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The Principled Life (Part 1)



Cultivating Christian Character - Steve Gregg

In this discussion led by Steve Gregg, the importance of cultivating a principled life is explored through various biblical examples and teachings. The concept of having two sets of desires - one fleshly and one spiritual - is highlighted, and the need to prioritize values based on biblical teachings is emphasized. Alongside a caution against materialism and societal trends, Gregg encourages the audience to seek wisdom and align their lives with God's values rather than those of society.

Transcript

Tonight we're going to continue an examination of the broad topic of cultivating Christian character. We come to our fifth lesson tonight, and I will be talking about the principled life. The principled life.

What is a principled life? What is a principled man or a principled woman? It is a person who has, obviously, principles that govern the life and which will not be violated. Principles for which all other things will be sacrificed if necessary. Of course, those can be higher or low principles, but the Christian life is one of high principle.

Now, we have talked in earlier sessions about things as spontaneous as walking in the Spirit, or as spiritual as allowing the Word of God to do its work in you. I now want to talk about the transformation of the mind and the character by the adoption of proper principles and the discipline of living by those principles. You see, Christian character doesn't just come real easily.

It doesn't come real simply. And all the things we've talked about in this series so far are a part of that, but so is this. The hard part is discipline, self-control, subordination of desires to higher principles.

That's what a principled life requires. We have many examples in the Scriptures of principled behavior. Now, I almost had said principled men and women, but actually, some of the people who exhibit principled behavior on one occasion aren't all that principled at other times.

David, for example. David seems to be very conscientious when he is fleeing from Saul, and he is in the cave, and Saul is pursuing him there, and Saul has to go into the cave to relieve himself, and he doesn't know David is in there. And David and his men are in a position in the cave where they could actually kill Saul, and Saul is trying to kill David.

Besides, God had already prophesied that David would be Saul's successor to the throne of Israel. And therefore, everything seemed to be, David's men who were with him seemed to see it as, you know, God had delivered his enemy into his hand to bring about the fulfillment of prophecy and so forth. But David said, God forbid that I would lift my hand against God's anointed.

He said, if God wants to take him out, that's God's business, but I will not lift my hand against God's anointed. He said that twice, actually. Once in the cave, and then once on another occasion when he and his men overtook or came into the camp of Saul when Saul was asleep.

And everyone else was asleep, too, including the guards and the sentries. But David would not violate this principle. We know, of course, later in his life, he became more compromised in some respects and did some terrible things.

But it's always inspiring to see a man at some point in his life, at least, just instances where men will not do the thing that would seem so natural. Here, he's being pursued by a man who wants to kill him. For him to kill Saul would seem quite justified.

And even if it wasn't justified, there'd be a strong temptation to do so to spare one's own life. And yet he would not do so because he honored the anointing that Samuel had poured on Saul's head. The same Samuel had poured an anointing on David's head, and it was the anointing of God.

And David simply would not violate that. Joseph, we know, shows principled behavior throughout his entire life. He's one of the few people in the Old Testament that we don't read any real blot in his character.

But one of the places where his principles really shine, of course, are when he was being tempted. Here he was, far from home, not accountable to anybody except God. A slave in a household with a woman who was continuously trying to tempt him.

And he would not submit to her. He would not submit because he said this would be a sin against God. Now, we have to realize Joseph at this point in time was 17.

He was a teenager. He was at the point, probably one of the highest points of his hormonal activity. He could easily have argued that no one would ever learn of this.

Certainly the woman would keep this secret and no one else would have to know. We don't know whether she was an attractive woman or not, but she may have been the

only woman he ever got to see. In any case, we don't have any reason to believe that he resisted her for the simple reason that he found her unattractive.

He resisted her because he found sin unacceptable against his principles and he would not do it. We have Daniel, also a young man taken far from home. Both of these young men, very unaccountable to anyone of their own religion or of their own family.

Both of them kidnapped, basically, away from their families. Taken into a pagan country that had no morals of their sort. No one of their religious convictions around them to know what they do.

And here Daniel is a young man, too, probably a teenager when he's taken away into captivity. And he's offered royal food because he's one of the captives that's going to be treated specially to be groomed for special office in Babylon. And so he's given a portion of the king's food, but the king's food contained foods that would be unclean for a Jew to eat.

And he would not eat it. Now, we don't have those same convictions because the New Testament says we don't have to. But under the law, it is very important to abstain from eating unclean foods.

Even Peter at a later date, even when God himself lowered these unclean animals before him in a sheep, Peter said, no, I'm not going to eat them. I've never touched anything unclean. Although God had to correct Peter about that because it was time to change his opinions about those things.

But Daniel, it says, purposed in his heart, in Daniel 1.8, not to defile himself with the king's food. It was because he purposed in his heart not to defile himself that he did not eat the dainties that were brought before him. And then later on, it was for the same reason that he did not cease to pray to Jehovah.

When King Darius gave an edict that anyone who prayed to any God other than Darius himself would be fed to the lions. That didn't keep Daniel from doing what he knew he must do. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniel's friends, likewise, took a similar stand upon principle.

Their lives were at stake. They were to be thrown into the fire furnace if they did not compromise, but they would not compromise. These were principled people, principled men.

And there are principled women in the scripture, too. We don't have as many stories of them because there simply aren't as many stories of women. But we have people like Esther, who is willing to lay her life down to save her people.

We have other godly women, Mary, the mother of Jesus, of course, and others. So we

have in the Bible many role models of principled behavior. But in modern times, we don't have very many models of principled behavior.

I've seen either a t-shirt or a bumper sticker. I can resist anything but sin. Or temptation, excuse me.

I can resist anything but temptation, it said. And that is sort of the mentality of probably the average non-Christian, at least now, is that, you know, you can't expect me to resist my drives. You can't expect me to resist my desires, my temptations.

After all, who does? The president doesn't resist. The televangelists don't resist. It's possible they've even been to a church where the pastor didn't resist his drives.

There are examples enough of unprincipled people, including religious people, to discourage people from believing that there can be such a thing as a principled life. A life where drives and desires and cravings are subjugated to principle. And yet, if anyone is going to have the character of Christ, they must become principled in this respect.

Now, we need to understand ourselves a little bit. Paul says, I don't understand what I'm doing in Romans 7. The thing I want to do, I don't do. The thing I don't want to do, I do that.

He says, I have in my mind an agreement with the law of God, but I find in my members another force at work, another law, bringing me into bondage to sin and death and keeping me from doing what I want to do. You all know that passage, I'm sure, in Romans 7. It begins at verse 14. I think it ends around verse 25.

Paul goes on and on about this. But he says, I don't understand what I'm doing, because I know what I want to do, but I don't do it. I have this one set of desires, and that is the desire to obey the law of God.

But there's something else in me that has its own set of desires in conflict with that. And this war of desire is the war that must be won in order to be a person of character and of principle. Paul had a very similar passage to that, only shorter, in Galatians 5.17, where he said, The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit lusts against the flesh.

And these two are contrary to one another, so you cannot do what you will. Now, the flesh lusts. The word lust literally means desire.

The flesh has its desires, and the spirit has its desires, and these are contrary. And every Christian has the desires of the flesh. You have appetites.

Some of these are part of God's equipment He's given you. There are certain chemistry in your body that God designed for good purposes. But if that chemistry is not controlled by higher principles, it will be temptation to sin.

And I'm not just talking about sexual temptation, whether it's the temptation to eat when you shouldn't eat, to sleep when you shouldn't sleep, to whatever, become tired and lazy when you shouldn't be lazy. Your body has its own set of cravings, which are not in themselves evil. They can be explained biologically.

God made them. When God made Adam and Eve, before they fell, they had all this equipment. And God said, It's good.

There's not anything wrong with these desires until they begin to govern, until they begin to be that which calls the plays in your life. If you have desire to eat when you shouldn't eat, that desire is not in itself wrong. But if you obey it and you steal food that isn't yours, or you break a fast before you should have broken your fast, then you've, of course, done something wrong.

This this desire, which at other times when you're hungry, inclines you to eat. This God given desire becomes a thing that becomes an occasion of temptation. James said in James chapter one, Let no one say when he is tempted, I'm tempted by God.

But every man is tempted, he said, when he is drawn away by his own desires and tempted. Now, your own desires can draw you away. These desires are not in themselves all bad.

Some of them are decent. Certainly, a sexual drive is something God designed, and it has a very legitimate use. But it has a very illegitimate use as well.

The drive itself does not differentiate. Your hormones don't differentiate between the right and the wrong use of them. All it knows is what its drives are.

Your body knows what it craves. Your mind and your spirit have to determine what will be allowed. And this is a conflict of desires.

You see, as a Christian, you not only have these bodily and fleshly desires, you also have the Holy Spirit. You become a partaker of the divine nature, according to 2 Peter chapter one in verse four. And therefore, you have God's desires in you as well.

These are the desires of the spirit, and these are in conflict with the desires of the flesh. Let me show you something rather, I think, interesting in Ephesians chapter two. Ephesians chapter two and verse three, Paul is describing that unflattering condition of the unregenerate.

He's talking actually about his readers prior to their being reborn. I'm going to pick it up in the middle of a sentence because it's long. He says, among whom you also are we also all once conducted ourselves.

In the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by

nature the children of wrath, just as the others. Now, before you were converted, Paul says you were fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Now, what what is that distinction, the desires of the flesh and of the mind? Well, your flesh is just plain old meat.

Your flesh is just so much chemistry. It has cravings. They come at the most inopportune times, and sometimes they're not there when they should be.

It's just an uncontrollable in terms of the arising of desires and so forth. It's an uncontrollable phenomenon, sometimes sometimes caused by environmental stimuli and sometimes caused by who knows what. But you have a craving for chocolate.

OK, well, where'd that come from? Well, it's something to do with your chemistry. It's one of your appetites. OK, is it wrong to eat chocolate? Well, when you're in church, it's not the best time you get chocolate on upholstery.

So this would be a wrong if you're getting a craving for chocolate. I probably shouldn't have said anything. Can I see a few people get up and go out toward the restroom? Of course, you can come back with chocolate over their face.

But if you get a craving for chocolate right now, really what you ought to do is stay and wait until we're done here. And yet you've got to resist the temptation. Now, that craving for chocolate is not in itself a bad thing.

It's it arises unbidden. You didn't ask for that craving, but you now have a responsibility to do something about it. That's the desires of the flesh.

Now, when you were on regenerate, Paul says you were fulfilling as a way of life the desires of the flesh. And then he says, and of the mind. Now, as Christians, we are not fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind at the same time.

If you are a Christian, your mind has changed. You see, before you were a Christian, your mind agreed with sinful behavior. That's the definition of being unrepentant.

You haven't changed your mind yet. Repentance means changing your mind. And so when you're born, your tendency is to justify your indulgence.

To minimize the wrongdoing. To rationalize so that it doesn't, you know, you're convinced that you're not really all that bad, even if you're doing some things that the Bible says are bad. I mean, you're not as bad as everybody else.

Everyone else is at least as bad as you are. And this was an extenuating circumstance after all. And you can always rationalize and minimize and excuse your own behavior because your mind is on the side of your flesh when you're unregenerate.

But repentance, when you become a Christian, you repent. And that means you change

your mind. What do you change your mind about? Sin.

Therefore, whereas your mind used to agree with and justify and excuse and rationalize your fleshly behavior, now that you've been converted, your mind doesn't think that way anymore. It's like Paul was talking about in Romans 7. He lives my mind, he says, I embrace the law of God. But in my members, there's another law.

There's like, it's got a mind of its own. Now, before we were converted, we were fulfilling the desires of our flesh and of our mind. Why? Because our mind and our flesh were in agreement.

But now that we've changed, now that we've repented, our mind has changed. But guess what hasn't changed? Your flesh. The desires of your mind are one thing, now your desires of your flesh are another thing.

Your mind now embraces God's standards. Your flesh doesn't have any difference. There's been no change in what your flesh desires.

It wants the same things it wanted before. But now your flesh has desires that are in conflict with the desires of your mind. And there is a warfare.

And there must be a victory. Now, you should understand, therefore, that you have, as a Christian, two sets of desires. Now, if you're not a Christian, you might have two sets of desires, but there's also a possibility you would not have two sets of desires.

As a non-Christian, you might simply have, you might, with your mind, desire everything that your flesh desires. But now that you're a Christian, you desire to be holy. You desire to exercise self-control.

You desire to live a righteous life, pleasing to God. That's what your mind desires now, but your flesh still has all the same desires as before. So you've got two sets of desires.

Now, character is going to be defined by which of those sets of desires are dominant. You see, when you've got desires in conflict, you can't do it all. You can't please both.

You can't please the flesh and the mind when there's a conflict in desires. So what happens? One of those two has to win. One of those entities has to be dominant.

The desires of the spirit have to subordinate the desires of the flesh. This is what we call discipline. This is what we call self-control.

And your character will be defined by which set of desires you allow to be dominant. Paul talks in 1 Corinthians 3 to a church that he refers to as carnal. He says they are babes and they're carnal.

Carnal means fleshly. Now, in Romans chapter 8, Paul said to be carnally minded is

death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. It's in Romans 8, somewhere around verse 7, 8, 9, somewhere around there.

And he said to be carnally minded is death. Now, we are all carnal in the sense that we all have a flesh. Carnal just means fleshly.

This part of me is fleshly. That part of me is carnal. I have carnal desires.

But am I carnally minded? Paul says in Romans 8, the carnally minded man minds the things of the flesh. The spiritually minded man minds the things of the spirit. To mind it, to set your mind on it, to set your heart on it, to set as your goal to fulfill the desires of the spirit.

And then to act on that and carry out that goal is to be spiritually minded. But if you simply allow your fleshly desires to predominate and you never subordinate them, you never dominate them, then you will find yourself to be very much carnally minded. The Apostle Paul talked about this struggle in his own life, even though he was a spiritual man and a mature one too.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 9, Paul took nothing for granted in his spiritual life. He said this, 1 Corinthians 9, 26 and 27, Therefore I run thus, not with uncertainty, thus I fight, not as one who beats the air. In other words, I don't have a sham enemy, I've got a real enemy.

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. Now that word disqualified is the Greek word that elsewhere is translated in the New Testament as reprobate. Same word used in Romans 1 where Paul talks about God giving him over to a reprobate mind.

Or in 2 Corinthians chapter 13 where Paul says, No you're not, that Christ is in you unless you are a reprobate. This is the same word in the Greek. He says, Lest after I have preached to others, I myself should become a reprobate.

Now he says, this is not hypothetical. I'm not fighting the air. I'm fighting a real battle with real consequences.

That's why I discipline myself. I bring my body under subjection. You see, the body has its desires, but I have some other desires.

And I must bring those desires of the flesh under subjection. And if that desire in me to live a holy and godly life is the dominant desire in my life, then I am a spiritual man. I'll be a man of character, of principle.

And yet, if I never bring my body under subjection, if I never make it submit to higher principles than those which it naturally craves, then of course I'll never be principled. I'll just be impulsive and self-indulgent. Now, what are your dominant desires? These are

your values.

Your dominant desires could be said to be your values. Now, you will at times do things that go against your values. I believe that when, I mean, I don't really wish to be a doom merchant, I don't really wish to be pessimistic, but I'd like to say you won't.

And frankly, I don't know why we would ever have to. But everyone I know, at some time or another, goes against their own spiritual grain. James said, in many things we all stumble.

He was an apostle. Paul, in Romans 7, I do not believe was speaking hypothetically. I believe he was speaking of his own life.

He talked about doing things he didn't like. But, he did not live in a pattern of sin. Why? Because his mind did not approve of it, and he was determined to bring his body under subjection.

Now, bringing your body under subjection is moment by moment, decision by decision. It's not something where you just cross some threshold in your Christian life and suddenly there's no more struggle. Or if there is such a state to come into, I don't think Jesus ever came into it in his life, because he was struggling in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Tempted, sweating drops of blood, striving against temptation, according to Hebrews. And, so I mean, I don't think Jesus ever crossed some threshold where there's no more any struggle against fleshly desire. I don't read of Paul ever crossing any such threshold, and if neither Jesus nor Paul did, I don't suspect that I'll be more fortunate than they.

Therefore, I have to be prepared that moment by moment, I will face the option of following the desires of my flesh, or my values, my principles. The things my spiritual man tells me I need to do. In your notes, I've written this statement, values are revealed by pursuit, not by proclamation.

Now, the reason I chose the word proclamation is because of the scripture I chose there, Proverbs 20, in verse 6, it says, Most men will proclaim every man his own goodness, but a faithful man who can find. Most people will proclaim that they are better than they are. And, therefore, you cannot determine what a person's character really is by what they claim or proclaim about themselves.

You will determine what their dominant desires are by what they actually pursue. What they actually do with their time and their money and their talents and the direction they steer their children. This is where you really see a person's value.

People can say, I stand for family values. Well, maybe you do, maybe you don't. You can say it, but let me see how you spend your time.

When you have elective time, when you have time that isn't already committed necessarily to something else, what do you do with that elective time? When you have money that isn't necessarily committed to anything else, when you have elective money, what do you do with that elective money? Jesus said, where your treasure is, your heart will be. You don't know where your heart is? Where's your treasure going? What are you spending your money on? What are you spending your time on? John said, I have no greater joy than to see my children walk in the truth. What's your greatest joy to see your children do? Get on a football team? Go to college? Become President of the United States? Those aren't high enough goals for me.

I've got higher goals for my kids than that. And that's that they be godly. You will discover a person's real values not by what they say their values are, but what they actually devote themselves to pursuing for themselves and for their children.

Seeing where they direct their children really is a real indicator in many cases. Because people usually care about their children. Jesus said, even earthly fathers being evil know how to give good gifts to their children.

They want what they consider to be good for their children. So whatever they pursue for their children is obviously what they think is good. That's their value.

Now let's talk about some values that the Bible puts before us. Some of these are values and pursuits that are unworthy of the Christian. I don't mean to step on any toes, but when you talk about Christian character, when you talk about the Scriptures, it goes against our grain sometimes.

At least part of our grain. Hopefully it resonates with something in us. That one set of desires to be holy, I would hope everything I have to say tonight would resonate with.

But there's that other fleshly part that perhaps some of us tend to compromise a little bit. And we might feel our toes are getting stepped on. But let me talk to you first of all about some of the values and the pursuits that the Bible indicates are not worthy desires to be dominant in the Christian life.

That doesn't mean that there's no place for some attraction to some of these things or for some... I mean, not everything I'm about to speak about are bad things. To desire them somewhat, even to have them somewhat, is not necessarily bad. But what is bad is when these become dominant desires.

These are unworthy dominant desires. When these desires and pursuits actually dictate the course of our life, our career decisions, where we're going to live, how we're going to spend the weekend. When decisions are being made regularly by consideration of these particular values.

Of course, the first of them is material things, money, money and toys and goodies and

stuff. That is, in our society, probably the greatest temptation to draw people away. Jesus said the seed that fell on soil that had thorns and thistles in it was the word of God that came into some people's hearts.

And it began to grow, but he said the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choked out the seed. There are many Christians who've begun well. They've accepted the word of God.

They intend to be fruitful. They intend to be obedient, but something creeps up, chokes it right out. And some of you may even be able to be... to recognize yourself in that description.

Maybe you were more spiritual at some time before, but there's some cares of this world, Jesus said, and deceitfulness of riches. These things definitely are insidious. And when they begin to... Now, I'm not opposed to taking precaution.

I'm not opposed to having things, obviously. It says in 1 Timothy chapter 6 that God gives us all things richly to enjoy. But it's when these things become the dominant desires and they begin to dictate to us what we're going to do with our lives.

Material things is simply not a worthy consideration. If there is some other more principled thing to do. A judge who takes a bribe, for example, is acting against principle in favor of material things.

He knows the right thing to do. And if he was a man of principle, he would do the right thing. But when he takes a bribe, he is... his love of money is getting the best of him.

And Paul said in 1 Timothy chapter 6 that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. But Jesus made it very clear that the desire for things and materials is pagan. These are the things that the pagans seek after, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 6, in verse 31 and 32.

He said, therefore, do not worry saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear. For after these things, the pagans seek, the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need these things.

These are pursuits of pagans. What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear? You know, that's interesting. He didn't say, as an example of pagan pursuits, he didn't say, how shall we entertain ourselves? What kind of car shall we drive? What kind of jewelry shall we wear? He was talking... these were frivolous things.

He's talking about necessary things. Eating, drinking, wearing clothes. These are necessary things.

But even the necessary things are to be sought with a kind of indifference and

submission to the will of God. Rather than insisting that I must have this kind of a standard of living. I must have this much security, this much money in the bank, this many things.

These are not worthy of Christians to pursue. Now you might say, well Steve, you've got some nice things. I haven't pursued any of them.

And that is a fact. I have never pursued things as near as I can tell. Never been interested.

Now some other things... Materialism is not my problem. I've got other problems. I've got my temptations too.

But money is not one of them. Never was. I suspect it never will be.

Everything I have I received unsought. Unsolicited. And I received a great deal.

Do you know that my wife and I own a house with no mortgage? We own two cars with no debt. We're pretty good shit. That's better than 95% of middle class America.

We don't have any money, but we're doing pretty good. We never asked for it. These things were voluntarily brought to us without us asking anyone but God.

And so I want to make it very clear to you. If I talk against materialism and say, well Steve, you've got a pretty nice piece of property out there. What do you talk about materialism? We're continuously talking about selling it, giving the money away.

We're always seeking God to know what He wants to do with it. Because we are not attached. We don't want to be attached to material things.

I've never wanted to be. Now I don't want to make myself sound like some kind of a saint. Because I could tell you things about me that are not so flattering.

But I'm saying that I can with credibility say, even though I have some things, that the pursuit of material things is an unworthy pursuit of the Christian. Now you might say, well, how in the world are you supposed to eat if you don't pursue that? Well, what did Jesus say? Jesus said, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you. Not as you pursue those things.

As you pursue God. As you pursue His kingdom. As you pursue His righteousness.

He will take care of those things. He will add them to your life as necessary. Now you might say, well, if I didn't pursue as hard after material things as I've been doing, we'd have to live pretty poor.

Well, that's up to God, isn't it? You content to be poor if God wants you to be? You need

to be prepared to be, if necessary. You need to be prepared to pursue God and leave the consequences with Him. Now, most people, when they pursue the will of God in their life, they end up getting a job because that's the will of God for them.

It says that in Scripture. He that will not work, let him not eat. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4, I will that men should work with their hands and that which is good that they might provide for themselves and for others.

If you seek the will of God, that doesn't mean you won't be working. Indeed, I hope that the work you do, you are doing it because you sought the will of God and that's what you believe God called you to do. But the job you do, you do for different reasons than the other people working at the same job.

If all is right in your spirit. You see, you are there because this is what you feel God has led you to do. I'm not saying I'm not saying that you have to feel like you got some kind of clairvoyant guidance to to go to a specific job as opposed to some other specific job.

But rather, you believe God wants you working in some vocation. And this is a job God opened the doors for. And this is and you and you have the sense that this is where God wants you.

I have nothing against that. That's in fact, I think normal. I think that's normal Christianity.

I think someone who's like me is abnormal. I have gone. I have gotten jobs before and just there's no blessing in it.

I'll tell you that I've in the 30 years that I've been in the industry. I've I've not usually held profitable jobs. I've worked.

Never got much money for it. But I mean, I've done janitorial work and things like that. Got a few minimum wage jobs on a few occasions.

Couldn't stay there more than about two months before they either kick me out or I kick myself out. Just never was very much in my element there. But in fact, once, even after I moved to McMinnville and I hadn't worked at a regular job for six years when I moved, I've been directing the Great Commission school full time, didn't have time to work a regular job.

And of course, the school doesn't pay anything. But but but we had a break in the school for two months. I thought, well, you know, to be responsible, I should go out and get a job.

So I went out and got a job at Sherry's Restaurant as a waiter. And it was the most unprofitable two months I ever spent in my life. And I you know, I didn't I didn't get any

more money during those two months that I worked my brains out.

Then I get most two months without doing that. I have every reason to believe if I hadn't gone and gotten that job, I would have probably had probably about the same income just from the Lord as I would normally have more than even I got working. I wasn't you know, I was trying to be responsible, but I really can't say that God led me to get that job.

There are people who are called to missionary work. There's people who are called to different kinds of vocations that that don't guarantee adequate income. But if it's your calling, do it anyway.

Don't worry about the income. Just seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all necessary things. We added you might live poor.

I did for many years before or you might not. He might prosper you. But I'm saying that that's more or less exceptional.

The Bible indicates that the average vocation that God wants most people to do is actually working at a job and making money. So you're at your job, hopefully pursuing God's kingdom there. And he adds the necessary things usually through your paycheck.

But what if the job you have doesn't provide enough pay, but you feel that that's where God wants you anyway? Well, then God's going to make up for it some other way. You do the will of God. You pursue God's will and don't let material things draw you off into a path that isn't the one that God wants you to have.

Many every kind of compromise in the world has been done for love of money. That's what Paul means when he says the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Think of the Ten Commandments.

The last one is thou shalt not covet. That's the love of money. The other nine before that.

Every one of them has been violated many, many times in history for the love of money. You shall have no other gods before me. Paul said, Covet.

Covetousness, idolatry. You should not bear. You know, you should not take the name of the Lord, your God in vain.

That's bearing a false witness after swearing honesty in court of law. That's people have lied in court for money. Keeping the Sabbath holy.

Have people broken the Sabbath in history for love of money? Of course they have. That's a good day's income they're losing out on if they keep the Sabbath. Many people have violated the Sabbath.

Now, as you know, I'm not a Sabbatarian, but I'm talking about in Old Testament times. Many Jews broke the Sabbath because of greed. I shall not kill.

Anyone ever kill for money? Of course people have killed for money. There's hired killers. Shall not commit adultery.

Anyone ever committed sexual immorality for money? Of course. Thou shalt not steal. Anyone ever done that for love of money? Bear false witness.

Every kind of evil, every kind of wrongdoing has been done at one time or another for love of money. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And therefore, we need to flee these things, O man of God, Paul says to Timothy, and pursue other things than that.

In fact, let me show you that passage. It's in your notes, I think, although not the whole passage. First Timothy chapter 6. Let me read the passage because this is perfect for the point I want to make.

Let me start at verse 8. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. Really? Should be. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Pursue that.

Don't pursue after money. Now, like I say, you can make money while you're pursuing God. If God is leading you in a vocation that generates money.

But do not set your heart on it. Solomon said in, I think it's in Ecclesiastes, he says, when riches increase, do not set your heart upon them. For surely they make themselves wings and they fly away.

Is that not Ecclesiastes? I believe it is. If God increases your riches, don't set your heart on it. And it's very hard not to.

Jesus said, where your treasure is there, your heart will be also. It's axiomatic. I once I once inherited some money.

It was many years ago when my actually my second wife was killed in an accident and she was hit by a truck and the truck was insured. And the insurance people came to my door and said, we owe you this money for wrongful death. Please don't sue.

And I wasn't going to anyway. So they gave me the money. And suddenly I had a lot of money.

I lived poor. I had lived in literal poverty for years. And the money they gave me was enough.

I could have lived at my present standard of living or even better for probably five years or so before I'd expended. But one reason I had lived in poverty is because I, I, I believe what the Bible said about how money can be a thorn and thistle that chokes out the good seed, the love of money. The deceitfulness of riches.

And I determined that while I had this money, I gave myself one year to give it all away. I would spend some unnecessary things. I was going to give the rest away.

I gave myself. I got it one year to be rid of it all. And within a year, it was all gone.

I spent some unnecessary things and gave the rest away. But during that year, I was determined I'm not going to let this money change me spiritually. I'm not going to let it change my heart.

But you know what? I couldn't help it. There were very subtle changes that did occur. Because before I had that money there in the bank, I was driving an old car and I had to trust God every time I drove anywhere to keep the car running.

I didn't have any money to fix it. I had to trust God every month to pay my electric bill and my phone bill, literally every month. I had to wait.

I didn't know. To this day, I don't know where the money comes from. I didn't know it then either.

But when I had all this money in the bank, I didn't have to trust God for that anymore. I could say I'm still going to trust God. But what's the point? If God doesn't come through, I can write a check.

It's no problem. And I realized that there was a dynamic of the life of faith that was interfered with. Even though I made probably stronger determinations than most people do to not let this affect me spiritually.

Yet I was sensitive to the fact that there were changes in my heart. That there was a tendency for one's riches to increase to set my heart on end. And boy, I was sure glad a year later when I didn't have any of it, I went back to living in poverty again.

It was a much, much happier state of mind for me. Because the love of money, it drowns men's souls in perdition and destruction. Now, am I opposed to Christians being rich? Not if they couldn't care less about it.

I don't. If you don't mind whether you're rich or poor, if you can, like Paul say, having food and clothing, I will be content. And that's true.

Now, I don't care if God pours all kinds of blessings on you. I love to see Christians prosper, to tell you the truth. I love to see the people of God prosper.

Though I sometimes get concerned for them and for me when I prosper. It's important that we don't pursue material things. We can have them if God provides them.

And if they come to us in the course of our doing the will of God in a disinterested way in terms of the money, then this is, you know, then your heart is not set on it. But it's a very dangerous thing and there are people who are Christians who, Paul said, have strayed from the faith because of love of money. Or as Jesus put it, the seed was choked out in their life, died.

Because of the deceitfulness of riches and cares of this world. Beware of that. To do something because it will make money and for no higher motive than that is an unworthy value.

And to direct your children into a career because it will make them financially, I believe is an unworthy thing. Most people would like to see their daughters marry someone who's kind of rich. I was amazed.

My father-in-law wanted me to marry their daughter because I was poor. I mean, he was a millionaire. And you might think, well, he probably just figured he'd support you.

Well, he didn't. He didn't and doesn't. But he was a millionaire.

But he came to my Bible studies every morning. I was teaching in a restaurant every morning in Santa Cruz. And my father and mother-in-law used to come every morning, six in the morning.

And then when my wife was killed, they knew me when my wife was still alive. When she was killed, they began to think in terms of matching me up with their daughter, Kristen, my wife. And looking back, I just think it's an astonishing thing because my father-in-law, though he was a millionaire, he gave away his money, all of it.

He became a millionaire twice and gave it all away. And he is now working on his third time being a millionaire, and he's going to give all of it away too. He gives everything else to Haiti, to missions and orphanages in Haiti.

He's a man who's three times rich. Every time, gave it all away. His heart is not... There's a rare case of someone who can have money, doesn't set his heart on it.

But what you could really tell that this man, though rich, was not motivated by material things, is he didn't mind. He even wanted his daughter to marry a poor man. That's amazing.

But I don't care if my... I don't mind if my daughter is married to poor men, as long as

they're godly men. And most people want their sons to grow up to do something lucrative and impressive and make a lot of money. If that's what you want for your children, then your values need to be made more Christian.

Because you're setting a trap for your own children. If you raise your children to be rich, I'm not saying they will fall away from God. You're just presenting greater danger.

Jesus said it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go through the gate into the kingdom of God. Do you want your kids to find it difficult or easy to get into the kingdom of God? Well, do you believe Jesus or not believe Jesus? That's the question, I guess. How many Christians in America believe that? Well, I do.

And I hope you do. Valuing material things in such a way that they become dominant values that determine action and choices and careers. And the way you spend your time and all that is not a worthy value for Christians to be motivated by.

Another unworthy value is the love of vain things. Vain means empty in the Hebrew. And the word is used many times, as you may know, in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Actually, the word vanity, which is a cognate of the same word. Vanity means emptiness. Solomon was a king, rich, unbridled, sovereign, not answerable to anybody.

And he did whatever he wanted. And there was a period of his life where he just, what he wanted was to indulge himself. So he got women, about a thousand of them.

Riches, big house, big gardens, read books, got into literature. And he chronicled this period of carnality in the book of Ecclesiastes. And he says that he tried all these things.

And he tried them in a big way. More than you or I will ever be able to try them all out. Save us the time and trouble.

He said, here's what I found out. It's all vanity. It's like striving after the wind, he said.

The King James says it's vexation of spirit. Which is another translation of the same Hebrew word, striving after the wind. Because spirit and wind are the same word in Hebrew.

Interesting alternative there. But he said, all these things are vanity. That means emptiness.

They're empty things. They hold empty promises. They make you think that if you find them and get them, you will be happy.

And people who find them and get them find that they don't make them happy. Now you can be happy even though you have money. You can be happy even though you have some of these things.

But those things will not make you happy. Happiness comes from another source. And these things vainly and deceitfully promise happiness.

Now, when I think of vain things, I think of things that don't matter at all. They're empty. They're inconsequential.

In our culture, there are many idols that are vain. Sports is one of them. Now, I realize a lot of you people like sports.

That's fine. It's okay to like sports. I don't care for sports.

But I'm not opposed to sports. But I just think a sports is an idol for many people. I had a pastor in Santa Cruz of our church there.

He loved football. He'd been an athlete when he was younger. And then he went into the pastorate.

He loved football. And whenever it was, what is it, Rose Bowl? Is that football? Rose Bowl? I don't even know. I don't even know.

Is it? Are the Blazers a basketball team? I forget. But I think it was Rose Bowl Sunday. That's a football game, right? This pastor would close the sermon early and go home to see the Rose Bowl.

He loved sports more than he loved almost anything else. Now, he loved God, too. I believe he loved God.

He steered his children into sports. And his children left God. They didn't leave sports.

But sports became their God. To a certain extent, it could be argued that sports had become a bit of a God to him, too. At least he was more willing to sacrifice his time for sports than he was to finish his sermon, if there was a choice between the two.

Sports can become an idol. But it's so empty. What is sports? What is a game? I mean, when I listen to the radio and people say, Go Blazers! And I think, why? Go Blazers.

What does it matter if they go or not? What does it matter if they win or lose? Who are they anyway? What do I care about whether they win a game? Nothing is changed if they win or lose. History isn't changed. What is a game but a striving to solve problems that were created for the sake of the game and wouldn't exist if the game didn't exist? It's an emptiness.

I mean, if you like sports, if you find it entertaining and relaxing, I'm not condemning that. It's not one of the things I find entertaining. But I have my own things I find entertaining.

But I'm saying, I'm not talking about enjoying sports. I'm talking about thinking that sports are important and making that a value. I have known many godly parents who protected their children from public school influence until their children got to the age where when they were homeschooled, they couldn't play.

There were no sports activities for them. So they put their kids in school so they could play in sports. I mean, I'm not saying you can't put your kids in school.

I'm just saying that if you would otherwise protect your kids for anything but sports will be the thing that makes you compromise. That's a value that I have no sympathy for. It's emptiness.

It's vanity. But there's many other things. There's fads.

There's clothing styles that matter a great deal to some people, especially youth. These clothing fads, of course, come and go very rapidly among youth. But Christian youth should recognize that the clothing styles that come and go, the fads, they're just vanity.

Now, by the way, the same is true of adult fads. They just don't change as rapidly as the youth fads do. It's emptiness.

What does it matter if you're wearing clothes that are in style or not in style? What does it matter if someone you don't even know decided that this year, wearing your pants down around your buttocks and being baggy enough to put four people in them, that that's going to be what's cool? Well, maybe that's what's cool in the mind of someone, but I don't have to follow them, thanks. I don't think that's very cool at all. Frankly, I think it's ugly.

Now, maybe I'm just an old fogey. You know, it's the wrong generation. But you know what? Just because somebody says that this is what's hip doesn't mean you have to agree with them.

People who chase after these things to be stylish, to be on top of it, to be, you know, on the cutting edge of the current fad. Who cares? The Ninja Turtles were no longer even a fad before my kids ever heard about them. They heard about them, but it was after they were already a fad that was gone.

Who cares? People might say, well, you're going to deprive your kids if you don't let them know of those things that are becoming the cultural icons of their generation. Why? When they grow up, are their friends going to be into Ninja Turtles? I doubt it. When they grow up, are their kids going to be in Power Rangers? I doubt it.

Then why do they have to know about it now? Why do they have to think that's important? Movie stars and celebrities, even Christian musicians, vanity, emptiness. And I'm not saying Christian musicians aren't saved or aren't doing something that's okay.

I'm talking about celebrity worship.

It exists. There are many young people who idolize secular rock and roll stars. They get saved, and they just shift their idolatry to Christian rock and roll stars.

And they think that these people are more important than other people. I was a long time ago in a band that was nothing. I was in a Christian band when I was a teenager, a Christian rock band.

And, I mean, we were nothing. We were lousy. But we played places.

We played in coffeehouses to the audience and stuff. And I remember I was once in a line waiting outside someplace. And someone came up to me and said, Are you in that band? And he named the band I was in.

I said, Yeah. And I saw him a few minutes later talking to his older sister or something. He said, I got that close to him.

I got that close to him. So what? Did I smell bad or something? I couldn't get any closer. What's the deal? What's so important about that? If you would meet your favorite Christian, whatever, musician, author, celebrity, whatever, would that, you know, would you get all nervous? Would that matter to you more than meeting some other person, meeting the church janitor? I mean, why should it? Celebrity is vanity.

Celebrity is emptiness. And yet people value it. Christians value it.

If they're not careful. To do something because you want to please a celebrity, name dropping even. I've met a lot of people who either were or have become, you know, in their own way, Christian celebrities.

And there's times when I want to tell a story that includes them, but I feel awkward even mentioning them by name because it may give the impression I'm name dropping. Celebrities are nothing. I mean, I haven't known a lot of big celebrities.

I'm not trying to make you think I have. But I'm I'm saying that a lot of people say, well, you know, when I was with so and so, just to impress other people, it shouldn't impress anybody. What is man? He's dust.

He's a worm. And the best of them are just dust and worms. So this fascination, this love for this pursuit of celebrities, fans, these kind of these are empty things.

There's so many empty things. So much entertainment is just emptiness. Well, there's another value that is not right for a Christian to pursue, and that is ease in the form of comfort and convenience.

A man of principle, a woman of principle acts upon principle and upon conscience. A

person who is not principled acts for convenience. When you have a temptation to do a certain thing, it's much more convenient to just go with the path of least resistance and do the thing you're tempted to do.

But principle means you stand against that. You don't take the easy route. It's a narrow road that we're taking, and that doesn't mean the easy road.

In Psalms 73, the wicked is associated with ease. Now, not every place in the Bible is ease associated with wickedness, because there are times when God says that he's going to ease the burdens of his people and so forth. And there's nothing wrong with being at ease if God has made you at ease.

But there are people who seek comfort, who seek convenience, that seek ease as a value in their life. It's important to them that their car is a comfortable car, that their home is a comfortable home, that they can make a living with not too much sweat. They don't have to work too hard.

And, you know, I'm not saying you have to work harder than you have to work. I'm just saying that that shouldn't be one of the things that motivates you or makes you make decisions. In Psalm 73, 12, it says, Behold, these are the ungodly who are always at ease.

They increase in riches. These must be people who get rich effortlessly. Amos 6, 1 says, Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.

There are times when ease is not what's best. It's always what our flesh desires. We always desire the easiest way.

It's just human nature. But it's not what God always wants us to do. In Luke, chapter 12, Jesus told the story of a man who was rich, had more than he needed.

And he decided to retire, really. I mean, to take his ease, he says. This is in Luke 12.

Why am I not seeing it here in the right place? Okay, here we go. I think I put the wrong verse number down. That's the problem, didn't I? No, I put the right one down.

My eyes just aren't working. There we go. Verse 16, The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops? So he said, I will do this. I will pull down my barns and build greater ones. And there I will store all my crops and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, You have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease. Eat, drink, and be merry.

Wrong answer. The guy has, he says, What shall I do? My ground is produced so plentifully. My crops are so abundant.

I don't have room to store them in my present grain elevators. What am I going to do? He said, Well, I guess what I'll do is build bigger grain elevators and keep it all for myself and just live at ease and retire. That's the wrong answer.

God said, You fool, this day your soul will be required of you. What should he have done? What's a better answer? I'm making more money than I can use. How about give some to the poor? Ever think of that? You know, there's a lot of people who make less than they need.

But this guy, he saw an opportunity to be at ease. He saw an opportunity to stop working for a while and just kind of relax and be comfortable. Now, I believe that we have a really wrongheadedness in our society that even Christians very seldom challenge in their own thinking.

And that is the idea that you work hard to raise your kids, provide for them, pay off your mortgage, put your kids through college, and then you reach retirement age and then you just take it easy. Then you get your RV and you spend your kids inheritance. Right.

And that is what what's normative. So normative that pastors even talk about retiring. I'm amazed.

I talk to them and they say, yeah, about 10 more years, I'm going to retire and retire. From preaching the word of God, who said you're going to be let off? Did God say you're not going to work anymore after that? I mean, who's who's dictating your your career, you or God? Now, I could understand if I was working at Hewlett Packard or someplace that that, you know, I was doing just to support my family. I felt like God has me there until my kids are raised and then I can retire from there and do something else.

So long as something else means something productive for God. I know a man, a relative of mine. I won't mention who he is, but he's he retired several years ago and he's not done anything productive for God, either with his money or his time.

He's a Christian. I've sometimes said of him, he's the one person I know that if he died, it wouldn't change his life at all because he's not doing anything of value with his life. He's in retirement.

I don't understand that. He says, so you've laid up many goods for many years. Take your ease, relax, eat and drink.

You've earned it. You don't you don't earn that in the kingdom of God. You work for God.

And then when you got that done, you work some more for God. And then when you got

that done, you work some more and then you work until you die. You don't find any retirement in the Bible.

Certainly not from the work of God, and all of us are in the work of God. If you're working at a regular job that pays you a paycheck, that's fine. That's what God called you to do.

Once you can retire from that, maybe God's got something really productive for you to do. My father-in-law, who I mentioned earlier, gave away his second million dollars back about the time I met him. And ever since then, he's been working.

He's 75 years old. He works 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, building up a company because he wants to be rich so he can give it all to Haiti. He's given most of his money there already.

And he lives for one thing, and that's to promote the kingdom of God. Retiring never crossed his mind. 75 years old.

Why? He's just starting. He's ready to start another company. Because he wants to serve God until the day he dies.

I can't imagine anyone justifying any other attitude from the Bible. But seeking ease, seeking comfort, even later in life. Now, I'm not saying it's wrong to retire from one kind of work because you don't need to work there anymore and you can draw some kind of a pension for it, and then you can be supported by that to do something really productive for the kingdom of God.

I'm in favor of that. If I was working at a regular kind of a job, I would be looking forward to that. I'd be looking forward to retirement from that.

So that I can then do something that my heart's really in. And even be supported by it. That's fine.

Don't think I'm saying you should never retire. What I don't understand is people who think in terms of, I'll work hard until I'm 60 or 62 or 65, and then I won't work hard anymore. I'll relax.

I'm working for my comfort. I'm working for my 30 years vacation. There's no vacation in the kingdom of God.

Now, I shouldn't say that. I just don't take any vacations. But if you take a vacation, that's between you and God.

But there's no 30-year vacation. When God releases you from one commission, and if that's the commission of supporting your family and so forth, and you get able to retire from some work, then he's got some other commission for you, and look for it. Look for it.

He's got something for you to do. The fields are white unto harvest, and the laborers are few. God's not laying anyone off.

They work until they die. And then, remember Jesus told this story in Luke chapter 17. He said, Which of you having a servant plowing in his field or working out in his field, when he comes in after a long day's work, which of you will say, Well, sit down and take your ease, and let me serve you.

Jesus said, No, servants don't expect that. That's not what the master does. The master comes in from working all day in the heat of the sun, and the servant, what does he do then? Then he serves his master food and cleans up the kitchen.

And after everything's done, and there's nothing else to do, then the servant sits down and has his dinner. And Jesus said, That's how you're supposed to think about this. He says, So also, when you've done everything that you are commanded to do, say, I'm an unprofitable servant.

I've done only what is my duty to do. But in our society, even in the church, we have people who love money. They love vanity.

They love ease and comfort and convenience. These loves do not produce Christian character. These pursuits are values unworthy of God and of his people.

There's another thing that people in the world value and seek after that's not proper for Christians, and that is worldly honor, prestige, pomp, status. You want to be respected. This exists in churches, too.

This exists even among pastors, very much so. Being a pastor these days has become for many a professional vocation. You know, a pastor goes to, in some cases, goes to as much school as a medical doctor goes to, sometimes more.

I know pastors who've got, earned three or four PhDs. I mean, they just go to school forever. I mean, these guys are professionals.

And I'm not saying they shouldn't get PhDs. Maybe there's some value in that. What I'm saying is, when a man of God begins to think like a professional, he begins to think in terms of having the rights of a professional.

He should be paid like a professional. He should have the recognition in his field of a professional. He should succeed in his field like a professional seeks to succeed.

And the indicators of success in pastoring churches is you've got large buildings, lots of people, big budget. You get promoted to a bigger church every few years because you're doing real good. And then you're invited to speak at all the conventions.

Eventually, you're the vice president of the denomination. Eventually, you're the

chairman. And this is, you know, prestigious.

Yeah, there's prestigiousness in the institutional church. And there's all that at your job and at other places, too, and just in society. Some people would be ashamed driving an older car because of what people might think of them or wearing a dress they got from the Goodwill.

The love for honor, for respect, for prestige is unworthy of Christians. Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 5, verse 44, he said, How can you believe they didn't, by the way? He said, How can you believe who seek the honor that comes from each other and do not seek the honor that comes only from God? If you want people to honor you, you're in the wrong religion. You get all upset because suddenly we see laws being passed and rulings and, you know, policies and so forth that are making the Christians kind of marginalized in society.

Ever notice that? Ever notice we're getting marginalized instead of mainstreamed? Well, Christians get all upset about this. We're being marginalized. We used to be so respected.

Well, welcome to history, you know. Welcome to Christianity. If people put you down, if they speak evil of you, if they ruin your reputation, Jesus said, Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, great is your reward in heaven.

If you are dishonored by man for Christ's sake, then you are honored by God. To seek for worldly honor is a wrong value, but it's there. It's there among Christians as well as non-Christians.

These values, if allowed to be the dominant desires and those that dictate career choices and leisure time usage and money expenditure and so forth, if those are the issues, you will never be a principled Christian. Your character will not be that of a Christian. Now, on the other hand, there are specific things that the Bible tells us we should pursue as our values, as the goals that we seek.

The things that we allow, our desire for these things must be allowed to be dominant. There are six of them in the notes I've given you. There certainly are more in the Bible, but these are fairly broad categories.

First of all, these are a godly person's values and pursuits. First of all, a godly person desires unbroken fellowship with God. David said in Psalm 27, for one thing, have I desired of the Lord and that will I seek after that I might dwell in the house of God all the days of my life.

He didn't mean the church building. There were no church buildings. He was talking, of course, about the tabernacle, but that was because that was the place where he went to meet with God.

We can meet with God in our room. But the point is, he wanted to be in fellowship with God. This thing I will seek, this one thing that I might dwell in the house of the Lord forever, that I might meditate in his temple, that I might behold the beauty of the Lord.

This was an obsession with David. This was his value. This is what he valued more than most things.

No wonder God chose him to be the king. God had chosen a man after his own heart. And David's heart was after God.

And David was after God's heart. That is a godly value. Now, you know, to desire that you have unbroken fellowship with God will keep you from sin.

When you are tempted to sin, if your other desire is that you not interrupt your enjoyment of God and his enjoyment of you, then that lesser desire to sin will not have its way. Because sin, though it may not damn you, and of course that's why Christians sometimes do sin, they reason in themselves, well, I could be forgiven of this. You know, I'm under grace.

I'm strongly tempted to do this thing, and if I do it, I know it's the wrong thing, but after all, by this time tomorrow I can be forgiven, it'd be as if nothing ever happened. Well, that's not exactly true. It's not as if nothing ever happened.

You break your communion with God when you offend him, when you grieve his spirit. David didn't want to grieve God. David wanted to dwell permanently, unbrokenly in the presence of God and enjoy his fellowship there.

That's a good value. He said, that's what I'm going to seek after. Another thing is to seek after God's favor as opposed to man's favor.

Paul said in Galatians 1.10, If I were still seeking to please men, I would not be the servant of Christ. If one of the things you're desiring for your life is to have people be pleased with you, then serving Christ is not for you. Now, you might find people aren't pleased with you.

I find some people are pleased with me when I serve the Lord, but there's some people who aren't. You'll have some who do. Jesus said, Woe unto you when all men speak well of you.

You'll have some who speak well of you if you're a good person, if you're a godly person. Even some non-believers will acknowledge that you're a good person. But there will be some who will not.

And if you're hoping to please men, you're on the wrong track. Pleasing God is the obsession of the godly person. In Philippians chapter 3, picking up just in the middle of

Paul's discussion here at verse 7, he says, But what things were gained to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

Yet indeed, I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that righteousness which is through faith in Christ. I want God to see me as righteous. I want God to be favored toward me.

I want God to think I'm good, not other people. All the things I did as a Pharisee, he says, I excelled in them. I had prestige.

I had the favor of my contemporaries. But he says, I've counted all that rubbish. Now I want one thing.

I want God's favor. I want God to say, there's a righteous man. I want God to say, yes, I like him.

I don't care what anyone else says or anyone else thinks. The desire to have God's favor has got to be a dominant desire in the spiritual person. Also, the desire for righteousness.

And by righteousness, I mean by that not imputed righteousness, although I believe in that, obviously. We just read about that. Paul said, I want to have a righteousness that's not of the law, but which is of Christ by faith.

I believe in righteousness imputed by faith. But there's also something more, and that is righteous behavior. In 1 John, John said, he that doeth righteousness is righteous.

Is that easy? Who's a righteous person? The one who does righteous things. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. The desire to be righteous, in other words, to be doing what pleases God, what is right in the sight of God.

That desire has got to be dominant in the life of the believer, or else temptations will draw him or her away. Jesus said in Matthew 5, 6, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Hunger and thirst, two of the most dominant cravings of human nature.

The raging thirst, the raging hunger. David had it. David said, Oh God, I like heart pants for the water books, so my heart pants for you.

Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness? That is to be righteous, to do what is right and to see righteousness prevailing the earth. God wants righteousness to prevail in the earth. Do you? Do you share his desire for that? In Matthew 6, 33, Jesus said, Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Now, I realize that we could interpret that strictly of being righteous myself before God in the imputed sense. And I believe that that is obviously a major New Testament doctrine. But I believe you also find in the scripture a concern about doing what is right, doing the righteous thing.

Because why? Because God is pleased with righteousness and displeased with unrighteousness. It is because of unrighteousness that people go to hell. Obviously, God is not pleased with it.

And that for which he allows unbelievers to go to hell. Do you think that's something that he likes when he sees believers do it? If it offends him so greatly that he'd send an unsaved person to hell for it. Do you think he's not offended when a Christian does these things? Unrighteousness.

You should have a passion for righteousness. God does. And a man of God will too.

Also, a godly person values and pursues after the kingdom of God. Same verse I mentioned earlier. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

And all these things we added to you. Jesus said in Matthew 11, 12, he said, And from the time of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of God has suffered violence and violent people take it by force. Now, he's not talking about violent people attacking it, although in the first phrase he does.

He says the kingdom of God has suffered violence. He is talking about people like Herod killing John the Baptist. But when he says violent men take it by force, he's talking about the fact that if you're going to take the kingdom, if you're going to seize it and have it and possess it, if you're going to seek the kingdom of God, you will obtain it.

Not without force, not without energy, not without commitment. Those who are opposed to the kingdom of God are forceful people. And those who obtain it must meet with that force, with the same determination.

In case you wonder whether that's the right interpretation of that verse, the parallel to it over in Luke chapter 12, I think it is, it says, The kingdom of God suffers violence and all men press into it. All men press into it. If you're going to get into the kingdom, you've got to press into the kingdom.

You've got to be one who is determined to get into the kingdom and who is obsessed with the promotion of the kingdom of God. How is the kingdom of God promoted? By the preaching of the gospel, by the teaching of the word of God, by the making of disciples, and by Christians growing up into Christ in all things and living like him and being a witness in their lives, corporately and individually. These things we should be desiring more than the things of the world.

Another dominant desire of the godly person is that he desires or she desires wisdom from God. Wisdom from God. God wants us to be wise.

You know, the desire to be holy in the Christian is not so much a matter of legalism as it is a matter of wisdom. Legalism is that attitude and that spirit that doesn't really want to do what's right, but feels compelled by rules, by laws, feels hemmed in, feels like they must do what's right, because there's consequences that they simply don't want to bring upon themselves if they disobey. And therefore, the rules hem them in and govern their lives.

That's legalism. A Christian lives a holy life, hopefully not for that reason, although we appreciate the fact there are laws of God and there are consequences for breaking them, but that shouldn't be the thing that motivates us. Wisdom itself, the appreciation for the fact that there is a spiritual world and things eternal matter more than things temporal, and God's favor matters more than man's favor, and everything temporal that you have, you can't take it with you, and you're going to have all of eternity either to rejoice in or to regret every choice you make on this earth.

Those kinds of things, bringing yourself into conformity, that wisdom is what will lead you to live a holy life, even holier necessarily than the law would require, because God actually gave laws that were more lenient than what he preferred. Remember when he allowed divorce, but Jesus said, but that's not really what God wanted from the beginning. He permitted you to divorce because the heart is your heart, but he didn't really want that from the beginning.

There are things that the law allowed that God didn't really prefer. He just kind of gave you some slack. A legalist will stay within the law, but a godly and wise person will appreciate the fact that whatever God really wants most is what is really best for me, best for all people concerned.

Therefore, I want that. I want God's wisdom. I want God to show me what he wants, what is good, what is wise, what is proper, to desire wisdom.

You know, that wisdom is not obtained without strong desire. It doesn't just come floating in to the person who's casually looking the other way, watching TV. In Proverbs chapter 2, here's how we get wisdom.

Proverbs 2, 1 through 5 says, My son, if you receive my words and treasure my commands within you so that you incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding. Yes, if you cry out for discernment, that's another word for wisdom, and you lift up your voice for understanding. If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hid treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

This is not something that you get easily. This is something you get by making it your obsession, crying out for it, seeking it. Do you desire the wisdom of God? If so, that will be reflected in how much you read your Bible.

It will be reflected in how much you meditate on the word of God because really, wisdom comes not only from reading the Bible, but from meditating day and night on it. There are many things that I personally came to understand about the Scripture, not when I was reading it, but when I was reflecting on it, when I was turning over my mind, when I was driving down the street, scrubbing the floor, washing the window, doing something else, and it was on my mind. It was rolling it over, meditating on it, chewing it up, and some insight would come.

Wisdom comes through God's word. Through reading it, through meditating on it day and night. The wise person meditates day and night on the word of God.

And therefore, a godly person will want to be absorbing as often as possible the things of God's word. And one other thing that is a godly desire that the righteous will have as a dominant desire and a value is valuing the things of God. Now that may seem very generic, and in a way it is.

The reason I chose that term, things of God, is because Jesus said that. Jesus said that to Peter. When Jesus told the disciples at Caesarea Philippi that he was going to be crucified and told them some of the things that were going to be happening soon in Jerusalem, Peter took them aside and rebuked them and said, Not so, Lord, this can't happen to you.

We won't let this happen to you. And Jesus turned back to Peter and says, Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to me.

He says, because you do not savor the things of God. You savor the things of man. Now, I wonder if we're a stumbling block sometimes to Jesus.

If we're an offense to Him. Because we too may be guilty of savoring, valuing, esteeming the things of man rather than the things of God. Well, what was the case there? Peter was revolted at the thought of Jesus dying on a cross.

He was repulsed by the thought. And yet, that was God's thing. That was God's plan.

It pleased the Lord to bruise him, it says in Isaiah 53. It was God's pleasure to bring about the salvation of man. But it's so contrary to man's ways.

God's ways and man's ways are not the same. And the things that man values are not the things God values. There's a verse, I believe it's Luke 16, 15.

Jesus said, the things that are highly esteemed among men are an abomination to God.

Wow. Those are strong words.

Abominations are very strong words. And He said, the things that are highly esteemed, values of man, those things are an abomination to God. That's Luke 16, 15, I'm pretty sure.

If it's not, then it's Luke 16, 17. So, the values of man and the values of God are different. And a godly man has set his heart on the things of God.

What are the things of God? Well, the people of God, for one thing. Who do you like to hang out with? Who are you attracted to? Who do you admire? Who do you, who would you rather just spend all day with? Some godly person? Or someone who in some other worldly sense is famous or attractive or somehow other? Or just people who are worldly? Because they're fun. I don't find them very much fun, to tell you the truth, but some people do.

Well, fun, I guess, is a thing of man. It's a value that, yeah, I didn't bring that up. Fun.

There's a false value for you. I can't tell you how many times just in the last few months I've had to correct my children about this. I've said, don't do, they're doing something.

They say, don't do that. I say, but it's fun. Don't do that.

But it's fun. Ever heard a kid give that as an excuse for doing something? I've had to tell them again and again. Fun is not a reason for doing anything.

If I say don't do it, you might argue that it's wise to do it. And I don't realize that it's wise. That it's profitable to do it.

But don't say it's fun because fun is not an argument for anything. Fun is not a value that determines Christian behavior. Now, is it fun to be saved? I think it's fun to be saved.

I think I enjoy my life more than almost anyone I know. I don't know why I call it fun. I call it joy.

I mean, maybe it's fun. I don't know. I think fun is what the world seeks when they don't have joy.

And joy comes from seeking the favor of God and finding it. In His presence is fullness of joy. And at His right hand are pleasures forevermore, it says in Psalm 16.

So, seeking the things of God, the people of God, the word of God, the work of God. To savor the things of God. Suffering if it pleases God, rather than being comfortable if it doesn't please God.

Peter offended Jesus because he savored the things of man and not the things of God. A

person of principle must savor the things of God. And those things of God must become the dominant desires in his life or her life.

Now, next time, we're going to continue this discussion of the principle of life. And we'll talk about what the basic principles are that govern a godly, principled life. And I'll ask you not to skip ahead in the notes and steal my thunder.

Put those away. Put them up in your Bible. Don't get those out between now and next Friday.

And we'll take the rest of these notes after that.