



Taking God's Side

Lent Journal 2024

"I often tell my congregation that when it comes to battling sin in our lives, the difference between Christians and non-Christians is not that non-Christians sin whereas Christians don't. The difference is found in which side we take in the battle. Christians take God's side against sin, whereas non-Christians take sin's side against God. In other words, a Christian will sin, but then he will turn to God and his Word and say, 'Help me fight against sin.' A non-Christian, even if he recognizes his sin, effectively responds, 'I want my sin more than God.'"

- Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

(Cover artwork, "Jesus and the Lost Sheep," purchased from Blessing Brush shop on Etsy.)

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This guide is for you, St. Luke Church family, to use during this season of Lent 2024. As Reverend Thad Haygood and Reverend Robert Wood lead us through this time, it is our prayer that we all will unite with God in taking his side against our sins. Let us prepare our hearts to **give up** pride, envy, shame, anger, sloth, greed, and all that we so easily hold onto and let us walk by our faithful Shepherd's side knowing he will not lead us astray as we are obedient to his voice and direction. – Amy Ward, Director of Adult Discipleship

Preparing for Lent

Ash Wednesday, February 14

Tonight we will gather as a church family in the sanctuary at 6:30 following a shared meal at 5:30. It might be easy to neglect attending this service especially as it competes with Valentine's Day. We encourage you to attend and allow it to set your heart towards God.

As we move through the 40 days of Lent, it is a good time to evaluate our relationships with God as we ponder the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ who willingly laid down his life for us so that we could have eternal life with God for those who believe in and follow Jesus Christ.

Our pastors have committed to gathering with us on Sundays during Lent and guiding us through selected Scriptures that will stir our affections to "give up" specific yet broad sins and the shame that tags along as we move alongside our Savior much like a faithful sheep next to their faithful shepherd (see John 10).

Each Sunday will be the beginning of a week's topic using the selected Scriptures as our jumping off places to check the states of our souls regarding pride, envy, shame, anger, sloth, and greed.

You can move through each week's journal page at your own pace each week.

To set the tone for now through Saturday, read Psalm 23 in your translation of the Bible daily and allow the Holy Spirit to open your heart to receive from **Jehovah-Raah** (the Lord is my Shepherd). Meditate on the truths of Scripture and the expectations of your heart as you prepare for Lent.

I Give Up: Pride

Sunday, February 18, 2024

Today's reading: 2 Chronicles 26

Sermon focus: 2 Chronicles 26:3-5, 15-16

Context: At this point in history, Israel is a divided kingdom after the reign of Solomon (King David's son). The Northern Kingdom (called Israel) was made up of ten tribes of Israel and the capital was Samaria. Through the years, there are kings one after the other who were disobedient to God. The Southern Kingdom (called Judah) was made up of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah and has its capital in Jerusalem. There were bad kings and a few good kings in the Southern Kingdom.

In 2 Chronicles 26, Uzziah becomes king of the Southern Kingdom.

In your Bible, read 2 Chronicles 26 and make a list below of the things you see about Uzziah: his accomplishments, his relationships, his start as king and the years as king, etc.

What happened when Uzziah was following God?

What happened when he became strong and famous?

What did the priests do and why?

In what way did God extend mercy to Uzziah?(See Numbers 3:10; 4:15; 16:39-40 to see what happened when anyone other than the appointed priest burned incense in the temple of God).

Word meaning: In Hebrew (the language of the Old Testament) the meaning of *pride* in this context refers to being arrogant, lofty and exalted in the heart.

Pride is a self-exalting trait that draws one away from godliness. Pride can lead to acts of rebellion and willful disobedience. Uzziah has lifted up himself in his own eyes - he has a lofty sense of self-importance. Godly Uzziah has been drawn away from God because of his success stimulating his pride. But pride is not only dangerous; it is sin. It involves a denial of our place as creatures, living in a world shaped and governed by the Creator, who has given a Word that is to govern our lives. Pride causes us to deny the significance of God as we foolishly exalt ourselves. (Source: New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words by Lawrence O. Richards.)

Look up the following scriptures on pride and note your observations:

Proverbs 29:23

2 Chronicles 32:26

Daniel 4:37

Obadiah 3

What does Jesus say about pride in Mark 7:14-23?

Compare what Jesus says to what you read in 1 John 2:16:

Is there such a thing as healthy or godly pride? See 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 and 2 Corinthians 7:4.

What is the difference in the pride Uzziah exhibited and the pride of which Paul writes?

What about you?

How do you reflect the healthy type of pride?

Are you more prone to the sinful kind of pride? In what ways do you exhibit this?

Are you ready to let go of the sin of pride? Write a prayer of repentance below adoring God, confessing your sin of pride, thanking him for the restoration he provides as you are faithful to take his side against the sin of pride, and pray for being attentive to the Holy Spirit's lead to not fall prey to this sin.

I Give Up: Envy

Sunday, February 25, 2024

Today's reading: Galatians 5

Sermon focus: Galatians 5:13-26

Context: This letter from Paul to the church in the Roman province of Galatia was written around 50 AD. He writes to combat the false teaching of the Judaizers who are telling Gentile Christians that they must adhere to the Jewish custom of circumcision and keep the laws of Moses in order to be saved. His letter to them is passionate as he defends the gospel, emphasizing that salvation is a gift from God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not from human works.

If at all possible, set aside the time to read in one sitting this letter from Paul to the Galatian church. It will benefit you greatly to devote 30 minutes of your time to read these rich six chapters so you can grasp the heart of Paul as he writes to these people confused by adhering to laws versus the freedom in Christ that is so foreign.

Put yourself in the place of these recipients as you ponder all they are trying to understand.

Rev. Haygood's Sunday sermon focus is on Galatians 5:13-26. Summarize the key point/thought Paul is making in the following sections:

- Verses 13-15
- Verses 16-24
- Verses 25-26

These verses (13-26) show a contrast between two "things" that are in opposition to one another. What are they?

According to these verses there is evidence of what a person's life looks like based on what/who they are controlled by. Make a list of those things that are common when a person is living under the influence of the flesh vs. the Holy Spirit:

Flesh-led

Spirit-led

Since the sermon is focusing on the topic of giving up envy, we will move forward in focusing on this particular sin, but know it in no way lessens the seriousness of all of those in this passage when they are part of the habit of someone's life.

Look up the word "envy" in a dictionary and write down its meaning below.

Word meaning: in Greek (the language of the New Testament) this word *phthonos* is envy, jealousy, pain felt and malignity conceived at the sight of excellence or happiness.

Envy is the green-eyed monster familiar to us all. It is that bitter feeling roused by another's possession of what we want but do not have, whether material possession, popularity, or success. The verb occurs only once in the New Testament (Galatians 5:26). The noun occurs nine times, and Galatians 5:21 is one of those instances.

(Source: New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words by Lawrence O. Richards.)

"ENVY CAN'T HELP BEING UNHAPPY AT THE BLESSING AND FORTUNE OF OTHERS. (IT) SEETHES AS OTHERS SUCCEED, AND EVEN SECRETLY SMILES WHEN THEY FALL." - FROM KILLJOYS: THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS, BY DAVID MATHES AND JONATHAN PARNELL.

In verse 21, it can be interpreted as a "burst of envy". How have you seen this "burst" occur in your own heart as you saw what another had and were jealous for it?

What can envy lead to or how can envy manifest itself in your actions and thoughts?

Look at the following cross-references regarding examples of those filled with envy and note what you observe:

- Mark 15:1-15
- Philippians 1:12-18
- 1 Timothy 6:3-10

Read James 3:3-7, and note those who are believers in Christ are not in the habit of practicing envy (among other sins). There is a defining moment in the life of the believer when something happens to turn him or her in the opposite direction. What is that something?

Has this happened in your own life? You may not remember the specific moment/date when you committed your life to Jesus Christ, but if you are a Christian, you should know and be experiencing the confidence of his life-changing power in your life and you should see progress in your sanctification.

Meditate on and memorize Galatians 5:22-23 this week: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*

Are you ready to let go of the sin of envy? Write a prayer of repentance below adoring God who, in his holiness, is righteously jealous for your affection and devotion to him alone. Confess your sin of envy, thank him for the restoration he provides as you are faithful to take his side against envy, and pray for being attentive to the Holy Spirit’s leading you to avoid those triggers that spur envy in you. Ask God to make you genuinely happy for people who have what you badly wish you had.

I Give Up: Shame

Sunday, March 3, 2024

Today's reading: 1 John 1

Sermon focus: 1 John 1:8-9

Context: This letter from John (the beloved disciple, brother of James, and a cousin of Jesus) may have been written between 85-95 AD in Ephesus before he was exiled to the island of Patmos. He was called to write to his "children" to protect them from deception and to warn them of gnosticism - a teaching that could keep them from having fellowship with God the Father and his Son.

Set aside the time to read this letter from John. It is five chapters that will be time well spent. Read it as though you are one of the recipients and ponder what it means to be a child of God.

Now that you have read this book, what truths do you remember about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?

Rev. Haygood's Sunday sermon is from 1 John 1:8-9 and the focus of his message is regarding shame. During Lent as a church family so far, we have heard sermons and focused our attention on letting go of pride and envy. But shame? Shame over what?

As believers we are called to discern truth from lies. In our postmodern world where the absolute truth of Scripture is foreign to many, we hear things like, "you do you," "you be you," "it's all relative," as a few examples. What are other phrases you may hear that are easy to embrace if believing God's word is not the highest truth?

1 John 1:5-10 contrasts light and darkness. What is true of those walking in the light and those walking in darkness?

Walking in the light

Walking in darkness

What do you see about sin in these last verses of 1 John 1?

1 John 1:9 says, “But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.” (NET) Look up that word “confess” and write down the definition.

Word meaning: in Greek (the language of the New Testament) this word *homologeō* (confess) is to assent or agree with another.

To “confess our sins” is to admit to God that our actions were indeed sin. We agree with him in his evaluation of our wrong actions. It does not mean to feel sorry or to promise never to do something again. (Source: New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words by Lawrence O. Richards.)

How does this relate to shame? Are you so burdened by shame that you have felt your sin(s) is/are so horrible that there is no way God could forgive you? Shame may cause us to run away from God in dread of punishment. Shame often prevents us from dealing with sin.

BUT! According to the absolute truth of Scripture, what does John say in 1 John 1:9? Write it out below and underline the word *confess* and circle the word *all*.

Look up the following verses and see how they parallel:

- Psalm 32:5
- Proverbs 28:13
- Romans 3:21–26
- Ephesians 1:7

“Shame is a complex concept in Scripture. In the Old Testament, shame focuses attention on the objective situation, a personal or national disaster that humbles people before others. In the New Testament, shame comes with public ridicule and represents a powerful fear that all too often motivates one to conform to the world. God calls on us to follow Jesus, whatever others may think. We are not to be ashamed even if others deride us. But shame in a good person can be a positive force, leading to a change in behavior. Those who are good feel shame when they do a dishonorable act, even though no one may know of that act.” (Source: New International Encyclopedia of Bible words by Lawrence O. Richards)

Read the following passages and meditate on them as you prepare your heart for prayer:

- Romans 8:1-10
- James 4:8-10

Are you ready to let go of shame? Write a prayer below regarding your own struggle with specific sins that you find shame trapping you from confessing before God. Agree with God over your sins. Take his side. Tell God how his words have changed your thinking this week.

I Give Up: Anger

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Today's reading: Romans 12

Sermon focus: Romans 12:17-21

Context: Paul around 56-57 AD writes this letter to the church in Rome because the preaching of justification by faith alone was under attack. While many directly opposed this, others twisted it to suit their own preferences. Judaizers said salvation might be by grace but the believer is "kept" by the law. At the other extreme, the antinomians taught that you could be saved by grace and still live any way you wanted—even continue in sin. A clear explanation of the gospel could refute these errors. Paul writes this letter eagerly to prove the gospel's power to save Jew and Gentile. He (like a good lawyer would) calls the gospel to the witness stand and examines it from every angle.

Romans can be divided into five segments, each building on the previous one: chapters 1-3:20; 3:21-5; 6-8; 9-11; and 12-16. The sermon this Sunday on anger is based on Romans 12:17-21.

Read Romans 12 understanding that the word, "therefore," refers to all that has been written previously and leads to Paul's next points in the remaining chapters of this letter.

Having read chapter 12, summarize the following verse sections:

- 12:1-2
- 12:3-8
- 12:9-13
- 12:14-21

These people to whom Paul writes belong to a community of believers in Christ. Yet, like us, they have to be in the world (not of it). What are the imperatives he gives this church family in relationships with one another and with those not of the church?

Jot down those things that got your attention in relating to your church family? What were those things that pertain to you as you relate to all people?

The sermon this Sunday focuses specifically on the topic of anger. Look up the definition for anger and write its meaning.

Word meaning: in Greek (the language of the New Testament) this word *ekdikeo* means to execute justice, defend one's cause, maintain ones right, but specifically in this verse to seek punishment/penalties.

The Bible deals with both human and divine anger. Anger, as a feeling that may be provoked by others' actions, is something all humans experience. Anger may be justified or unjustified. But the feeling of anger is never justification for sinful actions. The Old Testament gives us guidance for dealing with our anger, and the New Testament underlines the importance of choosing to respond as Jesus' own renewed persons, treating others with compassion and forgiveness rather than angrily seeking revenge. (Source: New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words by Lawrence O. Richards.)

Look up the following cross-references to Romans 12:17-21 and jot down what you find:

- Romans 12:2-3
- Matthew 5:21-26
- Matthew 5:38-48

This kind of thinking is transformational and “off” from the way the world responds. But, according to Paul a few verses before these, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Do you struggle with allowing anger to get hold of you to the point of seeking revenge?

What can you do to change your thinking and actions?

How can a right relationship with God help you when your anger is not “righteous” but is leading to worldly anger and sin?

See the following Proverbs for a bit of wisdom regarding anger:

"UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER VICIOUSLY ATTEMPTS TO PROTECT A FLAWED LOVE. (IT) EXPLODES OVER SELFISH, IRRELEVANT THINGS, AND CARELESSLY OVERLOOKS THE THINGS THAT OFFEND AND DISHONOR GOD." -
FROM *KILLJOYS: THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS*, BY DAVID MATHIS AND JONATHAN PARNELL.

- Proverbs 14:29
- Proverbs 15:1
- Proverbs 15:18
- Proverbs 20:22
- Proverbs 29:11
- Proverbs 29:22

Are you ready to give up anger? Write a prayer below as you have read and meditated on this passage from Romans 12:17-21 and the Proverbs this week. Take God's side against the sin of anger and seek his guidance and transformation by renewing your mind according to his directions for you.

I Give Up: Sloth

Sunday, March 17, 2024

Today's reading: Proverbs 19:15-16

Sermon focus: Proverbs 19:15-16

Context: Many of Solomon's wise sayings (3,000) have been preserved in the book of Proverbs. God gave Solomon wisdom as a direct answer to his prayer for an understanding mind as he led Israel. A proverb is usually a short saying that gives insight on life and human behavior. When reading the Proverbs, pondering over the short sayings is better than consuming them all at one sitting. It has been said that when reading them always look for God and three types of people: the wise, the fool, and the simple.

As easy as it may be to put this off, approach this week's topic with energy and momentum as you resist the temptation to be...slothful.

As you approach these proverbs, begin with prayer asking God to open your eyes to understand his word in the scriptures. Thank him for the blessing of his inerrant word.

Read Proverbs 19:15-16 and write the verses below.

What do you see is a connection between these two verses?

When you consider the word slothfulness, what comes to mind. Look up the definition of sloth, sluggard, or slothful and jot down what you find.

Look at the following cross-references also from the book of Proverbs and make notes of those characteristics of one who is slothful (a sluggard):

- Proverbs 21:25-26
- Proverbs 12:27, 19:24
- Proverbs 6:9-11

Word meaning: in Hebrew (the language of the Old Testament) this word *aslah* (for slothfulness) refers to laziness and sluggishness. It is the state of purposeful negligence to the point of destroying persons and their possessions.

"SLOTH DESPERATELY ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL LIFE IN ORDER TO PRESERVE (ITS) COMFORTS, DREADING BEING INTERRUPTED BY THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. (IT) IS LAZY-SOULED-BORED WITH GOD AND DOOMED TO A SLOW DEATH." - FROM *KILLJOYS: THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS*, BY DAVID MATHIS AND JONATHAN PARNELL.

This may be the least confessed sin for most. This is about more than taking needed time away from life's demands to rest. It is about not setting apart time for Sabbath rest. It is knowing there is a change that needs to occur and avoiding taking the necessary steps to do something about it.

We can look at sloth from a physical standpoint, but perhaps it would benefit us more if we consider it from the spiritual standpoint during Lent.

Sloth is deceptive and destructive according to the verses' focus of Sunday's sermon. How is sloth an impediment to spiritual growth? Consider these questions:

- What is preventing you from formalizing your commitment to St. Luke to go from guest to family member status?
- How can sloth influence whether you are being a plugged in member of St. Luke by giving of your time, talents, gifts, and service?
- How does sloth affect your most important relationships with others in your family?
- How does sloth affect your obedience to share the gospel with others?
- How does sloth impact your discipling others in Christ and being discipled?
- How does sloth affect your knowing and speaking the truth of scripture out of fear of man and the response of others over reverence to God?
- Do you allow cultural pushes and political correctness to dictate your belief system over the word of God?
- How does sloth prevent you from seeking forgiveness and repenting for sins you have committed knowingly against others and ultimately against God?

Look at the following scriptures that address our spiritual sluggishness:

- Psalm 1
- Titus 2:10-16
- 2 Peter 1:1-8
- James 4:17

Are you ready to give up sloth? Consider the words of Christ in John 15:1-17. Meditate on God's call in your life to abide in him and to bear much fruit. Write a prayer below about how slothfulness has affected you. Ask God for his help and for your obedience. Ask him to light afresh the flame of the Holy Spirit in your life.

I Give Up: Greed

Palm Sunday, March 24, 2024

Today's reading: Luke 11:53-12:34

Sermon focus: Luke 12:13-24

Context: Luke, the author of this gospel, writes the story of the Son of Man with careful attention to details. In Luke, we see the fulfillment of the things written about Jesus in the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. He gives an orderly account.

Read Luke 1:1-4 to hear Luke's "voice" as he explains his purpose for writing this gospel account of Jesus Christ.

Now read Luke 11:53-12:34 to grasp further context of Luke's writing about Jesus as he is coming away from the self-centeredness and hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees and is speaking to his disciples. Hear him talk as he tells them things he knows they need to hear and remember.

As Jesus is talking to his disciples, a man from the crowd following along says to Jesus, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Read verses 13-21. In the context of Jesus's response, he views this man's motive behind his request. Of course, Jesus already knows the heart of this man on this issue, but he turns this encounter into a teachable moment for the disciples and the crowd traveling along. It is now a teachable moment for us, too.

What is the warning Jesus gave this man, the disciples, and those following along (and us)? (v.15)

How does Jesus see/describe the motive behind the man's request? (v. 15)

In a dictionary, look up the definition for greed/covetousness and write it down.

Word meaning: in Greek (the language of the New Testament) this word *pleonexia* pertains to the love of money to the point of hoarding away, it is avarice/greediness.

Covetousness is desire running riot. The commandment makes it clear that it is wrong to desire the wrong things: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17). Covetous describes a person desirous of having more. (Source: New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words by Lawrence O. Richards.)

As is often the case, Jesus further teaches those around him by sharing a parable. Read Luke 12:16–21 and test your responses to the farmer’s various experiences:

- How do you respond to the wealthy farmer’s dilemma?
- How do you respond to the decisions of the rich man?
- How do you respond to the farmer’s desires?
- How do you respond to the farmer’s death?

What is the main point Jesus is making in this parable?

What does it mean to be rich toward God?

Look up the following scriptures and jot down things that line up with this teaching on greed:

- 1 Timothy 6:6–10
- Matthew 6:19–24
- Luke 8:4–15
- Acts 5:1–11

How have you seen greed striving for first place in your life?

“GREED OVERWHELMS (ITS) VICTIM WITH AN INORDINATE DESIRE FOR WEALTH AND POSSESSIONS. (IT) COVETS WHAT (IT) SHOULDN’T OR TOO DESPERATELY AND IMPATIENTLY WANTS WHAT (IT) SHOULD.” - FROM *KILLJOYS: THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS*, BY DAVID MATHIS AND JONATHAN PARNELL.

Are you more or less likely to see what you have as God’s provision to you to steward wisely?

Read 1 Chronicles 29:10–20 and note what David says about God’s provision in this passage.

What was the heart of those in Israel as they had given for the temple to be built?

Are you ready to give up greed? Take the time to write a prayer after you have considered the scriptures brought to mind this week. Talk with God about how understanding greed's motives and his call for you to be a wise steward can cause your soul to wrestle. Seek his will for you as you consider all he has provided for you (materially and spiritually). Take God's side against greed.