

Howdy. We are in Colossians 3. If you'd like to turn there, that will help you. I'm going to read a few verses from it and also from Romans 8, but truthfully if you'll just stay in Colossians, you'll be okay. While you're turning there, let me say, my name is Ben Stuart. I'm the director of a ministry in College Station called Breakaway, where we work among the Aggies. And we're wrapping up a series today. Really, as I've been filling in for Matt here I must say it's been a blessing for me to be here.

It's been a joy. This has not been a burden at all; it has absolutely just been an encouragement to my wife and me. We love this church, we pray for this church, we rejoice in what's happening in this church and we hope that you're doing the same, that you're praying for your leaders here, encouraging them, loving them, seeking God on their behalf. And I have to say that I appreciate that this is a place that would allow its pastor to take some weeks off to rest, recover, to hear from God and then come back next week to preach to you. So thank you.

So with that said, let me read to us and we'll pray and then delve. Colossians 3:1 says, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." And then Romans 8:6, "To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

Let me pray for us. "Father, I want to thank You for these few minutes that we have together. And Lord, we want to ask for Your grace. God, I just again feel the danger that this could be just another religious perfunctory experience where we gather in, do a little church and walk out and we remain unaffected. God, I pray that You would rescue us from something that vain and I pray that, in these moments Holy Spirit, You would stir us, that as we encounter Your word, it would fill our minds and move our hearts and enact the will. God, Jesus Christ died to set us free, and now we live to sing Your praise. That's our life. Would You show us what that means and how to do that?" And I'd ask you, if you're willing, to take a minute and just talk to Him and say, "Lord, please teach me something deep into my heart in these few minutes." And then if you would, please pray for me, that God would speak through me this morning and that it would make sense. "Well Father, we love You and we trust You. Do with this time what You will. And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen."

Well, we're wrapping up a series this morning that we call "The Fight." And we did so because as we've been learning over the last couple of weeks that the Bible presents spirituality with language of warfare. We seek this pure and simple devotion to the Lord, but this pursuit of intimacy with God happens in the context of adversity. We want to seek Him, and yet there is an opposing force to the degree that Jesus said at one point that the whole world lies under the power of this evil one. And in week one, we looked at 1 John where it says that the Son of God appeared, Jesus Christ came to earth to destroy the works of the devil, that there was one holding us captive and Jesus came to beat back the dark and to rescue those of us who are oppressed and bring us into the kingdom of the beloved Son. Jesus came to destroy something and liberate us, that we might run with Him. But yet, last week, we looked at this pursuit that we're in called "sanctification." There's a process and it's one movement with two parts. And we looked at how sanctification has a negative part that we called mortification. There are certain ideas, activities and modes of thinking that I must kill, and there are certain activities and ways of thinking that I must embrace to breathe life. And we called that vivification, that is God is sanctifying us or making us holy. He is pulling us away from certain activities and ways of thinking that dishonor

Him and ultimately steal life from us. And yet He's moving us towards activities and ways of thinking that help cultivate that intimacy that was purchased for us in Christ. And so when we become a Christian, we participate in sanctification, this one movement with two parts. I'm killing certain things and I'm bringing to life certain things. And last week was really all about this part, what we called the big "no." We have an enemy called the devil and he's been sinning from the beginning. His goal is to get us to participate in sin, activities or modes of thinking that dishonor our God and ultimately steal life from us. And the way he does this is by leading us to temptation. He solicits our minds with thoughts that stir our affections, that we would move the will to engage that ultimately steals life from us. We saw that in James 1, that each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own lusts. And when lust is conceived, it gives birth to sin. And when sin is accomplished, it brings death, and we arrive in a place where we're not meant to be. And so last week, we learned how to play D, that to get out of sin, I get out of temptation. Where are the environments that lead me to sin? And I sabotage those environments and all the moments that might lead me to those. And so, I fight against corruption, and that will be a struggle I engage in for the rest of my life. Jonathan Edwards said it this way in his resolutions: "Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken my fight with my corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be." And that's a big piece of the Christian life. I fight these things. John Owens said it this way: "Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you." And that was last week. There's some things I don't do, there's a big "no."

But the reality is, that is not the totality of spirituality. There's this big other piece of bringing other certain things to life, that I say these "no's," I don't do these things, I run from that way of thinking, so I can embrace that which will bring life. And that's ultimately where I want to be. And so, we used certain illustrations like gardening, where we said this is like the pulling up of weeds. And yet, that's not the entirety of gardening. If all you did was just pull up weeds and just have a yard full of dirt, you're not quite there. And there's no one who really does that, goes, "Good, no weeds. I love dirt." That doesn't happen. You pull that up, and then you plant that which gives life and is beautiful and refreshing. Or in marriage, there are certain activities that I don't do. I don't push my wife, I don't date other women. I don't do those things, and yet that's not the totality of marriage. If I came to my wife and said, "I just want you to know, I haven't been on any dates with other women recently," she would go, "Well, thank you. I appreciate that. I'm glad that's not taking place." But the reality is, if we're going to fully enjoy all that we have in this marriage bond, I don't do those things, but I do participate in other things like taking her on a date, talking to her and looking at her in the eyes, writing her notes. They appreciate that kind of stuff. And so, a good marriage has some "no's," but those are to free me up for this big "yes." Or if you want a sports analogy, this is like playing defense. I'm blocking shots, I'm guarding my man, I'm trying not to let them score, but I'm not going to win the game if that's all I do. At some point, I've got to grab the ball, drive the lane and hit the J or shoot a 3 or do something where I start embracing the positive, not just avoiding the negative. And that's the totality of the Christian life. I'm saying no to free me up to the yes. I disentangle myself from sin so I can pursue the path marked out for me. That's why when Jesus was asked, "What is spirituality?," He didn't say, "Well, it's a bunch of stuff you don't do. Like, you don't cuss, you don't drink. You don't do what he's doing. There's no hope for you. That's not what Jesus said. He said, "Spirituality? You should love Me. You love Me with your heart, your soul, your mind. You love me more than anything." Now intrinsic of that is that I cast off lesser loves, but it's not complete or full until I embrace the positive of enjoying and drawing near to Him. And that's where we're ending this series, not with the negative, we've already done that, but moving towards the positive. How do I become a person who enjoys that intimacy with God that was purchased for me in Christ. And the truth is, the best defense is a good offense. The Puritans used to say it this way. "How do you dislodge a beautiful thing from the human heart?" And their answer was, "You replace it with a more beautiful thing." How do you destroy our romance with sin? You replace in front of you sin with something more beautiful, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. And as I see Him and engage with Him, I participate in that which brings life.

So our goal this morning is to talk about what really is success? How do I get there? And then where is victory ultimately found? That's what we're trying to do. What is success spiritually? How is it I go about getting there? And then, where is victory ultimately found? And I would say success spiritually, if I really want to say, "Where do I arrive when I'm doing it?"

I think the Westminster Confession says it most perfectly. It asks, "What is the chief end of man?" And the answer is, "It is to enjoy God and glorify Him forever." My in my role as I glorify Him and enjoy Him, there's this intimacy that leads to glory. I draw into know Him, and then I want to make Him known. And you see, that's why He brought Himself to us in the first place. If you read Ephesians 1, it says that God has predestined us to be adopted as sons, that He's made known to us the mystery of His will, He's given us an inheritance, put His Spirit in us, He has pulled us out into His family, drawn us near to Him that we might know Him, that it might ultimately result, three times Ephesians will say it, in the praise of His glory. As I get to know Him and enjoy Him, see what He's like, see my Jesus walk along these dusty roads, see what God is like in the heavens, as I see my Lord, I love Him. And that love spontaneously erupts into praise. That's the Christian life. That's what you see in Psalms. As he sees the work of God, he bursts forth and prays with his voice, with music, with his life. We do that with movies. When you go and step in and enjoy a certain movie, you just step out and start talking about it. Some of us enjoy quoting movies as much as we enjoy seeing movies. I mean, surely in a church with people this young in it, I would guess a statistically significant number of the sentences spoken in this room are probably movie quotes, often movies starring Will Farrell. Because we see it, enjoy it, praise it. That's how we're built and that's the goal, that I see Jesus, I enjoy Him, I relate to Him and I praise Him. Like a good marriage, I draw near, I get to know You, and I enjoy You. That's where life is found. And that's spirituality, a life where I consistently and persistently draw near to my God that I might know Him. An as I draw near, I'm being changed to to be like Him, and we move from glory to glory as I praise His name in this broken world. That's success, intimacy and glory.

Now, how do I get there? Last week, if you will remember how the devil tempts us to sin, we said that he knew how we were wired, He knows that we are a mind, a cognitive process and we have affections, a desire that leads us to be inclined toward something or disinclined to it. And he knows we have a will, a decision making process. And what he does is solicits thoughts to our minds in the hopes of stirring our affections to enact the will to participate in sin. He uses our wiring to lead us to where he wants us to go. Well the reality is, we can do the same thing. It's the same wiring. We're still mind, affections and will. And we can harness it for our purposes, because that's just how we're made. An example of this happened to me just this week. My wife and I, a week from today, will be flying off to Europe. We are going to Italy. And as I thought about Italy, as I thought about my trip there, my mind has sifted through memories of the last time I was there. And as my reasoning faculties just remembered certain facts about Rome, periodically, it will land on a certain piece of data, just this one word, *gelato*. And as soon as my mind sets on that term, *gelato*, it consults my affections whence call forth more memories of my beloved experience with that concoction. If you've never tried it, it's something they do over there that's something like ice cream and yet far more superior. You can't even really compare it. It's like comparing Jordan and little dribblers. It's just not sufficient. And my mind goes, "I remember tasting that." And my affections say, "Oh, yes you do. And we will taste it again." And I remember that in my first trip after I had encountered *gelato*, it stirred me and it radically affected the rest of our trip. As I traveled around Europe, I was finally at one point going, "Michaelangelo, I don't care. Get behind me. *Gelato!*" And thinking, stirred and I moved and tasted, and I will do it again. As I've been planning our trip, you can see in my notes it is "Vatican, bookended with trips to *gelato*. Go and see academia, see "David" while eating *gelato*. Because when I think about it, I start caring about it. And so, I start chasing it. Because that's how we're wired. What you think about is what you care about. What you care about, you will chase. And the enemy tries to use that, but so can we. If I want to enact the will to be the kind of person who's living among thoughts of God, participating in activities of God, proclaiming the name of God, in a broken world, if I want to be one of His people to the utmost, if I want to live a life of that kind of activity, I need those kinds of affections. And those affections are stirred by a certain kind of data in my mind. And that's where we're landing today. Spirituality, however you conceive it, is primarily a battle of the mind. Because what you'll think about is what you'll care about. And what you care about, you will chase. And so, the big question of the morning is: What are you thinking about? What do you let occupy your mind? Because I'll promise you something. More than the big events of your life story, it is what you will allow your mind to entertain as you drive, as you lay in bed, as you walk the halls and sit in your desk, that will determine who you are and what you do. What are you thinking about? Because my thoughts lead to affections that move the will.

Incidentally, if you're hearing that and you're like, "I just don't know if I believe you. You seem nice, but I'm not buying it." Can I tell you something? I got this from the apostle Paul, and you watch him do this all through Scripture. Examples: Romans...what's happening in Romans 1-11? He's just laying out the theological landscape, right? "Let me tell you what God is doing in the universe. Let me tell you what He's accomplishing in Christ." He starts talking about all that God has done to rescue us. And in Romans 12, he gets into the implications. And what does He tell us to do in light of this data? He says, "Offer your body as a living sacrifice. That's the reasonable act of worship based on what's happened in Christ. Give your whole life to Him." How do I do that, Paul? He says, "By the renewing of your mind. When you start changing your mind it will start changing where you live." He told the Philippians, "Yes, I know you're believers." And he unpacks at the beginning, "I think you're legit. You've heard the truth, you've believed it." And then he gets into their life. In Philippians 4, he tells them, "Don't be anxious about anything." He says, "Philippians, there was a way of thinking that you used to engage in. No more. But whatever is true and noble and honorable, dwell on those things. Start filling your mind with thoughts of God." Because Paul knows, "If I've got your thinking, I've got your life." That's why when the Colossians were just joining a bunch of religious observances that he really didn't care about, he told them, "It's a waste of time. You're doing this 'don't eat, don't touch, don't taste.' That has no value in restraining your sensual indulgence." Which would lead them to go, "What do we then do, Paul?" Colossians 3, "You set your mind on the things above where Christ is seated. You put your mind on Him, and you'll move towards Him. I promise you." That's why Peter says, in both 1 Peter and 2 Peter, that he wants them to live lives worthy of the calling they've received. How do I do that? Well, he says, "I want to stir you up." He says that in both books. He says, "I want to stir you to move you." How are you going to stir them, Peter? He says, "I'm going to stir you by way of reminder. I'm going to start remind you, re-minding you. I'm putting things in your mind. Remember this? Remember that? Remember when he did that? Remember Jesus was like this?" That's his idea, that as I think about Him, I care about Him and I move. That's spirituality. What you think about is what you care about is what you'll chase. Paul said the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. How do I become a person who enjoys Him and walks with Him and glorifies Him? What are you thinking about?

So, what's our strategy to approach the place He's called us to live? I'd load my mind with thoughts of God. Now, let me say this note before I get real practical and we end our talk. I'm not saying this is how you're saved. We are saved by grace. I'm not saying you become acceptable to God when you start thinking a certain way. You become acceptable to God when Jesus Christ grabs you, pulls you out of the muck and walks off with you. That's how you're saved. And then once you're there in His kingdom, He starts rebooting your thinking. An example of that would be one of the elders of our church recently bought a dog. And that dog was previously owned by a very cruel master who would beat it. It was rescued by the pound, and then the elder came and bought that dog from the pound.

That dog was transferred from a household of evil into the household of the beloved elder. How did the dog relate in that moment? It was really a pretty passive carrier at that time. I don't even know if it knew what was happening, but all of a sudden, it's in a new kingdom, new master. And yet, even living in this new family with a new owner, even still when he saw a human being walk up, he would start cowering. When kids were playing, he would hide under the car. If anyone raised their voice for anything, he'd start peeing all over everything. Why? You're in a new home, but something's got to change. We've got to change your mind. That's not going to make you a member of the family.

You're already there. But once you've got there, we've got to reboot your thinking. Now, how does that happen with that dog? My guess is, the only way that's going to change is if it stays close to its master. And as it sees that he's kind, it will warm up. As it sees how he treats everyone with gentleness, it will begin to trust that gentleness. As he sees his benevolence, it will warm his heart, and it will change the way he lives, because it's changed the way he feels, because he changes what he sees. And it's the same with us. I load my mind with thoughts of the glory of God, that He doesn't change, that He doesn't sin, there's no darkness, there's no shadow of turning in Him. I think of my depravity, how broken

I am and where I've come from and then I think of Calvary. He came to get me. He died for my sin, and He brought me into His family. So I think of glory. I think of depravity, but then I think of Calvary. And He came to get me. And as I think about this king who would come to rescue me, I see how He can forgive even those who were nailing Him to a cross, and I go, "I can forgive." I see the way He's patient and He's kind and forgiving and He's loving, and I can be that. I see His kindness for the poor and it stirs me. And as it stirs me, it changes me. And as I see Him, I love Him and I walk with Him. That's how it works. But it starts with loading my mind, because what I think about is what I care about, and what I care about, I'll chase.

So let me ask and answer this question. How do we load our mind? What do we do to insert into our days and our life thoughts of our great king? I think He's given us three things: His word, His world and the work. In those places, I can load the mind. And here's what I mean by that. Number one, He's given us His word, the enduring word of God to insert into our heads. We've all heard this statement before and believe it's true: "To make a better pizza, we need better ingredients." To make a good thought life, I need good thoughts to insert into my thinking. If I'm going to think right thoughts, I need to get right ideas into my mind. Where am I going to find right ideas? In the holy and righteous word of God. So, we start loading our mind with His word. And to be a person that does that, I think you need two things. You need consistency and you need creativity. And by consistency, I mean there is a daily time in your experience where you are drawing near His word to read about Him in hopes that these thoughts stir affections to move the will, that there is a daily moment that I draw in and meet with Him. We call that a devotional time. Some people call it a quiet time, and that's fine for me. That's starting to sound like a punishment, like detention. Like, "Get in that corner and think about God in your quiet time." So, I call it a devotional because I'm wanting to stir my devotions with Him. And I think to have a good, consistent, daily devotional time, you need three things: a time, a place and a plan. I need a time where I know I'm awake, I need a place where I can focus and I need a plan of how I'm going to go about it. For me, that time is early in the morning, but I can't do it first thing in the morning. I know that's real spiritual for some people, "Before I pour my cup, I will lift You up." But the truth is, if I don't pour up a cup first, there's no lifting up a hymn, there's not lifting up of me. I'm not getting out of bed. So I've got to get up early, I've got to go work out in the morning, I've got to go shower, then I've got to go to Starbucks and start ingesting coffee. And in that moment, that time of day, I am most alert to meet with Him. And the place I meet with Him is Starbucks. Because for me, if I move to a quiet place, I'm guaranteed to be asleep. I've got to go to a place with that public accountability, because I'm not going to go "yard sale" across the table at Starbucks. I'm going to stay awake and focus. And so, early in the morning, that's my time, that's my place and I have a plan of how I dive into His word and study. Now for some of you, early mornings may not work for you. I remember, we had a student who had just come to know Christ, had fallen in love with Him, was excited about Him, was like, "What do I do now?" I said, "Well, you've got to load your mind with thoughts of Him, get to know Him, know what He's like. That will affect you." And he goes, "How do I do that?" And I was like, "You've got to spend time in His word daily. Let's think of a time. How about early morning? That's what I do." And he's like, "I just can't. I can barely get to school conscious. I can't meet with God in the morning." I'm like, "Alright, how about at night?" He's like, "That doesn't really work." Which at that point, I was like, "Yeah, I know that." Because we've all known that experience where we get in bed and we're like, "Father, I....zzzzzz" So I was like, "Alright, nights won't work. Is there any time of day you've got some mental free space and you're not engaged in a productive activity?" And he said, "3 o'clock, right after school, I'm doing nothing." And I was like, "Alright! 3 o'clock. Is there a place where you can focus? How about Starbucks?" And he said, "Nah, I can't really there," which was confusing to me because for me, all I need to do is have my Bible, a piece of paper and a pen and that coffee, and God is already moving. I'm like, "I love You," and I haven't even opened it up yet but God is present in that place. And so, I'm like, "Well whatever. Fine, so you can't do Starbucks. Can you do your house?" He said, "No, it's too distracting. I'll turn on TV, I'll start fiddling around with stuff." I said, "Do you have a park near your home?" He said, "No, we don't really have one." I said, "Is there any place in the universe where you can go and focus?" And he thought and said, "My garage. Nobody's in my garage." And I said, "Okay, 3 o'clock, in your garage, you and God, it's a date."

And you know what? He started doing it daily. I start hearing conversation about our king fitting into his life, and now he's a recording artist. He's writing music about our king, casting it out throughout the nation. And the beautiful truths that have risen up and burst forth from him in song have come from meeting with God in a quiet place and studying His word. I have never met a mature Christian who does not spend time in His word daily. I've never met an immature Christian who does. And so, we've got to get in the book. And I'd say we get a plan as well. And by that, I mean you get something you're excited about, because many of us have been in that experience where you set aside that time, you get into that place, and then that big Bible's sitting in front of you and you're like, "I don't know. I feel so lost and scared and like a little kid," and then you leave. The reality is, we find something that works. Matt taught that "How to Study the Bible" series. Maybe you get that and go, "Okay, that's how I'm going to study," and you launch out on your own. Find a book of the Bible you're excited about, get a good commentary and start studying that book of the Bible. Maybe that's too daunting for you, and you just need a devotional book. Beth Moore has written some great ones. Louie Giglio has written some good ones. I gather one of those, and they help me get into the Bible. You just find something that works, maybe a theology book. But I sit down and I have a plan, "I'm going to work through this book. I'm going to do this series. I'm going to listen to these sermons and write them out. I'm going to do something that gets the word inside of me on a consistent daily basis."

And not just consistency, but creativity. I tell students all the time, "Don't bore yourself with Scripture. Do something creative. Find ways to put it into you that you're excited about." And the reality for me is, that consistent time is not sufficient. I have to get creative of how I can put touch points with Him in my life throughout the day. I remember Matt talking about, with his wife, when he was courting her, that one conversation with her a day was not sufficient. And that was the same with me and my wife. Just talking to her once a day when we were dating wasn't like, "Hey, how's it going? Okay, talk to you tomorrow. See you later." That wasn't enough. We could talk on the phone, but as soon as we hung up, we're text messaging each other. I didn't even know how to text message. I learned so I could just talk with her and be like, "How you doing? I'm still here. I think you're cute." That kind of stuff. I'd go to e-mail and we'd start e-mailing each other. We even wrote hand-written letters to each other so we could show up at the mailbox and be like, "Oooh!" and grab that out. We used every medium possible to get thoughts of one another in our heads, because that stirred our affections and it moved us to the point where I finally just went and bought a ring and off we go. And so for some of us, you go, "What works for me?" I remember, we had a student in our ministry that came to know Christ, wanted to know Him, wanted to walk with Him and he asked me "How do you do it?" And I said, "You get thoughts of Him in your mind. You've got to start reading the Bible." And he said to me, "I've never read a book." I'm like, "What do you mean you've never read a book? You're a senior in high school. How can you never read a book?" And he's like, "Well, my mom did this..." I'm like, "Aw man! I don't even want to know. Here's the deal. God has revealed Himself in a written book. I'm going to go ahead and call reading crucial. We're going to have to figure that out, because we need to get you in this book." But past that, I said, "We've just got to get creative." And so, he came back to me a couple of days later and said, "You know what my mom and I found out? They've got the Bible on CD. So I've got the whole Bible." And so for him it was great. She bought him one of those ones that have dramatic presentation. So there's this Casio playing in the background the whole time. And so for him, every time he got in his car, he would just start listening to the Bible. And it was funny. One time he came by, because my office was near his house, and he pulled up and was like, "Hey, I want you to listen to something." So I get in the car and normally the guy who reads is really subdued, but he got to that point where God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. And we're sitting in his car, listening to it, and suddenly you hear the guy just go, "And the Lord RAINED DOWN BURNING SULFUUUUURRR!!!" And we were like, "What was that? Rewind that. That's awesome." And so every time I would see him drive by my office for the next year, I'd just go, "SULFUUUUURRR!!!" because we knew that's what he was doing. But can I tell you something interesting? His senior year of high school, driving in his car, he got the whole Bible into it. And for many of us that time us is just mental dead space. I mean, most of us in your car, you've maybe got like half a song stuck in your head for like an hour in traffic and we don't do anything. And in that moment he says, "If thoughts of God can stir affections of God, can move a life towards God, where

I consistently and persistently think about Him, live for Him, worship Him, proclaim His name to those who need Him, if I want to be that person, I'm going to harness my car and use that as a place to meet with Him. For me, in college, it was taking walks with the Lord. After that, it became sitting in the football stadium once a week, just a creative place. It wasn't my devotional time, but I knew that Sunday nights 11:00-12:00, He and I had a date. We were just going to sit at this football stadium and talk to each other. My staff now, we have a day with the Lord. One day a month, we all pull away as a staff, and we go to a little retreat center, split up around the house and we'll study the Bible and just sit with God for the whole day. And every time we get interns, they go, "Excuse me. So we're going to have a quiet time for seven hours?" I go, "Yeah." And at the end of the day, we go to dinner together and talk about what God's taught us. And do you know what they say every single time? "I ran out of time." Because after that first hour when your mind settles, God begins to speak to you in His word and He stirs you and He changes us. And so, maybe a day is for you, maybe taking walks is for you. You just find a way. We gave our team leaders Philippians, Ephesians, Galatians and Colossians on their iPod. It cost us \$4.00 to get us four epistles into their head. And we're hoping that as they work out, as they jog, as they go along their way, the word of God is soaking into them, because that will change them. And so, we use the word.

And the last thing that I'll say on that is this. We have to creatively put it in our life, consistently put it in our life and then when it gets there, we need to be convinced of its truth. And what I mean by that is this. When the word of God comes in conflict with our emotions and our own thoughts, these must fall to the enduring word of God. By that I mean, for many of us, we will harbor and marinate in thoughts that are displeasing to Him, and we need to put His word in front of it and cast these aside when we meet with Him. So for me, in my time with the Lord, I get a piece of paper, a Bible and two pens, and I write out the word of God in black. And then I write out my emotions around it in blue. And I just kind of let them fly and what they think. Typically, they're negative and a bit skewed. And at the end of that devotional time, I can look at it, and I see the enduring word of God in this deep color and I see my transient emotions. And I ask myself daily, "Which am I going to believe? Which am I going to rest in?" And I end that time by saying, "I'm going to walk with You." And for many of us, maybe the best thing you'll get this morning is that you need to start preaching to yourself and not just listening to yourself. Often we're far too passive. We will wake up with melancholy thoughts and we will allow them to occupy our head, take up our time of getting ready, take up our time in the car and then begin to act out in how we treat people. And some of us need to arrest that moment. One of the greatest pieces of advice I ever got came from a t-shirt that I saw in Colorado, and it just said "Don't believe everything that you think." And some of us need to take some of these thoughts, we have these common grooves that we'll walk in, ways of thinking about ourself, our family and our life that are victimized and deficient, and we'll allow ourselves to stew there, and you need to sabotage that and say, "No longer. I am going to take these awful thoughts and cast them aside in the presence of His holy word." And we need to move that way, that I don't believe what I think but I grab hold of something else. The psalmist did that. He said, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Hope in God." I love that Psalm, because who's he talking to? He's talking to himself. He sees its movement towards depression and says, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Hope in God." And he starts preaching to himself. And then he says, "I will remember His benefits." And he starts listing off the great things God has done to himself. Knowing that as he does so, what he thinks about...You know the rest.

And so, I get the word of God in me, the second thing I use is the world of God. I use His world. And by this I mean, I heard a great preacher talk once about this reality we have as Christians, this challenge before us to take this whole world that God just created. Yes it is marred by sin and yet it is not just out there for our temptation. The glory of God is in nature. One of the challenges for me is to take all that He's made and to harness it to move my affections towards Him. And so when I walk into the universe, I say, "How can I look up at the stars? How can I use the trees? How can I use a stream, a bird, a latte to put my mind on Him, to stir my heart for Him, to move towards Him. And I think He's given us four things in creation that I'll mention briefly. Number one is just nature. Psalm 19 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." His glory is out there. It doesn't have a voice, but if you look up, its speech will be heard. And for many of us, we are so enraptured with the self-absorbed navel gazing, we miss the glory

of God in a sunrise or a sunset. Jonathan Edwards used to take a horseback ride every day just to be stirred by the beauty of his God as he saw it in the beauty of creation. Charles Spurgeon said it this way, "A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best." Go outside, see the glory of God in what He's made and worship, not it but Him.

The second thing I use is art. Primarily, music moves me. And I'm not alone with that. The great reformer, Martin Luther, said it this way, "Music is to be praised as second only to the Word of God because by her all the emotions are swayed. Nothing on earth is more mighty to make the sad gay and the gay sad, to hearten the downcast, mellow the overweening, temper the exuberant, or mollify the vengeful." And then in typical Luther style, he cannot praise something without insulting all those who oppose. He goes on to say, "He who does not find this an inexpressible miracle of the Lord is truly a clod and not worthy to be considered a human being." And for me, I agree with him. And I found it in my own personal experience, the benefits of music. For me, as a young man, when I woke up in the mornings, typically for me, I was predisposed to a melancholy disposition. I'm just that way. Some of you are probably like that. You don't rise up out of bed longing to glorify Jesus, "A chance to praise Him, yes God!" You just don't land there. And for me, I would often get in my car with some of my negative thoughts and I would put in music that would sort of amplify, amen, vindicate these thoughts. Now I'm not saying that all secular music is evil. I'm not like, "Your rock-n-roll is from the devil!" That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying for me, I would listen to music that would amplify this kind of marinating in my own defeatist thinking. Until one day, someone gave me a Christian CD, which had beforehand been a fruitless endeavor, because I thought that all Christian music was lame. And yet, they put in a particular CD and there was a really kicking drum beat on the fourth song. It just started crashing in, and I started listening to it. And as this man began to sing, he was singing about the glories of God to a great beat. And I found in that moment something that had never happened for me. This common rut of moving towards negativity was arrested, interrupted. And I began to think about the holiness of God. And as I did and as music combined with that truth, it stirred me to Him. And I ended my car ride in worship. I've never done that before. And so for me now, David Crowder, Christ Tomlin, Shane & Shane, Robbie C., Michael Bleecker, these men are servants to me. I take in the music they are writing and I use it, I harness it to get my mind, affections and will chasing after my great king.

I use my body, and by that I mean this. All of our wiring, mental, emotional, physical, they're intertwined, and we know this about ourselves. And so I watch my body for the sake of His glory. Rest. I will often meet students who say they're depressed and the light of Scripture can't pierce the shell of darkness in their lives. And do you know what the first question that I'll ask them is? "How much sleep are you getting?" And they'll often say something like, "I don't know. Three hours a night, man." I'll go, "Alright, when you're tired, your mind starts to think kind of crazy and you can tend towards that which is deficient. So why don't we crank it up to about eight hours and see if that doesn't help you a little bit." And for me, I found that it does. I try to be a bit early, because I know I'll be more refreshed for my time with the Lord. Diet. We all know this, that there are certain foods that when we eat, it can make us feel sluggish and tired, and we just kind of waste the day because "Oh gosh, that was too much gravy." Jonathan Edwards found that the diet that most helped him study for long hours, and he stuck with that diet for his whole life. I'm not quite that disciplined, but I found that for me, there are certain things that if I can eat, I know if I maintain health, I maintain energy and I can study better. And for me, exercise. I don't particularly enjoy working out at 6:30 in the morning. That's why I make my interns do it with me. I told them at the outset, "I don't really care if you get in shape or not. That's not my priority. You are here to serve only as accountability/shame for me to make sure I'm up. Because I know if I work out, it releases endorphins. And I know for me, it takes a melancholy mind that I am tending towards and it replaces it with a more positive disposition. And in that moment, I can study the word of God better. And so, I harness dumbbells for the kingdom.

The last thing I think we get is community. Ephesians will say that God made some to be prophets, some to be teachers, some apostles. We don't have all the gifts. We need each other. And so, I draw near a group of people to help me think

about and delight in my king. Colossians will say it this way, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" among you. And every time I read that, I thought it meant just in me. Let His word dwell in me. So I was always confused by the next verse when he said, "...speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." I'm like, "Wait a minute. So the word dwells in me and then I'm singing to who? Who are they? I don't know. Do I sing to myself? Like, 'The Lord is your shepherd.' Like, what are you talking about?" And then I realized when I studied Greek, and you don't need Greek to know this, you just pay attention, but Greek helped me, I realized in Greek, they have two different words for "you." For us, if I wanted to say "you" singularly, I just say "you." If I wanted to say "you" as in "all of you," I say "you" or if I'm from Texas, I say "y'all." Greek has a "y'all." If I'm just talking to you, it's σ_ (su). If I'm talking to us, it's _με_ (humeis). Which do you think dominates the New Testament imperatives? Humeis. Let the word dwell richly in you, that we gather together around it, that we study it together. Because then, when we speak to one another, it's with psalms and hymns and spirituals songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to God, that we gather together, speak His word together, spur one another on towards love and good deeds. And so, if you're not in a small group, I don't know how you're going to do it. Because Christianity is a team sport. And so, I gather around people who love me and will call me to hope in God, like Jonathan did to David, to speak the word to him, to strengthen him in the king.

And the last thing I would say is that it is His word, His world and the work. For many of us, the reason our Christianity is so tepid is because we've never gotten involved in the things of the kingdom. And yes, the game is boring if you're always sitting on the bench. So you need to get on the court, take a couple of shots and see what it's like to play the game. William Wilberforce, that British man in the 1800's who systematically, through his role in Parliament, ended slavery in Britain without a shot fired...They just made a movie about him called "Amazing Grace." Mr. Fantastic played William Wilberforce. William had a lot of physical ailments and had a tough marriage. And that often led him to depression. And yet, he would engage in an activity he called "healthy self forgetting." As he would go out and play with his children, mix in with believers and then particularly as he engaged in that dynamic work of ending slavery, his participation in these things that honor God would stir him to love God and so serve Him. For some of us, the reason Christianity is dull is because we've never really tried it. And for some of us, maybe you don't have sufficient motivation to go out and become a missionary in India, but maybe you've got enough motivation to sign whatever's back there to get involved and serving somebody or caring for somebody. Because I've met a ton of people whose Christianity had been lame until they stepped into the work of the kingdom and as they saw what God was doing in the nations. That stirred them to say, "I want to live for this, and I'm going to die for this, to see these people know my king who loves me. And so for some of us, it's just getting involved in the work.

One last thing I would say and then we're done. Some might ask, "Okay Ben, I get the idea. I put thoughts of Him in my mind to stir my affections, to move the will. Question: what happens if I'm reading my Bible, listening to sermons, studying everything you tell me and yet my affections are still cold?" Well, there might be a lot of reasons for that, and we can't go into all that. John Piper wrote some wonderful books about them, "What Do I Do When I Don't Desire God?" And yet I would say, at the end of it, I set my mind on Him, but ultimately, I have to ask Him to stir my affections. The psalmist knew this. And so, as he opened the Bible, he would say, "Incline my heart to Your testimonies, O God" in Psalm 19. I'm going to read this book, but would you incline my heart towards it, that I would love it? He said in Psalm 119, "God, would You open my eyes, that I would see the wonderful things of Your word. I'm going to put it in front of me, I'm going to set my mind on it, but would You stir my heart? Will You let me see the wonder in it? Will You unite my heart to fear Your name?" He looks and says, "Ultimately, my affections are not under my control. I can't make myself love. It's the fruit of the Spirit that's love, joy and peace, not mine. I can't produce them. I can set everything up, but it's ultimately the grace of God that moves me." I do this with student's all the time, young kids when I do camps. I ask them, "Does anyone in here like apples?" And periodically, there's a couple of kids, typically they're kind of farm kids, and they go, "I love apples." I'm like, "Stand up, buddy." And they get up, and I say, "Alright, when you want an apple, do you try to grow it off your arm? Do you just hold it out there and go, 'Come on, Golden Delicious?'" And they look at me like I'm a madman

and they go, "No." And I go, "So, what do you do?" And they say, "Well, I go to a store or I go to a tree." I'm like, "Alright, you go somewhere else, because you don't have the faculties. You don't have enough chlorophyll or roots or things like that to grow an apple." And they're like, "No." And then I take them to Galatians 22, and I say, "Love, joy, peace, patience, whose fruits are those?" And they say, "It is the fruit of the Spirit." It's His. So do I try to manufacture them? No, I don't have the tools. I pray like Saint Augustine did. "Command me, Lord. Give me what You command. Call me to love You, and then kindle inside of me a passion for You. I will set my mind on things above, and as I do that, I am asking Your Holy Spirit to incline me towards these testimonies. I will open Your word, and in that moment, I will come in desperation and say, 'Lord, unless You build this house, I will labor in vain. Would You stir me and move me so that, in a protracted way in my life, I'm thinking about You, loving You, appreciating with You, interacting with You in intimacy that spills forth in glory, that I tell my coworkers in this world about a king who's worth living for and dying for. That's the goal.'"

Let me pray for us. "Father, thank You for these moments together. And I want to thank You, Lord, that an entrance into Your kingdom, Your approval of us, it is not something we earn, it's not for sale. But I thank you God that You, into the midst of our depravity and brokenness, sent a hero, that Jesus Christ came to beat back the darkness and rescue us. And so, I pray for those of us in this room this morning who thought that religion was just adhering to a couple of religious standards and God will be impressed with me and I move on. I pray that even now they're seeing it is far bigger than that and much more is at stake. And I pray God that they would cry out to You in the depths and say, 'I cannot make myself clean, I cannot make myself worthy. Jesus Christ, will You save me? Will You transfer me out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the beloved Son?' And might you cry out this morning and find grace meeting you there. And God, for those of us who know You, who have been brought into this wonderful relationship, might we, by Your grace, participate in the activities and modes of thinking that cultivate that intimacy with You that was purchased for us on that cross. God, give us the grace to set our minds on You, that You might stir our affections, that we might run with You throughout our days." And I want to ask you just as we close, would you take a minute and pray. And say, "Lord, show me in my life where my free mental space lies. Tell me what I'm thinking about. Give me a picture of myself in my car, in my bedroom, as I walk along the way. What is occupying my mind, Lord?" And then if you would, would you ask Him, "Lord, give me a vision of what it would look like to set my mind on things above." "Father, You say blessed is the man who meditates on Your word day and night. He'll be like a tree near a stream, and his fruit will come. I pray that we could plant our lives near Your word, that we meditate on it, it shapes us, that as we behold You as in a mirror, we are changed into Your image, from glory to glory. Make us a people who are obsessed with You, that You fill our minds, fill our hearts and then fill our days, that when the end comes and we see Your face in glory, we will have been a part of a church, the membership of a people who were radically in love with their great king. Thank You for our rescue. May we chase You with body, soul and mind. And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen."