going to diligently, and here's a good word, pursue that kind of godly purity which Christ modeled for us.

Now, as I said, this passage here is really speaking to the issue in Isaiah Chapter 52 verse 11 of the return, the post-exilic return from what used to be Babylon now was controlled by the Medo-Persians in about 500 B.C. That's the picture of them leaving this pagan like doghouse that they'd been in for 70 years. Well, that's great and helpful, but another verse that was spoken of here in terms of being my people, and you should jot this down. Your reference Bible probably has it in the small print. Ezekiel Chapter 20 verse 21. It talks about that same picture of reassembling. Remember Ezekiel, just like Jeremiah, we're reading Jeremiah in our Daily Bible Reading right now, hopefully you're keeping up, there is some good stuff in there this week. But here's Jeremiah and Ezekiel talking about the return. Ezekiel says, yeah, I will "bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations." Okay. This is at least its first referent fulfillment of the fact they're going to come back to Jerusalem under Ezra and Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. And so that's going to happen and he's looking at that. Here's how it starts, though, "As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries." I just love the image of that.

And there's nothing better, particularly on certain nights at our church where we actually have the barbecues all heated up. We had something at Thrive the other night or maybe it was at Abide, I don't know, but I couldn't help but grab a burger as I walked by. It smelled so good. And if you can think about, you know, you have all these big barbecues feeding hundreds of people at Compass Bible Church on a weeknight and you smell that, I mean, it's like the Pied Piper for me. I just went where is that coming from? And I just go, go to it. And in the Old Testament that was the centerpiece. You remember that. Right? Barbecue. That was the centerpiece. And you couldn't come to worship in the Old Testament, say it was a pilgrimage. Even if you lived out in the outskirts in some, you know, village far away, you had to go three times a year to Jerusalem and it was the hibachis, the massive hibachis were all like complete running full steam. Sacrifice after sacrifice. It smelled so good. And the picture of our righteousness even in the New Testament, Paul talks about this in Philippians Chapter 4. The things that we do that are righteous, they're like a pleasing aroma to God. And we see it throughout the New Testament, Ephesians Chapter 5, Philippians Chapter 4. And we see it even in Romans Chapter 12. We're a living sacrifice, that kind of oxymoronic thing. We can't be a living sacrifice. We are a living sacrifice when we do the right things, when we affirm



what is his good and perfect will. And when we say, that's what I want and that's what we do, it is a pleasing aroma to God.

So every step you take away from the kinds of commitments of fitting in, which really is called compromise in the Bible, and I step toward being separate or different or distinct. Right? Just like they came out of Persia and they came back and they said we're going to do this right. We haven't been sacrificing. We haven't been doing the Levitical system of worship. We haven't had our singers together singing to Yahweh. We haven't been singing the psalms. We hung our harps, you know, on the willow branch there in Babylon, in captivity. But now we're coming back. We're firing up the music and the barbecue and we're firing up the festivities of worship. And we're going to go worship God in Jerusalem, we are going to rebuild this thing, and Zerubbabel leads all of that. And that's great. Ezra and Nehemiah too of course. But what's happening? Right? They're moving toward something that God says that's a great smell. And it's just an olfactory, I get it. An olfactory illustration, just like we can still experience that. There's nothing better than driving by In-N-Out Burger when the wind is right or Outback Steakhouse or wherever you happen to live near the best, you know, smells you can imagine. That is a picture of God saying I love that. Now what do you do? Well, it's like me and the Pied Piper to the barbecues on Wednesday or Thursday. It's just God like gravitating towards. God saying I love that.

To diligently pursue purity is a condition of some different kind of relationship that we're seeing in Scripture that God is going to have with his already covenant people. More on this in the third point, but at least go to James Chapter 4 to get this started. James Chapter 4. I alluded to it last time we were together, but let's read it now, word for word. James Chapter 4 verse 4. Now this is a harsh condemnation, "You adulterous people!" Now there may have been adultery involved, but that's not what's on the table here. This is the Hosea Chapters 1 through 3 kind of adultery. And that is you're warming up to the world. You should be devoted to me. You'd be even more useful to me if you were devoted to me. But instead you're chasing after fitting in to all the Jebusites, parasites, the Canaanites, all of that they you used to do. Hosea is one of the earliest prophets, by the way, of the Old Testament and he was prophesying to the northern tribes. And he was saying to them you guys are compromising and it's like you're committing adultery with God. So the more you want to warm up to the nations and what they do and be liked by them, the further you're moving from me. And then he says, "You adulterous people!" Who's he talking to? He's talking to Christians in this passage. "Do you not know," verse 4, "that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." We could have just read that and not needed a sermon this morning. That's the gist of what I'm saying. Right? We don't want to warm up to the world in a way saying I really want to be liked, I want to fit in, I want to be open because eventually what's going to happen is the gravitas of what God is doing in the church it definitely is removed.

You want to talk about Ichabod, the glory is departed? The glory departs from every church that's filled with congregants who want to think this way. And eventually the seats are empty. We're all looking back at pictures of how it used to be, and we start figuring out how to mothball the church. That's going to happen every time. "Friendship with the world is enmity



with God." If you want to be a friend of the world, if you want to fit in there, if you want to be liked by everybody in your neighborhood, your workplace, well, you're going to be an enemy of God. He's talking to God's people. How do I know that? Next verse, verse 5, "Or do you suppose it is for no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?'" It's like Exodus Chapter 34, you're my people, I just brought you out into the wilderness. You're going to go into the Promised Land. And he says this. My "name is Jealous, ... a jealous God." Now, you may see that as a human weakness. It's not a human weakness, not in the right context. It's only appropriate that God would say you're my people. I'll redeem you, I'll be your God. But now you're chasing after other gods. And for us, of course, we don't go to temples to bow down to them. But there are plenty of things that are going to get your attention. There are plenty of things that are going to be a priority.

I heard it in one night, right? I didn't have the TV on for but 30 minutes. I heard two people say nothing is more important to me than family. If nothing is more important to you than family, guess what? You're an idolater. Let that one sink in at an Orange County church. If there's nothing more important to you than your family, you are an idolater. Do you like that one? Because anything that we say there's nothing more important, that is your God you understand. It is the favorite god of South Orange County. A close second is materialistic luxury and wealth. God has called them both out in Scripture. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me," or child more than me, brother more than me, "is not worthy of me," right? We've already seen, we've read passages already in Hebrews Chapter 13, I alluded to Matthew Chapter 6. If you're chasing after stuff and money and wealth and comfort then that's your God. Does that mean I can't have a family and I can't drive a nice car? I didn't say that. I didn't say that. Right? God has no problem in the New Testament with rich people, not to mention the Old Testament rich people like Job and like Abraham. No problem. It's just that you better make sure as it says, by the way, in our reading that we had this morning in First Timothy Chapter 6, if you haven't read it yet, you can read it tonight, it's about you, if you're rich in the present world not being devoted to riches, you can't have this to be your God. You have to just worship the God who gives us all things for us to enjoy.

And we never hold it tightly. We're generous, ready to share, rich in good works, storing up for ourselves life that's truly life, right? It's not a problem to have a family. It's not a problem to have a family and say I love my family. Love your family. It's not a problem for you to enjoy your house, to enjoy your car. There's nothing wrong with that. Enjoy your nice clothes. Fine. But they cannot be your God. And the more you want to warm up to these things and they become superlatives in your life, then the Bible says you've made yourself an enemy of God, because God wants your spirit devoted to him. The Spirit he's made to dwell within you, he jealously yearns over that. But God gives more grace. He can fix the problem. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Because there are a lot of people who idolize their families and are very proud of their families. There are a lot of people who idolize their house and their stuff and the material things and are very proud of their wealth. There are a lot of people who idolize power and they're very proud of their power. But God "gives grace to the humble."



So "submit yourself," verse 7, "therefore to God. Resist the devil," because that's the devil flaming all that, the enemy of God. And guess what the devil will do if you resist him, "he'll flee from you." He'll draw back. Instead, you need to "draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." But in doing that you have to say I'm no longer going to pursue the things that aren't pure. You have to "cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." You need to be "wretched and mourn and weep." Those are not memory verses for your kid's Sunday school class, but at some point they ought to be, because these are words that we need to have in our hearts that when we find ourselves compromising, wanting to fit in, loving the world, making sure the world loves us, then we need to say you have to stop. And here's this next phrase. So "let your laughter be turned to mourning." In other words, the things that you sought that would bring you all this happiness, right? Exchange that for being sad that you would ever be a friend of the world and not fully devoted to the Lord. "And your joy," all those things you're doing that make you so happy, turn it "to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." Diligently pursue godly purity. And we need to do it.

Go back to our text now. It says, "go out from their midst." Now, I know this was about the people leaving after the exile, but you want to talk about going out from their midst. I've preached thousands of sermons. Some of you feel like you've sat through millions of sermons of mine, but I can tell you from my perspective as I have a different visual perspective on the sermons than you do. Can you imagine? I get to watch faces, I get to watch body language, and then I get the great experience of having people fold up their stuff, grab their jacket and march out. I mean, I had people march out on one of my sermons and they don't walk, they don't waltz, they march out. They march out in protest, I'm done. I'm thinking Dawkins would have to be very proud of them. You're listening to this preacher spew all this religious stuff and now it's starting to get to where it's meddling with your life. You get up, you close whatever you have in your lap and you leave. I've had plenty of people march out on me. And it's clear, trust me, I can tell the difference between when it is I have to go to the bathroom, and I'm done with this guy. There's a very different kind of gait. Let's just put it that way. (audience laughing) So I watch people get up and physically separate themselves from what I'm saying. You talk about going out and being separate, they don't want to be a part of it. I've watched it. I wish you could just see in my memory just how many times I've watched that happen.

Well, that's exactly what God's calling you to do when the topic is inverse, when it's stuff that doesn't call you to be devoted, zealously devoted to God. When it's stuff that you know is displeasing God. If you know it's stuff that really is being stuff that you said I know the Lord is not pleased with this. This is antithetical to everything I know is true. Then hey, listen, turnabout is fair play here. Let's just get up in those classes and march out. Let's just get out in that work event and march out, that company party that you're in when the stuff going on on the platform up front that everyone's laughing at and clapping for, you get up and give it the gait that makes it clear, I'm out. I'm going out from their midst. Some of you need to leave and the students need to leave classes. Employees need to leave events. I hope we've all left a theater once or twice in our lives, have we not? I can't watch any more of this. This is garbage. The Lord is not pleased with this. And we say I'm done. And we walk out with that



gait that says I'm not interested in this. "Go out from their midst and be separate." "Touch no unclean thing."

Don't be afraid to do that. Non-Christians do it to us all the time. And while Dawkins is proud of someone standing up to me, the little Bible preacher, how proud is the Lord for you to carry out with what this verse literally says. Sometimes physical distance is exactly what you need to have. I'm done. I'm done. Get up and walk out. Theaters. Rallies. Work banquets. Alumni dinners. School classes. Entertainment venues. Not to mention the digital bow-outs. Those aren't as dramatic, but there's a time to get out of a text thread. You know that, right? Don't worry, "Yeah, but my name is going to be on there that I left the conversation. What are they going to think? I can't handle a harsh joke?" The Bible says, "Go out from their midst and be separate." "Touch no unclean thing." How proud is Christ going to be when you're willing to bow out of something that you know you shouldn't be a part of this.

I gave you this last time but maybe you didn't write it down, First John Chapter 2 verse 28. If you want a great little litmus test for all of this start with this verse. First John Chapter 2 verse 28. "Now, little children, abide in him." That's what I'm talking about. "So that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming." Little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. You do understand one of the neat features about the return of Christ. One reason I'm not a post-millennialist is because it's imminent. It could happen at any time. And he's told us you don't know when it's going to happen. The first installment of the day of the Lord, the things that are going to happen in the End Times, is going to be without any warning. And so he says you need to be ready for my coming but I'm not going to tell you when because "it will come like a thief in the night." So the only way to be ready for something that is not scheduled is to always be ready.

And one of the things he's arguing for here in this text is make sure whatever your associations, your involvements, your relationships, your workplace, your conversations, make sure that you're so connected to this God and his Son who is going to come back that when he shows up unexpectedly you're not going to go, oh man, what a time for the Lord to come back. I wished I wasn't doing this. I wished I wasn't listening to this. I wish I wasn't sitting through this. I wish I wasn't applauding this. I wish I wasn't a part of this, because you will shrink back in shame at his coming. Does it mean you're not going? I'm not talking about that. But we have to diligently pursue purity because it could be that Christ is going to show up.

How about vocabulary? Ephesians Chapter 5 verse 4. There should be no silliness, "no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving." How proud would you be if you were on just a paragraph full of being thankful to Christ when he shows up? Dude, your chest is going to be... I told you. Right? You're going to be thanking God as opposed to listening to something you shouldn't be, being in a conversation you shouldn't be a part of, being at the event you shouldn't be at. "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking," be among you, "which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving."

Or how about this two verses later. Do you want to talk about another kind of talk? "Let no one deceive you with empty words, because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." What things? Verse 5, "anyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Okay, being clear about the black and white ethics of the Bible, it says here, "let no one deceive you with empty words." I would hate to be spewing empty words about how great Mormon families are knowing that if you follow Mormonism you're not going to have the grace of salvation in Christ. I mean, I'd be really embarrassed to have Christ come back when I'm spewing empty words about how, you know, if we all just love Jesus I'm sure it's fine. Or, you know, I happened to just put my rainbow flag up in front of the church the day Christ comes back, something clear that God says this is immoral, this is wrong. And yet I have empty words saying no big deal.

You've been reading Jeremiah with me I hope on the Daily Bible Reading? What's he constantly coming back to? You know, the prophets are out there saying empty words. What are the empty words? Peace, peace when there is no peace. Was there peace for the generation of Jeremiah? No, there was Nebuchadnezzar coming. He's going to march to this place and destroy it. You need to be the righteous remnant who stands against the culture of Israel. Think about it. And the empty words are people saying no big deal. And I bet the headlines are like this: God's loving, God accepts everybody, God understands, God's about love. Do you think that stuff was coming out of their mouths? If we're going to be distinct, not only do we need to get rid of filthiness and foolish talking. How about empty words of affirming something that will lead you to God's wrath? I don't ever want to do that. Does that mean I'm trying to tick everybody off every day of my life with my sentences? No. Gentleness and respect. But I realize this, I can be very gentle and respectful with a Mormon, a Jehovah's Witness, a Buddhist and a Muslim. I can do that, but I'm still going to say it's wrong and I sure would be proud if Christ comes back when I'm standing firm on meaningful words, not empty words. If there's no peace for those rebelling against God, I don't want to say there is.

Of course, our conduct. I don't have time to even look at it. But First Peter Chapter 1 verses 13 through 19. If God is holy, we ought to be holy in all of our, here's the word translation into English in the English Standard Version, in all of our conduct "be holy in all your conduct." What is it that comes to mind when I say that? Be holy in all of your conduct and it ought to be obvious to the world. Philippians Chapter 2 says, if you want to "be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world," then I have to be pursuing holiness. And what's interesting in verse 14, it's a pursuit of holiness in something that's absent in my life. Do you know what's absent in my life? If you know your Bible, Philippians Chapter 2 verse 14, I hope you quote that one often to yourself, "do all things without grumbling or disputing." Even that, I don't want to be grumbling or disputing when Christ comes back. Diligently pursue holiness and you won't shrink back in shame. And the thing that makes us distinct, that maybe lets people say these people are different and morally distinct, the word is "holy," distinct. Holy. Because we're not like other people just going along with all the grumbling and complaining and disputing. The next verse because the sentence isn't finished there in verse 15, I'll read



the next one, "holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain." That's just such a good line. We'd like to be holding fast to the Word of Christ, and I guarantee you will not resolutely be holding firm to the Word of Christ if all you want to do is fit in and be liked.

Verse 18 back in our passage. "I'll welcome you." What does that mean? "I'll be a father to you and you'll be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." Now, I hope you recognize what's being said here. As I said at the outset of the reading of the text, it is not about our covenant relationship, but being heirs with the Son, being sons of God. Because regardless of your gender you're a son of God theologically, this is not about that. It's about being sons and daughters. You understand the difference here, right? Sons and daughters. This is a picture of family relationship. Let's just start corporately here and think through this. But first let me give you the verbiage. Number three, you need to confidently, if all this is true about us practicing his presence, pursuing diligently purity, then we can "Confidently Enjoy His Parenthood," his fatherly oversight. His family acceptance or welcome as it says at the bottom of verse 17. Okay.

What are we talking about? Let's start corporately. Jesus says to the church in Laodicea, who, by the way, if you want to talk about their problem, I've already stated it in modern terms. They wanted to fit in. He called them, what's the word, by the way, to the church at Laodicea in Revelation Chapter 3 verse 14 and following? He calls them, what? What's the one word that comes to mind when I talk about Laodicea? Lukewarm. Lukewarm. As I like to explain it when we were teaching that once to our high schoolers at the Revival camp, I said it just basically means you have one foot in the world and you want one foot in the church. And that's exactly what we've been talking about. Unequally yoked, relationships of compromise, chumming up with things that are going to make them say, I'm not really zealous about righteousness. I kind of want to find balance which the Bible calls compromise. God looks at a church in Laodicea and says you guys are compromised.

Do you know how it ends? "I stand at the door and knock." I stand at the door and knock. What? You're talking about a church here, and you're not even there walking among them. No, no, no, corporately I'm not. I'm standing outside. I'm like, hey, knock, knock, knock, if anyone would open the door I'd come in. And what's the word there, by the way, what does he want to do? He wants to do what with them? Dine with them, he'd like to eat with them. There's something great about that picture of table fellowship. Now, again, just to distinguish so that you don't misunderstand and I need to say it a few times so you don't misunderstand, Luke 15 talks about salvation. And I know you think, "I'm already welcomed by God. What are you talking about? I'm already saved. I'm God's favorite kid because I'm a Christian." Listen, I get it. The Father, when you were saved and the whole passage about sinners who repent, this is about salvation. The lost son, we call him the Prodigal sometimes, the lost son is all about the father saying, I embrace you, kisses him, waits for him on the porch, kills the fattened calf and put sandals on his feet, puts a ring on his finger. Is that acceptance? Are you talking about welcoming? It's a welcome. When you became a Christian you were welcomed into the family. But I just want to run the clock forward in this little analogy that Jesus gives us about the lost son being found. He "was dead and is alive again; he was lost



and is found." Let's run the clock forward as many years as you've been a Christian. Now the son is living there in the compound of the father. Do you think every day feels like that for him? Do you think there are celebrations in heaven before the face of God, so to speak, when one sinner repents? Well, I have a testimony, I repented 12 years ago, or whatever your time frame is. Do you think the son just theoretically, use your imagination, is every day like that? Does the fattened calf get killed every day? Does a new ring get stuck on his finger? No, we're not talking about that.

You do know, I hope, just like we celebrate, we see it in our church all the time, before a judge and the gavel comes down and the adoption is final. What a day of celebration. There's cake, there are balloons, there's candy, there are celebrations at church, in small groups. Everyone's so excited. The adoption is final. A day of rejoicing? Yes. Does that mean then Johnny never has a bad day with Mom and Dad? It's easy for that kid whom we celebrated when he was five at the adoption finalization to be in his bedroom at 15 at odds with his mom and dad. And all I'm saying is where have you been since that day? And now I want to say what he wants is just could you come out of your room with all that junk and just sit down and let's just eat and have fellowship.

It's a lot like Psalm 15. I wish I had time for that. I'm not sure if I put that in the discussion questions or not, but it's a good one. Psalm 15. It's the same concept here. We're not talking about becoming a covenant child of God, but he says, as David says, "O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent?" Do you know the word "sojourn?" That means you're an alien. You don't belong here, but you get welcomed in. You get to hang out in the tent of God, who gets to hang out in the tent of God, "who shall dwell on your holy hill?" Now, at this particular time we didn't have a temple built yet. David's son would build it but they had a tabernacle, and he says who's going to be invited into fellowship with God. The alien that doesn't belong there. Well, that's our adoption. And then "who's going to dwell on your holy hill?" Who's going to settle in there and just be tight with you. Well, then the whole passage unfolds. "He who walks blamelessly and does what is right speaks the truth in his heart; who doesn't slander with his tongue."

So there's a bunch of things that talk about the ethical pursuit of purity, which is, by the way, very contra-distinctive to the culture. I mean, I'll just read one line here, maybe two. It says, "In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord." Now, does the world do that? Do they really care who their favorite, you know, pop star is or their favorite basketball players? Well, how godly is he? How much does he fear the Lord? They didn't think about that for a second. He'll praise anyone whom he finds praiseworthy in his own eyes. And the Bible says that's not how Christians are. We can't praise someone who's vile in God's eyes. Sorry. He's not our hero. I don't care how well he plays the guitar. I don't care how well he plays golf. It doesn't matter. "In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the Lord." There's a good description. I mean just one example of many. I mean, even like "swears to his own hurt and doesn't change." I think of that one often. How different is that than most people? I was going to be there. I told you I'd be there but, you know, things came up, as opposed to if I said it, my word is my oath. I mean, Christians do



those kinds of things because they pursue the purity of reflecting the attributes of God and we do the best we can to pursue it.

Now, is David perfect? David, do you know of any skeletons in David's closet? We're not talking about perfection. Here's another verse for you to check out. And I think I did put this one in your small group discussions. First John Chapter 1. We can start in verse 6 and go to the end of the chapter. The question is this: do you have to be perfect to have this table fellowship with God? No. David wasn't perfect. As a matter of fact, the whole passage there is bookended by this, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." We're not talking about some kind of perfectionism here. We're talking about you being like David when you do sin you're willing to confess it. You're willing to come before God open-handed. There's not a person listening to my voice right now who could not have this fellowship. It's so different.

Both my sons grew up in the church, of course, and their wives grew up in the church. And being paid to be nice to people as the pastor, of course I was nice to those gals before they married into my family. When I saw them on the patio? Hey, how are you doing? I'm nice to their families. But do you think there's a difference between me accepting them as a congregant and loving on them and serving them as their pastor? Do you think that changed at all when they became family? Do you think my daughter-in-laws have to call before they come over? Do you think it's going to be a major disruption and a frustration where I'm going to say, I can't believe I was already in my pajamas when they came over and they came right through the garage. They used the code on the garage door opener. I can't believe it. I wasn't even presentable. Do you understand the difference here? You'll be sons and daughters to me. There's not a genuine Christian in this church then that I'm not... I love you, I care for you. You're part of the family here. But there are different kinds of sons and daughters. Do you follow what I'm saying? If one of my daughter-in-laws comes into my house and goes right to my refrigerator and pours herself, you know, a glass of milk, I'm not going to think can you believe what she just did. Dude, you take everything in that refrigerator, take it home with you if you want. Anything you need. I would do anything for you because you're family. Here's Christ saying knock, knock, knock, yeah, you're my people, my adopted people, but are we that close?

This is so good and I know I don't have time for it, but that doesn't normally stop me. (audience laughing) Philippians Chapter 4. Can I tie all this together? This has all the elements here that we've been talking about from the first point to the third point. Philippians Chapter 4. Start in verse 5. "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone." Your forbearance, as the old translations say, your ability to be kind, gentle, and together when things are not externally. "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone." Why? Here it comes, first point. "The Lord is at hand," and you know it. Why are you that way? Because you know I live in the presence of God, "and I'm not anxious about anything, but in everything," if I need something, I just ask dad, "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God." If that's the relationship we have here's the presence and what it does, "and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." When God comes close the peace now settles in. Because



if you and God are right, what else really matters? "Finally, brothers," then should we pursue holiness? Absolutely. It ought to be "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you've learned and received and heard and seen in me -- practice these things." And then I love this. Again, here's the conditional part of the intimacy with God. "And the God of peace will be with you." I love it, the peace of God, the God of peace.

I would like to dwell on his holy hill. I'd like to be a sojourner in his tent. But that means we're going to have to get serious about trusting God and pursuing him and caring more about fitting in with God and his kingdom than the world. Ezra was gathering the faithful remnant together by the river Ahava. And he had them staging there before they came back. Of course, the Persians are in charge at this time. Artaxerxes and Cyrus had already said, great, so they're all coming. They're about to come back. And Ezra the scribe says something very interesting in Chapter 8 verse 22. He says, as they're staging to come back, let me just read it here. He said, "I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way." If you're going to go from Mesopotamia where Babylon was, and now Persia is in charge, and you're going to go to Israel, or you're going to head to Judea? You're going to have to go north, you're not going to go through the desert, and there are a lot of enemies on the way. That's a frequently traveled path. And he says, "I was ashamed to ask the king." Why were you ashamed, Ezra to ask the king for mounted troops of defense? Here's why he said it. "Since we had told the king, 'the hand of our God is for good on all who seek him.'" I was afraid it would look like I really didn't mean that God would be with us. Because we're seeking... We don't want to be Persians. We don't want to be Babylonians. We're not interested in becoming like the Medes. We want to be God's people. We've hung our harps long enough. We want to go back. We want to "go out from their midst" and "touch no unclean thing."

Now, I quoted that several times because it's in our passage, that's the illusion. It's not an illusion, it's a quote from Isaiah Chapter 52 verse 11. Here's the last part of it that I didn't quote that's not quoted in our passage. It says, "the God of Israel will be your rear guard." God is going to take care of you. Ezra had that passage at hand. He's the scribe. He knows what Isaiah had said years previously. When you leave the Babylonian captivity, you just need to know. Leave. Don't run away. Don't be afraid. You march out with your head up high. You go back and you settle because your time of exile is over and God will protect you. Now, Ezra says, I kind of think we needed a little bit of a, you know, transport guard here protecting us but I was ashamed to ask for that because I had told him "the hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." All you have to do is look back at Babylon to see that. So his theology now is being tested. So he falls to his knees with the people, he says, "So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty." God did protect them going back and they didn't need mounted troops to protect them on the way.

I know it feels risky for you to step out from the world and not seek their acceptance. And what'll happen? Maybe I'll be overlooked for promotion, and maybe I won't make my bills, and



maybe people in our neighborhood, they won't invite us to stuff, or we won't be part of whatever? Just stop worrying about that. "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." Why would you want the pat on the back from people who are, as it says in Ephesians 2, sons of God's wrath? I'm just not interested. I'd much rather you join us and zealously head toward righteousness.

Would you stand with me? We'll dismiss in a word of prayer. God, help us, please, to leave this parking lot remembering what a privilege it is to walk through this world as your sons and daughters. Help us to remind ourselves this week because of the preaching of the Word that we don't need the world's approval to feel secure. We don't need the world to protect us. Make us feel safe. You're our helper. You'll never leave us. You'll never forsake us. You go before us. You stand behind us. You are our rear guard. God, we know we want to live distinctly and that's not easy because our flesh doesn't cooperate very well. But please let us make strides this week to diligently pursue purity that you might draw near to us as we draw near to you. We want to know your convictions and stand firmly on them. We don't want this church to be thinking about its heyday, how good it was back in the day when we were a church that stood for truth. And I know that starts with every individual heart that's here. So God help us to redouble our commitment, our resolve to you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.