

If you've been here long, we do a book and we do a series and we do a book and we do a series. That's just kind of how we've done it. The thinking was that we have done an excellent job over the last seven years of making the gospel explicit here. We've worked really hard to get you to understand what the gospel is and what it's not. So we always want to come back to the cross. We always want to come back to the fact that we're justified before God and not by behavioral modifications, but by the cross of Jesus Christ alone. That's the message. We want to come back to it over and over and over again because when we got here, we found that there was a great deal of confusion about what it meant to be a Christian, what the fundamental message of Christianity was. For whatever reason, we grew up in a period of time where the pendulum had swung over to what we call moralistic deism or "You had better behave this way or God's going to be angry at you." And so we were not listening to secular music, not going to certain places, not watching certain movies. That was just kind of the message we got.

So what you started seeing was kids who grew up in church, grew up in youth group and when they graduated high school, they just disappeared for a season. They just wanted nothing to do with the church. So as we began to meet you and began to talk with you as you began to reengage here at the Village, it was just that kind of story where you're like, "I didn't understand. I was trying to do this, I was trying not to do this. I wasn't any good at it. I kept failing, I kept stumbling and so I finally just walked away." So we got this story over and over again, and it went something like this, that you went to a fall retreat with a youth group, somebody preached and they did worship for an hour and a half until everybody got saved again and you came up and went, "I'm never going to struggle again. I'm never going to look at pornography again. I'm never messing around with my boyfriend/girlfriend again. I'm not going to do this. I'm not going to do that." And then you would go home, and for three weeks you would do awesome maybe. The more disciplined ones got to about three weeks. And then you would fall off the wagon and get back in all that you were doing. But you were in luck, because in February, Disciple Now rolled around. So you got to go to Disciple Now, they would bring in another speaker and band, the same kind of thing would happen, you'd come down the altar in tears going, "I'm not going to live like that anymore. I'm not going to do that anymore." And then you would make it from two days to three weeks before you're right back in that old life. Now, the good news is there was some sort of Spring retreat also. And the same thing starts all over again in this cycle of insanity. Every year, from 7th grade to your senior year in high school, you made nine commitments and got baptized like twice a year, which was great for your home church, because we got to keep reporting those numbers. And then one of two things happens. You either grow weary of that game because it's exhausting or you play that same game in college. So now instead of Disciple Now, you're going to Passion. Now you're not going to a youth camp; you're working at a youth camp. You just go from being a part of those things to leading in those things, but nothing has really changed in regards to that cycle of insanity where you continue to walk away from the Lord trying to modify your behavior and being miserable the whole time.

As we began to hear this story over and over again, it became evident to us that we don't know the gospel. We just don't know it. We can kind of say it, "Oh, Jesus died for my sins," but we don't understand the great exchange and we don't understand justification. So at the Village, we just want to come back to it over and over again. If you come to Christmas Eve at the Village, you're going to hear about the cross. If you come on Easter, you're going to hear about the cross. If everybody is healthy here, you're going to hear about the cross. If everybody gets sick here, you're going to hear about the cross. If we celebrate, we celebrate the cross. If we mourn, we mourn with the cross in view. Over and over and over again, we're going to come back to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ that has justified us before

God. So from what we teach children to what we teach teenagers, we want to keep coming back to this fundamental message. But one of the things we started picking up on as we were coming out of Luke is that, although we feel like you understand what the explicit gospel is, some of the tools that enable us to mature in our faith and grow in our faith seem to be progressing more slowly. So we took a step back and said, "Why don't we address progressive sanctification then?" Not justification, not what makes us right and pure before God, but rather how do we grow in the fullness of what was purchased for us in the cross? And that started for us "The Path" series." How do we passionately follow Jesus Christ with the cross in view so we don't just go right back to dead religion?

So we started in week 1 with the authoritative word of God. We started with the Bible. And I didn't want to start it from some historic, "why you should listen to the Bible" angle, but I more wanted to just go, "Let's think about this relationally." My mother, who is a godly, beautiful woman, encouraged me almost every day of my life, but she also very often drew near and said, "Don't ever do that again." My dad taught me the value of hard work, not by talking to me about work but by making me work hard. There were multiple people when I was growing up who would often engage me, rebuke me and say, "This isn't okay." Now, I had a little bit of a rebellious spirit or what adults called "an authority issue." Even when I knew they were right back then, I didn't want to admit they were right, so I would argue. Even to this day, I think I can win a verbal argument if we get into one. Sometimes, even though we would argue, I knew that they were right and I needed to mature in this area, I needed to stop that or I needed to start that. And even when I got into preaching, a guy named J.R. Vassar, the pastor at Apostles Church in New York City, sat me down after one of my sermons and just went, "You know, you did a really good job in Hebrews 12 there, but you might want to go back and read Hebrews 11. Because Hebrews 11 will actually help you preach Hebrews 12 correctly." We giggle about that to this day, but to tell you the truth, that was the day I went, "I will never proof-text again." I will always know what is before and what is after a text from now on because of that conversation. Steve Hardin, who is the campus pastor down in Dallas, sat me down when I was in college, and I didn't lie, I just didn't tell the whole truth. But he sat me down and said, "If you want to be a man of God, if you want to stand in front of people and be a man of God, you don't get that liberty. A half truth is still a lie." That devastated me. Now here's why I'm saying all of that. I don't know in any one of those circumstances that I liked what I heard, but here I am at 35 unbelievably grateful to God that people loved me enough to engage me and say, "Nuh uh."

And the thing that makes the Scriptures so important to us in regards to the spiritual growth is they're going to confront us. So it becomes problematic when you pick and choose and say, "I like this part of the Bible, but I don't like this part of the Bible. I like what God says here, but I don't like what He says here." When you do that, you rob yourself of intimacy with God and any real relationship with others. You isolate yourself so you are the greatest authority in your life. What you think trumps everything and everyone else. You have isolated yourself to a place of loneliness and despair that will haunt you the rest of your life. There's no way you get to intimacy and no way you get to mature and grow as a human being in that type of isolation. So over and over and over again the Scriptures are going to confront us. They are going to reveal in us error. They are going to show us where we believe we are smarter than God. And so we started in week 1 going, "The path starts with the Word. The Word begins to show us God's disclosure of Himself. This is where He wants us to walk." Now what we like to do in this day and age is look at culture and go, "But our culture says this. The Bible is at odds with our culture, so let's redefine Scripture according to culture." That happens all over the place, as if you can make Jesus cool enough for everybody. It's not going to happen. I don't care how cool you are, how hip you are, what you wear, how you talk, how technologically advanced you get, whether you have lasers or smoke or get Evel Knievel to jump across the stage, no matter what you work to make Jesus cool enough for everybody, it's not happening. Now that's not going to stop a great deal of Evangelicals from trying, but the Scriptures dictate to culture, not culture to Scripture. So we go back to the Word, and let the Word lean on us. I'm not saying I always like it. I'm not telling you that everything I read in the Bible I go, "Wow, I'm glad I just read that." Now I eventually get there, but sometimes the Bible is extremely painful. It even says, "The Word of God separates bone and marrow." That means it cuts deep.

So that's where we started. Now we moved from the authoritative Word in week 1 to week 2, which was confession and repentance as a continuing ethic. In that we said that, as believers in Christ, we're not going to mature, confess and repent less and less and less, but rather more and more and more. And in 1 John 1 & 2, he really kind of unpacks that there are ways to look at your life. One is to say that there's no sin in you. If you do that, you're a liar and you reveal that the truth is not in you, you don't understand the Scriptures and you don't understand the state of your own heart. The second path is that if we confess our sins, then He will be faithful and just to forgive us of all unrighteousness. So we actually will confess and repent more and more and more, because you understand your heart because the Scriptures are revealing both the character of God and your heart to you. So I think a mature believer doesn't go, "Oh man, I've got to stop this behavior." The mature Christian looks at his life and goes, "There is much in me that loves the world more than it loves the Lord, and I hate that." That's maturity. It's not, "Here's a behavior that needs to be modified." Rather it's, "In my soul, there is rebellion still, and I hate it." So we talked about how we're going to always confess and we're going to always repent. We're never going to get to that point here where that's not necessary anymore. That was week 2.

Then week 3 was about prayer, which was what we talked about last week. It was the prayer and sovereignty piece where God is sovereign over all things AND we are to plead with Him, ask Him, beg Him and grab hold of His garment and not let it go. And then we moved on from prayer to community and what community is. We talked about community a little bit differently. We talked about it in light of the Trinity and said three things about it. The first thing was that Gospel community freely cares for the good of others. So when the gospel penetrates our heart and we've been saved by grace and begin to walk in the Word, begin to confess and repent, begin to pray to God, He calls us not just to Himself but to each other and He forms this body of believers. So in that, we care for the good of one another, and we do that in multiple ways. Number one, we delight in one another. Like your strengths are a delight to me. I'm praying that my strengths are a delight to you. We are not threatened by each other's strengths; we delight in them. You are not me, I am not you, we are different. You're different from the people in your home groups. You all have different gifts. We don't look at other people's gifts with jealousy; we exalt that God has gifted them like that. And then we're grateful that we become better, we become stronger, we know the Lord more deeply because of the gifts given to them. Now, I would love to play music like Bleecker or Isaac or John play music. I would love to be able to do that, but it is not my aptitude, it is not how I'm wired, it's just not in me. But I don't watch those guys play and go, "God, why don't I have that? I want that." No, I'm going, "Praise God for those guys. Praise God that He did that in them, that He created that in them, that He stirred that up in them, that He gifted them that way. So we don't walk in jealousy towards one another; we celebrate one another. And that's one of the ways we delight in one another.

We delight in one another by spending good time together. From my family to my friends, there are few things that bring me joy than good company. And then we celebrate together. I've joked about this since we preached it years ago. In Leviticus, God really does threaten His people with death if they don't stop and celebrate. "If you don't stop, if you don't celebrate, I will kill you." So we celebrate together. The other thing we do is help those in need. In tragedy, in dark times, we rally and we help. That's been evident in my own journey here, but it has been evident in a hundred other people's journey here before it was my turn. So we rally in need when there is one, whether that be financial or just a ministry of presence. After my surgery, the coolest thing about coming in and out (because I was on a lot of morphine) is I would come to for just a second and I would see my dad. And then I didn't care anymore. I knew I was alright, and I could just go back out. And then I would come to and see Bleecker and I knew I was alright and I would just go back out. And I would come to again and I would see Patterson and I could just go back out. I wasn't going, "Where am I? What's going on? What's the prognosis? What did they find?" I could just breathe, because I had brothers there. I'd come to and see my wife and go, "I know that's my wife. Good, they didn't cut that part out." It's just amazing what happens when people can just come be there with you, right? And that's what we do. That's what gospel community does.

The other thing that gospel community comes back to confession, repentance and the authority of the Word. Gospel community is not cowardice. They're willing to say, "Bro, this is an issue in your life, and you need to do some business with it. We love each other by being honest with one another. If we see someone getting close to something that's dangerous to their soul, we don't just bunker down and go, "Oh God, I hope that ends well for them." We engage. We go, "Look man, I'm not trying to start a fight. I love you. Hopefully you know I love you. Hopefully I've walked with you in such a way that you know that I love you, but what you're doing right now is spiritually and eternally dangerous." And we engage as gospel community.

Gospel community walks in equality. It is a cultural phenomenon, a cultural leaning to scratch the back of those who can scratch your back. So you love on those who can love on you back. The gospel destroys all of that because God, in His triune nature, took care of everything. That means you have nothing to offer Him that He needs. So all that you have, all that you are, to everyone else, is also subordinate. You have been given gifts by God. Everyone in this room has been given gifts by God, certain nuances, skill sets, passions, things that you're good at. They were given to you for one of two reasons: for your enjoyment of the glory of God and for the building up of the body. So your gift is subordinate to the glory of God. My gift as a teacher, Bleecker's, Isaac's and John's gifts as worship leaders were not given for just them. They were given to them for the exaltation of Christ among the body. The same is true of you. You have nothing to lord over anyone. You are subordinate. We all are. There is One who gets glory, One who owns all things, One who is the Author and Perfecter of all things. It's not you, it's not me, it's not John Piper, it's God Himself. And this is what Gospel community understands, that we are all subordinate. So, it creates this atmosphere where we serve one another and we understand that our gifts are about building each other up. We are to serve one another in our differences and in our likenesses.

And the last thing we talked about is that gospel community communes deeply. And this is kind of that deep love that we should have for one another as we are rooted together in Christ alone, which means we have the same hope. Our hope is not just long life, healthy babies and the American dream. Our hope is in the fact that there is a new heaven and a new Earth, the kingdom of God being fully established. That's where our hope is. We've put all our chips there. And maybe you don't know that you have, but you have put all your chips there. Like I said last week, you're going to die. You are going to die, just like me. In fact, at this point in the message, we are 20 minutes closer to it. And some of us are going to live to be 93, but most of us aren't. It's happening, it's coming. We're all on a countdown clock, and we've pushed all our chips in on the grace of Jesus Christ. So we commune deeply because we've all banked on that together. When we do the Lord's Supper here, when you do it at your home group, part of what we're doing is going, "I'm still in. I still believe. I'm putting my hope in You with this." When we come together as a community, we're celebrating, "This is where our hope is." We commune deeply with one another in the understanding of what we've already covered, that all we have and all we've been given was given to us by God for Him and for the building up of one another into the fullness of Christ.

From there, we got into the sermon on marriage. I was a little ramped up that week because I had gotten some hate mail. It could have been the tumor. I'll blame it on that because I can and there's nothing you can do about it. We talked about men and women in the confines of marriage and how that works toward sanctification and how that really reveals things in us. I started with the women, because the Bible always starts with women when it addresses marriage. We said just a couple of things to the women. In 1 Peter, He command the woman to put her hope in God, not in her husband, not in her children, not in her external beauty. And if she tries to put it in those other things, they will betray her. Remember how we made fun of Jerry Maguire and "you complete me." No he doesn't. He does not possess that power. If you put that weight on him, it will crush him. He cannot do it. Men make miserable gods. So He commands the woman, "Put your hope in God." In regards to her husband, He commands the woman to be respectful, to be pure and to be gentle and quiet. It doesn't mean that you just sit there and let your husband be an idiot. It means that you engage him with

gentleness and respect. And I gave you a couple of examples of this. Lauren does an excellent job, when I'm doing what I'm not supposed to be doing, of respectfully engaging me to reengage like I should. So she'll come in and go, "Hey, will you help me with this verse?" She's so much smarter than I am, so I always giggle when she does that, because I know she knows." She doesn't come in and go, "Why do you hate our family? Why do you refuse to lead us like God has commanded you to? When are you going to be the man God has asked you to be?" I've never met a man who responds well to that. Even if you get him to do what you want, if he's angry in his heart towards it, you haven't won. In fact, you've taken a step in the wrong direction. So this is what He commands the woman.

And then He gets into the man. He tells the man to be considerate. Here at the Village we are complimentarians, which means we believe we were created by God equally yet distinct. It is far more offensive to say to a woman, "There is no difference you and a man," than it is to say, "No, we're different." We're equal; we're just different. So what ends up happening in that world view is the guy starts to believe, "My role is to bring home the bacon, and the rest of it is on her." So she works all day, God bless her, with the kids and doing all sorts of other things, and then you come home and plop down and your role in the evening is somehow watching the same episode of SportsCenter over and over again while she gets the dishes clean and gets the kids to bed. I'm saying you're an idiot. Get up, be considerate, put your kids to bed, clean the dishes. Be considerate. That's what the Scriptures command you to do. And then He says show honor by treating her like porcelain. It says, "weaker vessel," but it means porcelain. So we talked about how you as the husband have a duty to find, encourage and massage your wife's gifts so that she can grow into the fullness of those gifts. The Bible says that were you do your job, your wife should be like a blossoming flower, like a vine. So in my house, my wife is an artist, and so that means we have a piano, I got her a computer that she can record her stuff on and write songs and record them, and I create space as best I can so she can write and express her creativity. I put our kids down at night so she's got a little time at the end of the day just to breathe and read and write and do those things. So I think you have a duty to do that. I also want to encourage you to lose the little arguments so when it comes time to lead, you can lead. Some of you guys are just wound so tight and have to be right so badly that you'll argue about everything. You'll win every small skirmish at the cost of the war. There have been two or three times in my marriage where there was a very difficult decision that needed to be made and Lauren and I weren't exactly on the same page, so I had to go, "Okay, do you trust me on this? I know that if it goes bad, it goes bad, but will you trust me on this?" And thank God she's always said yes. The philosophy I have operated under during our ten years of marriage is that I don't sweat the small stuff. So I don't pick the music in our car, she does. And by the way, we have very different tastes in music. I don't decorate our house. I don't pick the movies when we go to movies. Lauren picks the movies. So I have seen the same movie over and over and over again, which is what they call romantic comedies. But she also likes some action movies, which is good. And my theory was, "Who cares about that stuff? That stuff is small." But then when it's, "Hey, I know we've just lived in this house for three months, but I think God's calling us to Highland Village First Baptist Church," that's a big one. I don't want to lose that one because I argued about what we were going to listen to in the car. I don't want to lose that one because I said, "No, we're seeing Rambo 7, and we're seeing it tonight on our anniversary." There's just this exchange. So I'll lose the small battles. And it's not really losing; it's more of just going, "I'm not going to make this a hill to even fight on." So we covered that, and then I ended on what the text ends on. And that's, "Don't be an idiot. Because if you treat your wife cruelly, you're going to hinder your prayers," which is what 1 Peter says. It says, "If you do not treat your wife like she's a coheir with you, if you treat her like she's some sort of subordinate to you, you're going to hinder your prayers." Think about that in light of what we taught last week and what we've taught on prayer. You treating your wife as some sort of subordinate to you hinders your prayers. That's a thick, scary verse.

Then we moved from there into generosity. I think it grows very difficult to mature in your relationship with Jesus Christ until you see and understand that all that you have and all that you own are His. Ownership of anything is a myth. You own nothing. Everything that you have, all that you are has been given to you by God and for God. You touching it and making it yours, you pretending as though you own it makes you a blasphemer. At what point in your mother's womb

did you decide that you would have the aptitudes and gifts that you have? Whether that be athletically, whether that be in the world of business, whether that be how you see numbers, how you hold on to stories, where did that come from? That was given to you by God for a reason. Here's the thing. We hate this about kids. It drives us crazy when we get our kids something and then ten minutes later ask to see it and they go, "No, it's mine." You're like, "It's not yours. I just bought it for you. You own nothing. You live in my house. You think that's your room? No, your room is in my house. Those are your clothes? Really? Where did you get them? Daddy bought them for you at Wal-mart? Then they're not yours." This drives us crazy about kids that can't seem to grasp that they own nothing. But we really believe and behave that way towards the Lord constantly. "This is my money, my house, my car, my gifts, my days off, my free time, mine." We act that way towards the Lord and don't see the correlation between us behaving that way towards the God who gave us all things and the way our seven year old acts when we ask back for what we have given. So we talked a great deal about generosity and the need to be generous in all things, to be open-handed in our living.

And then right before Thanksgiving, we covered Sabbath and solitude. We talked about the fact that God demands rest out of us, that life has a way of endlessly piling up on itself until all that really matters and is beautiful is obscured to us. So all there is left is works and things and tasks to do and you no longer see the beauty of your wife and your marriage, you no longer see the beauty of your kids and the park, you no longer stop and realize that you're on a tiny little speck in the middle of this massive universe. You lose all of that. Beauty, meaning, truth all goes out the window and is replaced with a haze and a fog of dizziness that robs the soul of meaning, that robs the soul of purpose, that robs the soul of that connection to the Creator God. So I just encouraged you in regards to the Sabbath, in regards to those days where everything gets turned off. You should have those days where you read the Word, where you do communion with good friends, where you go for a walk, where you drink a glass of good wine with good friends, where you have buy groceries and cook dinner and eat it with good friends. Those days are important.

So this is what we've covered up until this point. So now let's turn to Romans 6. I've never kept it a secret that there were some very frustrating things early on in my walk with Jesus Christ. I just didn't quite grasp all of it, so what I got at youth camp was, "Give your life to Christ, trust Him and things will be better." And what happened was I gave my life to Christ, I fell very much in love with Him, but I struggles for a very long time with a lot of things. And then my experience in church was, if anyone else was struggling like I was struggling, they sure were pretty quiet about it. So I began to think that something was wrong with me, but I was torn because I really did love the Lord. I had a deep love for the Lord, I had a deep love for the Bible, I wanted to know the answers, but I had some serious lust issues, I had some serious anger issues, some serious trust and bitterness issues. I just had some things that were wrong in my heart. And the reason I can articulate so well to you the cycle of insanity is because I lived it for quite some time. Romans 6 was a eureka moment for me. So let's look at Romans 6, starting in verse 1. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" Now those two verses right there were the problem in and of itself for me. Because he's asking a question that I didn't know the answer to. He's saying, "Shall we go on sinning? By no means." Well here's my problem: I'm sinning, I'm continuing in my sin. And so he's going, "Not only are we not going to, but how is it even possible? If you're dead to sin how can you continue to walk in it? So this was a problem for me. Is it a problem for you? It was huge 12 years ago for me, because I was really trapped in some things and couldn't figure out how to get out. And then my boy Paul here is saying, "How can you even do it?" And I'm going, "I don't know. Teach me." And thank God he does. Verse 3, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." I don't know what your background is. Some of us are Baptist, some of us aren't and some of us are and won't admit it. If you're a member of the Village Church, you're Baptist. Now if you've got a background in the Baptist church, then you've heard this during baptism, "Buried with Christ at His death, raised to walk in the newness of life." So we died with Jesus Christ, and baptism

is symbolic and more. And in that symbolism, we are dead to our old selves and raised to walk with Christ. That's what he's unpacking here.

Let's keep going. Verse 5, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God." Let me try to unpack this real quickly. Just a few months ago, I flew down to Houston to Clear Creek Community Church to do an Acts 29 function. That's about fifteen minutes away from where I graduated high school. So I hopped into the rental car and went down to good old Texas City/La Marque. As I drive into town, I see this field where I once got into a fight. It was a rare fight in that I won it and won it big. The second I saw that field, I felt shame. Because wherever that kid is now, there's anger in his heart over what happened in that field that day. It was not right, it was not fair, it was not just. It was wicked and horrible. And I felt shame. I drove by a couple of the houses that we lived in there, and at every one, all I could think of were wicked, dark things that I was a part of. And then I finally ended up at the church Christ saved me in and walked around there, and I had to preach the gospel to myself. It had been a long time since I had to do that. It had been a long time since I felt that kind of shame on me. I had to walk around that church going, "No, that Matt Chandler doesn't even exist anymore. That Matt Chandler is dead. That Matt Chandler died with Christ on the cross. That is not who I am. I am not marked by him, I am not owned by him and that is not my spirit, not my soul. He is dead, and I have been raised with Christ and walk in the newness of life." So that's what he's talking about. You and all that junk and where you're at now, all of that goes to the cross of Jesus Christ. That wrath being poured onto Jesus is about you, it's about all that stuff. That's what it's about. That's what we're doing in here. It's what we're celebrating. That field, those houses, all that darkness, all of that is off of me. I bear it no more. That's what we sing in It Is Well With My Soul. I bear it no more. My sins were nailed to the cross. It's over. Not just my past sins but my present sins and future sins were nailed to the cross of Christ. Which is why Romans 8 can say there's no condemnation for me. Because all of it was nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ and died with Him. And then this is where we get into the resurrection. The resurrection is now me walking in the newness of life. The flesh, my flesh has been weakened by the cross of Christ that has now freed me to pursue God, to behold God and be transformed by God and to not feel like I'm a slave to my sin.

Now let's keep reading, because he's going to give us a couple of pieces here that I think will help. So in light of the fact that your sins have been paid for by God on the cross of Christ, look at verse 11. "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." So you must consider that you are dead to sin and you are alive to Christ Jesus. I would say this. Some of you just have a self-pity problem. You go, "Oh, woe is me. I can't do this. This thing just owns me," and you pout. You sit and you pout in your sin. And he's saying, "Consider that all your sin is paid for and you've been made alive to God. Consider that that stuff doesn't bind you and keep you from the Lord, but that you're free to approach Him even though it's there." That's a profound text.

Look at where he goes next. Verse 12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God. . ." Okay, let's chat. In almost every one of our membership classes that I've been a part of, a twenty year old guy in the room has raised his hand and said, "If you had one thing to say to young men, what would it be?" And I think the thing I always aggressively go after young men for is passivity. It's this weak willed passivity where you don't take your sin seriously, you don't want to put anything to war and you just sit around and go, "Oh God, I wish I wasn't that way." There just seems to be no zeal for war, no desire to put anything to death. There's just this, "Oh, I hope this works out, but I'd rather not have to work at it or anything. Is there something You can do to just make this go away?" It's just this haphazard and lame attempt at putting

sin to death. And the text is going, "No, that's not how we're doing this." "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God. . ." Now I need to make a real clear distinction here, because one is about action and one is about a person. So he says here, "Don't present the members of your body, your hands, your eyes, your ears, your mind, don't present the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness." This is what your mama said, "Garbage in, garbage out." Be careful what you're digesting, but instead he says, "Present yourselves to God." So it's not just, "Don't do bad things; do good things instead." That's not what he said. He said, "Don't use your hands, mind and faculties to absorb sinful things, but rather press into God. Know the Person and work of God." One of the reasons I'm constantly trying to get you to read better books than read and to think more deeply than you think is because the Bible says it's by beholding God that we're transformed from one degree of glory to the next. That doesn't occur simply by modifying our behavior. It's in seeing and understanding the nature of God, the character of God, the beauty of God. And that's why he says here, "Present yourselves to God. Press into Him. Know Him. That's the goal." How do you do that? Well, that's what this whole series is about. Let's keep going. Verse 13, "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness." So now we're getting into some progressive sanctification. So now we go, "Okay, here are my eyes, here are my hands, here is my mind, here are my thoughts. Sanctify these things. Let these things be holy, let these things meditate on You." Now we're taking our bodies and putting them under the Lord and saying, "Let these things serve as an instrument to know You, to walk with You, to follow You." Here's where we start going back through "The Path" series and going, "Okay, if the authoritative Word is that kind of foundation, are we in it? Do we know it? Are we submitting to it? Are we reading it?" I don't believe that you're going to accidentally fall into godliness. If you're doing nothing today in regards to growing spiritually, you're probably not growing spiritually unless the Lord in just an infinite amount of grace just lights you up with something. So are you in the Word? Are you praying? Are you doing those things? Are you filling your mind, filling your heart and filling your world with weak temporary garbage or are you feasting in eternal, weighty, thick things? That's a legitimate question and one I think you need to answer.

Let's keep going. Verse 14, "For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." The best illustration I know is this. My youngest one, Nora, is at the point where she's starting to want to crawl a little bit. So it's not going to be long now before she works her way over to the coffee table, picks herself up, lets go and starts to stumble. She's going to take two or three steps, and then she's going to fall on the ground and we are going to freak out over it. Why? Because Nora is walking, despite the fact that it's not true at all. What really happened was she stood herself up, took three steps and fell down. But no one in the house is going to go, "The kid's an idiot." No one in the house is going to go, "Come on, are you serious? Three steps, that's what you've got? You're ten months old and you got three steps?" No one is going to do that. We're going to celebrate the three steps. Why? Because she's walking. So if you'll understand what Romans 6 teaches, then you'll realize that we take a couple of steps and then we fall, but we took a couple of steps. So we don't stay down on the ground and go, "Oh, I suck. I wish I didn't do that." No, you get up because we've been bought by grace, we're forgiven by God and we get up and press back into the Lord. We don't run from Him, we run to Him when we stumble, which is another one of those great shadows that the Lord gives us. When my son falls down and scuffs his knee, he doesn't run from me, he runs to me. That's not some sort of biological "Oh, that's neat." That's a picture given to us for what happens when we fall.

Now, look in verse 19. "I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification." That verse to me was the eureka moment, and here's why. When I walked in just pagan sinfulness, I was good at it. What I mean by that is I could lie, I could connive, I could



manipulate, I could schedule and I could be in two places at once if I needed to be. I worked hard at being bad and did it well. If it was a sport, I would have lettered early. According to this text, in the same way I used to plan, connive, manipulate and use a great deal of time, energy, effort and money to be wicked, leading to more wickedness, I should use the same amount of zeal to grow in righteousness. And that verse for me, for whatever reason, clicked in my heart and I said, "Okay, where I used my personality and intellect before to get what I wanted that led to lawlessness, I now want to use my personality and intellect to know the Lord deeply and to serve others. I now want to use the powers and gifts that God gave me to know Him fully and begin to redirect those efforts into knowing the Lord." So let me encourage you this way. I can't encourage you enough to get into the step studies. Some of you for four years have been going, "I'm going to do that. . .I'm going to do that. . .I'm going to do that," and you still haven't done it. It's just about to fire up again. Just do it. "Well, it's so busy." It's always going to be busy. It has been busy for four years. There's not coming a time where, all of a sudden, you're like, "All I have is weekends off. Saturdays for the next sixteen weeks is wide open." That day is never coming. You just need to make it a priority in your life to grow spiritually. It has been a secondary thought. So this is my hope for you, that we would see sin put to death in our lives and that we would press into the Lord and see godliness and a desire for godliness to really take off.

Let me pray for us. "Father, I thank You for these men and women. I just thank You that You let me preach again. I pray that Your Holy Spirit would really settle these things deeply into our hearts. I pray that, where we have grown lax or lazy in our pursuit of You, You would convict us deeply and that You would restore in us a desire to know You fully. Help us. Forgive us. We really are weak willed creatures, and we really do, as C.S. Lewis said, prefer playing in the mud than a holiday at the sea. So forgive us for that and give us bigger appetites for more of You, bigger appetites for holiness and bigger appetites for transformed lives. Help us hate sin, and I mean hate it. I'm not talking about sinful acts, but just the little rebellions in our hearts. Help us hate that. Just let us burn in us. Not a self-pity hate, but just a fiery, holy hate. We love You. Help us in these things. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."