

Our Fight with Sin-Part 2
Keeping the Focus on Christ
Pastor Mike Fabarez

Winter baseball is starting up for the two Little Leaguers in my house, and I got to tell you, I am glad that they are now of an age where the kids on their team actually want to be there. It's just great. I mean, they actually are coming because they care about baseball now. It's just been hard to watch over the years, and impossible to cheer, for those kids that step into the batter's box and they're clearly not even trying, you know what I mean? They're not even trying. And they kind of whisk the bat over the plate, like an umbrella in a dance recital. You know, just "La la la la."

It's like, that's not it. That's not it. And mom's in the stand going, "Ohhh, good try, Johnny! Good try."

And I'm like, "No, not really. Uh. Really, it's not."

And I wouldn't be so hard on Johnny if it weren't for the fact that when he's done striking out for the fourth time in the same game, when he's done he just kind of shrugs his shoulders, and kind of waves at his mom in the stands, and skips back to the dugout, and—it's like, you don't care.

No, I'm super glad that my kids are now getting to the age in Little League and it's seems like the more they grow and the older they grow, it's like the more serious they are when they step into the batter's box. I just love that. They get it, and they do not want to strike out. They hate striking out, and they want to hit that ball. They're not there for team pictures, it ain't about the uniforms anymore, it's not being part of the club. It's about hitting that ball through the infield. I love that. It's about trying to get one over the fence. They have this passion for that.

And my two, when they come home they reiterate that by their big baseball card trades that go on all the time. They've got their growing baseball card selection, and they never pick up a card and go, "Oh, I like his haircut." Or, "Aren't the team colors here really cool?" You know? They never do that. They're always trading these cards back and forth, and they're holding them up and going "Dude!" You know, they always start with that. "Duude," they say, "This guy, have you ever seen him hit the ball, Dad? This guy put one in the upper deck last week. You should have seen it!" And that's all they care about. And I love that, you know? They've got their heroes that do it right. And they have a passion to get in that batter's box at the next Little League game and hit one through the infield. Love that.

The writer of Hebrews has been dealing with us for the last couple years if you've been with us through our study of Hebrews. In a lot of ways he's like a coach looking at his team, and he's saying, 'Guys, let's grow up. It's time to grow up.' And remember back in Chapter 6; by this time you ought to teachers, you know? This isn't T-ball anymore. It's time for you to get in the batter's box and care about what you're doing. I mean, he's constantly done that. And he says grow up. Care about it. Care about your growth, your sanctification. When Satan throws stuff at you, you ought to hate striking out. You ought to always want to do the right thing. It ought to be a growing passion for your life.

And then in Chapter 11, he pulls out a drawer full of baseball cards, right? And he starts holding them up to his church and he says, 'Guys, look at this.' I mean, he pulls out the Ty Cobbs, and the Ted Williams, and the Babe Ruths of the Christian life and he says, 'Look at these guys. Look at their faith. Look at how they did this. Look at how they were willing, at their own personal cost, and their own personal sacrifice, to follow God.' Don't you want follow Christ like that? He keeps holding these pictures up.

And after that the summary statement last week we looked at in Chapter 12, verse 1, he says, since we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, since we have so many people—look at these guys, batting 350 in the Major Leagues—and he says, "Guys, don't you want to grow up and

live like these people? Defeating the enemy, and in their times of trial just hitting it out of the park. Don't you want to live like that?

After all of that motivation and persuasion, in Chapter 12: 2, he pulls out the ultimate card. He says if you're impressed with guys that bat 350, how about Jesus Christ? How about Jesus? Now here's one for you to fix your mind on, to get your eyes, so to speak, fixated on. I mean this is one who never struck out. You want some motivation? You want some encouragement? You know, here's Christ. Think about him. He's already introduced him in Chapter 4 as the one who was tempted in every way as are, yet without sin. Here's one that, every time Satan threw stuff at him, every time there was an opportunity for compromise, he stood the test. And he says, look at him. Keep your mind fixed here.

Take a look at it with me: Hebrews 12:2. He puts it very simply: "fix your eyes on Jesus." Let's do that. Fix your eyes on Jesus. He is "the author and perfecter of our faith." When you want to talk about his difficulties that he faced, how about the cross? Now remember this, "who for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame. And when He was all done, He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Consider him. Get your mind there. Fixate in this one. He endured such opposition from sinful men, and as you consider that, I hope it motivates you. He says, "so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." When you're tempted to compromise, when you're put in the hot seat, when it's a difficult time for you, I don't want you to quit. Let Jesus be a motivation for you.

I say he pulls this out, you know. You got to know this. From the middle of Chapter 10 we have not seen the word "Jesus" on the pages of the Book of Hebrews. I mean, it's been a long time. And then he says, okay. After all that build up, all the greats who have ambitious faith, he says look at the author and the perfecter of our faith, who when he was in a trial he did the right thing.

You know, if we are going to follow the command here, it's very explicit. It's very clear. Fix our eyes on Jesus, consider him. If he's going to be the focal point of our thoughts in the midst of our own temptations and trials, we've got to know something about him. He shouldn't be the Jesus of our imagination, he should be the Jesus of reality, and that means, if you've found your worksheet, jot this down: You and I, we need to study the life of Christ. We need to study the life of Christ. We don't want a Christ of your own imagination to fixate on. We don't just some ethereal, transcendent, I-just-really-can't-even-identify-with picture of Christ. We need the real Christ. The Jesus of the Bible. And if the Bible is telling us to fixate on him, and somehow he's going to help us not grow weary and lost heart in our trials, then I need to know more about him. I need to get in to the life of Christ.

And I mean that literally. I know we read through the Bible every year, and I hope that a majority of you will read with us. The schedule's on the back, and on our website. We have that. You know we try to put out there everywhere that we can, that we want you to be reading through the Bible at least once a year. But I hope that it's not just you cruise through the Gospels when the schedule tells us about it. I hope your mind and your heart is constantly drawn back to open up your Bibles to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and get that picture of this Christ who is the author and perfecter of our faith.

I mean it's great to learn about Gideon and Moses and Abraham, but Jesus Christ is the focal point. He's the centerpiece. And we ought to be spending more time reading, studying, and even memorizing the words and actions of Christ in the Gospels. As a matter of fact, that's why I'm so excited about our Men's Bible Study this year—and let this be another layer of conviction for you that you need to be involved in that. We're going to study through the Gospel of John. I mean we need to do that. We need to get that picture of Christ. And if you've never read through the gospels with the full stereophonic, you know quadrophonic effect, then you need to get what we call a "harmonies" of the Gospel, or synopsis that puts them all together. And on the back I just gave you one example. There's so many out there. But Dr. Thomas was the editor of the NIV Harmonies of

the Gospels. Read that. Just get that. And for once in your Christian life if you haven't done it yet, just read it with all four Gospels lined up column by column, and get the full picture and get yourself in the sandals of the life of Christ. Don't let your fixation on Christ be the wrong Christ. Let him be the Jesus Christ of the Bible. If I'm going to fix my eyes on him, if I'm going to consider him, I got to know Jesus. The real Jesus. The Jesus of the Bible.

And if I do that, and I think about the temptations that I face, I'm immediately going to be drawn to learn from Christ from His temptations. And if you have your Bibles, turn to Matthew 4, because here is a classic of Jesus being confronted by temptation. He—and I know he's God; I get it. God cannot be tempted by sin, I get it—but in his humanity, he is there as our representative. And as Hebrews 4 says, he has been tempted in every way as we are. Everything was thrown at him to compromise. Everything was thrown at him, the same kinds of temptations you face, he faced them. And one of the classic examples of that, if I'm going to learn about how He dealt with that, I need to remember Matthew 4. I mean, that's just a classic passage.

Look at verse 1. Matthew 4:1. "Then Jesus, led by the Spirit into the desert. He was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." Okay? The Spirit had no problem with this showdown. It was going to be instructive for us, it was going to be confirming for everyone, and so after fasting—verse 2—for forty days and forty nights—I know it's almost comical after that lead in; three words—"he was hungry." Duh. Right, I'm thinking okay. Yeah. I haven't eaten for a long time, out there fasting, praying, seeking God, and all of a sudden I'm realizing I'm pretty hungry. You know, after a month of this. And so he's hungry. Which is a great place to start, because so much of our temptations come through our fleshly or human impulses, our appetites. Right? I mean, they're not always for food, but I mean they're issues of our bodies crying out for some satisfaction. It's like Peter says. It's like the flesh has all these impulses that our waging war against our soul, so it's interesting to see. How does he deal with it when his flesh is crying out for something?

Well, here comes the temptation. Look at verse 3. The tempter came to him and said, " 'ey, if you're the son of God, tell these stones to become bread." And a lot of you Sunday school grads are yawning, going, "I know that. I read that, yeah."

Really? I want to ask you. What's the big deal? Right? I mean, if you had power to turn stones into cheeseburgers, and you're hungry. Are you going to use that? I'm going to use that. Right? Big time. Hah. I'm hungry. Poof! Fatburger with cheese. Mustard. Ketchup. Lettuce, tomato. Steak fries. Okay, there's some plants over there—steak fries, boop! Big Pepsi. Okay.

What's the big deal? You got the power, right? You got the power, use it! Do it! What's the problem here? In your margins, jot down Philippians 2. Please remember this about the temptation of Christ, to satisfy his appetites. Remember this: he came to fulfill all righteousness. he came laying aside the independent exercise of his divine attributes. That's a mouthful. But the concept in Philippians 2 is this: that though he existed in the very nature as God, he—it's the Greek word *kenosis*—he emptied himself. Or as the NIV says, "He made himself nothing." He was found in the appearance as a man. He was put into a human form to live like we live. Why? Because he was going to fulfill all righteousness. He was going to do what we could not do. To get into heaven, I got to have a resume that says I did it right. And I didn't do it right, you didn't do it right. We need the resume that did it right. So Jesus, second person of the Godhead, is coming to put on human form to live that out. Now one thing you and I don't have is the ability to turn rocks into hamburgers. We can't do that, see? So that when we have an impulse, or a need or an appetite, we have to look for some legitimate way to fulfill that. And if we're going to be godly, we have to look for some godly way to fulfill that. And if you're out there and you're deprived of something, we need to pray and trust that God will somehow provide.

Now you're saying, now wait a minute. Jesus did use his miraculous power. Oh, he did. He did. But remember how He used them, according to the Book of John: always in full submission to the Father. I don't do anything, he says, on my own accord. I'm doing this as the Father directs me,

in full submission to the Father. And the Father, when Jesus was hungry, didn't say, "Well, just make Yourself some bread out of the stones." He had to look to the Father to say, "How will I fulfill this need?" And you know, when he did exercise his miraculous power, it was to establish his deity before men. This was not it. This was to fill his stomach when it was hungry, and that wasn't going to work. This was a use of his power in an illegitimate way to fulfill a personal need in His life. And Satan says, "Come on, You can do it. Why don't you do it? You can fulfill it this way. I know God's path is over here, but just fulfill it like this and then you'll have your needs met." And Jesus' response—that's why it's so telling—He says in Verse 4: "Jesus answered, 'It is written man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " In other words, if I'm going to stay alive out here and I'm hungry and I'm famished, it's going to be because God wants me to stay alive. And even if I had food, I wouldn't stay alive were it not for the sovereign oversight of God. And so, the bottom line is, I'm trusting God. I'm not trusting in shortcuts to satisfy my need.

Now, that's starting to feel a bit more like a temptation we have. There are times when you can satisfy the impulses of your life, but you know it's not the path that God has drawn out for us. Right? That's what our teenagers, for instance, are all struggling with. They have the impulses of their life, and here's God's plan. Well, you know, sexual relations are reserved for marriage, and yet they could satisfy that. But we're saying, oh, no, take God's path. It's the same thing. That's a basic temptation. Adultery, same way. All kinds of other shortcuts—same way. You could fulfill that, but if you did you would have to shortcut God's plan. God's plan was for Jesus to be fully dependent on the Father, and to exercise His divine attributes only as the Father allowed him, and this was not one of them, to satisfy his own appetite. So, he has to respond by saying, "It is written." Which is telling. Again, if we're going to learn from the life of Christ, we're going to learn this: when he's hit with temptation, he seems to always going be back to the Bible. And then he quotes his favorite book. And since you've studied the life of Christ you all know what that is, right? He quotes it more than any other book in the New Testament. You've looked at your small print, haven't you? The book of Deuteronomy. He quotes Deuteronomy. He does that twice in this passage. And he says here, here's what the Bible says. It's not by bread alone that man's going to live, it's going to be by every word, by the sovereign decree coming out of the mouth of God. And so, I'm not going to shortcut God's plan, I'm going to rely on him to feed me.

So the devil said, "Okay. If you only exercise your divine to display to the world who you are, I got a great way to do it. We can do one of those right now." Verse 5. Devil took him to a holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple—right, the holy city; that's Jerusalem—and he said, "Okay, if you're the son of God, and if that's the whole concern here, if that's how you utilize your divine attributes, throw yourself down. Because—hey, and if you quote the Bible, I can, too—it is written He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up, it says, in their hand so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." Right? Quoting Psalm 91. "I can quote the Scriptures, too. And, here's the deal. Exercise some power here and show everybody that you're the son of God. That'd be great. Everybody would come to you, bow down to you, it'd be fabulous. Do that."

Now again, in full submission to the Father, laying aside the independent exercise of His attributes, He's relying on God for those cues, not the tempter. So he's like, well, I got an answer for that. Look at the next verse. He says this: "It is also written. And you may be quoting Scripture, and God may protect me, but I'm not going to put the Lord God to the test, 'cause that's what Deuteronomy 6 says. Do not put the Lord your God to the test. Not going to do it. I don't do that. That's not what that passage is all about."

So far, we're learning a lot. He's committed to the word of God to help him resist temptation. He is committed when his mind is now, because of the tempter, trying to rationalize a shortcut for his own promotion by quoting Scripture. Do you ever go through that? I mean, there's

the temptation, and then all of a sudden you get this passage in your mind, or this lesson from church, and you think, 'Well, they did say that. I mean, the Bible does say that.' And we're trying to justify and rationalize our compromise. And he says, "No, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to let the word be clearly understood. I'm not going to fall to the twisting of Scripture."

So the devil: "One more. Listen. It's all about ruling the world. It's all about having all the kingdoms of the world because the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ. Then here, I can shortcut that right now." Verse 8: The devil took Him to high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in their splendor, and he said, 'All this I will give to you.' And he said, "Here's all you got to do for me. Just bow down and worship me." That's an odd passage for people, and it's a whole 'nother sermon I realize, but according to 2 Corinthians 4:4, we do have in a very real sense—and the whole concept of redemption is based on, and 1 John 3 gives us a clear sense—that Satan has really got some kind of governance, or leadership, or lordship if you will, over the world. Okay? God is the owner, He has title and everything, I get it. But there is a real sense, 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, that Satan is the God of this world. And he says, "Listen, instead of waiting for this whole plan to go through, and the cross thing, why don't you just bow down to me now and I'll hand over the apartment. It'll go back to you, and you can just have it now. Okay? So take it. A little shortcut. You just, you know, all you got to do is a little compromise here, and you can get all that stuff without the cross. And all the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of you. You can have it."

And His response? "Just get out of here." That's what he says. Verse 10: He says, "Away from me, Satan. For it is written"—and again, quote #3 from the Scripture—"worship the Lord your God and serve him only." I understand that the goal that you're painting for me is the biblical goal God has for me, but you're creating a shortcut to get there. And I understand it's not selfish in this regard. You were trying to present to me a way to get what God wants for me, but you're giving me a shortcut to get there. I'm not going to take the shortcut, because the shortcut is a compromise in this case. And he says, not going to do it. Learn a lot from Christ. When facing temptation, which is the whole point, that I'm supposed to be able to run with endurance this race without hindrance and the sin that so easily entangles me, if I'm going to be like Christ I need to recognize the word of God is going to play a prominent role in this. A commitment and resolve to keep it, an understanding of it, and an ability to draw it out of my mind.

We talked about AWANA. Are your kids in our AWANA program? Is that a conviction for you as to how many verses they're learning every week? Just learn half of them, okay? And you will exercise the biblical model of entrusting the word of God into your life. That's what the psalmist says. Psalm 119. How does a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. And he says, here's the deal. "Your word I have hid in my heart that I might not sin against you." Here's the deal. The Scripture has to play a prominent role. A commitment and a resolve to keep it, an ability to be able to draw it out of my mind because I'm memorizing Scripture and my mind is in the Scriptures, and a commitment and an ability to be able to discerningly know, when Satan is throwing other biblical concepts or verses at me, that I know that I'm not going to twist it and I'm not going to take any shortcuts. And it's all based in this particular picture of Jesus' temptation on the word of God. That's insightful.

But in our passage, Hebrews 12, look at it again, the real focal point is not Jesus in the desert being tempted, although that's germane and relevant to the this text, the focus here is the cross. And if you think about temptation and the cross, you recognize well that was a temptation, too. Because the reality of Jesus doing what he was sent here to do was going to be painful and costly. And the temptation here was to say, 'Well, maybe I don't want to do that. Because obedience has got a big price tag, ah, maybe I'll stop short of it.' Instead of a sin of commission, that's Matthew 4, here Satan is tempting God in a very real sense through the pain and shame of the cross, of a sin of omission. Not doing it. And that was struggle in the garden, was it not? If you still have Matthew

warmed up, go from Matthew 4 to Matthew 26. That's the other end of his ministry. When he's sitting there on the night he was betrayed, thinking of the betrayal of the leaders of Israel and Rome, and now he was going to go the cross and be stripped completely naked, be nailed to a Roman execution rack, and have the Father pour the wrath from the sins of the world on him. That was big. And that was shameful. And that was painful. And that was costly. How did he deal with this temptation? The temptation to maybe stop short of fulfilling God's plan?

Well, according to Scripture, Verse 36, he's going to go to this little place, quiet little place, base of the Mount of Olives called Gethsemane. Matthew 26:36. "And he says to his disciples, sit here a while I go over there and"—what is he going to do?—"pray." Yeah, I need to pray. I'm facing a trial, I'm facing a temptation, I need to pray. And he takes some prayer partners with him; turned out to not be very good ones, but Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, that's James and John. So the inner circle, the three guys, they go with him, and he begins to be sorrowful and troubled. And he says to his disciples. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, so stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell on his face and fell to the ground and he prayed this. Now he's praying to the Father: My Father, if it is possible, may this cup—that's a symbolic way of drinking this very bitter cup, this pill, swallowing this bitter pill, he says, let it be taken from me. I would like to not go through the shame, the pain, the scorn of the cross. I don't want to go through that. And let it be taken from me. But, here's the deal. It's really not about what I want, even though that is what I want. It's really about what you, Father, want. That's Jesus' pattern for us. And here it is: "yet not what I will, but what you will." No quotation of Scripture here. He's praying and reiterating his resolve to say, God I'm about doing what you want, not just about doing what I want or avoiding what I don't want, so I want to fulfill the path that you have for me.

Now, keep reading. Disciples there have got their own temptation to face that night and that weekend. Their obedience would be put on the hot seat; they were going to have some temptation. And he focuses on that. He says in verse 40—he returns to the disciples, he finds them sleeping, and he says, "Could you men not keep watch with me for even one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray that you will not fall into"—circle the word, what?—"temptation." This may not look like temptation to you, but that's what passage is about. They've got their own cross that they're going to say either I'm going accept it and do the right thing and stand for God, or I'm going to wimp out. That's their temptation. There's the sin of commission, doing the wrong things, transgressing God's rules, and then there's the sin of omission, and that's a big temptation in our life too in many ways. When God is calling us to stand up and do right and we're tempted to, "Yeah, I don't know, is there a shortcut here? Can I stop short of that?" And he says, you've got a temptation that's coming your way, and you need prayer, too. Get on your knees and pray. And then he says this, which is so telling. He says, bottom of verse 41, "The spirit is willing but the body is weak." Did we not deal with that principle last week? The point is that if you are a genuine, converted Christian, God has changed your heart. The impulse of your new heart beats in sync with God's truth. You want to, in your inner man, do the right thing. It is created in the image of God. Now. That's your new person. You are incased in fallen, sinful flesh. The humanity of your physical body needs to be redeemed, and all of its human impulses, but for now you're stuck and there's a battle going on.

Now here's the problem. You may, if we were to strip away all the weakness and propensities of the flesh, have a heart that says, 'Yeah, I want to do the right thing. I'm going to stand up for you.' Peter already expressed that. Yeah, if I have to die with you, I'm going to die with you. Problem is, your flesh is weak. You have fears, you have anxieties, you have insecurities, you've got tempers, you've got problems, you've got lust, you've got appetites. All of that is going to fight against us. I know that the spirit is willing, but your body, your flesh, it's weak. So he goes away a second time, verse 42, and he prays. "My father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken



away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” I want to do it. I’m going to do it. I know it’ll be hard, but I’m going to do it.

Now, look at what we’ve got so far. When we think about sin and temptation and throwing off encumbrance, we’ve think of Matthew 4 and the temptation in the desert. How does Jesus primarily one thing, which is to summarize in one way Jesus’ response to temptation, it’s the word of God. And then the cross, the temptation of avoiding the cross, we see him responding to that with prayer. Now I know a lot of you come to church, you want some new idea. You’re Athenians at heart. Acts 17. Just give me a new angle on it. It’s not a new angle. It’s the old stuff. The old stuff is, if you want to conquer temptation and want to get over all the stuff that’s coming at you, and tear off the sin that’s entangling you, here’s the deal. Two basic things. And I know it’s old hat, don’t yawn through it. It’s the word of God and prayer. I know that’s, “Aw, that’s old school. I want something new school.” The old school works, okay? And all you got to do is think through it. When you spiritually wiped out last time, when you said that thing you shouldn’t have said, when you fell into that sin you shouldn’t have fallen into. Tell me how really immersed in the word of God your mind was that week. Tell me really how your prayer life was going that week. Are you really on your knees before God, starting your day with “not my will but yours be done”? Was this floating around in your head where the Scripture was coming out of your mind regularly? I don’t think so, see? We fall into sin when we haven’t been on our knees and our Bible’s collecting dust by our nightstand. That’s when we’re most vulnerable. There’s no magic here. This is no, you know, just, “Wow, I never thought of that,” some innovative idea.

And speaking of baseball, it’s like my two sons. I had the privilege of being able to take them to the Ranger’s Stadium out there in Arlington, Texas. They got to go in and see everything, and they were checking out all the practice facilities and the batting cages and everything, and here’s what they didn’t find. Some magical, Major League Baseball machine that these guys stepped into and became great players. Right? Now, there wasn’t a pill that the team doctor was giving them to become great players. These guys were there, and if they were going to play Major League Baseball and play it well, these guys that they admired, they realized. Wow, they’ve got the same things that we’ve got: a practice field, batting cages, workout room, same stuff. It’s the same stuff for us.

There’s no magical cure here. You want to fight temptation and win? It’s the word of God and prayer. I mean, those are the fundamentals. There’s more to it than that, I realize, but those are the staples of being spiritually strong. So how’s that going for you, by the way? I mean, how much of this is in my life every single day? Is it just checking a box, or reading a few verses, or is my mind being saturated? Is my prayer life just kind of relegated to a few short words before a meal, and a couple statements before I go to bed, or is there some real thriving thing there? And all I’m telling you is, the more vulnerable you are spiritually is all correlated to your intake of God’s word and prayer. And Jesus shows us that.

You know, study the life of Christ. And I know we don’t have time to study his whole life this morning, but you’re going to find the word of God and prayer are huge as it relates to the example. You want to pull out the ultimate card? Here he is. Jesus never struck out. How did he do it? Two basics: the word of God and prayer. Those are the two big things. More to it than that, but let’s all go study the life of Christ.

Now that’s great. And it’s very straightforward. You want to be a more godly person, you want to grow in sanctification, you want to say no to the temptations that are assaulting your life? Well, follow the example of Christ. Just follow the thousand hitter and you’ll be fine. You’ll get from 175, maybe up to 250 by summer. Right? Well, there’s more to it than that. As a matter of fact, the next phrase there in Hebrews 12:2 is the phrase that I think drives us a little bit deeper. Now, you’re supposed to fix your eyes, so to speak, on Jesus. You’re supposed to, verse 3, consider him. But he’s described in the beginning of verse 2 as “the author and perfecter of our faith.” Now I

was really disappointed, and I hope you realize that I'm trying to study and stand on the shoulders of the scholars of yesteryear, and I'm reading my commentaries every week, and going through what people have taught on and how they understood this passage. You know, that's my job. That's a big, big part of my job. And I did that this week, and I was really kind of disappointed to see that a lot of people these days look at the two words—and I realize they're Greek words that certainly can carry the meaning that so many have just kind of been satisfied to stick with. And that is that the author here word is that he's kind of the leader, the captain, kind of the guy at the top of the shelf, and if you've got a pyramid of great, godly people he's at the top. And perfecter or finisher of faith, is a Greek word that the root is teleos, and it's kind of he finished it, he went all the way to the end, he didn't fail in the garden.

And so he's the guy at the top of the list, and look at his track record, it's perfect, he finished the course. And I thought to myself, is that all the writer of Hebrews has in mind? Is that all the spirit of God is trying to tell us with this phrase as I fix my eyes on him, that he's just a great example? And I think, no, no, no. That's not where the writer of Hebrews has been with us. As a matter of fact, in the very verse that reminded us early on that he was tempted in every way as we are yet without sin, he didn't just say now that's a great example, go follow that. No, when he says that he is the author and perfecter of our faith, I think it means more than "he did it great, do it like he did it." I think there's a personal element to that. That's very objective. There's a subjective element to how God is going to help us through our trials, our temptations.

Take a look at the example of Hebrews 4, for instance, just to stick with the writer of Hebrews. Hebrews 4. Let's look at the passage; I quoted it three times already, but if he is the perfect one who never sinned but he was tempted like we are, let's see the context of that statement and see if we can't move away from just saying, "Isn't he a great example. Let's do what he did."

Hebrews 4. Look at verse 15. Again, even the imagery of high priest gives us a sense that he's an intercessor, he's involved with us. He's not just a distant template, he's an involved, intercessor, an advocate for us. Verse 15: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness. But we have one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin." And he goes on, verse 16. Hebrews 4:16. Let us then approach the throne of grace—if that's true—with confidence so that we may receive—this is good—mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Now again, I got to define "time of need" contextually. In chapter 4, look up a little bit and you'll see in verses like verse 11, example of disobedience, verse 9-10, a hard heart, all of that. The temptation for this team was that they were getting lulled into disobedience and they were starting to compromise. And he says listen, your time of need, you need help, not just a good example. You don't just need a good baseball to kind of emulate, you need a coach. And not just a coach who sits from the dugout and screams at you to keep your eye on the ball and your back elbow up. You need a coach who gets into the batter's box with you. And when Satan's throwing temptation at you, you need someone who's going to put his hands around your hands and help you swing that bat. You need real, personal, subjective help.

And when the writer of Hebrews says fix your eyes on Jesus because he is "the author and perfecter of our faith," I think it means a little more than just he's a great example. As a matter of fact, in chapter 13, he ends on this resonant note. And it resonates at the end of the book. And that is that he is our helper. Remember that? He will never leave us, he will never forsake us—that's a quote from Hebrews 13—and he will be our helper. Therefore we're not going to fear what man can do to us. That's right out of Hebrews 13. The picture of Jesus is not "he's a great template, go follow it." It's, "he wants to put his hands around your baseball gloves and let you knock one through the infield and not strike out this week." He wants to be your Lord.

And a lot of things in our Christian life are available to us, but we don't have them because we don't ask for them. So let's put it this way. Number two on your outline. Not only should we

study the life of Christ, number two, we ought to reach out for Christ's help, because he's ready to do that for you. You're struggling with sin right now, there's temptation in your life, you fall into last week and the week before, here's the deal. You cry out for the help of our coach, the author and perfecter and of our faith, a subjective author and a subjective finisher or completer or perfecter of our faith. You know what, he wants to get in and help you. And a lot of times we don't have because we don't ask. He wants to help you.

As a matter of fact, the whole point of the discussion, the upper room discourse in John, as Jesus is going to leave the disciples and go to the cross, was that I'm going to send another. Right? The stand in, if you will, for Jesus Christ in the lives of the apostles and the disciples, was the Spirit of God. And he was called the Parakletos—remember that Greek word?—the helper. He's going to come and help you. And I know the Spirit, Jesus said, has been with you, but when I leave, he's going to be in you. You're going to have some serious help from God. And don't leave that on the table. Take it. Call out for it. Cry out for that kind of help. And isn't that what we're doing when we're praying, right? We're not just saying, "Oh, God, I'm just reiterating my commitment that it's all about your will." I mean, so much of our prayer I hope in the midst of temptation and trial is, "Help me. I need your help. Do something in my life so that I won't fall to this."

Great passage. I got to turn you to this one. 2 Thessalonians. We don't look at this one very often. 2 Thessalonians 2. The verbiage of this is so good. And I understand that technically, if you want to be theologically technical, here's the deal. The Holy Spirit is the indwelling person of the Godhead in your life. And indwelling, I don't mean that he's somewhere between your spleen and liver in a little patch there you've got in the last crevice of available space. I'm not talking about that. He's not in your heart, and he's between the capillary and he's in the pump and every now and again he gets stuck in the valve. It's not spatial. This is all an analogy to tell you that God doesn't just want to be an outside force on your life, he wants to be an internal empowerment in your life, and the person of the Holy Spirit is there to do that for you. But Christ is so interested, as he sits at the right hand of the Father, it's as though Christ himself is getting involved in your life. If you'd call out for him, if you'd reach out for his help.

2 Thessalonians 2. Look at verse 16. 2 Thessalonians 2:16. This is a great phrase. "May our Jesus Christ himself." Isn't that good word? Just, ah, "him and God our Father who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope. May he"—do what? what do we want Jesus Christ himself to do? I love this—"encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word." Even the words you speak. Isn't that great? Here is Jesus you so desperately wants to help you say the right words. Isn't that good? So much of our sin really relates to our mouth, right, and the words that we say. Jesus is ready if you call out for his help to get involved as the author and perfecter of your faith, to be able to get into your mouth and your life and to strengthen you, and help you, encourage you into every good deed and word.

Drop down to chapter 3. He says this in verse 3. "But the lord is faithful. He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one." You want to talk about the onslaught of temptation? He wants to do that. He'll make you strong. "And we are confident in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command." It's all about sanctification. It's all about obedience. It's all about growing up in Christ. And this the great, great phrase here. Ready? Verse 5. "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's"—what's the word?—"perseverance." Perseverance. Greek students, what Greek word did you recently study? Do you think that might translate? Hupomone. There it is. Hupomone. Because in the battle to do right you need endurance, perseverance; you need hupomone. Right?

"Well, we didn't see that in our passage this week."

Oh, you missed it. Look at it. Go back to Hebrews 12. That's what it's all about. We need Christ Jesus himself to lead us into a place of having Christ's hupomone. Look at it. Hebrews 12—are you looking at it—verse 2 and 3. "Fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith

who for the joy set before him”—circle this word, guess what word it is? hupomone—“he endured the cross.” That was the path and he didn’t bail out. “He endured it”—hupomone—“scorning it’s shame. Sat down at the right hand of God. Consider him who”—what’s the word? hupomone—“endured such opposition from sinful men. That’s what we need. In the heat of battle, when the temptation is pressing down on us, we need the ability to stand up under it and do the right thing. Hupomone. God himself wants to help you do that. He wants to lead you into that.

And you say wasn’t that the first point, you know? Studying the life of Christ and understanding the importance of prayer? Yeah, I understand. We need those garden experiences before we walk into the office or into the neighborhood or into our little sphere of temptation where we might be tempted, but I’m not talking about that here. I’m talking about just verbally reaching out and grabbing Christ’s help in just the heat of the moment. And I hope that’s a prayer that you pray.

We see it throughout the Scriptures. There’s two examples and I love them. One is from Nehemiah’s life, and one is from Daniel’s life. And I love the way that there is just this expression of “God, help me!” And you might remember Nehemiah’s story. He’s been called by God to go and rebuild the walls, and he’s going to do it in record time: 52 days. The foundations of the walls around the city of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. Well he’s standing before King Artaxerxes, the Persian king. And in chapter 2 he’s called in after kind of laying down some hints, and the king finally looks at him and says, “Hey, Nehemiah, what is it that you want?”

And here’s what Nehemiah 2:4 says: “The king said to me, ‘What is it that you want?’ And then I prayed to the God of heaven. And I answered him.” I’m thinking to myself, that’s a pretty short prayer, right? The king isn’t going to sit around and wait for your answer. But between the question and the answer, I love this: I prayed to the God of heaven. I mean, that’s like a two-second prayer, but it’s the kind of prayer I’m talking about when the temptation hits you. What was Nehemiah’s temptation? To back down from the calling of God in his life. To wimp out, afraid of what Artaxerxes might say.

Oh, I know God wants me to do this, but I don’t know. He might not understand, I might be rejected. No, I’m not—God help me. Okay. I think we need to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. I know you aren’t real big on those Jews over there in Israel, but I think we should go back and rebuild.

I prayed to the God of heaven.

Do you need that prayer? How about Daniel? I know Daniel we often see as this great, strong, fearless person. He’s impervious to any kind of anxiety or fear. But you know, before he got thrown into the lion’s den, he was deep—and you know why he got thrown into the lion’s den, right? The coup, this group that was trying to take Daniel, out had created a law that you couldn’t pray. You’re not supposed to pray to anybody but the king of Babylon. And of course, because God had told his people to pray, from the beginning in the Pentateuch, we’re supposed to be praying to God, Daniel would have to break that law and defy him. But you know what, to defy the king, and the culture, and the laws, to do the right thing—do you think that might induce a little bit of anxiety and fear? And the Bible says that when he went back to praying after this decree had gone out not to pray to anybody—Daniel 6:11, I love this. When the group came to nark on David for praying, when they—it doesn’t say “nark” in verse 11; the word “nark” is not in the Bible, but, you know what I’m talking about. They went to fink on him? How’s that. Is that better? Fink?—Daniel 6:11. Then these men, they went and they found Daniel praying—here’s the word. Guess what he was praying about?—And he was asking for help from God.

He needed help. I love that. And you know why I think he was praying for help? I mean, he probably had his normal prayer list. But, you know what? This is illegal now. I’m probably going to get busted for this. This is going to be hard. And as he’s praying, he’s wanting God’s help. Those are the kinds of prayers I’m talking about. And when you and I are hit with temptation, and our

flesh is crying out for some kind of ungodly fulfillment, or our lives are being shown a path to whatever it is that we think God wants us to do but it's a shortcut, it's a compromise. Just remember this. Remember the best prayer you can pray is, "God, help me. God, strengthen me." And according to 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2 and 3, he wants to do that. He himself wants to do that. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, I get it, but he wants to help you. Cry out for that. Don't leave that on the table. He's a great example, but he's an example that wants to help. He's not just a template, he is a coach. He's not just a model to follow. He wants to get into the batter's box with us, and make sure that we don't strike out this week. Ask. God is ready to help.

Okay. But the point here of our passage is really about the cross. And the writer of Hebrews illustrates how he kind of overcame that temptation, and so there's some wisdom here we don't want to leave. So let's look at it. Hebrews 12:2-3. We going to fix our eyes on Jesus—verse 3—we're going consider him. He is the author and perfecter of faith, that's more than objective it's subjective. But, let's look at what we learn as the inspired writer of Hebrews gives us some insight on his temptation. He's going to endure the cross. How did he do that? First thing we learn: "Who for the joy set before him."

Number 3 on your outline. We need to not only reach out for his help, we need to specifically follow his example. Number three. And when I say that, I'm speaking specifically about the wisdom we gain from Hebrews 12:2-3. And if we're going to follow the example of verses 2 and 3, we're going to find the things that we see there and itemize them. There's at least three observations that are very in your face. And the first one is this: Who for the joy set before him endured the cross. The first thing I learn, pointy-finger number one—or letter A under number three, if you will—the thing that we see about Jesus as he faces temptation is, that he is one—put this down, number one—who ponders the joy of obedience. And you and I need to do the same thing. Ponder the joy of obedience. And that's not our natural tendency. We often fixate on the pain, and the sacrifice, and the frustration of it all, and the deprivation of it all. But here, the Bible's very clear that the author and perfecter of our faith as an example, he endured the cross by focusing on the joy that's on the other side of obedience.

Now, again, we're supposed to fix our eyes on Jesus. But as we study the tapes and ask for his coaching in our lives, what we're going to notice about Jesus in his batter's box is he's got his on the ball. And the ball that he's watching is the joy of obedience. And if you want to get, you know, a couple layers deep on this, put in the margin, the high priestly prayer of Christ which is found in John 17. And if you are a Sunday school grad, you immediately know that passage is Jesus expressing to the Father that now that his earthly ministry was done, or just about done—he had one more thing to do, to go to the cross and be resurrected—he says this, "I am ready," and he is anticipating and excited about having the glory that was with the Father before the foundation of the world restored to him. He was ready for being the obedient son who had completed the course of redemption for mankind. And he said, I'm looking on the other side of obedience. And that's my focus.

So if you want to overcome temptation, why don't we do what he did? He focused on the joy of obedience. And if, by the way, you think well that just sounds kind of selfish, well that's what it states in the high priestly prayer of John 17, but he goes on to say—let's complete the picture here—that the joy that he has in fellowship with the holy God, and the glory that he has there, he says he is excited about seeing fulfilled in the lives of the disciples. Is that not what he says in John 17? That he wants them to experience the joy that he with the Father. So the point is, it's not just you know what, I'll have the commendation of being obedient, but look at the fruit of being obedient. It's going to bring joy, and reconciliation, to the disciples and the Father. So he sees, you know, there's some good that'll come from this.

Now often when we think about temptation and saying no to sin, we're often focusing on the sowing and reaping that is negative. And that's a motivation, right? "If we sow to the flesh, we will

reap from the flesh corruption.” That’s Galatians 6. And it’s true. I need to think about that. Now, if I follow this path of temptation, where will it take me and what bad things might come from that? That’s a helpful and motivating thought. But you do know the next verse in Galatians 6 tells us that if we just don’t grow weary and give up, and lose heart and fall into sin, he says we will reap a harvest. See? So he says don’t grow weary of doing good. You’re going to reap a harvest; in due time it’s coming. And the point is, we often focus on the negative of the sowing and reaping when we need to start thinking about the positive of sowing and reaping.

As a matter of fact, that needs to overwhelm our thoughts as we’re facing temptation. So let’s make that practical for a minute. What temptations are you struggling with? Let’s think that one through. Can you fixate for a while in your minds, like Jesus did, on the good that would come if you conquered that sin? Think about it, okay? Maybe you’ve got an anger problem. It’s one of the things we looked in Colossians last week. What if I could come to your wife, and say, “Tell me about your husband?” And she would say, “You know what? The guy just is in control of his emotions and attitude. There’s no outburst of anger. He’s got it together.” What good would that bring to your wife? What good would that bring to your kids? What good would that bring to you as a Christian? Ponder the joy of obedience. What joy and benefit would come from that? Think about the joy or the benefit of obedience if your thought life was cleaned up. Think about that? If your thought life had all the impurity gone, and you beat those temptations and your mind was clean before the Lord, and your heart and your mind thought good thoughts. Pure thoughts. Honorable, excellent thoughts. And your mind dwelt on those things, and you kicked that temptation. What good would come from that? You think there’s any benefit there? Focus on the joy of obedience.

What if it’s your words, and you slip out words you know you shouldn’t say, and you say critical things behind people’s backs, and you’re always having to go back and say, ‘Well, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.’ What if you didn’t do that anymore? What would your reputation do, just if you were always one who spoke the edifying word that gave grace for the need of the moment. What if that was your reputation? Is there any good that would come from the joy of obedience? Think about your temptations, and instead of just focusing on “Well, it’s really hard to say no to those feelings and impulses,” why don’t we think about this? Let’s fixate on the joy of what would happen if you learned to kicked that temptation. That would be a good thing.

Who for the joy set before him endured the cross. Okay? Let’s focus on that. Ponder the joy of obedience.

One more phrase there. Are you still there in Hebrews 12:2? He not only endured the cross for the joy set before him, but he was scorning its shame. Scorning. Scorning. Have you used that word in your vocabulary this week? Probably not. That’s an old word. And when Bible translations go to real archaic words to translate Greek manuscripts, it’s often because those Greek words are kind of hard to figure out what exactly, you know, how do we translate that. It’s hard to translate. So they go back to archaic words we don’t use very often. Scorning is a good example. It’s the Greek word, Kataphreneo. Kataphreneo. And it’s a compound like a lot of Greek words, and it starts with the preposition kata. And kata means down. That’s the preposition down. Phreneo comes from the root, ‘to think, to ponder.’ And the compound word is ‘to think down on,’ which doesn’t translate well.

I like to—often, when I describe this passage to people—I like to use the phrase, “poo-poo.” Uh, which doesn’t translate very well either. It’s why that’s not in the Bible. He poo-pooed the shame. But that’s the point. You get that? You know, it’s like I just kind of gave it less credence. I gave it less influence. I thought down on it. You know, it’s like I don’t take financial advice from preschoolers. Right? You wouldn’t go to preschool and say, “I got a 401K and I’m thinking of reinvesting it; what do you guys think?” You wouldn’t do that to preschoolers, I hope, right? “Well, if I were you, I’d buy more candy. Bubblegum!” No. We don’t go to preschoolers for financial advice, right? And here’s the deal. We shouldn’t go to the pain, or the shame, or the sacrifice that’s

involved in temptation to help us make decisions about what to do. See? Don't let pain come to the table and influence you. Let's think down on pain. Let's make less of it. Let's don't let it be a power broker in our decision-making. It's just pain. Okay?

That phrase, "It's just pain"—I know that sounds weird, a little masochistic. I get that. I got that in my vocabulary as a junior-higher. When I was a junior higher, I went to summer camp at church, and we got taken up to this mountain. And we were there and we had something kind of strange that they don't do anymore because they would sue you for, but we had an electric chair our youth pastor had made. Um. You know, it was called The Hot Seat, but really it was nothing more than big batteries we would attach to it, and then wires, and then they had metallic tape on the top of a stool. Okay? I mean, it was called The Hot Seat but it was a modified electric chair, is all it was. And then, to kind of threaten us, he would lay his keys on The Hot Seat, and then it had a little trigger on it—a little button—and then he would hit the button, and he'd turn the lights down, and you'd see blue sparks, sparking, and you'd hear, and the keys would rattle on the top of The Hot Seat. Duzhuzhzh!

It's not the church of Satan. This was a Bible church, okay? I understand: "What? What is that?" I know. They don't do that anymore. But, that's what they had, and at camp they had this as the ultimate threat, right? If you had a dirty cabin, if you were late for a meal, you'd get The Hot Seat, see. And so, we all, you know, didn't want to get The Hot Seat. Because we had watched from the beginning of the week people get on The Hot Seat for dirty cabins, or late, or they did something wrong, and they just launched, right, as us perverted little junior-highers are going, "Fry him! Fry him! Fry him!" And, they'd go, "Ahhhh!" And their hair would stand up.

Well my cousin, older cousin, was a camp counselor that year. And his name was Jaime Dominguez, and I don't know what happened to Jaime; the last I heard from him was junior high camp. But he was a counselor. And he had developed a love interest, a romantic interest, at camp with some other counselor, and so he was late for dinner at the end of the week. Okay? Ohh, and the junior-highers, we saw blood in the water, right? This was great. A counselor was going to get fried. Talk about cheering. We were on our feet. "FRY HIM! FRY HIM! FRY HIM!" And so my cousin, big tall guy, sure enough, the youth pastor's going to fry him on The Hot Seat before dinner. And so they call him up. And Jaime, I'll never forget this. He walks, you know, through the tables, and comes to the front and he was legitimately late, and the youth pastor's, "Okay," you know, he does the little key test and it's sparking and all, and he says, "Great. Sit on The Hot Seat." Now we'd watched people just bounce off the ceiling from The Hot Seat. So Jaime, we're just thinking, the first time we've ever seen a counselor on The Hot Seat. He sits down on The Hot Seat, and he says, the youth pastor, "Okay, you've been late. You are now going to be fried." And he pushes the button. And you hear the battery. Vvvuuuuuu.

And Jaime just say there. He didn't move. We're all like, "It's Darth Vader. It's a cyborg. He's not real." He literally just sat there as the youth pastor—and it was totally anticlimactic. We're cheering, and then he doesn't move. We're like, "Whaa?" We don't get it. And there are people that had been fried earlier that week that are going, "Waitawaita—what's going on?" Jaime Dominguez gets up from the stool. I'll never forget this. He walks by my table, and he says to me. He looks down at me as he's walking back to his table, he says, "It's just pain. It's just pain." I'll never forget that. "It's just pain."

You know how many times I've just enlisted that phrase in my Christian life since that time? I thought to myself, you know what that spells? That's kataphreneo. You know what he said? It's not a big deal. It's just pain. And I thought to myself, in temptation if I could just get that perspective. When Satan's going, "But you'll be deprived. You won't get your needs met. You're not going to be fulfilled. You gotta do this. It's going to take too long if you take the high road. Take my way, it's compromise, it's better." See? I just got to say, "Yeah, I know it's going to cost, but I'm going to—the word, kataphreneo—I'm going to think down on the pain. I'm going to poo-

poo the pain. You know what? I don't care." Jesus had to fixate on the joy of obedience and he needed to downplay the sacrifice. Was it going to hurt? Yes. Was it a real pain? Absolutely. Was it shame? It was total shame. It was incurring the sin of the world. But that's what we need to do. Letter B. Did we put it down yet? Let's put it down. We need to think less of the sacrifice. I'm just going to think less of it. The word is kataphreneo. I'm going to think down on it. It's not going to be allowed to the table to help me make decisions about temptation. Because Satan loves to do that. Oh, you're hungry, aren't you, Jesus? No, you really are hungry. Just to think if you don't get to eat for the rest of the—it'll be terrible. It's going to hurt. The cross. Same thing. What a terrible thing. The dregs of drinking that cup, it's going to be awful. See? All you got to do, man, what if the deal is still on the table. You bow down to me, I'll give it to you now.

Downplay the sacrifice. Think less of it.

There's a parallel between verse 2 and the middle of verse 3. It says, after all that, it's scorning the shame, downplaying the shame, he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Now, that's a place, even in the first century, that in any picture of an ancient monarch, he's sitting at the right hand of the monarch, the king. That was the place of honor, that was a place of privilege, that was a place of ultimate approval to be at the right hand of the monarch. Okay? Approval. Look at the next verse. "Consider him who endured such"—what's the word?—"opposition from sinful men." Now here's the deal. When it came to obedience for Christ, he had a choice to make. Obedience, non-compromise, saying no to the impulses of the flesh, that leads to God's approval. The ultimate place of God's approval, for him. And you know what, if he were to compromise and do what men thought he should do, and kind of go down the path that was popular, he probably wouldn't have had the opposition from men. Right? People wouldn't have opposed him. So he had a choice to make. I put it this way. Pointy-finger number 3, or letter C: We need to crave God's approval. Crave it. Crave God's approval. And you might want to put in parenthesis somewhere, and a whole lot less of man's approval. That's Galatians 1.

It's not about pleasing people. It's not even about pleasing yourself. I don't live for myself anymore. I'm supposed to live for the King. And I want him to approve my life. I want him to approve my decisions. I want the king of the universe to be able to look at me, and give me those words from Matthew 25, don't you? "Well done, good and faithful servant." That was Jesus' passion. That was his craving.

Do you remember the woman and the well, Sychar, they were coming back with lunch. They had their Taco Bell or whatever drive-through. Jesus had just sat there and shared the gospel with the woman at the well. And when they came back, they tried to offer him food and they said, "Rabbi, eat." This is John 4. And he said this, do you remember that? After spending this time sharing the gospel, and they're going, "Come on, have something. Aren't you still hungry?" And he says, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Remember that? "I have to food to eat that you know nothing about."

And they went, 'B'orrrr, did someone bring him food?' Right? And he says that's not the point. He says this. He said, "My food"—do you remember this passage?—"is to do the will of Him who sent me. That's what I crave. Food, yeah, that's good, it's important and I'll eat it later, but, man, I'm more right now concerned about doing the will of my Father. That's the ultimate priority. It wasn't about pleasing people. It wasn't pleasing himself. You want to learn from Christ, you want to see the master, you want to know what God incarnate does, the ultimate godliness—it's the willingness to say I'm more worried about what God thinks of this decision than what people think, or what I think, or what my friends think, or what my family thinks. I'm more willing to do the right thing, to hear from God, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Because that's the most important thing. It's really not about these other people saying, "Well, we like you. You're a good guy."

I've got food to eat that you know nothing about. I hope that in our quest to live godly lives, that in the midst of temptation, we're not only thinking of Christ, we're not only calling out for his



help, we're not only saying I'm going to focus on joy, but I hope that the resonant truth of this message would be, "I want to hear to from God, 'You did a good job, you fought the good fight. Right on.' " We want to hear that. I know all the blessing come with it. And he says, "Take charge of these cities," in that parable of the steward and the master. I get it. But the real heartwarming part for a child of God is to be able one day to hear from him, "You did it. You fought that. You kicked that thing. It's exactly what I wanted you to do. Well done, good and faithful servant." May we hear that as we engage in the battle this week.

Pray with me please.

God, a lot of temptation in this world. Our fallen humanity, our flesh, still cries out to do what is wrong, and we as redeemed people, for those of us that are genuine Christians here today, we have to fight that battle every single day. And it's hard, God. There's plenty of failure. But we pray right now that you might help us to move forward in our sanctification, to become more like Jesus Christ, and in doing so, God, we know that we're going to have to crave your approval. It's going to have to be the most important thing. We're going to also have to be able to say that it's better for us to be obedient here than to enjoy, as the early part of Hebrews 11 said, the "passing pleasures of sin." God, help us to get our priorities straight this week, and as we stand in the batter's box, so to speak, as Satan throws stuff at us, I pray that we would rely on you, that we'd cry out to you, and that we'd be serious about doing the right thing. God, help us not to throw up our shoulders and say, "Well, you know, God's gracious." Help us to look into your face and say we want to hear from you, "Well done, good and faithful servant." So make us successful this week. We rely on your grace and your empowerment. In Jesus' name. Amen.