



A Closer Relationship with God-Part 4

Motivated by Earlier Days of Devotion

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My eight-year-old son, John, wants to be a good golfer. Came to me one day, said, Dad, how can I be a really great golfer? I said, well, just swing the club like Tiger Woods. I said, and you'll be really good.

Of course, he rolled his eyes. Come on, Dad. Come on, how can I get better? And I said, okay, my middle son, he's eight. I said, grab your older brother. Let's get in the car, take you down to the driving range. I said, I want you to watch your brother. Watch how he addresses the ball. Watch how he holds the club. Watch how he brings the club back. Go ahead, Matthew, tell him. Tell him what that feels like on the follow-through. And then you can stand right next to him and you can just, uh, you can follow that pattern, see? And he recognizes that's a much better approach than Dad's saying to just swing the club like Tiger Woods. Because he realizes that the example, if it's closer to him, it's much more effective. The further away the template, the harder it is to emulate it.

The Bible has a lot to say about following good examples. As a matter of fact, we learned in verse 22 of Hebrews 10 that we all need to be drawing near to God. And the very next thing the writer of Hebrews says is we need to encourage one another in that. We need each other. That's why you can't do church from home and you can't do it by, you know, downloading sermons on your iPod. That's just not it. We need each other. We need the example of one another. We need the encouragement of one another, the coaching of one another, to move into a deeper and more intimate relationship with God.

Now, the example is important, but sometimes I'll sit there and watch my middle son, my eight-year-old, hit a bucket of balls, and every now and then I watch him do it just the way he ought to. And he'll know it and he'll feel it and he'll smile and he'll watch the ball just fly off of his club. And I'll stop and say, that was it. I said, did you feel that? Did you see what that felt like? Now look, look at your follow-through. Look at how your shoulders are. I said, that's it. That's it. See? And that for him is like a light bulb that pops on. I mean, it's one thing to say, watch the guy on TV and just hit it like he hits it. It's another thing to say, listen to your older brother and he's going to coach you through it. But it's a whole other thing for him in his own mind to say, I know what that feels like. I just did it. And Dad says, take that feeling, take that experience, and just keep doing that. And his mind gets it, and he becomes a better golfer.

It's interesting that in Scripture that's so big on us finding good role models for the Christian life, it's interesting that in Hebrews chapter 10, before we get to Hebrews chapter 11, which is full of great examples of the Christian life, he starts in speaking of examples and he says, you know what? You really can serve as your own role model because you have done it right, and you know what it feels like to do it right. And he says, here's the thing. All you got to do is remember that and do more of that stuff.

Hebrews chapter 10, if you have your Bibles, open up and see this interesting take on role models in the Scripture that says really what you need to learn to do, at least in part, is learn to mimic yourself, at least the highlights and victories of your Christian life. Mimic, I say that because one of the most popular New Testament expressions as it relates to role models is the Greek word *mimetai*, and from that we get the word mimic, and then we usually find that in the mouths of followers of Christ who say to others, *mimetai*, in this second person imperative, that you need to mimic me,



follow my example, and of course, as Paul sometimes says, as I follow Christ. As I live like Christ, you watch me up close. I know Christ, he seems distant and far away, but you watch what I do and do it.

And here in this text, it says not only can you learn from other great Christians, as we'll see in Hebrews 11, but you can learn a lot from your own testimony. You can learn a lot about succeeding in the Christian life and drawing closer to God because you've had experiences of forward progress. And you need to look back and remember that. Take a look at the very first word in verse number 32. It's the word remember.

And I know for a lot of Christians they think, well, you know, I've read that passage in Philippians and it says forgetting what lies behind. You got to see the context of that. Paul had just listed his resume that he was tempted to lean on as a non-Christian, his pedigree as an up-and-coming Pharisee. And he says, I'm not going to think about that. But if you extract that one passage and you look throughout the Scripture and you realize that that's speaking about one thing that could become a problem for the Apostle Paul, you start to realize that God has a lot to say about us looking back at our experience with God. And he's often saying to the Old Testament Israelites, hey, pile up a bunch of stones right there and never forget what we walked through here together. He says, put up a monument here and remember this. Hey, this festival and this feast, we're going to keep looking back to that time when I took you out of Egypt. He's always trying to get them to look back. Why? Because if you can look back at the victories that you've had with Christ, you become your own role model. And you say, you know what? I can do it because I have done it. And God wants me to do more of it.

And a lot of times when it's a role model, I can see my son get frustrated as he looks at his older brother and he says, well, I just can't do it like he can. But see, when I point back to the hit that he had two or three swings ago, he says, well, I guess I can do it. And you know, he becomes encouraged and he gets motivated and he starts saying, maybe I can do it. Maybe I can do better. And the apostle Paul throughout the Scriptures is saying the same thing, with the exception of Philippians 2 when he talks about his resume, and the writer of Hebrews says the very same thing. Remember. If we're drawn near to God, we need to remember our victories in the past, and it will be a motivation for future growth.

Look at it, verse number 32. Let's read the text together. He says, those earlier days, remember those after you'd received the light. And look at this victory. When you stood your ground in the great contest in the face of suffering. Apparently some big thing that had happened, this series of events that had tested their faith, and they succeeded. They stood their ground. And he says, sometimes it got really tough. Verse 33, you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution. The early church often was pulled out as followers of the Way and of Jesus and this whole sect, that they called it, and they were made fun of. They were ridiculed. And he says, you went through that. And not only did you go through it, there were times when you didn't just have to endure it. You willingly stepped out of the crowd and you stood side by side with those who were so treated. And not only that, your heart was involved. Verse 34, you sympathized with those in prison. You felt for them. And when they came to take away your property because you were followers of Christ, you were like, okay, fine. You joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property because, look at your perspective, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

That's a great resume. And if you think that these guys are stellar Christians with no room for growth, that's not the context. The context is you got to grow. You got to get closer to God. But the



point is, you have had victories that should convince you that you are someone who knows what it is to have those victories, to show the expression and fruit of God in your life. And you know what? Build on that. Remember your past. And what's the whole point of it being here? So that you can keep moving forward. Verse 22, to draw near to God. That's the point.

And you and I need to do that. But before we make the comparison of where I've been in my Christian life to where I should be now, which is really the focus of your homework this week, I think we need to do what in this passage is done by default. It makes me think that before I was saved, I didn't have this capacity. But, you know, after my conversion, I had it. And there were those highlights in my Christian life where these kinds of things happened. And he says, you know what? Make that comparison. Think about the fact that this is a work of God in your life. And that gets me to think of, what about before I came to Christ? Well, I didn't have that. So let's make that comparison, and then we'll make the next comparison.

If you found your worksheet, it'll be important to pull it out this morning. Open it up. The first thing I want to do is make the comparison. And there's really two here that we need to make. One is going to have to be your homework assignment, or your home fellowship group assignment, or your personal devotion assignment, because you'll have to do business with God and compare your highlights to where you live now. But suffice it this morning to say, let us compare our lives before Christ in all six of these areas and our life after we became Christians, because those highlights really ought to drive us to being closer and closer and more intimate with God.

Now, I say six things because if you look at this carefully, it addresses six aspects of the Christian life. So let's make that comparison. And I know this is kind of a funny-looking worksheet. It was my attempt to try and make it look like it wasn't a chart, but it's really a chart, and I'm sorry. But I should have just drawn the lines on there for you. But the point is, we're going to kind of make some columns here and turn this into a little matrix that will help us understand that the things that are addressed in this passage about my life have really changed prior to Christ, now as a Christian. And then, you know, the question is, how am I doing now in all these areas?

So let's just do the work of that this morning, make the comparison, and let's start with the first thing that comes from a very interesting word, participle here in the very first phrase of verse 32. He says, remember those earlier days. Now what about them? Well, here's the first thing he says, after you'd received the light. That's how the NIV translates it. After you received the light. Now I understand that's a total metaphor. It's an analogy of something. And it speaks to, I'll prove this to you, it speaks to the arena of my mind, that something has happened to my mind. So in the first little blank there, let's put this down for letter A, pointy finger number one, we need to think about the change that took place in our mind. Jot down this, your mind, in the first line, okay? Your mind.

According to the Scripture, the analogy is pretty universal throughout the New Testament. Our minds were darkened before we came to Christ, and then Christ did something to our minds that could be rightly addressed as being enlightened. Something changed there. And let me show you what that practically looks like, and then we'll put that, the non-C column, that's the non-Christian column, we'll put down how we might describe that.

And let me show this to you in Romans chapter 1. It's a good expression, though the word mind is not used there. It's a good expression as to how our minds had to work as non-Christians if we were going to continue a life without Christ. And we did that for some period of time. For some of you, it

was shorter than others, but all of us have lived as non-Christians. What was our mind looking like? And then how did it change? That's the next column, okay?

Romans chapter 1. Let's go to Romans chapter 1. Romans chapter 1, if you would turn to that text where Paul is talking about how God is trying to convince people of the truth, of God's light, if you will. He's talking about how you can see it in creation. He's going to say in chapter 2 how we see it written in our conscience. He's going to get into chapter 4 and talk about how it's explained to us in the Scriptures. He's going to talk about general revelation to special revelation, and he's going to say God's attributes, God's will, God's truth is being shoved in your face all the time, but your mind was responding to it in a particular way.

Take a look at verse number 18 in Romans chapter 1, when Paul says this about the issue of God's coming judgment. Though it's put in a present tense, it's what we call in grammar a prophetic perfect. It's going to happen, but it's like it's happening now. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men. Now all that's going to happen in the future. Chapter 2 makes that clear. But it's like it's already just starting to be unleashed. And God is going to have to retribute sin, the wickedness of men, the godlessness of men.

Now how do they live in that state? There's something that has to happen as their mind interfaces with truth. They have to, look at the next phrase, underscore it, they suppress the truth by their wickedness. Really, by the fact that they want to live a particular lifestyle. They want to do things their own way. When through creation or conscience or Scripture, they have to do something when the truth of the light of God's truth assaults them. They have to respond. They have to fight it. They have to suppress it. And every non-Christian mind does this. Whether it's in creation, as they think about God's attribute, it's displayed in creation, and then they're going to do something that really doesn't reflect that, it's counter to that. Or whether it's their conscience that says you really shouldn't do that, and yet my feelings and impulses of, yeah, but I want to, I have to fight that truth. Or whether it's the teaching of Scripture, and like the people here in the early church, or us growing up in church, or hearing the sermons on a tape or a CD or on TV or whatever, we have to fight it. We have to suppress that truth so that we can live the way that we want to. And all of us have to, at some degree or some level or another, fight the truth with our minds.

So let's just summarize it in that first column. What about our mind? What describes our mind? Well, it fights the truth. And when it encounters it, it has to put an arm up and say, well, you know, that's great, but I'm not really, I don't buy that. It fights the truth. That's what every unregenerate mind does.

Now, if you have a reference Bible, I haven't found too many that have this cross-reference, but it would be a good one to write down. And the reason it's not there is because this text doesn't use the word mind. But jot this down anyway, because I can only suppress the truth for the sake of my wickedness by and with, rather, my mind. And that's Ephesians chapter 4, verses 17 through 19. Just jot that down in the margin of your Bible. And next time you read this text, you'll say, what did I write that down for? Then you're going to go over there and you're going to see these words in Ephesians 4:17-19. I won't read the whole text. I'll just give you the descriptions of our thinking. Here's how it's put: futile thinking, darkened understanding, ignorance of truth, and blind, and a fifth one, calloused minds. The word is often used in Scripture, as it is throughout Ephesians 4, heart. But please don't misunderstand. Heart, in Western society, we've hijacked that as the seat of our emotions. In Hebrew thought, it's the seat of our thinking. And I know that Valentine's Day is coming up and we often think about the Valentines and the hearts and that's how I feel and I have

the goosebumps for you and all that. That's not what the Bible means when it talks about heart. It means the control center, how your hard drive operates. And the Bible says about our minds, they're darkened. Our hearts are calloused. They're ignorant of truth and they have to fight it in a futility. They won't win, but they're fighting it.

1 Corinthians 2, this might be a cross-reference, if not, 2:14. 1 Corinthians 2:14. You remember that text? It says that the non-Christian or unregenerate mind, it sees the truth and it sees it as foolishness. It rejects it as foolishness. It cannot understand the spiritual truths because they're spiritually discerned. You need a new mind. You need something to click on. You need to go from a darkened mind and a calloused mind and a mind that fights the truth to a mind now that's turned around and all of a sudden says, wow, the thing I've been fighting, I really want more of it. I want more of that light and more of that truth.

And that's the next column. That's what happens to our mind. Our minds, which are the seat of how we think and how we operate, all of a sudden now, let's just jot it down this way, it becomes responsive to God. God is the one who's presenting this truth to us. And our minds now all of a sudden start saying, wow, I fought that, but then something happened in my life, in my soul. And I said, okay, I'm done fighting. I surrender. I quit. I will now embrace the truth of God's Word. We call it repentance and faith. We turn from sin. We trust in Christ. And now all of a sudden our minds are like, wow, now I'm ready to stop fighting the truth. Now I want the truth. Our minds become responsive to what God is saying, and we want more of it.

And as every Christian can testify to, we went from fighting the truth to a change that God worked in our heart. And now all of a sudden, we wanted more of it. And now all of a sudden, we wanted to go to church, and we wanted to read our Bibles, and we wanted to hear another sermon, and we wanted to buy a new Bible so we could read it more, and another one in our car, and it was like we couldn't get enough of it. We were, as Peter said, like newborn babies craving the pure milk of the Word. Isn't that a great phrase? We just wanted it. I'm thirsty for it. Well, what about that? Your mind has changed.

Back to Hebrews chapter 10. The phrase is here in your New International Version translation, unfortunately, adds a word that doesn't need to be there. And unfortunately changes this into something that makes it look like I just kind of woke up one day, got real smart, and grabbed the light. What does it say there? It says, remember the earlier days after you received the light. That's not what the text says. Some of you, you know, seminary students, you bring in your Greek New Testaments to church, and that's great. Look for the word received there, or any form of it, *lambanō*, or any one you want to find, it's not there. As a matter of fact, all you see is the Greek word *phōs*, light. And it's not a noun here. It's a participle. And more than being a participle, it's actually a passive participle. If you know your language, what is that? Why is that important? Because the text, if we were to literally translate this, is not that I grab the light or receive the light. The text is that really the light had done something to me. I was a passive participant. In grammar, a passive voice means it's happening to me. Some translations read that after you had been enlightened, and that's a little bit more accurate. It's like all of a sudden now the light bulb came on. I didn't reach for it. God just went poof. And that's exactly, by the way, in the context of Paul's discussion to the Ephesians, what he says in chapter 2. It's not as though you reached out for the light. It's like you were dead in your transgressions and sins, but, you know the text? God made you alive together with Christ.



And the amazing thing is most of us can look back in our Christian life in the first week, the first month, the first year, and realize that the change that took place there, God had done an amazing thing in the way that we thought. Our mind was changed. Now, the challenge is to continually renew our minds, right, as we continue to ingest and take in the Word of God. But unfortunately, sometimes what happens is, you know, we find we're not as excited or hungry or thirsty for the light of God's truth as we were earlier in our Christian life. And as often happens throughout the New Testament, even in the New Testament, the writers are saying, remember where you used to be as it related to your connection to truth. As Jesus said to the church at Ephesus, remember the height from which you've fallen and do those things you did at first. You used to love the truth. You used to love God's Word. Is it not quite as passionate or ardent now? See, don't say, well, those guys, they're really smart or they're into the Bible or they have some kind of knack for that and I don't. No, no, no, you have had that, right? You know what it's like in the morning to get up and grab your Bible and open. You know what it is to feed on the light of God's truth. See, you're your own role model. Don't think that it's not you. It is you. It was you. If you're genuinely a Christian, you can look back at doing it right and know, yeah, you're right. I've done it. And if I've done it, God's saying do more of it. Move forward. Keep making progress.

The third column's for you to deal with on your own, right? Where are you now? Because if you can identify with it, if in your heart you go, I know what that's like, and I had that at one time, a hunger for God's Word, I just want to say, how's your appetite for it now? How's your thirst for the light of the truth? Is it changed? Is it waning? I mean, is the dust collecting on the Bible during the week? Maybe I need to say, God, you're right, I do need to draw near to you. And it's not as though it's a foreign thing. I've done it before. I know the experience of having a mind that's reactive and responsive to you and your Word. I need that now.

After you've been enlightened. Well, what happened? I know that's just a description of what's happened. They'd been enlightened. They'd received the light, as the NIV puts it. Verse 32, Hebrews 10. When that had happened, you were new in that new mind. You had that new responsiveness to God. Here's one thing that was going on in your life. When the suffering came, you stood your ground. I love that. You stood your ground in the great contest. If you got your Greek New Testament, what is that word? It's the word for athletics. It's like an athletic event. It was the struggle of facing suffering. It was like a bunch of linebackers, right? It was like you just stood your ground. You were able to stand up to it. It's the picture of some kind of athletic competition, like a wrestling match in the Greco-Roman world, where you stood your ground, and they weren't going to take you. You were going to stand tough, and you did it even when there was pain coming your way.

Now that is something that happens in the Christian life that, as a non-Christian, it doesn't quite happen like that. As a matter of fact, if we can just categorize this part of the matrix, let's put this down. Let's analyze your strength. We took a look at your mind. Your mind really changed as a Christian. How about your strength? You have a capacity as a Christian that you didn't have before, your strength.

Okay, let me illustrate this for you in Matthew chapter 13. We'll fill in the first column here in a minute. Matthew chapter 13. Your strength. We're going to analyze that. Matthew chapter 13. Now Matthew chapter 13, as you turn there, we're going to look at what non-Christians who are exposed to the truth, that have some connection with the church or some connection with the teaching of God's Word, how they respond when they face the contest of suffering, okay?



All of us in our Christian testimony have that period where we start to warm up to the truth of God's Word. We start saying, well, that's starting to make a little sense to me. And that sure is interesting, and that might be hopeful, and we start to embrace it, not yet regenerate, but God is doing a work. As the Puritans said, there was a quickening taking place. Something is happening where now all of a sudden you're starting to associate and attach with it. You're not converted. What tests that and divides the two kinds of people is this thing called the great contest of suffering. And every Christian, or every pseudo-Christian, or every churchgoer has to encounter this, and they will encounter this. And it will usually come early on in the Christian life.

Jesus had just told in Matthew chapter 13 the parable of the four soils. Remember that? We often call it the parable of the seed and the sower. Well, the real focus is really not that. I mean, that's the unchangeable thing. God is using his servants to cast out the gospel and the truth or the light of God's Word. The real issue here is there's all kinds of people that the truth encounters. There's four kinds that Jesus delineates. The first one is the seed thrown on the path, right? The seed thrown on the path. The next one is the seed that ends up in the rocky soil, and then you got the thorny soil, and then you got the good soil. Now there's nutrients that are different in the good soil. Some bear fruit thirty, sixty, a hundredfold. But really there's four kinds. There's this kind that bears fruit, and in all varying degrees, and then there's the thorny, and then there's the rocky, and then there's the seed thrown on the path. You're familiar with the story. I know that. Mike, I know it. Great, okay, good.

Look at chapter 13 when he starts to explain the parable and what it means, and I want to look at the second soil. He says, listen, verses 18 and following, to what the parable of the sower means. Anyone hears the message about the kingdom, the truth, if it's preached to them and they don't understand it, they go, I don't get it at all. It's like the evil one, like the bird that comes and snatches that seed away. What was sown in his heart, he doesn't get it. That's the seed along the path, okay? Interesting. We know that. Great. We're not talking about that one. We're talking about that stage when people encounter the Word and they're responsive to it. They're not quite regenerate yet.

Verse 20, it's the one who receives the seed that falls on the rocky places. That's the man who hears the Word. Now underscore this, at once receives it with joy. Well, this is good. This is novel. This might be helpful for me. But since he has no root, and you got to have that, you got to connect here. There's got to be genuine life and connection to God. But there's not in this case. There's just this interest in the truth. Well, he only lasts a short time. Now, how do we divide this person out? How do we know? Well, here it comes. When trouble, underscore this, or persecution comes because of that truth, because of the Word, what happens? I've had enough. He quickly falls away. He is not interested. Even though he might be intellectually interested in truth, he is not interested in maintaining or holding truth if it's going to cost him pain. That's when he says, I'm going to compromise. I'm going to step back. I'm not going to toe the line or heed it, you know, and be a, I'm not going to be a fanatic about this. I mean, if it can help my marriage or help my interpersonal lives or whatever, but I'm not going to be a fanatic about it because it's costing me. And they pull back.

And unfortunately the church today seems to think, well, you know, those are just, you know, whatever, nominal Christians, all kinds of categories. The bottom line is they don't bear fruit. They fall away. And unfortunately the Bible says, man, if you don't endure to the end, you're not a genuine Christian. If you're not bearing fruit, you're not real. And what we're saying is a lot of people have an intellectual interest in the truth, but they're not real. And the difference is when they face the great contest of suffering, what happens? They compromise when it hurts.

Let's put it down that way. The first column here, your strength, your strength, it will compromise. When something about adhering to the truth hurts, it compromises when life hurts. It says, I don't want to keep going. I'm not interested in going all the way. I can't hold on to this conviction or this commitment because it's starting to cost too much. I might lose my job. I might lose a client. I might lose a relationship. So you know what? I just won't go any farther with this. And the Bible says, man, that's not real Christianity.

As a matter of fact, when you were a real Christian and converted, here's what happened to you. Back to Hebrews 10 in our minds. You stood your ground in the contest, the great contest in the face of suffering. When you hit that dividing line, when that test of your faith came, you passed the test and you stood your ground. See, that's a different kind of strength. It's a strength that doesn't pull back when the going gets tough. It's what we call in Scripture, and if you're familiar with this word, jot it down. It's the thing we put in the next column. Now it's this thing we call *hupomonē*. Do you remember that word? That's just worth jotting down. Well, just fun to say. *Hupomonē*. And if you want a word, what does that mean? Just put this underneath it: stick-to-itiveness, which sounds like a silly word, but it's in your dictionary. If it's fat enough, it's in there. I checked it this week.

What's the point? Well, you've heard me preaching *hupomonē* before, right? Please nod your head if you have, because I'm thinking maybe I need to preach that sermon right now, and you don't want the sermon to be five hours, so say, yeah, no, sure, I remember that. And if not, by the way, I think I listed it in that box in the back. I always list some sermons that will help you follow up and kind of expand on it. I think it's the second to the last one there, and I don't remember the number on it, but a critical reminder about *hupomonē*.

Okay, *hupomonē*, do you remember that word? It's a compound word, *menō*. You know, the part we get *monē* from, that means to stay or remain. *Hupo* is the Greek preposition that means underneath. I think even in that sermon I called it the Tijuana donkey. That would have been a good title for it too. You kind of want to be the Tijuana donkey, and that's not generally what you want to be, but you want to be that in this case. Because I remember as a kid going down to Tijuana and seeing these donkeys, and I could not believe the stuff they piled on the back of the donkeys. You've seen that? And you look at the suede back of the donkey sitting there looking stupid. He's fine by the tamale cart. He's not going anywhere. And you're thinking, wow, if you pile that stuff on me, I'm going to say, get me out from underneath this.

Hupomonē is the ability to stay under that pressure, under that pain, and you're not going anywhere. It's that great picture of standing your ground. And if it costs me to adhere to the Word, guess what? I guess it's going to cost me. I've got the ability to stick with it, even when the truth costs me pain, see? And that's *hupomonē*.

And now, here's the contrast. Before I was a Christian, you know what? If anything that was true or virtuous cost me, I backed off from it. But then I became a Christian, and God worked something in my heart. He gave me the ability to stand there in the face of difficulty and not move. And now the question is, third column, that's your homework, how's it going now? Still got that kind of zeal, that ardent passion? You got that kind of stick-to-itiveness, that kind of strength? And the question we've got to be asking is, if not, don't say you don't know what it's like. Don't say you're not that kind of person. I have people tell me, well, that's not me, that's you. That's, no, that's you too. Because every real Christian can look at a time in their Christian life when that test came and you

stood the test. So if you're getting, you're feeling weak right now, don't tell me you don't know how to do it. You've done it. God has worked that in your life. So you need to make the comparison. You got that kind of ability. You know that you've done it before. Now learn from your own example. Be your own role model in this case and say, I can do it.

And don't distance yourself from the great people in Hebrews 11 and say, well, I'm not like them. No, but you can look back right now and remember when you did not give in and you did not compromise when your faith was tested. Then why in the world would you think you can't do it now? Do it now. Remember that. Remember where you've been. Remember the enlightenment of your mind. Remember the *hupomonē* of your strength.

Thirdly, letter C, pointy finger number three, verse 33. Sometimes, he says, thinking back on your early Christian life, you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution. Why? Because you're a Christian. At other times, you stood side by side with those who were so treated. Now, you've got to tear this apart. There's two parts to this. Well, the first phrase looks a lot like verse 32. I was there holding up, standing firm, when because of my Christianity people were making fun of me. They were insulting me. They were persecuting me. Now you'd say if that was all there was to this verse, then you'd say, well, you know, it kind of goes with strength. You had the ability to stand there and be strong. That's great. But look at the next phrase. Here's the other part of this. You also, at other times, stood side by side with those who were so treated. Now that's different.

It's one thing because of my commitment to Christ or my commitment to God's truth to incur ridicule for that and say, okay, I'm going to stand up under, I'm not going to move off my commitment and my resolve for the truth of God. I'm not moving. That's one thing. It's a different kind of virtue. It's a different kind of work of God that when I see it happening in someone else, look at the phrase, I am willing to stand side by side with the person that's being persecuted. Can you see the difference? That's something else.

We call that third box, third line, we call that courage. The ability to say, I don't care. It may not even be my issue or my struggle, but I'm going to stand right next to this person because I'm not afraid. And if you're going to ridicule him for being a Christian, you can ridicule me too. That takes courage. That's more than strength. That's something that has to do with my bravery. That has something to do with the fact that I am not afraid. And if it's going to incur more ridicule, insult, or persecution, I'm not afraid of that.

And as non-Christian, did you have that? No, not at all. As a matter of fact, that's not a part of the non-Christian virtue. You don't have it. You may have some courage, but you don't have courage when it relates to this kind of thing, because there's always in a non-Christian mind something else floating around that is not extricated, it's not taken away until God does a work in your life at conversion. And it is illustrated best in Galatians chapter 1. So let's look at the contrast in Galatians chapter 1, and we'll spell it out. I don't have that kind of courage as a non-Christian because really in my earthbound myopic perspective, all I'm really concerned with, or at least as a part of the composite of my concern, is something that Paul delineates and spells out here.

Take a look at what he says in Galatians chapter 1. Is that what I said, Galatians 1? Okay, just making sure. Galatians chapter 1. Paul's talking about the gospel. He says don't sway, don't compromise. Stand firm no matter what people say. Stand firm on the gospel. And he says in verse number 10, Galatians 1:10, he says, am I now trying to, look at this phrase, win the approval of men, or am I trying to win the approval of God? Am I trying to please men? Look at this. If I were



still trying to please men, which seems to be the linear experience of non-Christians, he said, then I wouldn't be what a Christian is, a servant of Christ. They are mutually exclusive. God does a work in a heart that changes that.

So let's put it this way. When it comes to courage, there's always a limiting factor in a non-Christian mind. And it's because we're a part of the human race and because we don't have God in the equation, here's the thing. Let's put the column next to your courage. Let's make it say this. We need to recognize that there were limits to our courage, and it usually included a composite of this, that we were afraid of what people may think. It was part of the equation in our decision-making, okay? We were afraid of what people may think. Our courage was limited by our desire to please people. Now, I know we may want to please ourselves. We may want to please our principles. But always there, haunting us in the back of our unregenerate mind, was what is this going to do to my reputation? What are people going to think if I do this? And that was the dominant thing that kept us from doing other things we might have done. There's always that non-Christian peer pressure that's not just a teenage phenomenon. It's an adult phenomenon. And we start going, well, you know, I don't know, what will people think?

And then all of a sudden God does something in our heart that changes not only our mind and our strength, it changes our courage. It moves us from worrying about that. Look how Paul says it, where now we're consumed with wanting the approval of God. I want God to be happy with this. We all of a sudden now, as we said last week, we have this fear of God. As opposed to my constant concern about what men will think, I'm no longer afraid of this. I'm afraid of that. So therefore, I'm going to please him even if I don't please you.

And I love the example in Scripture of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Do you remember those guys? A.K.A. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Remember those guys? And when it came down to it, they said, we're standing with Daniel. You know what? We're not afraid. As a matter of fact, we'll step out of the crowd. And if you, Nebuchadnezzar, want us to bow down to your idol, here's what we have to say. We're not going to do it. And he says, well, you know, look at this, I'm going to throw you in this fiery furnace and I'm going to kill you, see? From New York, Nebuchadnezzar was, apparently so. That just came out for some reason.

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah said to the king, I love this, in the book of Daniel, said, listen, God is able, remember this verse, to save us from your fiery furnace. And I love this phrase, but even if he doesn't, we're not bowing down to your stinking idol. Stinking's not in the original text, but the feel of it is there. We're not going to do that. We're not going to do that. And you know what? We're not afraid of you. We're more afraid of God and being idolaters. And we're not going to do that. We wouldn't be an idolater because we answer to God. So if you want to think we're stupid, when you blow the trumpets and everybody's bowing down and everybody's on their forehead before the idol, you can find us, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and we're gonna be standing shoulder to shoulder going, hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm. We're not gonna bow down because we're not afraid of you anymore. You know what? If we were like everybody else and didn't have this resolve and this work of God in our hearts, I'm sure we would be bowing down because we're more concerned about what people think. We're very pragmatic as non-Christians, but as Christians, we say I'm pleasing someone else. There's an audience of one in my life now that is starting to captivate my thinking to where I'm not afraid of you anymore. That's different. God does that work.



It is, let's jot it down in the next column, we are, and this is a great word, zealous to please God. We are zealous to please God. And you and I can look back at our conversion, can we not, that first six months? How about those first fifteen months of your Christian life? Weren't there times when you said to those who would think less of you because of your stand for Christ, and you said, I don't care what you think. I care what God thinks. You've had that experience. Don't say that's just, well, those are just those really ardent, fanatical, zealous Christians. No, no, that was you. That was you in the early days of your Christian life, wasn't it? You know that feeling. You know what that's like. Don't say that's someone else. Don't say you can't do that. That's Tiger Woods. No, it's not. It's you. You've done it. And the Bible says, remember that. Remember that. And you know what? That's all God wants. Just keep doing that stuff. Keep saying, I'm going to be zealous to please God.

The distinction is so clear in Scripture. I know we don't see it as a Christian virtue, but we should. Because you know when the list is made in Revelation chapter 21, I mean right near the second to last chapter of the Bible, when God is talking about the people that will inhabit the lake of fire, you remember that list? You know how the list starts as he starts itemizing groups of people? He doesn't start with idolaters. He doesn't start with sorcerers. He doesn't start with adulterers. You know what he starts with? The cowardly. That's what he says. The cowardly. That's the first thing on the list. Why? Because they weren't afraid of God. They were afraid of men. They were afraid. They wanted to fit in. They thought about what people would think of them. And you know what? Those are the people that end up populating the lake of fire.

And that's why when Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1, he said, God did not give us a spirit of, you know what the word is? It's not *phobos*. You're learning some Greek here in church, aren't you? We said that was our last Sunday's word. You know what the word is? Cowardice. It's the same word in Revelation 21. God did not give us a spirit of being a coward. He gave us a spirit of *dunamis*, of power, of love, and of discipline. See, when you become a Christian, all of a sudden now, you start to see the cowardice of caring what people think, and it starts to go away.

Now here's the real question. It's the next column, and that's for your homework. But the real question is, are you still getting tempted right now to kind of fall back into caring about what people think? Oh, I know, I was kind of zealous there early on in my Christian life, but you know what? The Bible says you should be zealous for God. And you should know what it feels like because you've done it. And every real Christian can stand up and say, I have a testimony where I remember doing that. And I could open up the mic and you could stand up and you could say, yeah, I was a six-month-old Christian and then I remember standing, I didn't care what people thought. Next, okay, well, I remember that too. I was a brand-new Christian and I didn't care what people thought. Okay, then why do we care now? The Bible says, remember the height from which you've fallen and do the things you did at first. I'm quoting, that's Revelation 2:5. That is the picture. Look back and see it, and let's recapture that. Live there and build on that and move forward. You want to draw near to God, don't say you can't do it. You've done it. Let's do it some more.

Your mind, God's changed it. Your strength, he's changed it. Your courage, he's changed it. Let's go to letter D, number four. Letter D. Hebrews chapter 34. Let's look at that first phrase. Not only were you someone who could stand up under the pressure, you had courage to step out of the crowd and stand by those who were so treated. Look at verse 34, key word, you sympathized with those in prison. Let's just stop there. You sympathize. Key word, you sympathized with those in prison. That is a transliteration of the Greek New Testament. It's not a translation. It's not a different word. It's the same word. It's just letter for letter, not thought for thought. It comes right out of Greek. *Syn*

is the Greek preposition that precedes it. And *pathos*, you know that word from Greek, feeling. You felt the same as they did. You weren't in prison, but you felt like you were. Your heart went out for them. You had more than a sympathy in English. We need that extra word to kind of show us what Greek sympathy was. We had an empathy.

So let's define that. Fourth box, fourth line. How was your empathy? How did God change that? God wants us to be empathetic as Christians. And when, I don't know, I'm not very empathetic. No, no, no, wait. If you're a Christian, you know how God changed that category of your life. Your life changed. Before you were a Christian, you're right, you didn't have much sympathy. Matter of fact, your empathy had a clear delineated line. You only cared so far. And how far did you care? Let me try to illustrate it for you. You can jot the references down. We won't turn there. But how about two passages that represent two parables? Matthew chapter 25 and Matthew chapter 18.

Matthew chapter 25, Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats. Do you remember that one? The sheep and the goats. The sheep, he divides there, for eschatology's sake, right at the end of the tribulation. He's dividing those people and he's saying, listen, one of the main things he's saying divided you as Christian and non-Christian, no matter how much you wanted to say you were saved or a Christian, here's the difference. You had empathy, the sheep, and goats, you didn't have empathy. And the illustrations he gives is when I was in prison, and they're going, when were you in prison? We didn't see you. If you've done it to the least of these my brothers, you've done it unto me. That's from Matthew chapter 25, right? The point is, when you did it for other Christians, when the other Christian was in prison and you cared so much, you went over there and you visited them, it was like you did it unto me and you showed you had empathy that was supernaturally born in your heart. And you know what? When your brother was without food and didn't have food, you fed him. And you know, when your brother didn't have clothes, you went and got your credit card out and you bought them clothes and you did it. Your empathy went that far.

But you know what? Then he turns to the goats and he says, you guys didn't have empathy. You heard someone is in prison. You go, yeah, pray for him, you know, and that was it. And somebody was hungry. He said, yeah, that's fine. But, you know, the brother can fend for himself. Somebody needed clothes. Whatever. My budget's tight. I can't do that. The line that distinguished was a desire that they would have for themselves if they were in prison, if they were hungry, or if they were without clothes. But they didn't extend that to other people because it wasn't close enough to them. Oh, they would have done it for their family or for their kids or their parents, but they're not doing it for people when there's really no reciprocation. There's no reciprocity. There's no quid pro quo. There's no, yeah, you know what, if I do that for that person, I feel good because there's a lot of comeback on it, see?

Same thing. What did I say? The other one, Matthew chapter 18. Is that what I said? That's the parable of the unmerciful servant. The parable of the unmerciful servant. And maybe you remember that one. That's when the parable is told. Jesus says the master forgives the servant a ton of money. And actually, the monetary equivalents are absolutely outrageous. It's like millions and millions of dollars he owed his master. It's almost comical. And he comes and he says, I can't pay it back. And the master says, well, okay then, fine. I forgive you. Zero. You owe me nothing. That's a good day, right? So off he goes. He owed millions of dollars and the boss said, you don't owe me anything.

And he goes out, the unmerciful servant, the hypocritical servant, what does he do? He finds his fellow servant who owes him a few bucks, a couple *denarii*, a couple days' wage. And because he can't pay him back, he will not forgive him. And instead he throws him in prison. Remember that



story? And then what happens? That servant is brought to the master. He has to give an account to the master. And the master says, because you weren't empathetic, that's not the word he uses, but because you were unmerciful, you didn't care about your fellow servant. You wanted grace, but you weren't willing to give it. Stuff you wanted for yourself, you weren't willing to extend. Because of that, you are going to be thrown in and tortured, Jesus uses the word, and you will pay back every cent. There's no forgiveness for that person. And then he says this, he wraps this, if you're not willing to forgive your brother, he says, then God in heaven won't forgive you.

What's the point? Forgiveness comes to real Christians, and real Christians have an empathy in their heart to do to others what they want done for themselves, even if there's no payback. Let's try and compare these two. This is what I'm trying to say. The limit for us in our empathy as non-Christians, generally speaking, is I ask this question, what's in it for me? And as non-Christians, that's about the extent of my empathy. If I think that the equation equals out to make it profitable, then I'll say, okay. It's like putting money in the stock market. No one's going to say, well, this is a loser, but I'm going to put a few thousand dollars on this stock. Who's going to do that? Nobody. And that's how non-Christians work as it relates to empathy and sympathy. They're not going to put it out there if there's no payback. They're going to ask what's in it for me. And though we might be empathetic, it's because, well, it made me feel that good, or they might be able to see that I'm a great guy and my reputation might be, whatever it is, there's something coming back.

And the Bible says God takes a hold of our hearts, and all of a sudden now, we don't have these hypocritical desires anymore, where I want for me, but I'm not willing to give, or I'm making a limit that says, well, what's in it for me? God does something in our hearts to where when we hear that someone's in prison, it doesn't matter if they're a brother in Christ. I don't care if I get anything out of it. I will invest in that stock, even if I know the stock is a loser. And who's going to do that? Only a regenerate heart. Who gives without any thought of receiving? Only someone who's reflecting the attributes of God. And isn't that exactly what Jesus said on the Sermon on the Mount? He said, you will be sons of your Father in heaven if you are willing to send out and give without any reference to getting back. Tax collectors and sinners, well, they always give as long as there's something coming back. But the empathy of our heart usually stopped there.

But you know what? When God does a work in your heart, your empathy goes even further. You have what we often call, let's put this in the next column, a selfless concern for others. And if you're a real Christian, there have been times in your Christian life where your empathy has extended without any thought of what you might get back. As a matter of fact, when your mind said, I'm going to actually get nothing back from this. And these people had sympathy for people like that in the early church. And you know what? They did it anyway. They did it anyway.

And the Bible says, you know what? Think back. You've done it. And if you've done it, don't tell me that you don't have any area there in your life where, you know, don't tell me you don't have the capacity to do it. You have the capacity. You've done it. What does it mean, draw near to God? Well, one part is my mind, my strength, my courage, my empathy. It all needs to keep moving toward Christlikeness. Well, you know what? Don't say you don't know anything about it. You've done it. And every Christian should get up here to the mic and be able to say, yeah, you know what? There were times when I just selflessly gave of myself and I went and it didn't matter what I got back. Now that may not be the general action of your life today, but Jesus would say, remember the height from which you've fallen and do the deeds you did at first. See, that's the challenge. You are your best role model right now. If you analyze the victories in your Christian life, man, look back

and say, I know I can do it and I can build on that and I can go even further, draw near to God. Let's make it better.

Your mind, your strength, your courage, your empathy. Let's go to the next section, middle of verse 34. Hebrews chapter 10, verse 34. Not only did you sympathize with those in prison, but you joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property. And that is absolutely nutty and insane, right? Think about that. If I said, hey, you know what? Your SUV's getting towed away right now in the parking lot, nobody's gonna go, oh, praise the Lord, you know? If you come home after church and your house has got all the furniture, moving trucks, and people repossessing all your life, you're going to go, oh, fantastic. You're going to be torqued, right?

That's the natural response. Something hurts me. If there's a negative action in my life, the actual response of an unconverted heart is a negative emotion. Negative stuff, negative emotion. That's how it works, see? But there's something going on in this text, obviously. It's not just bad stuff happening to you. It's the understanding of something larger, of God doing a larger work and even a larger reward. Verse 34, more on that in a second, the bottom of verse 34. But the point is, because of their Christian life, here was probably Claudius, the Roman emperor. They weren't yet being slaughtered yet. According to chapter 12, they hadn't yet shed blood for the cause of Christ. And that would have happened under Nero or Diocletian. But probably under Claudius' reign, where they were just confiscating their stuff. They were making fun of them. They were publicly ridiculing them and throwing pastors in prison. And that was happening to this church. And they said, you know, when they came for your stuff and said, oh, you're a Christian, huh? Fine then, you know, all Christians today, new law in the city, every Christian's got to turn in their donkeys and camels. You can't have them anymore. They just hated, they were jeering, they were persecuting them. And you know what the Christians were doing in the early church when they hit that suffering for the sake of their commitment to Christ? They were saying, I can find joy in that. That's okay. You can take that. That's fine. That's not going to bum me out. I'm going to have a negative thing happen to me, and I'm going to know that the hand of God, the providence of God, the principles of God are going to govern that. And you know what? In my heart, I can find joy there.

Non-Christians, nah, that's not how it works. When negative things happen, negative emotions. Put it down this way in the column. We haven't even put the box yet. Let's talk about your attitude, because that's what that is, right? It's my attitude. My attitude. Non-Christian attitude, here it comes, ready? We easily give way to negativity. It's not hard to knock us off the block, right? You may be having a great attitude as a non-Christian, but all it takes is a few negative things and all of a sudden now we're negative. That's how it happens.

Two primary, by the way. I know this is turning into the world's longest sermon, but hang in there with me. But I'm thinking about two primary negative responses in Scripture that distinguish non-Christians from Christians. One is whining and complaining, okay? And think about the people that were redeemed out of Egypt. There were people that were redeemed out of Egypt who had the right heart before God, and when big challenges or trials or troubles came their way, they said, that's okay. We got God. We're going to make it. Remember Caleb and Joshua coming back? They had spied out the land, and they said, yeah, they're big, but that's all right. We're going to take them. God's with us. It's okay. Big perspective. And the others, well, they're really big, and they're really going to hurt us, and I can't do it. God, why are we here? Let's go back to Egypt. And the others were going, you know, it's okay. God's taking care of us. Look, pillar by day, you know, fire at night, and no problem. The cloud, the pillar, it's okay. Manna, look at the lawn. Every morning God's providing for us. Good attitudes. But a lot of them were like, I'm just tired. Back in Egypt we



had so much stuff to eat. Now I've got to, couldn't see the common grace of God, the guiding of God. They had negative emotions. They were whiners and complainers. Didn't take much to push them into that.

And how about the other one, the big negative and dangerous emotion in Scripture, anger. Think about that. Didn't take much to take an unregenerate heart and knock it into anger. Even when there's a chance to do the right thing and fix it, they still, they're stuck in that trap. I think of Genesis 4 and Cain and Abel. Remember that? Cain and Abel, what a fascinating example. We'll get into it in chapter 11. But here is Cain. He does the wrong thing, whatever it is, he brings the wrong thing, the wrong heart, and he's mad. He's crestfallen. He's downcast. And God, it says in Genesis 4, says to Cain, do you remember what he says to Cain? He says, why are you downcast? Why are you angry? He says, won't, just, he says, do right, and won't you be accepted? Fix it. That's all. You don't have to be mad. Let's just fix it. And then he says this, but you know what? If you don't, sin is crouching at the door, and it wants to master you. This thing will destroy you. It will cause all kinds of devastation in your life. And you know what Cain chose? Easily knocked into anger, and that anger captivated his life.

Now you find that today. I mean, non-Christian hearts were easily, we turn into grumblers and complainers, whiners, and we turn into angry people. Easy. But you experienced that in your non-Christian life and then God did something to your heart. To where when you saw the big picture and you understood the providence of God and a bad thing happened, you did something that the non-Christian world scratched their head at. They did not understand it. You were able to, next column, joyfully, next column, joyfully, I'm sorry, you were able to rejoice. There we go. You were able to rejoice in hard times. You encountered something negative and instead of having the natural human response of negativity, you had a positive attitude. You were joyful.

Anybody experienced that? If you're a Christian, you can look back and you've seen that happen. Now, is that happening every day now in your Christian life? Maybe not. See, but remember the height from which you've fallen, and do the deeds you did at first. Revelation 2:5. That's what you need to do. Why? Because you've shown that you have that supernatural ability to rejoice. Why? Because the Lord is near, as Philippians says.

Philippians 4, remember that text? It says this, that if you do the things that the Scripture says, you understand the Lord is near. He's walking through this and he's holding your hand and you're giving your request to God. It says the peace of God, which, important phrase, what's the next phrase? Surpasses all comprehension, all understanding. People go, I don't understand that. It will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Does it do that every time in your life now? No, maybe not. But you know what it is to have that happen. How about that first year of your Christian life? Was there ever anything bad that happened to you? And all of a sudden now, instead of getting bummed out and negative, all of a sudden you're saying, you know what? It was weird. I sat there and actually could rejoice. And I thought God is working his plan out in my life. And they just towed my SUV away for whatever reason, but I can see God's plan in this. And I can be at peace, and I can even have a positive emotion of joy. And I can feel that. I can sense that. And that's just something that didn't happen in my heart before. Do you see the distinction?

Question is, column, third column, homework. How's it now? Don't tell me you can't do it. You have done it. And God wants you to do it more.

Lastly, number six, last phrase, verse 34. Hebrews chapter 10, verse 34. Now, again, there's more to that phrase. They rejoiced because they confiscated their property because of their commitment to



Christ. But the reason they could do that, there was something else. And I wanted to make these distinct because they're really two parts of our lives, not just our attitude. But look at the last thing. Because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. Now, what's that? That's a perspective. Let's put that down on the last line there. Number six, letter F, perspective. Your perspective as a new Christian changed.

What is it before we become Christians? Well, that's really simple. Let's just call it, I like to call it myopic, you know, perspective, but let's just call it this: it's earthbound. All that matters is we're trying to figure out what will it do for the rest of my life? What effect will this have on my life? That's the extent of your rationale about decision-making. We're trying to see what's it going to do. And if it's going to hurt because now I won't have a car and they just towed my SUV, then you know what? You're going to be bummed. But if you are able to rejoice, part of that is because you have a different perspective.

And if because of standing up for what's right, you suffer some loss, you have the perspective that God is a rewarder of those who suffer for his name. Didn't Jesus say that, Sermon on the Mount? He says, when people ridicule you and persecute you for my name's sake, he said, in that day, rejoice. He said, because, do you know the next phrase? Great is your reward in heaven. And so that's how they treated the prophets in the Old Testament too. But you know what? Rejoice. Why? Because when, for the sake of Christ, you encounter hard times, it is adding up on your account in heaven. And if that sounds like being a greedy, a spiritual materialist, now you're getting it. Because Jesus said that's the way you ought to be. Store up for yourselves treasure where? In heaven.

I know that a lot of people believe in celestial communism, but that's not how it's going to work, right? I know. Write that down. That's a good bumper sticker. And put celestial communism, circle slash. There is no celestial communism, okay? You and I are building up treasure in heaven that we will enjoy. And if it comes to the fact that because of my cause of Christ, my SUV gets towed away, I can rejoice if I have a perspective that's not just earthbound. If it's bigger than that, and I think, great, two new SUVs just went into my mansion in the new Jerusalem. No problem, because Christ promised that if we're persecuted, great is my reward in heaven.

Now, that's a perspective that's supernatural. That's a perspective that's not earthbound. Let's just put this matching word, the contrasting word. How about a perspective that is eternal, eternal. And the perspective there is great. Store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth can eat it up, rust destroy it, or thieves break in and steal it. You ought to be rich there. Luke 12, right? The fool who built those silos, and all he cared about was myopic, earthbound treasure. And what does God say? He says, you fool, for tonight your soul is required of you. And he says, the problem with that is that's how everybody is who is not, look at this phrase, rich toward God. I want to be rich in the kingdom of heaven. The Bible says that is a godly thing.

And the deal is sometimes when my Christian life brings on persecution or trial or insult or confiscation of my stuff, or I have to lose a house or a job for the sake of the kingdom, the Bible says have a party, pour the M&M bowl to the top, and drink Pepsi all night. Because here's the thing, great is your reward in heaven. That was too revealing, I recognize. Sorry. That sounds like a party to me, though. Uh, God says if you sacrifice it for me, what happens? Here's the deal. You're gonna, you're gonna have something in the kingdom that's an eternal perspective, okay?



Now you're looking at your watch going, that was the first point. What's the second point look like? Oh, I'm hungry. Uh, look, the second point is really short, okay? And it's not found in the text. It's found in the rhetorical context. Because all we're told here, the one imperative verb for us is remember. And we've just done that. We've tried to remember that we've all had success in an eternal perspective and in a good attitude and in real empathy, in courage and a new mind and new strength. We've had that experience. And God would say, remember that because you can do it. You've hit the ball, hit it again. You know how to do it. Okay.

But why is it here? Because, verse 22, we're all supposed to be making progress in drawing near to God. What's the title of the series? We all should be closer to God this year than we were last year. The point is forward progress. So let's just put it down this way, okay? Number two on your outline, you and I need to resolve to excel. Resolve to excel. And if you want to target, take the six we just looked at. You want to resolve to excel in being hungry for the light of God's truth. You want to resolve to excel in being strong for the commitment that you have to Christ. You want to be growing and excelling in your courage to stand up for what is right. You want to grow in your empathy and your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ. You want to grow in a positive attitude that sees things from the light of God's Word, and you're willing to say, I can rejoice even in the midst of hard times, and I want to grow in my perspective and think more about eternity than I'm thinking about the next 10 years of my portfolio. I want to grow in those areas. I want to excel in those areas.

If you're a New Testament student, you know out of the 27 books of the New Testament, there is some uniqueness to the book of 1 Thessalonians, don't you? If you look at every other book that Paul wrote to somebody, he's addressing issues and problems. Look at the book of 1 Corinthians. Every time you turn the page, well, and you have this problem, and well, now you have that problem. And you look at Galatians, you look at Romans, they're all filled with issues that he's trying to correct. The book of 1 Thessalonians is pretty unique, because the book of 1 Thessalonians, here's a church that's doing it right, and that church that's doing it right, he's got praise for them page after page.

But I love this. What you'll find punctuating the book of 1 Thessalonians, you can find it in 1 Thessalonians 4:1. You can find it in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 4:10. It's all throughout the book. He's got this perspective. You may be doing it right, but here's the thing. There's room for growth. And I love the way he says it. He says, you're doing it, but I want you to excel still more and more. That's the literal translation of that phrase. I want you to excel and do it more and more. I want you to keep going and keep growing.

And some of you are here and you've been a Christian for three years. And it's like, yeah, those are all things that are happening in my life. And it's great. And I'm going to say to you, keep excelling. Grow and do it more in all six areas and find six more and keep growing. And then there are some that are sitting here and they've been a Christian for 35 years. And they're going, you know what? I don't have that like I used to. All of these are convicting because I remember times when I was a whole lot more courageous and a whole lot more hungry for truth and a whole lot more sympathetic and a whole lot more positive in my attitude, a whole lot more empathetic, all of those things, and had a better perspective.

You know what? Here's the thing. The whole reason this is here is to motivate these people. And as Jesus said, Revelation 2:5, remember the height from which you've fallen. See? And do the things



you did at first. And that's all God's wanting you to do this morning. Go and do it. Do it. Move forward. Make forward progress. God wants you to do it.

Oh, what, isn't it a God thing, you know? Isn't it something that God, you know, does, and I'm just passive? You know what? I know the verses. I know Philippians 2:13. I know it. But I also know verse 12. God is at work in us to will and to work for his good pleasure. But the verse that precedes it is this, that you and I need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We've got to effort. We've got to resolve. We've got to push to this thing.

I know God doesn't care whether I play golf like Tiger Woods. That's clear. He's forsaken that area of my life for the most part. But he cares a lot about whether or not I live like Christ. And he knows that I've got a long way to go. And he knows that you probably have a long way to go. But you and I don't get discouraged because we're looking at Christ and going, I can't live like that. You know what? Don't tell me that. You have. You've had moments in your Christian life where you've lived like that.

And you know, the only thing I got to say as an addendum to that is if you look at that list and go, I don't know, Mike. I've not seen that stuff in my life. You know, here's sermon number two, and it's only 30 seconds, but here's the thing. If you don't know that experience, then you need right now to repent of your sins, to give up, have your mind stop fighting the truth. Tell God that you want right now to be enlightened and to embrace him. And you'll see the old things go when the new things come because he'll make you a new creation. But you got to stop fighting him. This is not a potpourri. You can't make it yourself. It's not cafeteria-style Christianity. You've got to say, I'm going to embrace it. And if this book says it, I'm going to do it. This is your Word. I'm submitted to it. I'm going to follow you.

And if you do that, you know what? You're going to see new things come. And then the great news is you won't need this message for a while. Buy it in three years and then you can listen to it because you'll need it then. But your life is going to be on fire for God. And then we're going to take you, I'm going to baptize you in a blow-up pool in a few weeks. And that's the third sermon, but don't get me started on that one.

So let's grow, okay? Let's pray together.

God, help me, please, and help this church. Help us all as individuals and help us corporately because we know those words from Revelation 2, were really given to a church and we don't ever want to be that. As Compass, we're in this newness, this phase, and it's great. And God, I know years from now, you're going to need to look at us corporately and ask these questions. Individually, I know right now, most of us here can say, yeah, I got to look back. There was a time when I felt that, and I saw that, and I watched your work, and now I just, it's, man, I don't know. Maybe I'm not moving forward like I should.

God, I pray for those this morning that are in that situation, that like the writer of Hebrews said to this early church, that they would remember those victories and use those as a role model for their future behavior, for their behavior this week. Help us in all six areas, I pray, and help us, God, at the end of this year to look back and say we're making progress. We're drawn near to God. Our lives are different than they were last year. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.