

Our Fight with Sin-Part 5
Breaking Recurring Patterns
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Some people have wondered and even asked why in an age of grace we would be spending over two months prolonging this look at battling sin. I mean, why would we deal with this with so much emphasis for so long if, you know, God's taken care of the sin problem. The sin his son has paid for, his grace, mercy, all of that. Uh, you know. Is this all that critical?

Well, I suppose that the short answer is that we're prolonging our look at this for a couple of months because God's word as we carefully move through it has extended sections of God's word that deal with us battling sin. So that's the practical answer, I suppose. But the more personal answer is that even though we as Christians rely on the grace and the forgiveness of God, the bottom line is that sin can still ruin your life. I mean, that's the bottom line. I mean, we can as Christians say that we are absolutely confident that we are adopted children of God, and that we have the forgiveness of God, and that because of the cross all of our past, present, and future sins, they've all been paid for. And we're not going to encounter any condemnation for those. And that may all be true. But in the image of Proverbs 6, you cannot scoop fire into your lap without getting burned. Remember that passage? I mean, there's no way for us to mess around with sin and not get burnt.

But really, I think we need to even rephrase the problem. It's usually not a one-time act that we're concerned with. The real destructive and toxic power of sin, it takes root in our lives when we fall into recurring patterns of sin. I mean it's one thing to touch a hot stove. It's another thing to lay down on the grill. It's one thing to kind of fall or stumble into a particular sin and then step right now, and it's another thing to find ourselves going back to it again and again.

Now, if the damage and toxicity and the destruction of sin, it comes in increasing measure as we get habitually involved in it, some would think well, you would never commit the same sin twice. You might be fooled once, but you know, not twice because that's not good for you. But of course, that's the real phenomenon of sin. It has, as Jesus said in John 8, it has this enslaving power. Right? It's got a certain magnetism and you may fall to it once, but it's interesting that the second time seems even easier than the first. And there's certainly something about our fallen humanity and Satan's work to egg us on that seems to pull us into patterns. And that's where the real damage often comes in the Christian life.

It could be, I suppose, depicted as a sin that so easily entangles us. And that's how our passage began in Hebrews 12 about throwing it off. Cast it off. You've got that sin that so easily entangles you, get out of it. I mean, that was the clear directive of the beginning of the series and we've looked at several reasons why, but we really haven't honed in on the practical ways to do it. And thankfully here, after a lot of motivation, in the middle part of chapter 12 in trying to remember why we should do it, now here comes in verses 12-13 a little bit of the how. And it is needed. And it's welcomed at this point, because, well, you know. Okay, we may be committed to doing it, but this recurring pattern of sin in my life? And we usually think of that one thing that in this season of your sanctification keeps on just creeping up in your Christian life and it's the thing that you've asked God to forgive you for week after week for months? That's the thing that really comes into view here.

In Hebrews 12, and if you haven't opened up your Bibles yet to that passage, please do, as we try to look at this chapter for the fifth time to try and understand what it is to break these recurring patterns of sin. To fight this battle against temptation. And if we're to do it, we certainly need the words of verses 12 and 13. Are you with me? Take a look at this text.

Therefore—and you might want to look back up at verse 11; the therefore comes on the heels of all this motivation that we could one day produce this harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by the discipline of God. It says after all of that, here’s what you need to do. Here comes the imperatives. Two of them. One in verse 12, and one in verse 13. He says strengthen your feeble arms and your weak knees. Strengthen them. Verse 13: And secondly, he says, make level paths for your feet. And he says you got to do that because there’s really two options here. We don’t want the lame, and in this case it doesn’t mean those that can’t walk; that’s a parallelism to verse 12, that is the weak knees, the legs that aren’t really walking this path as they ought let alone running this race with perseverance as we saw in the first part of the chapter. He says your legs aren’t working right, you’re stumbling. You’re continuing to stumble. You’re not pedestrian. You’re not running as you should. He says you don’t want that, to be disabled. Rather, wouldn’t you rather gave God heal that? And those are the two options. But let’s look at the imperatives.

Verse 12 says we need to strengthen your feeble arms and your weak knees. And that makes sense, right? The physical analogy runs throughout this chapter. And if I’m going to be able to ward off some kind of physical restraint, I need to be physically strong. And the same thing’s true here. If you’re going to in your spiritual life say no to sin that keeps enslaving you to drop back to that same failure again and again, you’re going to need to be spiritually strong, and that’s the analogy here.

Number one on your outline. If you found your worksheet in your worship packet, pull it out and jot this down. Number one: You and I need to get strong. I mean that’s just the basic analogy here. Our spiritual life has to be stronger if we’re going to conquer this recurring pattern of sin in your life. We just have to be more spiritually strong. And if you are the same spiritual strength this year as you were last year, then you’re probably dealing with the same sins. And if you don’t get any stronger by next year, you’re probably going to be dealing with the same kind of sin. So we need to get stronger. And that doesn’t mean we’re not Wesleyans here, we don’t believe that you’re going to reach this level of perfection. You’re going to continue to fight the good fight like Paul did in 2 Timothy, his last book. On his deathbed he says, you know what? I fought the good fight all the way to the end. And so we’re going to be at some other level of sanctification, but let’s get past this level. Let’s deal with this recurring sin. Let’s make the current sin that you are entangled in this year, let’s make that a point of history, okay? Let’s make that something that is not going to happen next year or the year after. Let’s move on to something else. And so it is in our Christian life that we need to understand, we’ve got to be stronger. And if you don’t get stronger, we’re going to be stuck.

Great. How do we do that? Doesn’t tell us. Doesn’t say. Just gives us the imperative, you need to strengthen your feeble arms and your weak knees. Which is really, by the way, if you don’t have a reference Bible and some don’t even show it, that’s an allusion to Isaiah 35:3-4. And it’s not only found in Isaiah 35, it’s a common biblical analogy. You don’t want faltering feet. You don’t want to fall down. You don’t want to stumble. So you need to be strong. You’re not going to get entangled, you got to be strong. How do you do that?

Well, the passage doesn’t tell us, but the book has talked a lot about it. Take a look, for instance, in Hebrews 5. If we’re going to be spiritually strong, there’s some basic ingredients that need to be bolstered in our lives. You can’t be spiritually strong without these things, and he’s already talked about these. And we’ve preached on them at length. But take a look at Hebrews 5:11. Here’s one basic component. He says, in this text, starting in verse 11, Hebrews 5:11: “We’ve got to much to say about this.” And that little demonstrative pronoun points back to this discussion about Melchizedek, and they all went “Who?” Oh, yeah. He was some character back in the Old Testament. And then somebody goes, “Oh, yeah, wasn’t he referred to in Psalms, he’s in the Psalms somewhere, too. But I don’t know, that’s hard. That’s difficult. We don’t quite track with you there, writer of Hebrews.”



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FOCAL POINT MINISTRIES

And he says, “Yeah, I know. It’s hard to explain to you guys because you’re slow to learn.” That’s not a compliment, right? Duuhr. You’re not keeping up here. And you’re not keeping up—it’s not because you haven’t had time. I mean, you’ve had time, verse 12. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers. And you remember, when we taught through this, we made the distinctions of two often used Greek words for this. This is not *chiroi*, it’s not like you’ve had lots of opportunities. You’ve had enough *chronos*, you’ve had enough years or months to be spiritually mature and to know these things. But you don’t. By this time you ought to have enough mastery of biblical knowledge, but you don’t. You need someone to come and to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. It’s like—now this is a good analogy—it’s like you need milk and not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk still being an infant, and the problem with infants is they’re really weak. I don’t ask the infant to go out and cut the lawn, right? They can’t do it. They’re helpless. They need someone to help them. And that’s the problem with just drinking milk. He says you’re not acquainted with the teachings about righteousness. But solid food, that’s for the mature. And solid food in this context is the deeper understanding of God’s word that you should have, that when you say Melchizedekian priesthood as it relates to Christ meeting our need, standing in the gap—oh yeah, I know all about that. I have a sense of that. I’ve mastered some of these deeper truths of the Scripture. He says well that’s for the mature. Who—now here’s the interesting relation to chapter 12—by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish between good and evil. There’s the real practical point of connection to chapter 12. When it comes to the path of either taking the off ramp of compromise and sin, or staying on the path of righteousness and saying no to temptation, you know it’s those who have had solid food and have constantly ingested that solid food, they’re able to do that. But you know, if you’re still sucking the bottle, you’re not really apt and strong enough to resist the temptation. That’s the real issue here.

Letter A, if you want to put it next to pointy finger number one, it’s simply this. If you’re going to get strong, here’s what you need: you need more spiritual food. Just to keep in the analogy here. If you’re going to be spiritually strong, you got to have spiritual food. And you might want to put next to that, good food, solid food. You’ve got to move from the simple truths of “God loves you,” to the deeper truths of God’s word. At least moving in to the Gerber cubelets of turkey, you know. Something more than the formula. Right? You’ve got to move into the direction of something more challenging. You need more spiritual food. You can’t do it without it. As a matter of fact, he says in chapter 6, verse 1, let’s leave the elementary teachings about Christ. And some people, by the way, they love that, right? It’s all about that. They want someone to tell them the stuff they already know because it makes us feel really smart. And it’s interesting how many people don’t want to go to a church, or be a part of a Bible study, or even have Christian friends that are going to challenge them to go a few levels deeper, because we like to affirmed in what we already know. And a lot of people, just give me the Gospel again” They want every sermon to be all about the Gospel, because they’ve got that one mastered. There’s not a lot of conviction in that for the Christian. Those are the kinds of the churches that are easy to fit into, and what you don’t realize is that if all the message is about is repentance and faith, which is what verse 1 is all about, all you’re doing is sucking on the bottle. You need more than that.

As a matter fact, he says let’s move on from, verse 2, the whole issue if initiation into the body of Christ, baptism, and the laying on of hands. An initiation into ministry. And let’s leave behind the basics of eschatology, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. I mean, those are basics and they’re good, and we’ve got to have that, but that’s just the milk. We ought to be going a little further than that. And if, by the way, all you’re counting on is a meal served up for you at the Sunday restaurant of church, I hope you realize that ain’t going to last all week. That is not someone who is constantly being trained by the ingestion of this book to be able to resist temptation on Thursday night. See what I’m saying? Not going to happen. You got to get into this book yourself. And I know some of you are going, “Haaawr, I heard that a million times.”

Great. You know, it's like if you go in and you want to lose weight they're going to tell you the same thing every time you go. "You need less food, fatty fatso, and you need more exercise." Right? Now, for some reason, you know, I know we want the shortcuts, but there really aren't any. If you want to be strong and leave behind the sin the so easily entangles you, if you want your reoccurring pattern of sin to change, you need more of this book and you need a deeper encounter with this book on a more regular basis. Constant use. Which means that in the morning, if you spend time in this book, you're not just going to your favorite verses and reading about the simple truths of God. You're willing to move systematically through it, just like we do on Sundays. You ought to be doing on your own, moving systematically through the Bible. I suggest you take no more than one or two verses a day. You want a prescription? Here it is. You can write this down.

T-A-N. TAN. Okay? T-A-N. If you want to know, you may carve out the time. Now here's how you deal with that time. Okay? T-A-N.

T stands for Then. If you don't open your Bible and get ready as the initial encounter with that one or two verses in the morning, if you're not ready to put on the ancient cloak of a Greco-Roman world in the New Testament, or ancient Judaism in the Old Testament, and slide into the sandals of the ancient historic context of the text, then you're just drinking milk. As a matter of fact, you're probably doing violence to the text as you try to look for words and phrases and themes that apply to your afternoon meeting. You got to start in a historical setting. Which means, that's why you buy those big, fat books in the Christian bookstore to learn something about the historical context of the Bible. And those verses also were made up of words and sentences. You need something of the grammatical setting of that. That's called the Then. If you don't spend ten to fifteen minutes just dealing with the ancient world in which those verses are set, I guarantee you, you are not going to be able to understand what God is saying on any level other than just the surface level of the text. You've got to invest in your library. You have to invest in going a few levels deeper, not just on a church that tries to make you think for a half an hour on a Sunday morning. You've got to do this on your own in the mornings. You've got to do this on your own every night. There has to be an ingestion of the word that begins with Then.

The next step then is A, Always. You've got to be able to pull out principles. And this is a difficult part, but you've got to train yourself to do it. To be able to look at a text after spending ten to fifteen minutes in one verse on the ancient context, to be able to then extract from that the eternal truths that are true for all time. The universal truths. The kinds of things that overarch the ancient context, and they're always true. They're universal principles of that text. And that's something you've got to get in the habit of doing all the time. Don't rely on someone you're hearing on the radio, or your pastor on Sunday. You can never be a Berean, who gets into the word and ingests that word on a level that's going to strengthen you to be able to face temptation unless you do the Then, get in that for ten to fifteen minutes, the Always, that's going to take brainwork for at least five to seven minutes, and then we can get to the N.

And that's the Now. Now we can start talking, and thinking, and processing that passage, for the sake of my afternoon client meeting that I have. Dealing with a neighbor next door. Dealing with my marriage. Focusing on the ways that this might change my relationship with my kids. The way it might adjust my values. But you see, you're going to spend a good twenty to twenty-five minutes dealing with issues that are preludes to accurately applying the depth of that passage. And that's work. That's going to cost you if you spend fifteen minutes just dealing with the application of that text, which has to wait until the Then and Always steps. That's forty-five minutes in the Bible, right? I mean that's thirty-five to forty-five minutes a day just to do that in one verse of the Scriptures. We've got some work to do. That's what it means to go a little deeper than just sorting through the Bible, reading a proverb, looking at a psalm, or cruising through the Bible in a year, and you know, that's kind of cool, I learned a few things and was reminded of a few things about God.

If you want to change that pattern of recurring sin, it's going to take a new relationship to God's word.

I know that's not, you know, "Wow, never thought of that." It's just, you know, because the problem for Christians is not the knowing usually, it's the doing. And so we just got to put this into action. We've got to become students of God's word. It's there, you're literate, you've got printed Bibles, we've got electronic Bibles, we can do this work. God has given us the tools. And you need more spiritual food if you're going to be spiritually strong.

You're in Hebrews 5 and 6, look across the page at the beginning of chapter 5. There's another element we learned about spiritual strength in the book of Hebrews, and it came from the pattern of Jesus' life. Look at verse 7 in Hebrews 5. It says, "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up"—what's the word?—"prayers. Prayers and petitions"—what kind of prayers—"with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." We've already seen in this series that if we're going to conquer sin it's going to take the second basic biblical ingredient, and that is that our prayer life has to be happening.

Number two on your outline. You not only need more spiritual food and better quality of spiritual food, secondly, you need more times of focused prayer. You need more focused prayer. And by that I mean I know we all pray. I know you say a few words before a meal, and I know you probably pray with your kids before you put them to bed, and maybe you pray with your wife in the morning—that's great. But a lot that is just real, simple surface checking in with God kind of talk. We need to this kind of stuff. Take a look at it. Jesus himself was dependent on this to face his trials. What kind of prayers? Well, look at it again. Petitions, loud cries, and tears. That's a different kind of praying than most of us are used to. You want to conquer this recurring pattern of sin in your life? It's going to take a deeper relationship with God's word, and it's going to take more fervent and focused prayer.

And again, wow. That's so redundant. It is. Because the problem with us is not the knowing, it's the doing. But we've got to make this the pattern of our lives. Remember that very classic passage on fighting temptation in Ephesians 6, the armor of God? One of the elements, and it's unfortunate, and it's just counter-intuitive in the text, too, because we thing the important things are all analogized by a part of the armor that we're supposed to put on to fight the attacks of the evil one, to stand firm on that evil day? And they are. They're all important, all the breastplate, the helmet, the shoes. But the one that he doesn't analogize, that doesn't get representation on the flannelgraph board is really one of the most important ones and it comes at the end. And I know Paul thinks it's important because he repeats it five times after the analogy of the armor is complete. You know the very last thing he says after all the discussion of the armor? Here's what he says. You need to pray. You need to pray, you need to pray, it needs to be about prayer, it needs to be fervent prayer in the spirit. He makes it clear. And if you're going to put on the, "armor of God," don't forget the thing that Paul resonates with at the end of the discussion. And that is, how's your prayer life?

I mean, maybe the reason you're falling to the same sin over and over and over again is because there's not a lot of this kind of praying going on, in Hebrews 5:7. Now, again. Think about that. Spiritual strength comes from the two basic ingredients of the Christian life. It comes through a better relationship, and a deeper relationship, with God's word. And it comes through more fervent and focused prayer life. That's what Jesus said in the height of his temptation, saying to his disciples in Matthew 26. You want to avoid temptation? Watch, and—what? Pray. That's what you got to do so that you will not fall into temptation.

If you want to get spiritually strong, you need more spiritual food, you need better food, you need more focused prayer. Thirdly, look at Hebrews 10. Want to talk about spiritual strength? If we're going to make our arms that are feeble strong, and our knees that are weak, if we're going to

make those sturdy and stout, then here's what you need. You need a third ingredient, at least. You know, we could list five or six, but these are like the top three in the book of Hebrews.

Look at verse 23. Remember this? "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess." That's a great statement about being strong, standing up, not compromising, holding on to this Christian commitment that we have. "For he who has promised is faithful. And," he says, you want to do that, here's a good way to do it. A little conjunction here to tie these together. "Let us consider"—what does it say?—"how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds." You're going to need to do this as team effort. "And let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching." Encouraging one another, and as it says here, "spurring one another on to love and good deeds" is really—I know it may involve this time that we have here, but it's really not the one another time, is it? And you sitting there, certainly in Orange County, very quietly listening to the preacher yak at you for, you know, forty-five minutes. Now, that may give you some tools and some edification, I hope, but it's really not the setting in which we're encouraging and spurring one another on to love and good deeds. And that is what we need as a third ingredient.

Let's just put it down this way. Letter C if you will, pointy finger number three: You and I, we need more time with strong friends. If we're going to be strong, we need some strong friends around us. And we've got to have those friends around us in increasing measure all the more as we see the day approaching. Why is that? Because the Bible predicts the closer we get to that day, the worse off the world will be. Translation: the more temptation you're going to encounter. So what do we need? We need more strong Christian friends around us in increasing measure as the world gets to be a more tempting place.

So, that's an ingredient that I can't, I cannot, ignore. I got to have that as a part of my life. And again, you can sit here quietly, like you do so well on Sundays, and you know what? There's no real letting down of your life to say to someone else, "Hey, how can you help me live a life of love and good deeds?" Not a lot of that going on. But that's Paul's perspective in the book of Romans, for instance. Romans 15:1. What a great passage to remind us what we need. We need some strong friends. Especially if we have points in our Christian life that are weak. Those weaknesses are exploited, we get entangled in recurring sin. Here's what we need. Romans 15:1:

"We who are strong ought to bear the failings of the weak." Let's stop right there. If there's failings of weakness, right? The strong in the church should come alongside and help those. Now there's not people that are consistently, perfectly strong, and those that are consistently, perfectly weak. But in your Christian life, wherever you're at, wherever that point of repeated failure is, that sin that so easily entangles you, there are people, I trust, in the church, in your fellowship, that have strength in that area where you're weak. And the Bible says that those people can be called into your life if you let them, and they know what your weakness is, and they can come in and be strength to you.

Which, by the way, is counter-intuitive for the way churches work today. And I think it's hilarious, and I don't quite understand it, but the real trend today is to get everybody together in a small group that have the same exact failure in the same area of their Christian life. Right? I don't get that. You know, we're, "Oh, I struggle with that, too." "Me, too." "Well, that's why I'm in that group, but if you have a different sin go down the hall. That groups down there." And I'm thinking, "Wait." I don't get it. I don't want to put noodles around my knee if I've blown my knee out. I want a brace with some strong parts there, right? I want to get some things around the weakness of my life that are strong. So whatever the sin is in your life, you need to be vulnerable enough to let down your veneer and have in some setting where the chairs aren't facing the front, but where the chairs are facing each other, in some context in the church, and be able to say, "You know what? Here's my problem." Finding a Christian that says, "You know what? I used to have that problem, and God

has got me through that. I'm strong in that area. Maybe I can help you." That's what the text is saying. We who are strong ought to bear the failings of the weak.

And not please ourselves. And that's helpful, certainly, if you turn this truth around. Because if you really start to think about being the leg brace in someone's life, you're thinking, "Ugh! That's a hard thing to do." And you're right. It is hard. But, by the way, we're never going to have a church where people can help people's areas of their life that are weak unless people are willing to get involved who are strong to help them. You following me there? In other words, we need the command. And that's what Paul is directing the command. Hey, if you've conquered a particular area of your life, in our context, then you ought to be willing to get involved with someone that hasn't. And a lot of Christians, they come to church just for their own edification. But the Bible says, look at the next verse. "Each of us should please his neighbor for his own good to build him up"—that's the word edification, by the way—"to make him stronger, for even Christ didn't please himself." And that's an important principle. And I should say, are you not only willing to let your veneer down in an area of weakness and have another brother or sister in Christ help you through that, but are you willing to be that for someone else. The church has got to work both ways. There has to be a synergistic relationship as it relates to this principle, or the church will never have it available. So you and I need to say, hey, we're willing. We're going to get involved. We're going to be the linebacker for someone else, and we're going to allow other people in the church to kind of, you know, be my linemen to get me through the temptation of my life.

Get strong. To do that, you need at least, you know, meaty spiritual food, and more of it. You need more times on your knees with not just "Oh God, bless the missionaries." You need some kind of fervent prayer with God that's regular and focused. And you need more strong Christian friends and more time with those strong Christian friends. That Ecclesiastes 4 passage by the way is great, right? Two are better than one, because when one falls down the other can help him up. And a cord of three strands not easily broken. The defensive nature of that simple observation by Solomon is so helpful in our spiritual quest. I mean, if I had two or three people in the area of weakness helping me in that one area, there's help there. There's strength there. So we need to get strong. The text says strengthen your feeble arms and your weak knees. The analogy is your spiritual life has to be able to fight off the entanglement of the sin that's always cropping up in your life.

But there's something else. Go back to verse 13 of Hebrews 12. There's not only an internal examination of 'I need to be stronger' here, there's something now that flips in verse 13 to being external. Now he doesn't say, "Oh yeah, and work on your diet" or something, he says, "And let's talk about where you're walking now. Let's talk about the path that you're running on." He says, "Make level paths for your feet." And is that in quotations, by the way, in your text there? That's a quotation of what passage? Do you see it in the margin? Proverbs 4:26. That's the context of that. And it's one that's often seen in the book of Proverbs as an image of the Christian life, in our case, from our perspective, the Christian life. The ability to follow Christ in a world filled with all kinds of temptation and stumbling blocks, and making sure that the environment that we're in is as conducive as possible to me walking and not falling. And the focus now is on an external thing. To the extent that I can control it, I want to be able to make level paths for my feet. I don't want to be choosing to walk down some gravelly, laden path, or logs across the path, or big rocks jutting out of the path. I want to be able to have as smooth a path as possible.

Now in this world the path will never be perfectly smooth. We cannot avoid temptation in the world. But, we can minimize it by choosing to get from Point A to Point B—let's just call Point A "Monday," and Point B "Saturday." To get from here to here and touch all the bases the way I'm supposed to: I got to go to work, you know, we got to shop, we got to cook, we got to deal with all the things of life. Well, to get from Point A to Point B, there's lots of different paths to get there and still touch the bases. And the question is, to the extent that I can control it, what am I doing to, number two, steer clear—number two on your outline—of temptation? Because that's what it

means to make the level path. I want to pick a path between here and the end of the week that is as free from the temptations of sin, particularly the sin that so easily entangles me. I want to do the best I can to walk a path between Monday and Saturday that avoids as many of those bumps as possible. So I'm going to choose, carefully, my environment. That, by the way, what Proverbs 4 is all about. I mean, and since he quotes it, I think we have license now to camp there for a little while and turn in your Bibles to the Old Testament book of Proverbs. And I want you to see this quotation in context, and maybe glean some principles for us about how to create a life in a weekly environment in a sinful world that steers as clear from temptation as possible.

Hebrews 12 takes us to Proverbs 4. Right? "Make level paths for your feet." If you look real quick at verse 26, there it is. Do you see it? "Make level paths for your feet." Let's get the context though. See what we can glean about this instruction from the book of Proverbs. Let's start in verse 10. Go all the way up to verse 10. Let's see the context of the quote, "making level paths." Starts this way; the thought starts in verse 10. "Listen, my son. Accept what I say and the years of your life will be many." This will be a good thing if you do what I'm telling you to do. "I will guide you in the way of wisdom"—there's the analogy to path—"and I will lead you along straight paths." That'll be better than crooked ones and ones that are fraught with all kinds of problems. "When you walk your steps won't be hampered, and when you run you won't stumble." And that's the analogy in the imagery we're looking at, right? We don't want to run down paths that are going to be obstacles for my sanctification. So how do I do it? Several things. Let's look at several of them. I didn't have enough room for all the pointy fingers, but if you write small maybe you can get some of these if you want to.

Verse 13. Okay, here's the first one. First instruction, if I'm going to walk on a path and not be hampered, run and not stumble, I need to, verse 13, hold on to instruction, do not let it go, guard it well for it is your life. That's a dramatic and poetic way of saying, whatever he's talking about, it is critical. It is the difference between life and death, it is the difference between toxicity and the destructive nature of sin or the reward of righteousness which he already referred to in verse 10 and 11. So, I'm saying, just to keep the motif here, let's keep the verb the same. Let's put it this way, as some kind of sub-point in just understanding the context of Proverbs 4. We need to—now this is going to be distinctive. You're going to think it's redundant, but it's not. We need to steer our minds back to biblical truth. Steer our minds back to biblical truth.

Now take a look at verse 13 carefully once you write that down again. It says "hold on to instruction." Now point 1, letter A, was that we get that instruction. We need to ingest this spiritual, meaty food. But look here at this text. It says hold onto it once you get it. And that's different. To guard it, right? To make sure that my mind is going back to it. Because Jesus, when he was met with temptation Matthew 4, as we saw earlier in this series, think about that one. He had to ingest the book of Deuteronomy if he was going to recall the book of Deuteronomy when he was hit with temptation. His mind wasn't too far from the text of Scripture. His mind wasn't far from recalling and enlisting and employing the truth that he studied. So that's the distinction here. Yeah, if we're going to be strong we need to ingest spiritual food. But here, if we're going to talk about making level paths, in my daily life as I'm out there I need to make sure my mind keeps coming back to biblical truth.

And there's a lot of practical ways to do that. If you're in a home fellowship groups this would be a good one to discuss. I don't think I put it on your questions this week, but how can we do that? I mean there are all kinds of ways in taking my morning Bible study and bringing that into my life during the day and having my mind not far from the truth and the instruction of God's word. All kinds of reminders, all kinds of creative ways to do that. But if I'm going to win temptation, part of that is taking into the path of my life, see, the kinds of guarding of that biblical instruction. Hold on to it.

Secondly, verse 14. “Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men.” Now the purist looks at that and says, “Impossible! We live in a sinful world. Every path in this world is trodden by evil men.” Okay, the point here, and of course the writer of Proverbs knows that. But there are paths between Monday and Saturday, are there not, that are filled with more evil activity than other paths that we could take. In the course of a year there’s a way to get through the entire year and not travel the paths that are well worn by the sinful activity that is going to again inflame my temptation to go back to that thing that so easily entangles me. I need to somehow weed those out, and I need to—look at the first two words of verse 15—I need to avoid it. Whatever that sinful environment is I need to try to avoid it. I can’t every one of them. As Paul said, I’d have to leave the world to live in a perfectly righteous place. But, I can avoid the path in many situations. There’s a lot of things I don’t have to read. There’s a lot of things I don’t have to listen to. There’s a lot of places I don’t have to go. There’s a lot of vacation spots I don’t need to be in. I can choose to avoid those because I don’t want that area, that sinful environment to be accosting me when I’m there. I don’t want that. I want to, according to this, not travel on it, verse 15, turn from it and go on your way. Go a different way, because people that are in those environments—and you know what I’m talking about—verse 16, they can’t sleep until they do evil. They’re robbed of slumber until they make someone fall. I mean, it’s just filled with people trying to egg us on to do the wrong things.

Let’s put it this way. If you’re taking some sub notes here. Letter B. We need to steer clear of sinful environments. Right? If we’re going to steer clear of temptation, we got to steer clear of the places where temptation is highest. And you and I knows exactly what we’re talking about as it relates to whatever your recurring sin problem is, right? You can’t do that. And I know. Oh, here we go. Side bar.

I know what people are going to think. Oh, you know what, Mike? I know what that’s all—that’s that whole, kinda, fundamentalist, separatist movement. They’re really weird. They button their top button and they’re separate from the world. Those are the fundies. Those are the legalists.” There’s another one employed to bash this position. Can I say this to you? I don’t care what they call you. I don’t care what your libertine friends want to say to slander your decision to obey this text. But I would much rather be called names by my libertine Christian friends, than to sacrifice my sanctification by trying to show that I’m not a separatist. That I’m not out here trying to avoid temptation, and I don’t vacation there and I don’t watch that, and I don’t listen to that stuff. Call me whatever you want. I mean, in my life, I mean I don’t have HBO, I don’t go to R-rated movies, I don’t listen to secular music on the radio. And some of you are going, “Oh, really? What kind of church are all you—.” You know, call me whatever you want. I don’t want to be in an environment that’s going to try to take my mind and pull me back to things that are going to make me stumble. I don’t want to do that. So I willingly separate myself from things that in and of themselves may not be wrong. But it’s an environment that’s wrong for me, see? And I just think that’s wise living. Because I’d much rather not be stumbled in those environments. Call me weak. Fine, call me weak. You can be a libertine. But those things may lead you to sin.

Are you tracking with me on that? Because some people go, “Woohoo!” You know, “Come on, now, we’re living in the twenty-first century, you know?” Yeah, fine. Fine. But there are things that we willingly forsake—areas, arenas, vacation spots, magazines, television programs, all kinds of things we say “I’m not gonna be there.” And call me weird if you want. But I know that in those settings I’m more prone to be tempted than in other settings, so I’m just not going to have it. Okay, now we’re going to build a fortress in the mountains and start a monastery. Can’t do that. You and I are called to be salt and light. So we have to penetrate the world. We have to live in the real world. If you were up at Men’s Retreat last weekend, we have to interface with a sinful world to reach a sinful world. But we are not going to, when we have an opportunity and a choice to choose paths

from Monday to Saturday, we're not going to choose paths that put us in harm's way. We're just not going to do it. At least, we shouldn't.

But you know what, if you avoid the wrong path, look at verse 18. As long as we're here, what a great, great verse. "The path of the righteous"—are you still in Proverbs 4?—"The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn shining ever brighter till the full light of day." I know we're not going to be perfectly righteous till we meet Christ face to face, but don't you want the path to get brighter and brighter and brighter? Don't you want your life to reflect more the glory of Christ? Isn't that what Paul said: reflecting his glory on one level, and then next year reflecting it on another level? Well part of it is avoiding the environment of sin, and I think it's important to do that even if people think you're nuts to do it. Way of the wicked though, they don't even care about temptation. It's like deep darkness—verse 19—they don't even know what makes them stumble, there's so much temptation in their lives. Right? "My son, pay attention to what I say. Listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body." And again he reminds us, this is worth it. Avoid temptation. Avoid situations and environments that are tempting.

Okay. We got two, let's go to three. Let's go to Letter B here. Verse 23. "Above all else," he says, "guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life." Now, verse 13 talked about me taking my mind and directing it back to biblical instruction. Verse 23 now, ten verses later, says just guard your mind. That's what your heart is in a Jewish mindset, right? The analogy is the seat of my thinking. The place where my mind gets to think about what it wants to think about. That's my heart from a Jewish context. And it says here, guard it. That's a defensive posture. In other words, let's put it this way: I need to steer clear of tempting thoughts. I need to steer tempting thoughts. If I'm going to steer clear of tempting environments and sinful environments, I certainly want to steer clear of tempting thoughts because thoughts always precede action, right? That's why Jesus made such a big deal, if you don't want to be an adulterer don't look at women lustfully, because you know what? The thought always precedes the action. And he says the problem starts in your mind. And if you don't want to be some kind of crass Orange County materialist, then stop flipping through those magazines of stuff that you're never gonna buy that would never promote your family or your life in the direction of godliness, and you'd never buy it anyway. Do you see what I'm saying? Am I meddling too much on that one? Stop. It's not necessary. If you're not going to buy it, if that's not what you want to pursue, don't fill your mind with those things. Watch your heart. Careful what you think. Jesus said you'd never become a murderer if you didn't first hate the man in your heart. You'd never slander him behind his back if you didn't harbor bitterness in your heart about it. It's all about your heart. He says that's the wellspring of life. Everything comes from there. Guard your heart. Steer clear of tempting thoughts.

Look at verse 24. Let's get the fourth one here. "Put away perversity from your mouth and keep corrupt talk from your lips." Now we move from your mind to your mouth. And the Bible here says that if we're going to walk on a level path that's not filled with temptation, then we're going to have to steer clear of sinful words. Because the gap between thoughts and actions is words. Rarely are you going to fall into a pattern of repeated sin that hasn't in some way or another been articulated with your mouth, and the connection between your mouth and your heart is a close connection in Scripture. Jesus said, "The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart." It's coming out of your heart. Your imagination, your mind, where your mind goes. The fantasies of your mind are going to leak out of your mouth, and they will probably precede the actions. So let's guard our mouths.

Is that the fourth one? Steer clear of sinful words. Take a look at 25: "Let your eyes look straight ahead and fix your gaze directly before you." Now again, I understand that the analogy is an analogy of walking on a path and keeping your eyes on the path, but because Scripture so often

ties our sin to our eyeballs—Jesus did it, John did it; in 1 John he talks about the lust of the eyes—then I think it would be appropriate when the analogy is here to make that a point of its own. We need to steer our eyeballs away from temptation.

Let's get back to the magazine example. Let's just not watch things, look at things, put images in our eyeballs that are perhaps going to inflame a temptation in the sin that so entangles us. I mean, think about lust and adultery for instance. I love the way Job puts in the book of Job. He says, "I made a covenant with my eyes that I will not gaze at a young man." That's just a good commitment of my eyeballs. And you ought to say the same about whatever your sin might be. Make sure your eyeballs aren't gazing at things that are going to inflame your heart to temptation. I know that seems very stern, but remember the command. It started in verse 10: years of your life will be many. Or the encouragement of verse 22: they are life to those who find them and health to a whole man's body. This is for our own good.

Steer our minds to biblical truth. Steer clear of sinful or tempting environment. Steer clear of tempting thoughts. Steer clear of tempting words. Steer our eyeballs away from temptation. That would be good. How about verse 26, if you still have room on your worksheets. "Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or to the left. Keep your foot from evil." Here's the quotation, verse 26, that we find in Hebrews 12. "Make level paths for your feet." Then he says, "Take only ways that are firm, do not swerve to the right or to the left. Keep your foot from evil." And the analogy is the path. And I love this because this is all preceding how I'm going to live this week. We can put it down to the day. It's preceding how I'm going to live today. And I love the fact that in Scripture this is such a common thing, that before I ever start on the path I'm making this kind of commitment that I'm not going to swerve to the right or to the left.

I put it this way, and it's a principle we see throughout the Scripture. We need to—just to the analogy going, and the verb going—we need to start steering, let's put it this way, on a daily basis, before the day begins. We need to start steering before the day begins. If you and I are going to avoid temptation, why don't we start after our time in the word and our time in prayer, why don't we start with a commitment that says today I'm not going to fall to temptation. Now, I know what immediately our current twenty-first century culture of Christian says: Well, I don't want to make that commitment because I may break it. I don't understand that thinking either. I just don't get it. I don't want people at weddings saying, "Well, we don't want the whole vow thing 'cause, you know, it may not work out." Right? I mean, at weddings let's say "I do." Okay? Even knowing that in a sinful world, who knows. Maybe at some point you won't, but you should start with "I do," and then by God's grace, hopefully you will. See? And I think with the whole commitment to living godly lives, let's start every morning that way. God, this afternoon and tonight when the temptation comes; by midmorning when the temptation is there to backbite, to gossip, to lust or whatever it is that is the recurring sin in my life. I'm making the commitment this morning, God, that I'm not going to let my foot swerve. I'm going to stay on the path. I'm not going to deviate to the right or to the left. Make that commitment. Let it come out of your mouth.

"Well, I might have to apologize to God by the end of the day."

Fine. You're more likely to walk on a path of righteousness if you start with a resolve to do it. And so, articulate. Tell God you're there to do it. Start steering before your day begins.

If that sounds like a lot of, you know, tailoring of your life that seems impossible for you because whatever your situation you can't change it. Before I concede anything there, I'd like to say maybe you need to rethink that. Some people say, "Well at my job that's just the way it is." Maybe you need to change your job. "Well, in our neighborhood, that's the way it is." Maybe you need to change your neighborhood. "My circle of friends, well that's the way they are." Maybe you need to change your circle of friends. See what I'm saying. Maybe you need to start there. But when I do concede something, because you say, "Well it's my family" or something, and "that's a sacred

covenant and commitment and I just can't bail on that"—fine. Great. Then when you've done all that you can to steer clear of temptation, when in your mind you're resolved to do these things, then we should pray the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray. It's found, the particular phrase, in Matthew 6:13. Matthew 6:13, you don't need to turn there because you already have it memorized. Here's what it says: "And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." In the path that must necessarily be walked in my life—and there are things I cannot change. I live in the world, I live in the twenty-first century, I have the family I have, and if it's not an overwhelming case that I should change jobs, there are certain things about that job that are tempting, there are certain things about my neighborhood that are tempting. To the extent that I can't change the path and make a level path, and the path's always going to have some stumbling blocks on it. I then need to pray the prayer, "God, lead us not into temptation. On the path that I'm walking, I know I picked the path that has the least amount of stumbling blocks, but when I hit the stumbling blocks? Man, God, help me to avoid them. Lead me not right up to that. Don't let my foot strike that stone. And then God, deliver me from evil. Don't let that happen. Keep me from it."

But a lot of people are praying that prayer and not doing anything about steering clear of temptation. As a matter of fact, I think it's providential that we start with Proverbs 4, and we work hard to steer of temptation and then we say to God, "Okay, God, I'm doing all that I can do to steer clear of temptation now. Don't lead me into temptation today, and deliver me from evil."

Steer clear of temptation. Starts with making sure we're stronger. You're never going to get out of the sin that so easily entangles you unless you're stronger as a Christian, so let's get strong. How do we do that? Spiritual food, more focused prayer, and strong Christian friends. Time with those people. Then we need to try and work on our environment. We need to steer clear of temptation, do the best we can to clear a path as clearly as I can from Monday to Sunday. Okay?

Lastly though, I think it's important that we're ending the two imperative about trying to conquer temptation here with another reminder at the options. And that's what we have here. The purpose clause, bottom of verse 13, is this: "Do all these things"—work on yourself, work on your environment—"so that the lame may not be disabled but rather healed." There's two options there and we ought to contemplate them. Number three on your outline: Let's contemplate your options. Because really, when it comes down to it, you got a choice to make now that the sermon is wrapping up. You're going to either work harder on being strong and controlling your environment, even to the chagrin of your libertine friends. Or, you're going to kind of blow it off and say, well, you know, God of grace, whatever. Just remember this little tag at the end of verse 13. It's a reminder to contemplate the options. And the first option isn't a good one, is it. It says, "So that the lame"—and that means if you keep on stumbling here, your legs continue to be wobbly and you keep falling on this path, you're still entangled in this sin and you're not running the race well, see; then you should fear this last word in the phrase: disabled. These two words by the way? One is, you know, we're stumbling along. The other one is a big word. It's really literally the Greek word "to dislocate." It's one thing to stumble and stub your toe. It's another thing to dislocate your knee or your hip. I'd rather break something than dislocate something, right? I mean, there is something that's catastrophic about that word, and unfortunately it doesn't come across real catastrophic in our English translation, but it's a big word. You don't want to be dislocated. You don't want to have this total uselessness in your walk.

Now there's two ways that that can happen. Let's put it down this way, pointy finger number one. What this means, whatever it means, it means more hurt. So let's put down greater hurt. That's option number one. If I don't deal with reoccurring patterns of habitual sin, you can count on the fact that eventually you're going to have greater hurt in your life. Now we started the message with the simple motivation that I don't want the toxicity, the destruction of recurring sin because it's bad. And certainly if you continue on that path and you don't deal with this sin and make it ancient history in your spiritual sanctification, then you're going to have more pain just

because of sin's destructive nature. But I don't think that's what's in view here. As a matter of fact, remember last time we looked at this whole section on discipline. And it was all about—look at verse 11—discipline being unpleasant or painful. That's the context we've just come out of. And I think the picture in this passage is more like the good shepherd who watches the straying the lamb, and he gets a few whacks on the side of his noggin; you know, "Get back in line, don't stray from the path." And eventually if that lamb won't stop straying, what does the shepherd do in the ancient agrarian culture? You know the story. You've been to Sunday school. You've heard this before, right? Snaps his leg. Guess what? You're not straying anymore now, are you? And the shepherd in the old picture has to now carry that lamb. But that lamb not going wander now that I've broken his leg, or dislocated his leg. That may seem harsh to you, but unfortunately the God of the Bible sometimes in our twenty-first century, glossy, plastic Christianity will seem a bit harsh. And that's the only God we have to deal with. A God who says if you won't deal with recurring patterns of sin, you can look forward to dislocation because that's where it's heading. God won't let you continue.

And I know I referenced this briefly last week, and some of you bristled. I watched your eyebrows go, "Mmhmmm!" right? So I just want to let you know I'm not making it up, and I think I threw a quick passage out there. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 10, and I want to show you an extended section of Scripture that is written for us to remind us that if we don't deal with recurring patterns of sin, the ultimate dislocation is spelled out for us here. And that's not good. Because it won't only hurt us, it'll hurt our families, it'll hurt friends, it'll hurt our church. 1 Corinthians 10. Context here is the children of Israel, they should have followed Moses, they should have followed Caleb, they should have followed Joshua, they should have had faith. Unfortunately they were busy having fun, and that didn't please God. Even though God gave them all these benefits. Look at verse 5: "Nevertheless, with all the good things God did for them he wasn't pleased with most of them. And their bodies were scattered over the desert." And that's not like sunbathing or anything, right? That's reference to death, isn't it? Right? And if you don't believe it, keep reading. We'll see it. Verse 6: "Now these occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did." You mean, they were scattered in the desert and God killed off a generation of Israelites so that we from a new covenant perspective would not set our hearts on evil things and throw off the sin that so easily entangles us. That's what the text is telling us. It's for us.

And some of the specifics, well, look at it. Verse 7: "Do not be idolaters as some of them were, putting things before their loyalty and love for God. As it's written"—look what they were, they were all into fun and having a good time—"the people sat down to eat and drink and they got up to indulge in pagan revelry." The opposite of Proverbs 4; they weren't trying to make straight paths for their feet. They were out there just to have a good time, and if it meant like being like all the cultures that were in Egypt, no problem, we're going to do that. Oh, and "Don't commit"—verse 8—"sexual immorality as some of them did. And in one day twenty three thousand of them"—circle the word, what happened to them?—"they died." Keep reading. Verse 9: "We should not test the Lord as some of them did, and they were"—circle the word, what?—"killed by snakes." Verse 10: "And do not grumble"—that doesn't seem like a big sin, but it was a recurring pattern in their life and they did not break it, and some of them that were tied up in the sin that so easily entangled them, the sin of complaining and being hypercritical as they were, guess what? "They were—what's the word?—"Killed by the destroying angel."

These things happened to them, but they would never happen to us because we live in the new covenant age, and God took a Tylenol. He's feeling much better now, and he would never treat us like that. See that in verse 11? The Tylenol verse. You see it? It's not there, is it? "These things happened to them and were written down as"—what's the word?—"warnings"—for who? For us—"on whom the fulfillment of the ages is come." And that's a loaded statement saying, man, the stakes are even higher now. And this is an example for us. So if you think you are standing firm, be careful. And I think the standing firm here is people that are thinking, "Oh, God's grace, you know,

God loves us. We can grumble, complain, and have our little secret sins. It's not a problem." No, no, no, no. You'd better take heed. You'd better be careful lest you fall. And the falling here is the falling that's defined in the context. Look at it. They died, they died, they were killed, they were killed. I don't want permanent dislocation. And I know you don't see much of it, maybe from your perspective, but ask our pastoral staff. Because we have to do funerals all the time, and sometimes we're burying people, lambs that keep on straying. And I think it's a sign, it's a hopeful sign, that our Father in heaven loves them. But they die untimely deaths sometimes because they will not give up their recurring patterns of sin. We see it. I know it's hard. I mean, that's not the way we start the sermon at the funeral, but that's the reality. And a lot of us stand in the back room going, "Wow. God had to take him home, huh?" And we know what they were struggling with. We know their sin. It started to become more of an issue and they never dealt with it. That's what the text is teaching.

So he reminds us. Verse 13, good passage: "No temptation as seized you except what is common to man." And that's good news because there is someone who is strong in that area that's conquered it, the thing you're dealing with. I know you're afraid to let anybody know about it. But, trust me, it's a common thing. We deal with about eight basic temptations, right? Really. I mean, the medieval church used to itemize those. I even put one of the books on the back—I think I put it on the back—C.S. Lewis, *Vices and Virtues*. And you know what? It's the same old seven or eight things. But you know what? They're common, and that's good. That's hopeful because there's someone out there in our church that can help you with that. It says, "But God is faithful," and God is faithful and he's not going to allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. And that's not a sometimes statement. He is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. So stop being a fatalist about your recurring pattern of sin. But when you are tempted, guess what? With every single temptation that comes your way, he is also providing a way out so that you can stand up under it. You can bear up under the temptation. You can choose the right path. Isn't that hopeful? It's the hope of our passage, and the passage says you either got one thing to look forward to, which is greater hurt or, Hebrews 12:13 says there is another option. And the other option is healing.

Put that down on your outline. Letter B. I mean, you can have greater hurt or you can have, the good news is, healing. God can take that pattern of sin, provide the way out for you. You by God's grace can take it, and as you take that out, you know what? That becomes something in your path. Then you start sentences like this, when you're helping a person thirty-three years from now, "I used to struggle with that problem." Wouldn't that feel good to say that about your current sin? "I used to struggle with that problem." Now, you'll be struggling with something else. God will reveal another level of sin in your life, but let's get to that place. And that's going to happen when God heals us. And if you've got your Greek New Testament, you Greek students out there, look at the voice of that last verse. Look at the voice. It's not an active voice, it's a passive voice. You notice that? The passive voice of this verb also gives me hope. You know, it's not like you're healing yourself. It's like you're going to the doctor, the great physician, and he's taking this weakness in your life as you do all you can to get strong and avoid temptation. Now he's saying, "Great. If you want to get out of this, I'm not only providing the out but I'm ready to take your hand and to bring you out of that. I'm ready to heal you." I love the passive voice there. "I'm going to bring you into a new state of health in your sanctification." God is willing to do it. He is able to do it. He wants to do it. You can be healed of that recurring pattern of sin.

Ah. I cannot not end with this passage. Turn to the little book of Jude, just before the book of Revelation. Turn to the last book of the Bible, and go to the sixty-fifth book, the little book, one chapter book, of Jude. Find the maps, find the concordance, go to Revelation—thank you, for laughing at that—and find the book of Jude. Jude 1. Obviously, that's all there is. Verse 17. Let's get some context here. "Dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus foretold. They

said this, they said in the last times there are going to be scoffers and they are going to follow their own ungodly desires.” We’re surrounded with people compromising. Verse 19: “And these men will divide you. They follow mere natural instincts.” They don’t even have the Spirit. Verse 20: “But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.” Summary of what we talked about this morning. Verse 21: “And keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt, snatch others from the fire and save them, to others show mercy mixed with fear, hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” Okay, all of that, and that’s an intense section. And then he says this, “Now”—the great benediction of this book—“to him who is able to keep you from falling”—do you believe that? He can do that with every temptation he provides the way out, he can grab your hand and he can heal you—“keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious throne without fault and with great joy.” Wouldn’t you much rather enter the kingdom having conquered those recurring patterns of sin? I mean, that’s going to be a good day to the only God our savior, be glory, majesty, power, and authority. He’s got all the resources to fix the problem. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and even into—twenty-first century Orange Country—forever more. Amen.

God has the power to fix the problem. He is able to make you stand. He is holding out his hand and wanting to bring you through the Monday through Saturday life that is fraught with temptation. Get strong, take the path filled with the least amount of temptation, and trust him to heal you. Because if you don’t get serious about this, your only other option is great hurt.

Took my kids at the end of the summer to a foreign country, and I knew in that foreign country we were going to go to this open air bazaar, this market, and you know, mostly because my wanted to go there, but. We went there, and I thought to myself, My kids are in massive trouble. Right? They’re used to Costco and Wal-Mart. They’re not used to people popping out behind every little display case trying to sell them something. And I knew they also had their big wad of cash that they had collected from their allowance for the last three months, so they had some money in their pocket. And man, I was afraid. I thought, Oh, today’s the day. We’re going to the open air market, and everybody’s going to—you know, every little piece of junk, piece of plastic, they’re going to come out with a too-good-to-be-true story about why they should part with seven bucks to get their American money, and when they walk away give them a ten cent piece of junk. And so I gave them the briefing in the morning: Okay? I know you got money. See, but this probably ain’t the best place to spend it. And you’re going to have people telling you about all kinds of things, and they’re going to be in your face, and I know you’ve never experienced a shopping experience like this before. But you know what? Hang on to your money. When we get back to the States, we’ll take that money, buy you something you want, and just avoid the pitch.

Now, we went into this place. And my kids are usually trailing behind, you know, but I was kind of putting them in front. And I was kind of holding their shoulders. And occasionally their head would start to turn toward that little toy shop, and I’d take their head and, “Nope. Keep walking.” You know? Because it’s full of just junk. And so I, “No no no, save your money, save your money.” And I knew it was just burning a hole in their pocket, you know? They just wanted it so badly, and everybody’s coming out, “Ohh, this this, you’ll love this little kid.” And you know, “No no no no.”

Friday night—course, it’s been a month or so since we were out of the country—Friday night we were at the sporting goods store. Mom’s at Women’s Retreat so, Dad, you know; it’ called Wienerschnitzel and Big Five. And, uh, we were at Big Five walking around and my kids, they both found this thing they wanted to buy at the sporting goods store. And they go, like, “Oh, Dad, we want that.” And Dad’s response is always, “Well, did you bring your wallet? You got any money?” And you know what? It was so great to hear them both say? “Yeah. We got money.” And they both had enough to buy this thing at Big Five, and I thought to myself, That’s great. I thought in my

mind—I didn't tell them this. I'm preparing this message—I thought, had you fallen to all those pitches, and you got hit up fifteen times in that open air market, you would have left with nothing. See? Had you spent all that money in that market, you'd be sitting here wanting something that is really ten times better than what you ever could have got in that country, and you would not be able to buy it. And I thought to myself how great it was that you got through that whole experience without getting ripped off. And as I thought that, articulated that in my mind, I said that's what this message this weekend is all about. God's desire for us is to get through this life without getting ripped off. I mean, the point is the get through this world that's full of too-good-to-be-true pitches about compromise and sin and indulgence and immorality, and all of it's beckoning us to indulge. And God's saying, Just hold on. And sometimes he just wants to take our face and keep our gaze fixed right ahead. Just walk this path of righteousness. Because you know, if you get to the end of this, you will walk into the kingdom with great joy if you can look back with a mitigated amount of sin in your life.

So whatever it is you're struggling with right now. I mean, God has given us the prescription this morning. Took a while to get to this, a lot of reasons to be godly and a lot of reasons to put off sin, but here's some of the instruction about putting sin. Wouldn't it be great to see your recurring pattern of sin be ancient history, and get on to some other challenge that God has for you? That'd be great. So let's start today with a commitment and a resolve that God, that's what we're going to do. Because God's heart is for us. Do not get ripped off. Every corner, someone trying to sell you some kind of compromise and sin. Don't do it. Get strong. Clear your path of temptation, and trust in me for healing.

Let's pray. God, help us in a world that I know is tempting us all the time. And some things we can't avoid; there's billboards and philosophies and talk at the water cooler. God, I pray you wouldn't lead us into temptation, you'd deliver us from evil. But God, I know there's a lot of temptation that we seem to foolishly put ourselves in harm's way, and I pray that we get wise. And we'd know that whatever the sin is that's entangling us, there's situations that we should probably avoid, and just exclude from our weekly path. So helps us in that, God, and if people want to call us weird and legalistic, they certainly don't understand the meaning of that word, and let them call us whatever they want. We'd like to be godly people, and I know that to do that we're going to have to get strong. We're going to have to skip sleeping in, and we're going to have to skip our favorite magazine, and we're going to have to spend time with an open Bible, going a little deeper that just reading our favorite verses over and over again. God, we're going to need to spend time on our knees praying to you, sometimes with loud cries, petitioning you for help and deliverance. And God, we're certainly going to need some honesty with some real Christian friends. God, I pray that we would do that without fear, recognizing that I know it's vulnerable for us to get honest with other Christians, but God, what an important ingredient in being able to brace up the weaknesses of our lives by finding strong brothers and sisters in Christ to help us. So God, I pray for that, that the end result may be true, that we wouldn't be dislocated, that there wouldn't be greater discipline or even, God, because of the truth of Scripture we know that we could even untimely see our lives come to an end if we don't deal with recurring patterns of sin. But God, what we want is to be able to see your healing in our lives. So bring it on God, that's what we'd would to do. We want to give our all, work out our salvation with fear and trembling, but also know that it's you that in us both to will and to work for your good pleasure. So help us in this regard, to balance in our lives this incredible amount of trust with an incredible amount of discipline and work to see ourselves grow in increasing sanctification as we win our battles with sin. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.