

How to Examine Your Focus, Part 2

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[0 : 0 0] I love hearing you sing that song. It's a beautiful, beautiful truth. When I see your eyes sparkle and your smiles on your faces singing Jesus is strong and kind no matter what, it blesses your pastor's heart.

It's good to see you encouraged. It's good to see you blessed. It's wonderful to know that you come here enthusiastic, that you come here in peace and that you seek to be a blessing and to give God the glory.

And that is a beautiful thing that we share together, isn't it? Can we covenant together, truly covenant together that we will work very diligently together to keep that main thing of honoring and glorifying Jesus every Sunday what we want to be about.

Let's just keep doing that. And let's see how God opens this place and brings people to come in and sit under the Word of Christ and be blessed by Jesus and given hope.

Hope. The worst thing that can happen to our world is not World War III. It's for our world to remain in darkness. And so we'll just keep trusting Jesus, won't we?

[1 : 2 3] Well, this morning I want to deal with this issue of... Whoops, let me back up. How to examine your focus. And this is a part two, as I'll mention in just a few moments.

Of course, I'll make some introductory remarks here and take you through a few Scripture passages to kind of set the tone for what I want to emphasize in this message.

I think it's timely. I think we need to think carefully about the truth that God's going to reveal to us today. I want you to do that every Sunday, of course. But particularly now, because of the time of year that we're in, the season that we're in as a country, as a people, and particularly now also as we celebrate Christmas together.

Well, friends, listen. This election season, like previous election seasons, is bringing to light both the best and the worst in people.

If you watch the news, you see it. The polarized reactions to this election are still occurring across the spectrum of our society.

[2 : 3 1] And I personally suspect that that's going to continue in the near future. This polarization that transcends political parties.

What we're talking about in this polarization is light versus dark. Light versus dark. And we need to remember that as Christians and get past the veneer, veneer of the facade of what we see coming at us and hear coming at us and look deeper into the issue of what is going on here on a spiritual level, a theological level.

Get past the political hype and all of that and think biblically and discerningly about what we're hearing and what we're seeing and why it's important for us to do that.

As it relates to the ways people are reacting, then, I can say this, that is to what they are saying and doing, what we're actually seeing people say and do in response to the election.

The election itself, then, is not the issue. The issue is how the hearts of people are focused on interpreting these events in either godly or ungodly ways.

[3 : 49] You want to ask the question when you hear some of these people talk, where is Jesus in all of this? Has He just gone somewhere in the universe and washed His hands of this world and said, yeah, you're on your own?

No. This is His world, His universe. He owns it. It would be good for us to remember these things. Here's an example that I want to share with you this morning of the election or at least a part of it revealing the heart.

Heart revealing the heart of people. This particular article that I want to share with you in just a moment was in the news last week just before Thanksgiving.

And what I'd like for you to do is this. As I read this true account to you, please listen for what it tells you about the what and the who in terms of these people being focused on something.

who are they focused on? What are they focused on? This particular individual. Some of you will have already heard this.

[5 : 00] A Yale psychiatrist said this week, last week before Thanksgiving, that it was quote, essential unquote for those who are triggered by the outcome of the election to cut off members of their family for the holidays who voted for President-elect Donald Trump.

Yale University Chief Psychiatry Resident Dr. Amanda Calhoun made these remarks on far-left MSNBC host Joy Reid's show The Readout while talking about the election.

She said that the societal norm is that if somebody is your family that they are entitled to your time.

She's saying that's the norm. That's what everybody assumes and thinks. Now I quote her. And I think the answer is absolutely not. She said.

So, if you are going to a situation where you have family members, where you have close friends, who you know have voted in ways that are against you, like whatever, against your livelihood, it's completely fine to not be around those people and to tell them why.

[6 : 29] To say, I have a problem with the way that you voted because it went against my very livelihood and I'm not going to be around you this holiday.

I need to take some space for me. She said that it may be essential for people's mental health to establish boundaries with their family members over the results of the election.

People are concerned about their human rights, their very existence, and their safety, she claimed. Hooey.

That's a theological word, you know. This is an example of what we're dealing with today across the spectrum of our society, at least one part of it.

What are we to make of this idea of alienating close friends, quote unquote, and family members who voted differently than you did? I want to put this up on the screen for you and ask you to compare it to what you just heard.

[7 : 45] let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for building up what is needed so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Did anything I just read to you resemble that truth? No. Unwholesome is the Greek word sapros. It means rotten, worthless, bad.

And so the idea is that it culminates to be something that is useless. It is useless. Not only is it bad, worthless, and rotten, it is unhelpful.

It is useless. Why even speak it? In contrast, you have the passage telling you that we are to speak that which is good.

And good simply means in this context suitable or helpful. Speak that which is helpful, useful to people.

- [8 : 50] And what is the result of that contrast between what is unhelpful and rotten and what is suitable and helpful? The purpose is this, that it will give grace to those who hear.
- And in this context, grace means the outworking of good will. Did any part of what I just read to you communicate to your soul that that woman was concerned about the good will of people in relation to one another?
- No. No. Not at all. How does scripture, how does God's wisdom in Jesus Christ help us see God's view of the perspective of, and I quote, I have a problem with the way that you voted because it went against my very livelihood.
- That is, she's using it in the wrong way. What she means is not how you earn your living, she means your identity, your being, or your personhood. I have a problem with the way you voted because it went against my very identity.
- It is a personal threat to me, and I'm not going to be around you this holiday, I need to take some space for me. Where is God's wisdom in that?
- [10 : 05] And you say, Jeff, if this person is an unbeliever, and it certainly appears so, if this person is an unbeliever, isn't that what we should expect? Yes, but it's how you interpret and what you do with it on a spiritual level that's going to help you be discerning.
- You have to look past the rhetoric. You have to look behind what's being said and understand the spiritual dynamics that are involved in people espousing these kinds of things.
- Where is that coming from? From their heart. And so, what do we say? This issue here is not Donald Trump, it's not Democrat, it's not Republican, it's not America.
- It's the heart. Your heart, and my heart, and her heart. What's unfortunate is that she has a platform to tell millions of people to do this, and believe me, they are following through.
- They're doing it. They're doing it. this is the ideology of the cancel culture, and it's alive and well.
- [11 : 15] The cancel culture says this, if you disagree with me, if you do not affirm me in my views, then I see you as a threat to my identity, and I will cancel you from my life.
- Now the question comes for this morning's purposes and the theme of my message, where is the focus here? Where is the focus here?
- This is what I want to put forward to you as we watch our nation move through the next couple of months in all of the rhetoric and all the hype and all the spin that goes on over the next couple of months, being able to ask ourselves, what do I hear in the way of a focus there?
- Very much so. Someone said self. Please keep in mind, friends, as we go through this little exercise moving into our chapter for today, please keep in mind that the occasions or the circumstances or the situations of our lives are controlled by God.
- and those daily situations are not, I say again, not what produce or cause our responses to life.
- [12 : 39] We cannot say the devil made me do it. We cannot say those nasty Republicans made me do it or those nasty Democrats made me do it or because Donald Trump's being elected, that's what's setting me off, that's what's triggering me.
- This is the nomenclature of our times, triggering each other. I'm triggered by these things. And what we're saying is espousing what we've learned over decades from the psychological community and the social community, and that is telling us that what happens to you is what causes you to do what you do.
- What comes from outside of you produces the kind of responses that you make to those situations in life. And the Bible says exactly the opposite. But it's subtle and it's convincing because it sounds sophisticated.

It's wrapped in sophisticated scientific sounding wording. There's nothing scientific about it.

It's unbiblical period. It is the ideology of the cancel culture. Daily situations are not what produce or cause our responses in life.

[14 : 04] No one makes us speak and act the way we do. I cannot say when I'm having an issue with my wife, you make me mad.

You make me resentful. You make me bitter. You make me pouty. I choose to be those ways in response to what's happening to me in that relationship.

I am making a choice from my own heart. I don't have to make that choice. You say, Jeff, how can that be? Look to Jesus.

When Jesus was sinned against, what was his choice every single time? To please the Father. Period. To please the Father. Period. And so he never said, well, we're not Jesus.

No, Jesus lives in us. Jesus is the difference in who we are. And what are we told over and over again? We are to live to please him.

[15 : 02] Now, do you believe that we can do that? Or did God set us up for this big joke so that when we get up into heaven, he's going to look at us and laugh his head off and say, one more sucker. See ya. Crazy, isn't it?

You respond to life's people. you and I respond to life's problems and perplexities, things we don't understand, from out of your own heart so that you speak and act based on what is in your heart, not the other person's heart.

The Bible defines our hearts as the makeup of our thoughts, emotions, will, and desires. That's your heart. heart. So what we're talking about biblically as the Bible defines your heart are your mind, your soul, your spirit.

These are all synonyms for the heart. Heart, mind, soul, and spirit are all ways of saying the same thing for emphasis. So our heart is who we are in the core of our being.

When I get to your heart, I've gone as deep as I can go to define you. That's what you think out of. That's what you feel out of.

[16 : 19] That's what you choose out of. And that's what you desire out of. Is the core of who you are. And this is why we say and why the Bible tells us that when we are tempted to sin or when we are in sin, we're the issue.

I'm the issue with my sin. You're the issue with your sin. Jesus taught us that our mouth speaks from the overflow, the overflow of what is in our heart.

My mouth only speaks what is in my heart. And even if that is duplicitous, even if it's hypocritical, even if it's a lie, I'm still speaking out of my heart.

Even if I'm saying something that I know, I don't believe, it's still coming out of my heart, isn't it? Yeah. Here's how Jesus put it. The good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth what is good.

And the evil man, out of the evil treasure, brings forth what is evil. For his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. Luke 6, 45.

[17 : 31] Likewise, Jesus also taught that all sin, all of our wrongdoing, comes from inside of us, not from outside of us. It comes from our hearts.

And it's very important for us to establish that. Be reminded of that so that when we hear people speaking, when we see people doing things, particularly when we know those things are anti-God, anti-biblical, anti-truth, we need to understand this is coming from the heart.

Therefore, what we are saying is at its root, this is a spiritual issue. We cannot solve the issues of humanity that are spiritual with political answers.

We can't do it. We want godly leaders. We want people who will lead us in faithfulness and have some morality and integrity about them.

We want people who are wise in the way that they lead our country. We need to understand this. These are rooted spiritual issues that require a spiritual solution.

[18 : 36] And that brings us to the one answer for the issues of the human heart, the Lord Jesus Christ. It all comes back to the gospel. We cannot abandon the gospel.

We get saved by the gospel. We stay saved by the gospel. We are taken into the glories of heaven by the good news that Jesus saves. You would expect a preacher to stand up here and get red faced about that, right?

It's the truth. It's the truth. Jesus said that all of this in terms of our sin comes from within, not from without.

I cannot look to society, to culture, to the pressures of life, to my job, to my spouse, to bad luck, and say that all of those things are the reasons that I then do or say wrong things, sinful things.

No. Look, Jesus also said this, for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts.

[19 : 41] You ever had an evil thought? Well, that came from within your own heart. Fornications. Thefts. You ever stole anything? Murders.

Adulteries. Deeds of coveting and wickedness as well as, now notice this, deceit. You ever deceived anybody? Sensuality. That's selfish sexual pleasure.

Envy. Slander. Pride. You ever been proud? And foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man, according to Mark 7.

You can read that in greater length from 19 to 23. So, friends, listen, as I try to do each Sunday, this Sunday being no different, I want to help you look behind then the hype, the spin, the noise, to help you align your heart with biblical truth.

We should always be discerning the things of the world that are coming at us through the grid of biblical truth, through the grid of pleasing Jesus and applying the wisdom of Christ to what we're what we're seeing.

[20 : 53] We want to skillfully apply Scripture to discern our times and the situations of your life and my life each day.

To look to Jesus Christ for our hope beyond the hype, beyond the spin, beyond the noise, to help you align your heart with biblical truth is our goal.

Ultimately, we want to exalt Jesus, don't we? We want to keep Jesus foremost in how we're moving through our day. He is the sovereign Lord over his universe and over our little part in it.

And that's good for us to remember. The universe is ginormous and we're in it, but it's not so ginormous that he doesn't know the number of the hairs on your head.

God. That's a God worth worshiping. Right? A God that's so big you can't get your arms around him. You can't get your mind around him.

[21 : 58] He's too big. And yet he condescends to live in you. What a God. What a miracle of God's love and grace.

This is the wonder of what we preach in the way of the gospel. Let me put this up here for you life lived in the wisdom of God is then about focus.

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.

A heavenly hope. You look around the world and you watch the news and you got to ask yourself, my goodness, where's the hope? Where is the hope? I don't put my hope in any man, but I'm commanded to pray for my president, my leaders, people who govern my life, that God will help them to be wise even in their unbelief.

But I don't put my hope in them. Here's how the psalmist expressed it from last Sunday. I shared this with you. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Know my heart.

[23 : 09] Try me and know my anxious thoughts and see if there be any hurtful way in me and lead me in the everlasting way. Do you hear what he's praying here, my friends?

Search me, O God, because I know only you can do that. Only you can pull that off. Know my heart because only you can really know my heart. You've told me I don't even know my heart, but you do.

Try me and know my anxious thoughts. You see, he's not asking God to search the heart of someone else that he's figured out is the problem.

Yeah, search their heart, God. Deal with them, God. If we're going to pray a prayer like that, we better pray it in humility because God will bring it right back on our heads. Notice he goes on.

See if there be any hurtful way in me. Is there any bitterness in me? Is there any resentment in me? Is there any anger in me? Is there anything in me that would keep me from honoring you and keep me from being unforgiving toward others?

[24 : 13] Hopeful, joyful, thankful. Anything keeping me from being thankful? Short-circuiting that line directly to you that keeps me bowed before you in a grateful attitude and a humble heart.

That's what he's praying. And then he says, lead me in the everlasting. Lead me in an eternal perspective on life and the situations of my life.

Help me have your mind on this, dear Lord. Folks, look, when you break it down like that, only God can answer a prayer like that in a truthful way, right?

Because only God can see into our hearts. And because we are handicapped, as I mentioned last week, you and I are handicapped by the deceitfulness of sin working in our hearts.

Sin that masquerades as other things. So that bitterness and resentment and anger and envy and jealousy, all of those things are going to masquerade or camouflage themselves as something else so that you will self-justify in those things.

[25 : 25] You'll self-justify. You'll tell yourself you are justified in feeling these ways after all because they said this. They did this. Two of the most prominent ways that this particular deceitfully sinful thing handicaps us and shows up in our lives involve what I told you last Sunday.

What were they? Self-favoring and deceitful desires. Self-favoring and deceitful desires. Amanda Calhoun, the psychiatrist I quoted for just a few minutes ago, Amanda Calhoun's approach to disappointment and disagreement is an example of how self-favoring and deceitful desires conspire in our hearts and lead us to be harsh, unforgiving, and even hateful.

You and I might not be able to imagine sitting across from someone who is a close friend, that's a quote, or a family member and looking at them and saying, I cannot share life with you right now because of how you voted.

Now I'm going to look you in the eye and tell you that happened to me and Suzanne. I have to take a break from you right now because of the way you voted.

That's right. This is happening to families across the nation because people in their disagreement and in the unforgiveness of their heart believe that if you don't believe like they believe, you have to be canceled out of their lives because you now have become a threat to their identity.

[27 : 25] I don't know how to disagree with you and still love you. It's all or nothing. You either go my way or you hit the highway. That's where we live today.

No middle ground. It's being politicized, socialized, psychologized and passed off as truth.

And it is not truth, dear friends. And I don't want it to poison your hearts. I don't want you to fall into the trap with you and your children of this mantra, this nonsense that's going around today.

God willing, I have another message that I'm already working on for next Sunday to reveal even more of this for us. I'm not preaching this because I think any of you are espousing this or believe this.

I haven't had any issues where, boy, boy, who sparked Jeff? You're looking around, which one of us know? Greg and I haven't had anything like that.

[28 : 26] We're just continuing to speak the truth to do anything to reinforce in you that this is the truth. Not this nonsense that you're hearing out there on the news and in other places that it's being a spouse now.

No. We want to be careful about this issue of self-favoring and the deceitfulness of sin. It's an example of how our hearts focus determines what we say and do.

Amanda Calhoun offered the counsel that she offered because of what's in her heart. Her mouth spoke from the overflow of her heart. These kinds of sinful responses reveal at its root that it's always an issue with our hearts toward the Lord.

Always. If you hate Jesus or you marginalize Jesus, you're going to talk like that and you're going to live like that. If you love Jesus and you want to please Jesus, you'd rather have your arms cut off than displease the Lord, you're going to speak like that and live like that.

In your integrity. Whether people are looking and listening or not. It's going to be important to you to honor Christ. And that's what we want. So this message today is a two-parter.

[29 : 50] The second part here is dealing with how we can biblically examine the focus of our lives so that we can be increasingly defined and shaped by more of a heavenly or eternal perspective for life.

That's what the psalmist prayed. Teach me, guide me, show me the everlasting way. Help me to live that way. We're using scripture to help us do some important heart evaluation about how you can be more focused on the Lord.

Less focused on yourself, particularly as that focus relates to your sin, your suffering, your sorrows, your trials, your challenges. I've drawn some of this teaching from Paul Tripp's materials I mentioned last week.

Let's go to Psalm 73. It says, Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. The psalmist says, But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling.

Uh-oh. This is a candid confession right here. My steps had almost slipped, for I was envious of the arrogant, and I saw the prosperity of the wicked. There are no pains in their death.

[31 : 00] Their body's fat. They're 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. Pride. They have set their mouth against the heavens.

Wow. And their tongue parades through the earth. Have you seen that lately? Therefore, his people return to this place, and waters of abundance are drunk by them.

They say, How does God know? Is their knowledge with the Most High? Behold, these are the wicked, and always at ease. They have increased in wealth.

So surely in vain I've kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence, for I've been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus, behold, I would have betrayed the generation of your children.

[32 : 02] When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight. Until I came into the sanctuary of God, then I perceived their end.

Do you see that turn there in 17? Until I came to worship God, then I gained perception.

Surely you set them in slippery places. You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment. They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors.

Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, you will despise their form. That's terrifying. When my heart was embittered, and I was pierced within.

You see that confession? There's your result. Your result. When my heart was embittered, and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant.

[33 : 01] I was like a beast before you. Now notice. Here we go turning again. Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You have taken hold of my right hand.

With your counsel, you will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. Isn't that wonderful? Whom have I in heaven but you? And besides you, I desire nothing on earth.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For behold, those who are far from you will perish.

You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good. I have made the Lord God my refuge that I may tell of all your works.

That's how you go on. That's how you answer the world. That's how you answer the cancel culture. That's how you deal with your grief and your pain and your uncertainty. But as for me, the nearness of God is my good.

[34 : 10] That's enough. The nearness of God is enough. That's enough. It really is. That's enough. I've made the Lord God my refuge. I have made.

I have determined. I have purposed. I have set my heart to know that God is my refuge. And I will open my mouth and tell of the goodness of who you are.

I'll declare your works of gospel glory. Isn't this wonderful? This is the spiritual answer to the spiritual problem. And it's beautiful.

We're dealing primarily with 1 through 14, but I'm going to look at other verses as well as we move through it. I mentioned to you last week that the writer of this psalm is Asaph.

He is known as a seer. And that could attest to him as a prophet. A prophet would be someone who speaks and interprets on behalf of God.

[35 : 07] So this is very interesting. Asaph is recounting a season from his life and he transparently confesses his heart struggle with God's mysterious ways with people.

And he says, you know what? I can't figure it out. I just can't figure out how God works with people. As soon as I think I got a grip on how he works with people, he does something that blows my mind. I just like, I don't get it.

He's not punishing the people that I think should be punished. He's not blessing the people that I think should be blessed. I can't figure him out. In this case, it has to do with God allowing bad, selfish, hateful people to prosper.

And then, good, selfless, honorable people to suffer. This is what it seems like to him. This is what he's writing. He said, I went through a season in my life where that was really working on my heart.

And I grew bitter about it toward the Lord. Well, the biblical examination that we want to take from this passage involves what I told you, three steps for now.

[36 : 13] That's all we're going to cover. And we covered the first one last Sunday. The first one came in last Sunday and it was this one. Understand the power of your interpretations. You all are meaning makers and you're making meaning of what's coming at you in life because you are made in the image of God. You're not neutral. You're always interpreting. You're always trying to figure it out, trying to understand, trying to make decisions.

You do that. You know, if we were able to take stock of how many decisions you make every day of your life, you'd be astounded. I think they'd go past the hundreds into the thousands.

Every day. Little bitty things you have to decide. Right or left. Left lane, right lane. Blue socks, brown socks. Right?

All the way up to is this deal going to sink me for a hundred grand or am I going to make a hundred grand, you know, or whatever. I mean, every single day we live like this.

[37 : 16] Notice verse one. Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling. We have a transition going on here. Asaph begins in verse one with sound foundational truth.

All right? He's making a statement that's true, it's sound. He's believing the truth about God as the Lord has revealed himself to Asaph in Scripture. He's saying, God's shown me he's good in the Scripture and I believe he's good.

It leads Asaph to reflect on God in truthful ways. Very important. We reflect on God for who he is by coming to his word, reading his word, and understanding what he's told us about himself and about the way the world works.

That's where we take our wisdom from. What has he shown us? How does he want us to know him? Through the Scripture. What he's shown us in the Bible. That's how we know him, right?

We don't just make it up. Asaph declares then that God is good and I gave you this definition last week of God's goodness. God's goodness is that he is the perfect sum, source, and standard.

[38 : 22] For himself and for his creatures of that which is wholesome, that is conducive to well-being. He is the sum, source, and standard for what is virtuous, beneficial, beautiful.

We find all of that sourced in God himself. You can't get any gooder than God is in himself. So God is good when we don't understand.

God is good when we can't make sense of what is happening in our lives. He's still good. He mentions the pure in heart in this verse.

The pure in heart as I told you last week are simply believers who benefit from God's goodness at work in our hearts. Believers are people who turn to be thankful to God because they recognize the source of blessing.

Unbelievers don't do that. Unbelievers don't look into the heavens and thank God for the blessing in their lives. They don't. They take the credit or whatever. Believers are people who look into the heavens and say thank you for letting me breathe your air today God.

[39 : 32] We got a great start to the morning. I get to breathe your air today. Verse 2 but as for me my feet came close to stumbling my steps had almost slipped.

He tells us that he began a downward drift. How? Where? Where's that downward drift taking him? Into himself. Into his own interpretations of the matters of life. Very dangerous.

And all it took for this to happen was a subtle and all too easy shift in his perspective. His focus changed and he began to feel sorry for himself. You ever been in a hard situation and started feeling sorry for yourself?

Woe is me. Yes. It is such a human issue that it's like breathing. We get there without even realizing it.

Or we need to realize it. This is what he's saying. Verse 3 For I was envious of the arrogant and I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

[40 : 40] That kind of sums it up. He tells us what his heart was focused on. He was focused on envying the arrogant the prideful those who walk around all puffed up about where they are in life what they've accomplished in life what they've been able to do the kind of people that are around them the kind of stuff they have.

He said man I put my eyes on those people. He fixed the eyes of his heart on the prosperity of the wicked. God haters unbelievers people who marginalize the Lord at best.

And this brought us to the main idea of this first step. This is all in the way of just a quick review. And here was what I left you with last week.

Here's the point. The danger of your wrong focus is your focus on self, your focus on the wrongs and sins and weaknesses of other people in your life, and your focus on pursuing a priority of your own pride, the danger in that kind of focus is that it will cause you to doubt and disbelieve in the value of your personal holiness before God.

We're going to talk about that. And it will lead you to doubt and disbelieve in God as the highest good for your life.

[42 : 07] Now we see both of those realities in verses 13 and 14. Will you look with me in there? Psalm 73 verses 13 and 14.

He says, he comes to this conclusion, Surely then in vain I've kept my heart pure. See what he's saying there? In vain I've washed my hands in innocence.

In other words, the high and holy life that I've tried to lead in the Lord and in faith in God has been for nothing. It's all been in vain. Look at the injustice that I see in all of this.

The wicked prosper, the arrogant and prideful prosper. It's not fair. So surely in vain I've tried to walk in faithfulness.

I've tried to be godly. I've tried to believe in the Lord and do what God says. for I have been stricken all day long. That is a pity party right there.

[43 : 05] I've been stricken all day long and chastened every morning. I'm the one that's suffering but does anybody help me? Does anybody understand my troubles?

No. Yeah. Right? Right? But we do this. Spurgeon, Charles Spurgeon in the treasury of David wrote this, Asaph was a seer but he could not see when reason left him in the dark.

Even seers must have the sunlight of revealed truth to see by or they grope like blind men. In the presence of temporal circumstances the pure in heart may seem to have cleansed themselves altogether in vain but we must not judge after the sight of the eyes.

What's he saying? He's saying that for Asaph being a seer even when reason, his ability to take his understanding as far as he could take it into the situation and then it stopped.

Couldn't go any further. That's as deep as I can go in my understanding of what's going on here. When reason stops and leaves him he's in the dark. He's groping. So stop.

[44 : 35] Why are you trying to go further than you can go? You're just groping in the dark. You're just guessing now. That's the best thing. You've reached your limit. Let it be what it is. I don't get it.

I can't figure it out. Okay. Is that the end of the world? This is where he finds himself. Even seers have to have the sunlight of revealed truth to see by if God's not revealing it to you in Scripture if he's not showing you the next step in Scripture stop where you are and let it be right there.

That's okay. Right? I'm done. We try to force it. We try to and it doesn't work. We have to have revealed truth to move past.

If the Scripture is not revealing it to us we stop and say hey that's the limit of my humanity right there. I'm done. Going beyond this is a place that God didn't want me to go or he would have shown me the way.

All right. Let it go. Let it go. What does he say next? In the presence of temporal circumstances earthly stuff temporary stuff the stuff of our life in the presence of these temporal things these trials and struggles and sorrows the pure in heart those who are believing may seem to have cleansed themselves all together in vain.

[45 : 50] I've lived a holy life for nothing because none of this makes sense right now. None of this seems relevant right now. But we have to understand we cannot judge all of that after the sight of the eyes we have to judge it by the truth.

What does the Bible say? God is good and always does good for his people. And we have to just stay right there. Don't go past that. Don't try to reach beyond that.

Why? Because God hasn't revealed anything beyond that. God is good. He's wise. And he always does good for his people. Sometimes that's all you have. And then listen to this.

Sometimes in this cancel culture the circumstances won't change. As you seek to be faithful and take the next step of faith the circumstance that you're in that's caused all the grief to your heart doesn't change.

What changes? That's right friends. That's where the magic happens in the Lord Jesus. That's where it happens. You can have forgiveness in your heart in Christ.

[46 : 55] You can change. You can have hope in your heart. You can change. The circumstance might not change. But you can.

You can change in your attitude and perspective toward what's happening. God can do that in your heart. Because He's the God of hearts. Souls.

Mind. Spirit. And He's real. Amen. He's real. This other stuff? Eh. Step number two.

Recognize the four symptoms of a wrong focus. Verse three again. I was envious of the arrogant. I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Look at verse five. They're not in trouble as other men nor are they plagued like mankind. Well that tune's going to change toward the end of the psalm when he says that I went in to worship the Lord and God began to give me perspective all this and now I realize these people are in real trouble.

[48 : 00] What appears by my earthly sight is not the case on a spiritual level. And if they don't change they're headed for hell. And it's terrifying.

Then you look over at verse 12. Behold these are the wicked and always at ease they have increased in wealth. Well that's the way it might seem. There may be a kernel of truth to that but when you look at it from a spiritual level things change very fast very rapidly.

So in terms of the thinking that we see going on here remember this is recognizing the four symptoms of a wrong focus. The first one is envy.

Envy. It would be better for me to have that than for them to have that. I can't really be happy for them.

Oh I'm so glad you got that. And then desiring what they wanted in their heart what Asaph wanted. That's wanting something at the expense of someone else not having it.

[49 : 05] That's what envy is. Let me say it again. Envy expresses itself from the desire of your heart. And that desire is that you want something at the expense of someone else not having it.

Asaph was on a path of becoming bitter and cynical and resentful toward life in the Lord. Here's what we tell ourselves in envy. I should have that. Other people have that.

How come I can't have that. And it doesn't have to be material things. It can be something you see in the way they live or how God blesses them.

And we think you know what? I should be able to live like that. I should be able to live in that kind of blessing with that kind of person. Why do you think people get divorced?

Because they don't have what they think they should have in their marriage or in their spouse. So they want to get another one. Asaph's focus was on created things.

[50 : 14] Tripp says that this is where we can also come to define our lives. And this is a quote in terms of possessing and experiencing the things of this world. Our lives become defined by the idea of possessing and experiencing the things of this world.

my life is the sum of what I own and what I can do. That's my life. It's not who I am. It's not who I worship. It's what I can get and what I do with it.

But the issue is not the things. It's not even the possessing of things or experiencing the things. The issue is defining and measuring our life by either earthly things or heavenly things.

Because we know that we're not staying here. This isn't home. Our final destination isn't here. This earth is going to burn. We're going to get another one.

If you measure your life by what you get or don't get, by what you have or don't have, or by what you think your life should be like, you'll never be content with God's work in your life.

[51 : 31] Never. You're always evaluating based on what you think you ought to have. After all, you shouldn't be this miserable.

You shouldn't be this neglected. You shouldn't be this overlooked. You should blah, blah, blah, blah. Listen now, stay with me on this. I'm not trying to be harsh or hard-nosed about this.

I'm trying to help you not let your heart get poisoned. Discontentment and bitterness will work against you cultivating a heart of gratitude to God. You will not be thankful to the Lord when you're discontent and bitter.

When you stay in a constant state or level of disappointment about life, it's going to be hard for you to be thankful. How can you show thankfulness to God while at the same time experiencing a disappointment about your life that sours everything you look at?

I don't know how to do that. It's one or the other for me, Mark. I'm either complaining and I'm sour or I'm thankful to God because my perspective is on Jesus and I'm just glad to be breathing His air today.

[52 : 36] That's the way it works. The reason that you won't be thankful to the Lord is you won't see the matters and contents of your life as God's good gifts to you.

That's not how you'll see it. But these are God's good gifts to you. including the difficult situations and even the difficult people in your life.

Now that's hard. That is hard to see the difficult circumstances and the difficult people in your life as God's good gifts to you. You can tell you, you can only go so far in that bad boy and then you got to shut her down and say, yeah, I don't, I don't, there's a lot I don't know about this.

But what can I know? God is good and he uses everything in my life for the purpose of conforming me to the image of his son. This is no different. I can know that.

He is doing a good work out of this because he gets to be sovereign in it. The limit of my understanding is very, very quickly running out. Boop!

[53 : 42] And now I get to revel in the fact that my big God takes it and he's got it all there. Beyond that little space where I have to stop is this big God who knows it all.

Does that help Jeff? Yes, it helps. It makes the difference in how my heart looks at the Lord and the situations and the people involved. Yes, it does. It keeps me praying for people who abuse me and are bitter toward me and take advantage of me.

A second thing that this does, a second way, confusion. Another symptom, confusion. In verse 16, when I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight or trouble in my sight.

It was consternation to me. I looked into this. I tried to understand this and all it did was bring trouble to my heart. I just couldn't figure it out.

Ugh! Confusion. That should sound familiar to you. If you look in Ecclesiastes, look in Ecclesiastes chapter 8 verse 17.

[54 : 51] I'm going there real fast. Ecclesiastes 8.17. I want to tie this. If you look in the margin of the cross referencing of your Bible, you will probably see this reference for Psalm 73 verse 16.

And here it is. And I saw every work of God. Ecclesiastes 8.17. I saw every work of God. I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun.

Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover. And though the wise man should say, oh, I know, he cannot discover.

You see what he's saying here? You can only go so far. You look into the work of God, you can only go so far. He said, I did. I looked into the work of God. And you know what I found?

No man can discover that work which has been done. None. You can't do it. He couldn't do it either. It's very interesting in this passage that Solomon says, even though man should seek laboriously, what a word, he will not discover the depths of God's work in the lives of people.

[56 : 10] Now listen, Solomon's laboriously in this, or toil, some of your translations may say, that is the same Hebrew root word that Asaph uses for troublesome or wearisome in Psalm 73, 16.

Same exact Hebrew word. It's the Hebrew word amal, and it means trouble, labor, toil.

So the idea here is this, don't miss it. For all your trouble to try and understand all of this and the way that God works with these people, you will only serve to confuse yourself in the issue.

When God works with you in ways that are mysterious to you, let it be what it is. The harder you work to look in, or even to look out, and demand answers and figure it out, the more confused you will be.

Why? Because you're going into territory you can't handle. And God doesn't want you there. And so, if you're finding yourself more confused, more drawn into the depths of depression, or despair, or anxiety, or worry, or fear, all these different ways we respond to these, if you find yourself kind of moving into those avenues, then you know, you already know, whoa, I better back up, and I better put my thoughts, the thoughts of my heart somewhere else.

[57 : 30] I need to move away from that, because what I'm thinking on right now is taking me more into the dark, not into the light. You see? You've got these red flags. You see how practical the Bible is?

Aren't you excited about that? It's just refreshing, isn't it? Yeah. There's no word salad here.

This is straight up truth. Straight up truth. What is the alternative to this kind of confusion? One word, not confusion, contentment.

Contentment. Contentment is settling in your heart the issue of God being good and doing good work in you and through your life, even when it's hard, even when it's unknowable.

That's the goodness of the Lord. I have to hasten on. Verse 13 gives us this third one, and it's discouragement. We're back in Psalm 73. Surely in vain I've kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence.

[58 : 34] Discouragement. He's discouraged. You struggle or just give in to hear how I'm going to say this. What is discouragement for Christians? Listen, it's spiritual withdrawal.

It's spiritual withdrawal. You grow heart heavy and worry weary. You're worn out because you're heart heavy and you're weary weary with earthly things.

Now, remember, you may say to yourself, oh, but I'm not aware that I'm focused on earthly things or whatever. Well, just think about where you are. Remember, I told you that these things camouflage, they mask themselves, they're deceitful.

That's what Paul calls them, deceitful desires, right? They hide. They don't want you to know what they really are and see them for what they really are. So they mass camouflage themselves.

They want you to rationalize. They want you to self-favor. They want you to, in pride, exalt yourself over. That's the way it works. What happens is this, friends, hear this carefully.

[59 : 48] Your own interpretations and perspectives wear you down. They wear you down over time. With your focus on earthly things and with the senselessness and vanity of an earthly focus on life bearing down on your soul, you lose interest in obeying God in the basic aspects of Christian living.

You lose interest. That's what I was telling you earlier in that point that I gave you, that you begin to compromise your personal holiness. holiness. You become more and more disinterested in personal holiness because you're more and more confused about what's going on and it just discourages you.

And you say to yourself, what's the use of the Christian life? I have had people come into counseling and say this to me, yeah, I've tried that from scripture, yeah, I've tried that, it didn't work.

In counseling 101, you're going to be taught when you hear that, yeah, I tried that and it didn't work, that is a huge siren going off about the operation of the heart.

So that's all scripture is to you. It's some kind of pragmatic way of getting what you want. So when scripture doesn't give you what you want, you abandon it. Let's try something else that didn't work.

- [61 : 08] We do that. We do that. Nope. Personal holiness, hear me now, personal holiness, prayer, service to other people, self-denial, church attendance, enthusiasm for the truth, all of these things begin to suffer or even disappear from your life when you're like this.
- Because you are too distracted with your agenda. You've become too distracted with your agenda. And sometimes that agenda is, I need to get myself out of this problem.
- Or whatever. And then finally, this fourth one, 21 and 22, when my heart was embittered, see, he admits it, this all led me to bitterness.
- When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, those are, those are, that's good language. Boy, we have felt that. Oh, I just feel pierced. then, when then, I was senseless and ignorant.
- He admits it. Oh, I thought I was wise. I thought I knew what I was doing. I thought the way that I was going was the way I needed to go. But I was like a beast before you.
- [62 : 27] I was just like an animal. I was just living on instinct. Anger, driven by resentment, bitterness, fear, jealousy, envy. Oh, yeah. I just, like a ping pong or a ball in a, what do you call that?
- Thank you. Bing, bing, bing. Just get an image. All right. This final symptom, this final symptom of a wrong focus being anger, anger, internal, external, or both, both of these, it is a very subtle and very dangerous step to being embittered with God and with life when you think it's all up to you to make your life worth living.
- I can change her. I can change him. He should change. She should change. This should change. That should change.
- People should understand me. My boss should get a clue. Whatever. When it's all up to you to make everybody in your life understand how your life needs to be worth living in the way you want it to be lived, you will be a major disappointment to yourself.
- We tend to look outside and say, they're disappointing me. Okay, that could be true. you will do it. But there's another truth. You will project your own personal sense of disappointment onto other people.
- [64 : 05] In other words, you have a disappointment with you, but it's masking itself in disappointment with other people. Again, I'm not saying that other people don't disappoint us.
- It's what we do with that. But typically what happens when we're internalizing these things like this, this wrong focus, when we're internalizing these things, we become disappointed in ourselves.
- Why? Why would that happen? Because we quickly learn we cannot be God. And we get disappointed about that. And we get anger. What's the anger masking?
- Self-disappointment. I'm disillusioned with me and I can't get over it, so I need to find somebody to blame. I need to look for something else to blame because I can't handle knowing that I'm the problem.
- I'm not the problem, you're the problem, they're the problem, it's the problem. You see where this is going? This is all Bible. It just, it angers me so much, and here I'm talking about anger, it angers me so much.
- [65 : 09] They think they wrote all this. No, look, when you have that disappointment about yourself, you will project that self-disappointment onto other people. In other words, you will confuse being disappointed with yourself with being disappointed in them.
- That's how this works. Asaph looked within himself, he says it, for the proper interpretations of what he was observing.

The deceitfulness of sin led him into a swamp of self-pity and self-favoring and self-disappointment. he quickly realized that he couldn't rescue himself and it made him mad.

I can't change this. You know how many years I've lived in this? When I hear stuff like that, I realize I'm not hearing a statement about their disappointment in another person or another situation as much as a disappointment in themselves.

What they're pridefully saying to me is this, and they don't even realize it, I should be able to fix this. I should be able to get out of this. I deserve better than this.

[66 : 16] Says who? Give me verse and book. Quote it for me. Says who? Where is it written in this book that you and I get a pass like that?

You can't find it because I haven't been able to and I looked. I'm stubborn enough to where I went looking for it. It's not there. What's the biblical alternative to this?

Because anger masks itself. Some people are angry because they're grieving. Some people are angry because they're disappointed. Anger is a secondary emotion. It's always pointing back to some issue in the heart.

The biblical alternative for this is self denial and a humble heart toward God as a good and gracious savior.

Now let me say it. I've been I've been hinting around it. Now I'm just going to say it. I'm almost done. Look, people will sin against you. I am not saying that people don't wrong us.

[67 : 28] They do. I'm not saying that in a marriage we can't disappoint each other, hurt each other. Yes, we can. people will hurt you.

People will disappoint you. Both believers and unbelievers. The ones that hurt the worst are the ones you trust the most. Anger and bitterness and unforgiveness will leave you empty.

Asaph's strong descriptions of what was happening to him warn us away from this kind of sinful anger. Instead, the Christian life is about you nurturing a heart for Christ and for others.

Say, Jeff, I don't know how to get past this. I can tell you. It's not preacher talk. It's scripture. Turn your heart to Jesus Christ. Look full in the face of Jesus Christ and see the forgiveness and love and peace and glory that he brings to you and let that fill your heart.

That's the starting place. That's the starting place. I want to give you this final step and then I'm done. identify and confess the true treasures of your heart.

[68 : 39] Jesus said this under this one. Jesus said where your treasure is there your heart will be also. So your focus for what you want most in any given moment is what will shape your interpretations of life and determine your responses to your circumstances.

Whatever you want in that moment, that's what you're going after. You're putting everything you have into getting what you want in that moment. And that's going to shape you and define you. It'll come out of your mouth. It'll show in your actions.

All right, now this is what I'll give you. Let me give you just a few questions to help you root out what you're really living for. Because I told you these things mask. They mask.

First of all, when, under what conditions, do you tend to experience fear, worry, anxiety, anger, disappointment?

The list goes on. I just named a few. Think about the circumstances or conditions of your life that typically elicit this kind of thing or make it conducive for you to be in a state of these kinds of things fairly continually.

[69 : 50] Next, how have you struggled with regret? Saying things like this, if only.

If only. Another one would be this one. I should have. Why didn't? These are ways that you're expressing a sense of regret from the past and living in the past is a dangerous thing.

Another one, when do you experience problems with prayer and personal worship? faithfulness in gathering for worship and in your relationship with God.

When the spiritual disciplines, Greg, when the spiritual disciplines of life begin to suffer and wane in your life, when the priorities of heaven begin to diminish in your life and get fuzzy in your life, and your life ceases to be more about eternal things and more about earthly things, when that begins to happen, what's going on there?

Those are flags for you to back up and say, whoa, whoa, whoa. And then finally, in what situations do you typically struggle with anger? Anger is just such a big one.

[71 : 06] Now you say, Jeff, you know what? I am not a person who walks around yelling at people, shouting at people, complaining, you know, with loud tones and veins bulging.

You know, some people show anger that way, right? And you don't have to be, that was my dad. God bless him, he got saved, and he was a changed man. But my dad growing up was an angry dude, man.

Really angry. And you didn't have to guess when my dad was angry, he showed it. Whereas, have you ever known somebody where the anger just sits under the surface, and they show their anger, and they can look at you and smile and say things to you and cut you in half and smile while doing it?

They can say and do things in the calmness of the spirit that, betrays the fact that underneath they are seething against you.

You see, anger can express itself in all kinds of ways. Yes, it can be passive-aggressive or it can just be flat-on aggressive and you don't have any doubt. What are the situations that typically put you in a struggle with anger as a response of your heart?

[72 : 18] Now, these questions can help you begin to identify what you're focusing your heart on. They can help you see what you're treasuring in your life. Am I treasuring security, avoidance, privacy, pleasure?

We can take even good things, wholesome things, and turn them into idols that we pursue when we put too much emphasis on them. When I'm willing to sin to get this good thing or sin if I can't get this good thing, I'm in trouble.

It seems to be a good thing in my life if I'm willing to sin to get it. I just want my spouse to fill in the blank. If only he or she would.

If only this could change to fill in the blank. We're dealing with issues of contentment now. You're just a small step away from anger and you might not even realize that you're angry.

Well, beloved, I want to leave it there. I want to honor the fact that I always give you more, but that's okay.

[73 : 26] You can take this home and you can have devotionals in your family with it. I know some of our families do that. Guys, you can take this home and you can choose a portion of it and you can sit down with your wife and use it to do a Bible time with your wife and pray with your kids.

Right? All this is fair game. Make use of your pastor's sermons and turn it into something that blesses you beyond just Sunday. Alright?

Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for the goodness of your heart as you reveal these truths to us and show us that the scriptures are so practical and relevant to the way that we live our lives.

Many of these passages that we studied, written thousands and thousands of years ago, and yet they bear on the human condition in such relevant ways.

And so your word never goes out of date. Your word is never out of tune with our hearts, but helps our hearts to resonate with you. And so we thank you for that as your people.

[74 : 28] I pray now as we move into what we call the Christmas season, when we're being constantly reminded of your goodness and sending this little baby in human form, the Lord Jesus Christ, born as an infant coming from a woman and entering this world, a baby born to die.

That's what we pray you will help us to reflect on, the wonderful gift of your love in your Son Jesus. Thank you for the gospel and thank you now for each soul here this morning.

May you encourage us in this truth and teach us to live to please Jesus in every aspect of life. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.