

How to Examine Your Focus, Part 1

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Date: 24 November 2024

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, beloved, I truly am blessed and thrilled to be back in the pulpit after several weeks away, but weeks well spent, and we were very blessed to have Pastor Ickes come and bring God's Word to us.
- I've had several of you comment about how blessed you were in what he was able to preach from the Book of Truth, God's Word for us.
- Now, what I'd like to do this morning as we get started is to, first of all, reflect on the title of the sermon for this morning. We're going to do that in two, one.
- The title of my message this morning, as the tech guys, is it? Are you getting? Yeah, it's all good. The title for the message this morning is How to Examine Your Focus.
- How to Examine Your Focus, and what I'm dealing with here is the focus of your heart. And I'll tell you more about your heart in just a moment. We will be in Psalm 73, but we're going to look at other scriptures prior to that in the way of me walking you into this.
- [1 : 1 3] Now, here's one of these sermons that I need to offer a caveat for. We have probably about 70 or so people or more in the room this morning. And many of you are probably going to leave this morning feeling like I read your mail and I'm speaking directly to you.
- Well, the Holy Spirit hopefully is speaking directly to you in the way of using this message, this truth, to minister to your heart. And so all of us should walk out of here today thinking about how can this truth bear on my life, my attitude toward Jesus, my attitude toward others.
- To what degree can this truth help personally change me into Christ likeness, into the character of Jesus? And so as I move through this this morning, if it sounds like I'm speaking directly to you, that's great.
- But I promise you, I don't have any particular individual in mind, OK? Your pastor's not using the pulpit and weaponizing it against you. I'm trying to feed you here.
- So let's all get into this together and think in terms of the reason that this is so common in the way of its application to the human soul is because we are human beings under God's sovereign care.
- [2 : 3 5] And all of us deal with the issues I'm going to be speaking about today to one level or another and in one season or another of our lives. This is one of the reasons that the Bible is always relevant to the human condition.
- We never outgrow the truth, no matter what era or season we are in as people. The Bible is always relevant. It doesn't grow old.
- It's not an ancient book that has no relevance for modern people. We believe that here at Grace. It is relevant to our lives because it's God's truth for his people.
- So how do we examine your focus? And this will be a part one. We're only going to cover a small part of what I want to do with you in the whole and we'll cover the rest next week. Now, question.

Rhetorical. You don't have to answer. Just think about it with me as we get into it together. How many of us here today have some sort of issue or concern or problem that we would like to be able to resolve?

[3 : 39] And you might say, well, you know, things are humming along pretty good right now, Jeff. We're not really facing anything monumental. Maybe a couple things here or there. But you've been in seasons, if that's the case for you now.

You've been in seasons where you had things going on in your life and you would have liked to have seen them resolved sooner rather than later. All right. So we've all come in this morning at some place in terms of issues or problems in our life.

And then how many of us have struggled within ourselves to try and figure out why and how this particular issue or circumstance became a problem in our lives?

How did I get to this place in a relationship with another person, in relationship to some aspect of the way that I have to live my life that now is creating this pain, this uncertainty, this fear, this anxiety, this worry or whatever it is.

And now think about this. For those of us who consider ourselves Christians, for those of us in the room who would profess that I'm a believer in Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of my life.

[4 : 56] For those of us who will make that kind of profession, here's the question. What do we believe Jesus and his truth in Scripture have to do with the problems that I'm facing in my life?

Can you think about that? If you're calling yourself a Christian and professing faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then ask yourself, all right, the way that I'm looking at my problem and understanding my situation right now, what do I think Jesus has to do with that?

Where does the truth of the Bible fit in to how I'm looking at my problem, facing my problem, dealing with my problem, or not dealing with my problem?

Where's Jesus in all this? Where's God? Where's truth? Where's wisdom? Where's humility? Where's Christlikeness? Where's trust? Where's faith? Those are fair questions, don't you think?

I mean, if we're going to say we're following Jesus and we're facing some issue in life, it's fair to ask, well, where's Jesus in all of that for you? Since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, and then consequently throughout all of human history since that time, mankind has labored apart from God and apart from His wisdom in the Bible to try and understand the world and man's place in it.

[6 : 31] And whether you realize it or not, you do that every day of your life. Every single day you wake up and God gives you breath for life, you are engaged in this kind of pursuit.

As you go to work, as you relate to your spouse, as you raise your kids, pursue your hobbies, and involve yourself in the matters and courses of everyday life, you are one of those people who are trying to figure out where you fit in and what it's all about.

This is particularly true with people when we face problems or sufferings or some type of sin issue going on in our life. Those are the kinds of times that kind of slap us around a little bit and wake us up and make us think about, what is this all about?

What is going on here? Or why me? I had one of those recently in my life, and this may sound very petty to you at this point, but if you would have been where I was in the moment, I was very tired for one thing, not making excuses, but we had someone steal some stuff out of our mailbox.

I went out one morning to get the mail, and the box is open, and everything's gone. And we knew they'd delivered a package, and so this is the time of year people are trolling around thinking that there's Christmas presents in there, and all they got were a bunch of little lids for some Tupperware stuff and not even the bowls, and I was like, yes!

[8 : 03] Useless! Use it as a little Frisbee. You know, that's... So I had to pray, and I had to say, you know, Lord, take care of these people. They obviously needed it more than I did kind of thing. We need to deal with this issue of every single day at some level or another in our lives, we're going to face some type of suffering or adversity or sin.

We're going to sin against people, and people are going to sin against us. And the question comes again. All right, fine. That's a reality none of us can escape, whether we want to or not, deny it or not.

It's true. Where is Jesus in all of that for you? What difference does He make, if any, in the way that you think about this in your life?

This is the issue. Now, last time, and it's been a few weeks, last time I shared this particular insight with you from a theologian that Greg and I love to read.

His name is John Frame, and he's a brilliant man. And so I shared this with you in that particular message a few weeks ago. The quote is this. God does make knowledge available to human beings, but to gain knowledge, we must begin by listening to Him.

[9 : 23] Well, that makes sense, doesn't it? And then he references Proverbs 1, 7. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. You have to understand this high and holy reverence for God in order to have God's wisdom.

You have to be willing to humble yourself under the Lord and listen to Him based on what He has revealed to you in His Word. The quote goes on, We can come to know the world when our thinking is based on God's revelation.

Found in the creation, yes, to be sure, but also in the Bible. Then we must know our limits. Our goal must be not to gain a divine knowledge of reality, but to obtain a human knowledge sufficient to carry out whatever calling God has given each of us.

So in each situation of life, our calling is not to have a full-on God knowledge of everything that's going on. And why? Because you're going to ask yourself, Why me?

There's 50,000 other mailboxes in this street. Why me? That's the wrong question. That's the wrong attitude. That doesn't matter one bit in God's economy.

[10 : 48] What matters in God's economy with these kinds of things that come into our life is, God, what do you want me to do with it in Jesus? What does this have to do with my heart toward the Lord Jesus in this moment?

Because that's going to determine how the attitude of my heart and the actions of my life either reflect on Him or against Him.

Right? And that's where the rubber meets the road. And so frame is telling us that we're not supposed to approach these issues in our life trying to get God to tell us everything He knows about the situation, which would be a divine knowledge about it.

No, it's enough for us to say, God has made known in His Word enough of the principles and understandings of life that I can take this truth and I can apply it in my knowledge now of what God's telling me to honor the Lord and give Him glory.

God's given me enough to do that. The question then begs, do I know His Word well enough to do that in my life? Can I apply the truth to the circumstance or situation that I'm in in a way that has integrity?

[12 : 07] You see? That I'm honoring the Lord in that truth. This is what frames point. Our goal must be not to gain the knowledge of God in all that we do, but to obtain a human knowledge that's sufficient to do what?

To help me be faithful in whatever it is God's calling on me to be in that moment and respond in that moment. That's what I need. So frame tells us we can gain knowledge about the matters of life, but that knowledge is limited and we need to be okay with that.

We can gain some insight into ourselves and our problems, but this knowledge is limited and it's based on this.

It's very important. Hear this. It's based on the truth only when our thinking is based on what God has revealed to us in creation and in the Bible.

We get in a lot of trouble when we depart from the truth of Scripture and trying to start reading our own bias into what God has said.

[13 : 12] And we are constantly guilty of that kind of thing. We're going to talk more about that in just a few moments. So we need to think in terms of what God has revealed to us when we make interpretations about what's happening to us in our lives.

That's what I'm trying to say. Frame correctly and wisely limits our understanding of the issues of life to what God has revealed to us.

God has given us a way to interpret life through the Bible, through His truth. And what's written in this Bible constitutes the limits of our understanding.

We don't have a full-on God knowledge. We have as much knowledge as God wants us to have in Scripture. And if you do believe, Psalm 34, if you do believe that God is good and always does good, then you know that God hasn't shortchanged us in giving us Jesus or Scripture.

Amen? Right. The problem is we're tempted to live like He has shortchanged us. And this is what we want to deal with this morning.

[14 : 24] I can put this in other words. Here it is. God decides and prescribes the limits to what we can know about how life works.

There it is. Now, you're either going to rest in His sovereignty and goodness in that, or you're going to struggle with it and be miserable. And you're going to make people all around you miserable in it too. Try as we might, you and I will never be able to transgress the limits of understanding that God has prescribed for us.

And we shouldn't want to. We should be able to rest in our trust in the Lord. Now, again, in my last message, Solomon had this to say about his own search.

Solomon, the greatest and wisest man who ever lived aside from Jesus, in his own search, he was trying to plumb the limits and meaning of the matters of life.

Because Solomon came up against all kinds of stuff in life. And he wanted to figure it out. He had a very inquisitive mind. And so he wanted to nail it down. At the core of it all, what's going on here?

[15 : 31] Let me take you to Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes. And I want you to read along with me as I share this with you. Ecclesiastes. And we're going to be in chapter 7.

That's where we were a few weeks ago before I went on my little vacation. And I'm going to read in 23, 723. And remember now, this is what Solomon is saying about his own search to plumb the limits and meaning of the matters of life.

Here's what he came up with. I tested all this with wisdom. And I said, I will be wise.

But it was far from me. What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious.

Who can discover it? And the answer begs, no, nobody. I directed my mind to know, to investigate, and to seek wisdom and an explanation.

[16 : 40] He says, you know what? I wanted to know these things. I wanted these answers. I wanted to know, he says, the evil of folly. Or foolishness. And the foolishness of madness.

I wanted to plunge myself into the depths of the human mind when it wasn't thinking rationally. That itself is irrational. Why do you want to do that?

Do you want to try to get into the head of somebody suffering from schizophrenia? Yeah, me neither. But this is what he's saying he wants to do. Now, if you drop down in the passage and look at verse 29, the last verse of chapter 7.

Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices. God made mankind upright, and we have made a mess of it.

That's what he's saying. He said, after all of that, this is what I can tell you. We are messed up. That's what he's saying. We are messed up. Well, that's no surprise to us, because we are people who understand and recognize we need a Savior.

[17 : 51] We need a Savior. That's what we need. I keep trying to tell us, I keep reminding us, that science can bring us many good things in life, and it has.

But science is not our Savior. Donald Trump is not our Savior. Alright, we pray for Donald Trump. There are many of us who are glad Donald Trump won the election, all that kind of thing.

That's all great, but we have to understand, folks, we didn't vote a pastor into office. We voted a man into office.

That you have a man standing before you today, trying to be your pastor and preach the word to you, but I am just a man. I am in as much need of Jesus as you are.

There is no level of my spirituality that takes me beyond you, so that I can look at you guys and say, well, maybe one day. Bless your hearts. We don't live like that around here, do we?

[18 : 50] We don't, but we call each other to that higher standard of what God has said in His bar for holiness. We don't compromise personal holiness because we're whiny babies.

We don't do that. We tell all of our whiny baby hearts, get a grip. And make sure that grip is on Jesus and don't let go. Again, in my sermon a few weeks ago, I characterized this particular section of Scripture in Ecclesiastes as this.

Life is not about explanations. It's about focusing on God. Life is not about you getting your way and understanding everything you want to understand and getting the whys and wherefores all answered for you so that you can make it a neat little package.

That's not what it's about. Life is not about explanations and bending to your demands. It's about focusing on God. So try as you might, and I want to put a couple of these up here in a minute.

Try as you might. You cannot explain what you don't understand. When facing adversity, when facing sorrow, suffering, limitations, your own and those of others, when you're facing the wrongs that you do and the sins that you do and the wrongs and sins that others do to you, when you're facing fear and doubt and worry and the injustice of life, listen, God has limited what we can know about these things.

[20 : 23] And so here's what Solomon says. Let me put it up here on the screen for you. Solomon says that what we can know God has revealed and what we can't know God has concealed.

Now, that is very important. That may sound to you like, well, that's pretty basic. Yes, it is. Boy, would it help us when we're in trouble to remember this. Whatever it is that we can know, God has revealed it.

Whatever it is that God doesn't want us to know, he's concealed it for a good reason. And we need to trust the sovereign God in that. Can you take comfort in knowing that your father loves you enough not to tell you everything?

Because you couldn't handle it. I couldn't handle it. We're not God. We're his children. When you are raising your children, do you sit your six-year-old down and start telling them about all of the different things they're going to face in life and all of the wickedness that's going to come at them in life and all of the adult kinds of things that you might have in a conversation with your 23-year-old?

Do you do that? No. You wisely withhold from your kids information that you know they cannot handle. That's what God does with us as well.

[21 : 49] So it's not about the search for you to discover or know or even explain God's reasons and ways for his working in your life.

And it's really not even about you getting answers for all of this. Haven't you ever sat down with somebody who's suffering through something and you listen to their story or you listen to what they're going through and you're racing in your mind to try to figure out what you can say to them even from the scriptures and you come up looking at them and going, I don't know.

And all you can do is weep with them. Have you ever been there? We just, there are things we can't know. I've been in that situation many times as a pastor and a counselor.

I've told you before, some of you have heard me say this to you, the first funeral that I ever did on my own, fresh out of seminary, I was on staff at a church and all three of the, I came on staff and within two weeks all the other three staff members got out of Dodge and left me whole.

I'm like, oh, thank you guys, right? And they had, we had a couple in our church whose baby was born, little baby girl was born and she lived three days and died.

[23 : 04] And they wanted me to do the funeral. I've never done a funeral in my life. And so my first one was that. And when I got to the funeral home, not knowing what to expect, they wanted me as the pastor to come back into the room where they had the tiny little coffin and the little baby in a pink dress laying in the coffin with the lid open.

And all the family gathered around and destroyed, just destroyed over this loss. What do you say? What do you do?

What would you preach? How would you comfort them? What would you pray? I just realized in that moment, all I could do was cry out to God and weep with them and remind them that God is good.

And that God just spared that little baby a lifetime of sin and sorrow and took that baby to paradise instantly. That's hard for us to deal with because we suffer the loss on this side, not the baby.

Not the baby. The baby went to paradise, right? So there you go. Life lived in the wisdom of God is about focus.

[24 : 21] It's about focus. It's about keeping our hearts tuned to God's wisdom in His Word so that we can know the wise and wonderful way of a heavenly hope.

That's where hope is. If we back that statement up and go in reverse, we can say the only way for us to know a heavenly hope is to tune our hearts to God's wisdom in His Word.

If we don't tune our hearts to God's wisdom in His Word, we lose hope. Why? Because that just leaves us with us. And what I can figure out, and the more I look into me for answers, the more I realize I don't have them.

Well, that's pretty depressing. Sometimes you have to tell people when they come in for help, you have to say, well, the first thing I want you to do is I want you to stop looking in so hard because you're looking into something that's dark.

Let's put your eyes somewhere else where there's some hope. It doesn't mean that God won't help you understand yourself, but we have to understand how He does that.

[25 : 28] The more you look in, the more depressed, afraid, and insecure you can become. Why? Because looking in shows you the darkness of your own heart.

Looking in leaves you with just the limits of yourself. You look in and you find confirmation of the truth you want to deny or avoid or keep away from.

And that truth is that you are the problem. Did you hear me? In all love, I say this about us. I'm with you. What we don't want to look in and see is the very thing we need to see and then we need to move on to Christ.

We need to look in and see I'm the problem. Now, having realized I'm the problem, I realize I don't have the solution. I can't be my own Savior. I'm the problem. I'm the one that needs fixing.

And in the words of Scripture, I'm the one that needs saving. And I can't save me and neither can you. I need to turn my eyes somewhere else and put my hope in someone else.

[26 : 43] And we all know that that person is Jesus, right? We need to look to Christ. We need to exalt Him and trust Him and believe Him. Even when we can't explain what's happening to us.

Even when we have a limited knowledge. Especially when we have a limited knowledge about what's going on in our lives. All of this is so critically important, folks, for us to understand about how life works.

Particularly in adversity. Now look, this can be more challenging and difficult than you might think. Because we're avoiders.

We typically try to avoid scenarios like this. Right? We need the Bible. We need God's wisdom to help us navigate these dark realities about our own hearts.

So apart from God, you and I cannot know the truth about what is really, truly going on in our hearts. Now, I'm going to say that again. Apart from God, you and I cannot plumb the depths of our own hearts in order to be able to better understand what's going on and who we are and then move towards some solution.

[27 : 57] We cannot do that on our own. We cannot do it. I cannot do it with the help of another person if that person is not helping me turn to God's wisdom to do it. God's wisdom is the key.

God's wisdom is the key in all of this. You're not surprised to hear us say that, are you? Apart from God, you and I cannot know the truth about what's really going on in our hearts. You say, Jeff, when you talk about a heart, what are you talking about going on in my heart?

What are you talking about? All right, here, listen. Real quickly. The Bible defines the heart synonymously as the soul. So when we talk about the heart, we're talking about your soul.

The one thing about you as a human being that God tells us is going to survive death on this earth. Your body will die. Your soul will not. Whether you believe in Jesus or not, your soul will survive.

The matter is, where will your soul spend eternity? Will your living soul upon your death on this earth live in eternity in hell or in heaven?

[29 : 05] That's what we're dealing with. So when we talk about your heart, the Bible defines your heart in four categories. Or four elements. The first is, your heart is your mind.

It's your thinking. Your heart comprises your thought processes. The way you think. All right? The second thing that your heart does is it has emotions.

Doesn't it? You feel certain things. The third element of your heart would be then your desires. Your desires.

What you want in life. You want out of your heart. And then finally, your will. So your mind, your will, your emotions, your desires.

Your will is the choice place in your life. Before you put into action anything in your life, you have to exercise your will toward it. Your will is what leads you to choose to do what you do.

[30 : 07] All right? You with me? So you're thinking, you're choosing, you're emoting, and you're desiring. Those are the four elements that the Scripture gives us in terms of what makes up our heart.

So our heart is not our organ beating the blood, pushing the blood through our body. It's your soul. It's how you think about life. It's how you feel about life.

It's what you want out of life. And it's how you choose to live life. That's your heart. You do all of that out of your heart according to the Bible. So I'll say it again.

Consider the value of these verses then that we'll go through because apart from God, you and I cannot know the truth about what's really going on in our hearts. I'm going to tell you why in just a minute.

The value of the verses we're going to look at now speak to our need for God to show us the truth about ourselves. That's foundational and fundamental. As you and I process as human beings the issues of life coming at us, it's very, very important that we do this in a biblical way.

[31 : 14] If we don't, all we're going to do is compound the confusion. And what that's going to lead to is bitterness. So if you'll turn in your Bibles with me to Jeremiah chapter 12.

Now I realize this is a very different sermon for me. I typically grab a passage of Scripture or a book of the Bible like we are in Genesis right now and we go verse by verse through the thing.

This is a little different but hang on with me. I'm trying to answer some issues here for us. So we're going to be in Jeremiah chapter 12.

Let's go there first. Jeremiah chapter 12. If you've all found Jeremiah. And notice what Jeremiah says in this particular prayer.

He's praying to God and he's expressing his heart to the Lord. And he comes to verse 3 and he says this, But you know me, O Lord.

[32 : 14] You see me. And you examine my heart's attitude toward you. Do you see that? Who does all this?

God. God knows Jeremiah. God sees Jeremiah. God examines Jeremiah's heart attitude toward the Lord.

That's the work of God. Now if you'll turn over to Jeremiah chapter 17. And notice how the Scripture speaks to this issue of our heart.

Jeremiah 17 beginning in verse 9. This is the Bible's declaration about every human heart. The way we think, the way we choose, the way we feel, the way we desire.

The heart is more deceitful than all else. Now that's the first thing you need to grasp about yourself. Your heart is more deceitful than anything else on the planet.

[33 : 18] And your heart is desperately sick. Now notice the question. In light of those realities, who can understand it? And what's the answer? No one.

Nobody. But verse 10 gives us a higher answer. I, the Lord, search the heart. Notice the continuity here when he talks about the heart.

Now what is he going to say? I test the mind. Those are synonymous terms. Your heart is your mind. I, the Lord, search the heart.

I test the mind. Even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds. God says, I know what you think before you think it.

I know what's going to come out of your mouth before you speak it. I search your heart. I know you better than you know yourself by far. And the reason that God knows you is because he's not deceived by your heart.

[34 : 23] He sees it for what it is. Hear me? He knows your heart's desperately sick. So he doesn't go in with bias and prejudice about your heart.

He knows the truth. And that is what we need. Don't you want God to deal with your heart in the truth? Or do you want God to play games with you and lie to you? Yeah, I want the truth too, Mark, even when it hurts, like rip.

Because I know that's the only pathway to me getting out of this. Let me give you just a couple of more lest you think that I'm proof texting here.

I'm not. I'm trying to give you the contextual meaning of these verses. Hebrews chapter 4. Would you turn back to the back of your Bibles in Hebrews? It's right before the book of James and 1st and 2nd Peter.

Hebrews chapter 4. And I'll be reading in verse 12. So we were just in the Old Testament in Jeremiah.

[35 : 28] And now we're in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews. And it says this, verse 12. For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of, notice, soul and spirit.

Those are synonymous terms. There aren't two different things. Of both joints and marrow. And able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

So now he's diving into your thinking and your motives, your desires, why you do what you do, why you want what you want. The only thing that God uses to do that is His Word.

The Holy Spirit brings God's truth to bear on your heart and it drives down into the very depths of your soul. You can't get any deeper than that. And it judges the thoughts and intentions of your heart, your soul.

Now notice verse 13. And there is no creature hidden from God's sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

[36 : 38] You may not understand you, but God does. I may not understand you and you may not understand me, but God understands both of us. He knows us to the depths of our soul and He sees everything going on in who we are and why we do what we do.

Now that's the God we want to appeal to, isn't it? Or is it? Well, it is in the psalmist's case and this is exactly why the psalmist appeals to God in the way that he does.

If you'll go to Psalm 139 now, this is the final one I'll share with you. Psalm 139. And we see the psalmist appealing to God because he knows only God can see into his heart and help him with this issue.

God, help me see me for who I really am. Help me better understand why I'm in the mess that I'm in due to what I've contributed to it.

Not pointing the finger at someone else or exercising the blame game, but asking you to search my heart. This is what he says. Psalm 139, verse 23.

[37 : 48] Here's a wonderful prayer. Search me, O God, search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts and see if there be any hurtful way in me and lead me in the everlasting way.

Isn't that a wonderful prayer? I commend it to you. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my anxious thoughts. Why? Because God knows we all deal with this.

See if there be any hurtful way in me. Literally, hurtful here, there's a footnote in the margin of my Bible about this particular Hebrew term.

Hurtful here could literally be interpreted as way of pain. And see if there be any way of pain in me. In other words, search out and help me understand ways that I'm grieving my own soul.

It could be disobedience. It could be rebellion. It could be something irrational, unbiblical in your thinking or in your wanting. And he's saying, God, help me root those things out because these are the things that twist up my soul.

[39 : 07] They cause pain to me and to people in my life. Did you notice that he's not saying, search my wife, oh God? No. No.

The psalmist had to pray this because he knew he needed God to search his heart and show him the hurtful ways within himself. We all are like this. Only God can do that in a truthful way.

We are handicapped by so much, y'all, in this process. We are handicapped by our own bias, our prejudice. But let me give you two other things that I see constantly not only in my own life as I fight sin, but as I, as a pastor, sit alongside and help other people face off with these issues in their life.

We are handicapped by the deceitfulness of sin working in our hearts. Remember what the Scripture just told us? The heart is deceitful among all things, above all things, and desperately sick.

Alright? So there are two ways this handicap of deceit shows up in our lives. It involves, first of all, look, it involves self-favoring and deceitful desires.

[40 : 23] Self-favoring and deceitful desires. I am only going to say a quick word about that. Self-favoring is just exactly what you would think by what it says.

You and I go into these situations and particularly when we are suffering some type of adversity or someone has sinned against us or particularly when we sin against someone else.

We are so masterful at rationalizing and justifying and doing yes, but, but, but, but, but. If you had to live with who I had to live with, you'd sin too, buckwheat, I can tell you that.

No. That's what we do. We self-favor. What we do is, have you ever done this? Have you ever gone to someone and you know you need to say to them that you're sorry for something?

And the Bible tells us we need to ask forgiveness. Not just say, I'm sorry, because we can do sorry in so many ways. But boy, when we're asking for forgiveness, we're identifying where the issue is.

[41 : 26] Right? I'm sorry could mean, I'm sorry, you're such a, and you know, God help us both. No? Have you ever gone to somebody and said to them, you know, I know, okay, I know.

Listen, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I did this. But at the same time, you just, you understand that when you, that's self-favoring. That's self-favoring. We're rescuing ourselves.

We're not allowing ourselves to own our part in it and leave it at that. I've got to, I've got to remind you about how you are weak and how what you did. That's self-favoring.

Self-favoring will also cause us to look at something that we're involved with with someone else and see it all as their fault. That's self-favoring. We will skew the truth.

We will always favor self when given the option. God's wisdom comes in and stops that process and says, no, no.

[42 : 27] We're going to deal with you and your heart. We're not going to let you judge the other person's heart. You can't see into their heart. Only God can do that.

And so, you can't even see into your heart, but I'm going to help you understand what's going on in your heart through the wisdom of my word. And then deceitful desires.

Deceitful desires are desires, they're the I wants in relationships and in life. It's the I want. And the problem with deceitful desires is what?

They're deceitful. That's it. They hide. They masquerade. They camouflage themselves as something else so that you are tempted to justify and rationalize your desires.

You come off thinking they're legitimate when what's happened is maybe you've taken a legitimate desire and turned it into something illegitimate by the way you're going after it. And you want everybody else to get on that page with you.

[43 : 32] And so, everybody else is wrong or an obstacle or thwarting you when you've decided that that's what you want and come, you know what, I'm going to get that. And so, if anybody doesn't get on that page, they're in the wrong and they're an obstacle and they're somebody to be dealt with.

And so, what do you do? You find a way to punish them. I'm going to punish you for getting in my way. Don't thwart me in what I want. Now, do we not do this?

You're going to think, boy, was he at our house last week? No, I was at mine. I'm one of you. I need Jesus just like you do in fighting these realities.

So, what I want to do is bring this message to you this morning in a way that helps you with the time I have left to biblically examine your focus in life.

I want to help you be increasingly defined and shaped by a more biblical or heavenly or eternal perspective in life. And I don't know where I'm going to stop in all this.

[44 : 37] I've already told you it's a two-parter. So, we may go a few more minutes and I may not even get to step one in this process. Don't worry. If God gives me breath for life, I know how to come back.

I know where this place is and I'll be here again next week at this time and we'll jump on it. Right? So, don't worry about that. Now, look, I've drawn some of this teaching from a man named Paul Tripp and some material that I interacted with years ago when I was going through my degree program for biblical counseling.

That's where I came across some of this. It was very helpful to me and I knew then that I wanted to practically help put this out here for you. So, I'm providing you here in some measure with an example of what Suzanne and I are using in our ministry of counseling.

We often use this kind of approach to help people in counseling because, again, remember, all of this has to do with our focus.

Examining our focus in life. All right? So, this won't sound, again, like a typical expository message where I'm moving verse by verse through a book of the Bible.

[45 : 47] I'm going to take a chapter and work through it with you today and tomorrow. We'll see how far it all gets. But this is about our heart evaluation or our focus in life particularly as it relates to times when we sin or we've been sinned against.

Times of suffering. Times of sorrow. Times of doubt and fear. We all have this. So, we'll go to Psalm 73. And let's just wade into this a little bit and see what we can do with it.

Psalm 73. Greg reminded me this morning that he has preached out of this psalm not too long ago. So, two years?

Two years ago. So, we'll revisit some of this. We're going to deal primarily with verses 1 through 14.

So, that's as far as I'll go for this morning. He says, surely God is good to Israel. So, there's the theme of goodness that we saw in Psalm 34. Surely, God is good to Israel to those who are pure in heart.

[46 : 59] But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling. My steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant and I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For there are no pains in their death and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like mankind.

Therefore, pride is their necklace. The garment of violence covers them. Their eye bulges from fatness. The imaginations of their heart run riot.

They mock and wickedly speak of oppression. They speak from on high. They've set their mouth against the heavens and their tongue parades through the earth. Therefore, His people return to this place and waters of abundance are drunk by them.

We'll talk about that. They say, how does God know? And is their knowledge with the Most High? That's mocking. God doesn't know. What does He know?

[48 : 03] Behold, these are the wicked and always at ease. They have increased in wealth. Surely in vain then I've kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence for I've been stricken all day long and chastened every morning.

Wow. Wow. The writer here is Asaph. He was a gifted Levite. Of course, Levites are from the tribe, the Jewish tribe of Levi, the twelve tribes.

Asaph led one of the choirs in the worship services of ancient Israel. There are twelve Psalms that are associated with Asaph. And he is termed a seer.

Seer. S-E-E-R. And that could attest to him as a prophet or someone who speaks and interprets on behalf of God.

He's recounting a season from his life. A true situation he found himself in. And he very transparently confesses his heart's struggle not only with God but with God's mysterious dealings with Asaph as he looked on and saw that bad guys prosper and good guys suffer.

[49 : 28] And so he came up with the idea that's not fair. And I'm going to be mad about it. That's what he did. And so in the MacArthur Study Bible which many of you have there was an outline that MacArthur used and here it was going through verse 14.

I'll just let you look that over. He titled it Perplexity Over the Prosperity of the Wicked. The prosperity of the wicked, the pride of the wicked, and the presumption of the wicked taking us from verse 1 to 14.

We're going to use Asaph's candid confession to help us determine where we fixed our eyes so that we can gain a godly focus in responding to our own difficult circumstances and the injustices of life.

So in Asaph's case, here's what we're dealing with primarily in what he's confessing to us. The issue that he's struggling with is that he's feeling sorry for himself.

He's put his focus on earthly stuff. He's put his focus on other people and where they are in life and what's going on with them and it's made him jealous and envious and bitter.

[50 : 41] And so he's having a pity party. And that's what's going on. And God's going to confront him about it. I mean, I appreciate the fact that the guy has enough integrity to admit that this was an issue for me in my life.

And here's how it affected me. Now we're going to take our examination in three steps and just for a little while this morning I'll give you some of step one. We may have to come back and fill in step one a little more.

And that's fine. And then we'll do the other two as well. So keep in mind what we're dealing with this morning as we go through this. Here it is. Step one, understand the power of your interpretations.

We're talking about how your focus in life affects the way that you think and behave. Particularly as you think about what does Jesus have to do with any of this in this moment in my life.

Understand the power of your interpretations. Now if you look at verse one with me, Asaph begins with sound foundational truth. He says something that is foundationally wonderful and true and helpful.

[51 : 49] He says, surely God is good to Israel. That's right. He is. Always. Every time. There's never a time when God is not being good to Israel even when he has to discipline them.

When you had to discipline your kids, were you not being good at that moment? Did you not love them? Did you stop loving them? No. You discipline because you do love them. No.

Surely God is good to Israel. That's good. He's believing the truth about God as the Lord has revealed himself to Asaph in the scriptures.

And what this does is it leads Asaph to reflect on God in truthful ways. He's not making this up about God. He knows from what God has written that God is good.

And he's banking on that. And so he makes this statement. Asaph declares God is good.

[52 : 45] And hold on to that. Hold on to that. Now I want to give you a quick definition here of God's goodness. It's a little bit complicated but I think you can work through it just fine.

God's goodness is that he is the perfect sum, source, and standard for himself and his creatures of that which is wholesome, meaning conducive to your well-being, that which is virtuous, beneficial, and beautiful.

God is the standard for what is good for you, what is virtuous for you, what is beneficial for you, and what is beautiful for you. God is the standard for all of that.

In his perfection, you can't get any higher or deeper than the goodness of God in your pursuit of what is good. You can't. You can't find anything better than God.

In his goodness. That's the highest. Psalm 119.68, if you want another reference, says, God is good and does good.

[53 : 53] That's what the psalmist said. God is good and does good. God is always good. Listen to this, folks. God is always good, even when we are ignoring Him.

Even when we're angry with Him. Even when we are trying to dodge Him. Even when we are disobedient to Him. God is good when we don't understand and when we can't make sense of what is happening in our lives.

Are we going to say that God stops being good because I don't get it? Are we going to allow our circumstances in life that we have a very finite and limited understanding on to define for us whether God's good or not?

Well, God doesn't feel good right now. Well, there's your problem. There's your problem. You're allowing your feelings to dictate to you apart from truth because the Bible says God is good and does good always.

always. And it's something that we need to remember especially in times when we are tempted to doubt His goodness toward us. So, beloved, listen, our circumstances, good or bad, hard or easy, don't alter God's innate goodness.

[55 : 13] Amen? They don't. God is your standard for what is conducive to your well-being. Now, did you understand that?

God is your standard for what is conducive to your well-being. He is the measuring stick. That standard doesn't change just because you choose not to follow Him or obey Him.

He's still good. So, when you and I, understand the ramifications of this, when you and I are not pursuing the Lord and seeking to obey the Lord, that is, when our focus in life is ourselves, and not God, we are hurting ourselves.

We are hurting ourselves. And we are doing what is counter to our well-being. This is why the psalmist said, Search me, O God, and know my thoughts.

Look into the recesses of my heart and reveal to me the ways that I'm hurting myself. You see? Why? Because we self-favor and justify.

[56 : 21] And so, we need God to do this for us. Here's the mystery. The mystery, to me, is not that God works like this. There's mystery in it, meaning that there are things we can't know.

But no, the mystery to me is that we do this. We live in disobedience to the Lord. We run away from the truth. We try to hide through self-favoring and self-justification and things like that, and then we wonder why we're in the mess we're in.

That's what mystifies me. About me. And then we want to whine and complain, and then we get to the place where we grow bitter and blame God.

When we get into trouble and when we hurt the people around us in the ways we do, and then look around and think, well, what in the world? And then we don't allow ourselves to realize, well, wait a minute, what does any of this that I've been doing have to do with honoring Jesus?

Where's Christ in all this? Where's Christ been in my heart? I mean, I hadn't even thought about Jesus, about this. Well, no wonder. The rest of verse 1, look at this.

[57 : 35] The rest of verse 1 says this, that God is good to the pure in heart. You notice that? God is good to Israel. Yes, He is. He's good to you too. He is good to those who are pure in heart.

Now, by His common grace, God is good to everybody, even unbelievers. Everybody gets to hold babies, go on vacations, make a living, drive nice cars, have rain come, eat good food.

Even people who hate God have all that. That's the goodness of God on their life. They don't know it and then acknowledge it, but it's true. But God is especially good to those whom He saved from sin through faith in Jesus Christ.

Look, here's the thing. You cannot have a purified heart apart from faith in Jesus Christ. So the pure in heart refers to believers, Christians. You can't be pure in heart apart from Christ, can you?

No. No. Even when you're pure in heart in the Lord Jesus, your heart can still deceive you. We go on needing Jesus after we're saved, right?

[58 : 40] We don't get saved and then go, yeah, now I got this. No. Now remember, life circumstances don't change God and life circumstances don't change God's ways toward us when He is being good and gracious to us.

He's always good and gracious in whatever He does, even when He has to discipline us. God always deals with you and with me out of His goodness and grace because He's a good God. He can't stop being God in dealing with us.

He's always good and gracious. That's who He is. So we can expect that. Even when we're rebellious and disobedient. This is why we need to be very long suffering and patient with others in their disobedience, ignorance and rebellion.

People are at all different levels of understanding in their walk with the Lord. Some people are unbelieving. They don't want anything to do with God. And so what do we do?

We patiently woo them to Christ. We continue to live a life before them so that they can see the grace of God working in our life and it makes it attractive to them. Right? Other people are at a low spiritual understanding and so we have to be patient with them as they try to grow in that grace and understand how to apply it in their lives.

[59 : 55] We're all over the place in those ways. Verse 2 brings us to the issue. But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling and my steps had almost slipped.

There it is. That wraps it up. What does he mean? Life happens. Life happens. And in this case, Asaph tells us that he began a downward drift into himself.

He began a downward drift into his own interpretations of the matters of life. That's the problem. Asaph looked out on the life and began to interpret it in a wrong way.

His focus changed. That's the problem. It was a very subtle change in his perspective but a change nonetheless. His focus changed.

We see his godly perspective in verse 1. You're like, read verse 1 and you go, yes, that's right, Asaph. Good for you. That's God is good.

[60 : 54] God is doing good. That's contrasted now with his ungodly view in verse 3. Look at verse 3. For I was envious. Does that sound like a guy who's looking at the Lord?

No. No. For I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. He fixed his focus on earthly things.

He fixed his focus on the arrogant. He envied then the prosperity of the wicked. He saw unbelievers living the high life and it made him mad.

And in his mad, his anger, he turned it in, went introspective on himself, came to a dark place and got bitter about it. And now he's in a big fat pity party.

Boy, that was a short jump from verse 1 to verse 3, huh? Because all that happened was a little bit of change in focus. His heart was zeroed in on the way these people are living.

[62 : 01] I've said it to you before, friends, and please hear this. God made you and God made all people to be meaning makers.

I'll say it again. Meaning makers. You can't help yourself. You must interpret life. You have to. You're a human being, not an animal.

Animals live by instinct. You don't. You live by what you interpret. You have a soul. You're made in the image of God, unlike the animals. So everything that comes at you in life, you interpret.

You try to make meaning of it. You try to figure out what it's about, what's happening, why. You go through all that in your life. Every single day. You have to try and make sense of what's happened to you or about what's happening to you and you're made that way.

Look, here's the thing. Asaph's observations, they're legitimate. He's seeing that happen in these people's lives and it's true. Do you see unbelievers out here who could care less about God?

[63 : 07] And they're wealthy and they've got nice cars and big homes and they have babies and, you know, they seem to, they have a pool and they have all the things that people tend to look at and go, that's successful. Right? And they don't seem to be suffering.

They're not divorced. They seem, you see them and they seem to be happy. How is that the case without Jesus? Well, Asaph focused on that and he said, you know, that's just not fair.

I'm over here suffering for you, God. I'm over here taking the hits for you, God. And then I look across the street and see the Joneses and oh man.

And it made him bitter. Well, look, what he saw was legitimate. The wicked do prosper in their wickedness, don't they? They do.

But now notice how he characterizes what he interprets from what he sees. Look at verses four and five. There are no pains in their death and their body is fat. They're not in trouble as other men and nor are they plagued like mankind.

[64 : 07] Now, let me just ask you something about this. Is that true all the time? No. What a fool. Dude, get a grip.

That's not true. You may see that in a case here and a case there and maybe a hundred cases across the spectrum of all of this. But that is not a truism. That's not axiomatic.

There are plenty of people out here who don't believe in the Lord and they're miserable. And they have a lot of money. And they have a lot of stuff. And they're miserable. Absolutely miserable.

And so, Asaph, you're making a legitimate observation about the fact that the wicked do prosper, but where you've come to in your interpretation is wholly inaccurate.

And what it's doing is making you bitter. He says the same thing or a similar thing in verse 12. Behold, these are the wicked. After giving this great list, you know, of all the things that are wrong with them.

[65 : 06] Behold, here you go. Here's the wicked. Always at ease. And they've increased in wealth. Boy, this guy is really having a pity party, isn't he?

That's where he's living and that's what's affecting the way he's interpreting everything. Does it sound like he's interpreting the matters of his life from a humble heart and in the wisdom of the Lord?

No. No. And that brings me to the point that I want to leave you with this morning. Here it is. I'm going to put it up on the screen. I won't I won't finish everything. I'll say we'll bring some of this back.

But here let me end here this morning for you. The danger of your wrong focus, the danger of focusing on yourself, focusing on the wrongs and sins and weaknesses of others in your life and your focus on pursuing a priority of worldly things.

The danger in all of that kind of a focus is that it will notice cause you to doubt the value of your personal holiness before God. And it will lead you to doubt and disbelieve in God as the highest good for your life.

[66 : 17] Now, I hope you can relate to that immediately. If you've ever been in this place where you let your focus get on you or on earthly things or both, you have found yourself suffering in these areas.

You begin to discount the value of personal holiness. And you begin to doubt and disbelieve that God is truly good and being good to you, even in the moment, even in the moment.

Now, I'm going to leave that with you. There's more that I have here to say. I'll just bring that over into next Sunday sermon. I want to encourage you with a last word, beloved.

Walk in Jesus. That's just not preacher talk. That's the Bible talk. Walk in Jesus. Make the issue of the focus of your life about learning who Jesus is and seeking to please him in all respects, especially when you don't know the answers.

You can have one answer you can count on. God is good and he has been good to me in Jesus. And let that be enough in that moment.

[67 : 39] Can you do that? We'll do that together and pray for each other. Let's pray. Father, I thank you for our time this morning. And I thank you for being God.

And for reminding us that we're not. Father, thank you for putting into perspective for us the issue of the focus of our hearts. We want to be able to interpret what's coming at us in life from the perspective of the truth of Scripture in our walk with Jesus.

We never want to discount or dissociate ourselves from our relationship with your son, the Lord Jesus Christ in whatever we're facing.

So I pray for my brothers and sisters through this next week. I pray that you would make them strong in their walk with Christ. Christ. And if any of them in here this morning are finding themselves stretched thin or feeling distant from you, help them to cry out to you as we saw the psalmist doing to cry out to you from their heart of hearts and to ask you for relief in their suffering.

And then to trust you for the grace that they need to move through these issues to the greater glory of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in his name.

[69 : 05] Amen.