

# The Way of Life and the Way of Death

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Father, we give you thanks and praise that you are good, that you are only good, that you have ever been good and will always be good.

And we give you thanks and praise that you are an ever-giving God, a generous God that we can never outgive you, that you are never in our debt. And we thank and praise you, Father, for that all of the good in the world and whatever good there is within us has ultimately come as a gift from you.

And we acknowledge before you, Father, that we often doubt your goodness and are presumptuous about your generosity towards us. We ask, Father, that you would do a gentle but wonderful work in our hearts this morning to bring home to us the truth of who you are and the truth of what you have done in your Son.

And as we are gripped by this, help us to understand better the truth, the true truth about ourselves, that we might be filled with life and freedom and live to praise you.

And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So those of you who have known me for a while know that I have a, well, I have sort of a bit of a right-handedness when it comes to the Bible and when it comes to, I guess, Christian teaching.

[ 1 : 25 ]     And I don't always, like in some ways I wish that I could change it. It's just my right, so I had trouble trying to figure out how to start this sermon today because my right-handedness is to be a Christian apologist.

That's my right-handedness, to try to hear and understand the objections to the Christian faith and to address them. And so as an apologist, and that sort of goes at war with an evangelist.

An evangelist is a person, or more of a, I guess, a more pastor type, in a sense, would also be, they want to try to woo people. They want to woo the lost sheep to come home.

They want to woo the sheep to eat and to be fed. That type of nurturing aspect of a pastor, a shepherd, a nurturing aspect of an evangelist.

And they war within me at some different times. So the way my mind normally works when it comes to pick a sermon thing is I look at a text like today. We're going to look at James 1, 12 to 25. And the first thing that goes through my mind is, oh, that's very interesting.

[ 2 : 24 ]     There are many people who think that God, one of the reasons that many people in our culture have rejected the idea of God is because they believe that God promotes violence. In fact, it would be a commonplace to many people.

Oh, yeah, the God in the Bible tells people to kill people. Like, if I was to go and say that, you know, for actually being able to have, like, in a bar, and just say, oh, you know, by the way, I was just reading today about how the God of the Bible tells people to kill people.

Like, people just nod. Yeah, yeah. Like, it's just like talking about COVID-19 or the weather. Like, everybody knows that. And that's one of the reasons people don't like God. And that's the normal way my mind would work when I look at a text like this because actually the text says something about that belief about people.

On the other hand, if I was more of an evangelist, more of a pastor, I would do something to try to woo you, to entice you into it because maybe those of you who are here are particularly worried about that particular question.

But I could woo you and say something like there was a non-Christian, this is about 20, 25 years ago, there was a non-Christian who studied as part of his PhD all of the self-help and all of the self-improvement literature for the previous 100 years.

[ 3 : 33 ] And he tried to synthesize to see if there was some common teaching for the self-help improvement literature for the previous 100 years. And he came up with seven things which seemed to be common to all of the self-help literature that had been written in the previous 100 years.

And interestingly enough, once again, remember this is a person who's not a Christian. And interestingly enough, one of the things that he came up, one of the seven things that was common of all self-help literature over the previous 100 years was something that James wrote in the year 40 because it's actually here in the text.

And so anyway, I've done both. I just share you. You can pray for me because sometimes my apologist side of me just automatically thinks of questions and objections.

And I should also think more of that which woos. So we'll look at both. And so if you have your Bibles, look at James 1, verses 12 to 25, which is where we are, second of our sermons in the book of James, James 1, verses 12 to 25.

And it begins like this. And actually, those of you who remember my sermon from last week, heard and remember it, will know that last week we went right up to verse 12, and yet I'm reading verse 12 again.

[ 4 : 48 ] And there's a literary reason for this. Sorry here. Grammar geek moment. Just those of the rest of you, try not to fall asleep. This is a text that at a literary level is sometimes can be referred to as a Janus text.

In other words, if you look at it from a literary point of view, it sort of summarizes verses 2 to 12, and it sort of summarizes the stuff that went on before or sort of clarifies it.

But it's a Janus text because it also actually introduces what's going to happen next. So it's one of those texts that James wrote it so it looks two ways at the same time, helps to clarify what just went on, and actually helps to introduce what comes next in a very important, powerful way.

So we're going to read verse 12, and it goes like this. Blessed is the man or the woman who remains steadfast under trial, for when he or she has stood the test, he or she, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

Now, we didn't talk about this text very much last week, but it actually has something which is several things. So first of all, I mean, I'll just be honest, I have no particular interest in wearing a crown. So if this text was to try to grab me, it doesn't grab me at all.

[ 6 : 00 ] Like, I mean, the only time I wear something like a crown is when I go to a kid's birthday party and they have crowns. And I, of course, put on the crown and I wear it as long as the kids wear it, and it's all good fun.

But beyond that, it doesn't do anything whatsoever to motivate me. Maybe for some of you who love the crown and love the monarchy, you know, the idea that maybe you could go to Buckingham Palace and have tea with the queen, and at the end of it, she'd say, by the way, would you like to wear my crown?

And you'd think you'd died and gone to heaven. So then maybe that's a good analogy for some of you. However, actually, the type of crown which is being mentioned here isn't that type of crown, so you'd be disappointed.

In the ancient world, when you won the marathon race or you won the athletic event, you were given a crown to show that you'd won.

And that's the type of crown which is referred to here. So you've been, you know, God in his goodness and love sends you different types of trials and tests. That's part of the normal Christian life.

[ 7 : 02 ] And at the end of all things, this is how it summarized the last thing. The way you understand it is if you're in Christ, the end of your walk with Christ is to, in a sense, be crowned by God, congratulated for having run the race well.

But it's even more important than that. It's actually an image that at the end, you are engulfed in a greater life than you have ever known right now.

It's a very, very powerful image. And when you understand that the image is sort of implying something that you see throughout all of the Bible, that if you take, I mean, it's sort of, on one hand, if you have, if there is the world's greatest athlete and they die in a helicopter accident or a car accident, but they're in Christ, on the other side of death, their death, which means the end and the breaking of the end of their body, they'd actually, if they're in Christ, they'd get swallowed with a greater life than they ever knew or experienced on this side of the grave.

But it's also really hopeful because those of us who have loved ones who are now very, very, very frail, very, very broken, their body is becoming next to nothing, and then they die, if they're in Christ, what happens in the moment of their death is that they are engulfed, they are swallowed, they are clothed in life.

And that's the telos, that's the end that God has for those of us who are in him. And as I like to say over the last little while, the end of the story makes the story completely and utterly different.

[ 8 : 43 ] I mean, this is one of the problems that we have actually right now in Canada because, as you know, all of the smart people, many of the, not all of the smart people, many of the smart people want to have doctors be able to kill more people. That's actually, it's going on right now in the Senate and everything like that.

And if you read newspapers, there's many, many arguments to give doctors more freedom and to encourage more doctors to actually be able to do this, to be able to kill people.

But of course, it actually, it's so fascinating that this is going on in our culture at the same time that we're having COVID-19 because there's a lot of fear right now in our culture.

I think there's lots of fear. And it's interesting because we live in a culture that wants to kill. I know I'm being very blunt, but that's what the doctor does.

He kills or she kills. And we want to have that doctor have more power to kill and to be able to kill more people and to be able to qualify more people and have less bureaucracy to be able to kill people.

[ 9 : 52 ] And that's what we want. And at the same time, we live in a culture which is in denial about death. And COVID-19 is partially revealing that we live in a culture that's terrified of death.

And at the same time that we desire death, are in denial of death, are terrified of death, we are also completely and utterly able to see that about our culture.

And that's, I think, a little bit why there's both the acquiescence to very, very major government interventions in freedoms and all in Canada and also a lot of the hysteria.

I'm not a COVID-19 denier or anything like that. I'm not that. But it is something about our culture that's going on right now and that our culture is blind to it.

And it's hard for us to know how to pray into it. And that's a bit of an aside and maybe I shouldn't have gone into that. Maybe I will. Who knows? Maybe I'll get some angry letters or emails or whatever. I don't know. But what we need to see here is that the telos, the end, the goal that God has for every person who, he desires that every person would come to be in Christ.

[ 11 : 17 ] And for those of us in Christ, the end is to be swallowed up by life. And that means it's a, it's, it's unlike the athletic crown, which is a zero-sum game.

If all of us enter the marathon, only one of us would be the best person for Messiah. You know, maybe in our case, I don't know, maybe some of you are unbelievably fit. You know, the best finishing time would be four hours or something like that.

If you're maybe in some places in Kenya, the best finishing time would be two hours and ten minutes. But, but only one of us can be the first to cross the line. But this is not a zero-sum game.

The more who are in Christ, the more everyone receives this telos, this end of life. And, then the Bible actually says, talks a little bit about death next.

Like, it doesn't just talk about life, as if it just talks about life, life, life, life, life, life, and, and, and just doesn't look at what's going on in our culture, what goes on in our own life, the fact that many, that all of us will die, and, it's, well, the Bible actually now talks about death.

[ 12 : 25 ] It goes from life to death. And if you look at it, it's verses 13 to 15. It goes like this. Let no one say when he is tempted, I am being tempted by God.

For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

Verse 15, then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death. So, one of the things that the Bible is doing here, which is very shocking, is it's saying that death isn't a merely biological category.

Like, actually, if you think about it, one of the things which is going on in our culture as well, is that there's a crisis of meaning. Because, basically, if we've grown up in a culture that basically teaches us that God doesn't exist, or if he, then it really, you're caught with it.

Was it Stephen Crane, who over a hundred years ago made some comment about, we say to the universe how we're feeling, and basically, of course, the universe doesn't really care. The universe is completely and utterly impersonal.

[ 13 : 38 ] It's just stuff. It's just matter. It's just energy. And if we live in a universe which is just stuff, it's just matter and energy and physical laws, and that's all there is. And life is merely a biological curiosity, and death is merely a biological curiosity, and nature cares no more whether things come to life or whether things die.

They're all just natural processes, biological processes, that just happen. And yet, at the same time, we know that there must be meaning. And the Bible says that, in fact, there is meaning, and that death isn't just a biological thing.

There's actually something which brings death about and is intimately connected with death. And what is intimately connected with death is the desire for us to be like God, the desire that we have to sin.

And what the Bible is saying here is very, very powerful, is that nobody can ever say, remember one of my early apologetic things, that many people, they look at the world, and they see that suicide bombers, the suicide bombers believe that, in a sense, God commands people to kill, and that they'll be rewarded for killing.

And they don't make distinctions. Many people in our culture between, you know, that holy book and the Christian holy book or other types. It's just a general, all religious people are like that.

[ 14 : 56 ] But we actually see that in this particular book, the Bible, that in fact, the Bible actually says that God is only good, and he never puts into your mind to do something evil.

Like, he never does that. We can never say, if somebody comes to you or your accounts, and I think God is telling me to kill somebody, you can say, well, no, God's not telling you to kill them.

I mean, he's just not. Not the true God. I mean, a demon might be doing that, but it's more likely just something that's coming from within you. So that the world that we live in is a world where there is real evil, but the source of real evil actually comes, and here's where, you see, at a first reading this text, our Buddhist friends would actually say, my, this sounds like a very Buddhist type of text, but it's not a Buddhist text.

It doesn't say that the problem is desire. In fact, the opposite of it, I mean, the reason that in verse 12, the Bible tells us that the God's telos, his end for you, is more life, that that's your destiny in Christ, is to be engulfed with more life.

That's your destiny. He tells, the Bible tells us that, so we'll desire it. That's, he tells it, so we'll desire it. So the Bible doesn't say that the problem is desire.

[ 16 : 21 ] The problem comes from desires within us, but it isn't a desire per se. You know, I was just thinking about it. I bought a coffee between the services.

It's water in here right now in case I need to have a bit of a sip. But I was just thinking on the way between getting the coffee and coming back, what a great invention money is.

Like, money is a great, great, great, great, brilliant invention. I know there's at least one economist in the congregation. Talk to the economist about how great an invention money is.

If we didn't have money, I don't know, I'd have to bring like, I don't know, like a live rabbit or something and I'd give them the live rabbit that they could kill later on and they'd give me a cup of coffee and, you know, one of you come up with a brilliant device that you can sell and you sell it online through your own webpage and somebody in Vancouver wants it.

I mean, they just wire you money and you wire them and you send them the thing. They don't have to send you, you don't have to say, well, I'll give you this widget if you give me, I don't know, like a pound of flour, three pounds of butter and a bottle of wine.

[ 17 : 24 ] Like, no, you know, they just send you money and you can buy that stuff. It's a great invention and so the problem isn't money. But we all know that money and the misuse of money and the allure of money causes all sorts of problems and heartache.

People who study marital counseling say that one of the issues that brings, that's connected to a lot of marital problems is in fact arguments over money. One of the things that you'll get surprised at in marriage is your maybe right-handedness is to save and another person's right-handedness is if you have the paycheck, you spend the whole paycheck.

Actually, if you get a paycheck, you spend all the whole paycheck and maybe 5% more because that's the wonderful thing about credit cards, isn't it? I mean, you just pay it back in the next credit card and all of a sudden you think you love this person.

You go, what? You're going to do that with the money? And they say, what? You're going to do that with the money? Come on, live a bit. Don't be so tight. Come on, don't be so, you know, just spend all your money on stuff. Like, what about rainy days?

And then you start to have conflicts and both of you just think it's natural. And that's separate from the fact that people can be consumed with money, that have money rule them, that they make their decisions, their decisions about things based on money.

[18:34] And it's also connected to the fact that you get lots of money and you don't say to yourself, you know, I have lots of money and, you know, gosh, there's this, you know, young couple in the church and, you know, maybe I should just bless them by giving them a couple of dollars or, you know, there's this opportunity, you know, we're supporting a missionary in Angola, we're supporting a missionary here, we're supporting a missionary there, you know, they need to eat and I should be generous towards them and there's the needs of the church, I should be generous.

But, gosh, you know, there's an old joke, maybe some of you have heard it, there's an old joke, there's a young man who was starting up a business and he went to his mom about what he should do and his mom said, you know, listen, the Bible says that if you bless, you know, if you're faithful, God will, you know, bless you and all that type of stuff so I suggest that what you should do is you should make a commitment before God that you tithe, you know, whatever money comes in.

So, you know, he has his business, the first week he makes, first couple months he makes \$500 a week and at the end of every week he writes a check to \$50 and, you know, puts it in the offering plate and then, you know, before you know it he's making \$1,000 a week, \$1,500 a week, \$2,000 a week and every time he writes a tithe but all of a sudden his business takes off, like really takes off, he's making \$10,000 a week and he can't write \$1,000 check to the church, like he just can't, like that's a lot of money and so he's wondering what to do about it and he says, and the mom says, I don't know, I think you should just keep tithing but I don't know, talk to the pastor, he knows all about this type of stuff, this isn't me so the young guy goes to the pastor and the pastor listens to the problem and he says, yeah, I know exactly what to do, I can pray about it and it'll be alright with God, I know exactly how to pray into this situation and you'll be really happy at the end of it and so the young man says, oh I'm so thankful, pastor, let's do that and so the young, the guy says, can I hold your hands?

He says, yeah, you can hold my hands, we hold hands, he prays and God says, dear Lord, please reduce this man's income to \$500 a week again so that he can tithe and that's not what the young, that's not what the young man wanted at all, he wanted a bit of a pass but the point of it all is this, that in fact, it's very, very hard, money isn't a bad thing, money's a brilliant invention, it's a good thing and for those of you who are just starting out and you need more money and the other, you can work hard, be creative, come up with businesses, work for promotions, that's all good things per se but we all know that the problem comes for desires that start to bend that, that we start to desire things too much, we desire money more than we desire maybe our kids or our wife or we desire, you know, power too much or whatever it is, there's nothing wrong with power per se or authority per se but that there's something and the Bible is saying that whatever evil there is is going on in the world, none of it comes from God, it comes from within us and what happens is that it comes from within us and it's as if there's a little voice, good grief here,

I just got out of the blue, distant relative from Australia left me \$200,000 tax free and while some of us are not even tempted anymore, we just spend it all on ourselves, not thinking that maybe part of the reason that that blessing has come is to be actually generous and some of us might struggle with it, others don't even struggle with it because we're no longer even tempted, we just give in to having money control us, it can be the same with the beauty of a man or the beauty of a woman, it can be with all sorts of things, you just go on and on and on is that this, first there's the desire, we're tempted, some people don't have the tempted anymore because we just give in, give in, give in, give in, give in, and it's maybe like as I said, maybe with the marriage and a couple, they don't realize that one of the people is actually really, really consumed with money, they don't realize that because they're just, you know, their parents were consumed with money, their program was consumed with money, their friends were consumed with money and they marry a woman and all of a sudden a woman's not consumed with money and they go, whoa, woman, like maybe there's a different way

[ 22 : 35 ] I should handle money, but we have a desire and it leads to temptation and we give in to the temptation, giving in to the temptation, refusing to be generous, making an idol of money, lusting after a woman, you know, acting out of that lust in some particular way, being filled with anger at something which has happened a slight and so we have the desire, we give in to it and it's sin and sin always leads to death.

In a sense, death is a sign that we are under God's judgment, which is one of the reasons why we feel no matter how much biologists tell us it's a natural process, we all know that it's not a natural process.

There's something wrong and offensive and broken about it. We know the world should be mended in a different way and we sense there's something wrong about it and the Bible is saying there is something wrong about it.

It is a sign of the judgment of God. It is a sign of that aspect that comes from within us that wants to be like God, which means that we have to be over others, that we have to be the center, that we have to have it be our way or the highway and on and on.

So some of you might say, George, thank you for that. That's a very depressing whole thing. We're all going to die. It's a sign of the judgment of God. You know, thank you for that.

[ 24 : 10 ] That's very, very helpful. The news sucks. Desire taints all human beings. But the Bible doesn't just stop with that because some of us might say, George, there's lots of good in the world and in fact, I actually sort of talked about it and I say money is a brilliant invention.

It's a brilliant invention and it's a good. It makes many things in life far more easy. It allows there to be business and enterprise and people to work really hard and to be reimbursed.

It's a brilliant thing and in fact, you see, the Bible doesn't just talk about evil and death. It talks about life. Remember, that's how it began. Look what happens right after verses 13 to 15.

It goes like this, verses 16 to 18. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. So the Bible actually says that there is good.

[ 25 : 20 ] There's an unending amount of good in the created world and there's good within every one of us. But that good is always a gift. It's a gift that comes from God.

And in a sense, me, when, if people see goodness in me or see goodness in you, what they're really seeing is something that God has done in me and through me or it's a reflection of God's goodness which you're able to see.

But in fact, there is good in the world. It isn't the case that the world is all evil or that the world is all good. There is real evil in the world and it comes from human beings. It comes from desires that we have that are disordered.

But there is good goodness in the world. And in fact, all goodness is a gift and the greatest gift that God gives of goodness is that God's greatest gift is that he does something for us that we cannot do for us ourselves which is to make us right with him.

You see, you know, if you think about it for a second, if you're good thinking that that means that God will reward you in some way, like why won't God reward me with eternal life for all the good things that I've done?

[ 26 : 32 ] Like why wouldn't he do that? Isn't that a good question? Like I do good things, why doesn't God reward me for those good things or honor me for those good things? And honor is just another way of saying reward or recognize and recognize is just another way of saying reward.

Like if I do these good things, why don't I get recognized by God in some way and get some type of reward? And if you think about that, if you think about that, there's two things with it. First of all, that means you're actually motivated by the reward, not by God.

You're motivated by the reward, not by God. But the second thing about it is, well, and that, well, that's the first thing. You're not motivated by God. You're not motivated by the greatest good, the source of all good.

You're motivated by something that that good can give me. And snuggled into the humility, the apparent humility, is actually a type of pride.

Because we don't desire God. We desire something that God would give us in recognition for something that I have done. And the fact of the matter is that if we understand that there's something in us as human beings, it means at different times we just, and we can't stop doing it.

[ 27 : 44 ] If you meet a parent and they say they have a five-year-old and their five-year-old is perfect, you know that's just the parents are deluded. They're delusional parents because you just know that they haven't actually produced the perfect five-year-old.

I mean, we know that, right? And yet, at the same, because there's something in us that just keeps, we can't save ourselves. So unless God does something to save us, we're completely and utterly incapable of being made right with them.

And that's what this text says, verse 18, of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be kind of first fruits of his creatures. And this is another one of those wonderful images like the crown of life.

The first fruits is an image of something special and precious. And just like no baby chooses to be born, fundamentally, we don't choose to be reborn.

That prior choice is made by God. And when we receive the word of truth, we're receiving something that God had already decided to give us.

[ 28 : 49 ] And he's already done all that has to be done about it. And it's a very interesting thing that it describes us, what it means is that we receive the news about Jesus and what he's done for us.

And when we receive that news about who Jesus is and what he's done for us, we receive him and the benefits of what he's done for us. And it's talked about as a type of word of truth.

Truth is a meaning word that comes into us and it's as that word comes into us, the truth comes into us. The goodness of God, a good gift of God is that his word of truth comes into us, that we can receive it and that when we receive this good gift of who Jesus is, that the fact that, remember how I said last week, some of you might remember this, that James is a very interesting thing about the way he begins.



If you look at the historical biographies of Jesus, the historical records of him, you'll see that James was the younger brother of Jesus, same mother, different father, and that James thought that Jesus was crazy, he didn't believe him, he mocked him and he wasn't around when he was dying.

And what changes him is that he knows the grave, he knows that Jesus died and he knows the grave is empty and Jesus appears to him alive, resurrected, and completely changes his life.

[ 30 : 22 ] And he understands that this message of the truth is that when Jesus was dying upon the cross, in a sense, all of those things within me that have ever desired wrong, and everything that I still will do that had been desired with wrong, in a sense, that was laid upon Jesus when he died.

And that everything that Jesus did, which was just right, that he never acted in any way that wasn't right with God, and that is offered to me. And that's what the meaning of sacrifice is.

And that this whole thing that Jesus accomplishes is something that God desired for us to have because he loves us and because he's good and it's a gift. And when we receive it, we receive something vastly more.

It just, we can never have earned it. We could never have accomplished it. We don't deserve it. And even the word truth is so powerful because it means that God knew the truth of George.

He knew the truth about how George doesn't have these desires. I've never been tempted by gambling, for instance. Just not in me. I've never been really tempted to be drunk.

[ 31 : 38 ] I'm not boasting because it's just not been a temptation of mine. And that lives you a long list of things I have been tempted to. By telling you I can maybe add one more and everything else are things I've been tempted to.

And God knew the truth about all of that and still Jesus died for me. Still Jesus died for me. And that's the gift of life.

And so the question then might be how do we grow? But God the question isn't everything comes from God as a gift.

So the question isn't how do I grow? The question is how does God grow me? And that's what the last little bit comes in. And that's where we get to Stephen Covey actually. And in fact the next verse that we look at for many of us I know it is for me is a prayer that I need to pray every day for the rest of my life.

What does it say? Look at what it says. Verses 19 to 21. Know this my beloved brothers and sisters. Let every person be quick to hear slow to speak slow to anger.

[ 32 : 49 ] I don't know about you but that's something that I need to pray just about every day of my life. This is what made it into Stephen Covey's list of the seven habits of highly effective people.

Because the fundamental problem is that most of us are far more desirous to be understood than we are to understand. Most of us go into meetings wanting to be understood not to understand.

Often in our marriages we want to be understood not to understand. Often divorces are connected because the other person one person will say my husband or my wife never listened to me.

They stopped listening. they don't know me they don't care. And not only is there this problem that we don't understand or listen but we know for a fact that when you're angry you stop listening altogether.

I've shared with you that there was a bit of a Twitter storm around something that I helped organize and I can tell you for those bleepity bleeps involved in the media storm and proudly trying to damage incomes of people they didn't listen.

[ 34 : 12 ] Didn't listen in the beginning didn't listen to go on and they just consumed with people who are angry we all know they don't listen. So right here we'll continue we know this my beloved brothers and sisters let every person be quick to hear slow to speak slow to anger for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your soul.

And so it's saying this wonderful thing that there's a wonderful line and I think it's 1 John chapter 4 that says how can you say that you love God whom you can't see if you don't love the people you can see like that's a really good examination of conscience why do I believe I love God when I actually don't love my neighbor my boss my kids I don't know people here I don't know and it's the same type of thing why do you think you actually are good at listening to God if you're not good at listening to people like that's a good question so there's this interesting dynamic that to learn to listen to God will also mean that I learn to listen to others and to learn to listen to others will also mean I'm learning how to listen to God it's not an either or it's a both and so once again for many of us a prayer that we could pray for the rest of our lives is Lord today help me to be very quick to hear quick to understand help me to be slow to speak and slow to anger help me to listen well

Lord help me to listen well and Stephen Covey said it's actually a key to success successful people listen well understand well and are far quicker to understand than they are to express their opinions or to get angry but the Bible goes a little bit further into one of our problems and it talks about the fact that we can't just listen but we actually have to put it into practice in some way to really be able to listen you see and that's because we'll use it the other way around my wife can listen to me very very very well and it might very well be that after she's listened to me very very very well she'll say George you're wrong and that's completely fair game like she's really listened and after listening she says

George you're wrong or George you're selfish you know or George you're unforgiving you know or George that's not godly you know George that's envy but we can't say that to God because God's only good so what it says here is very very interesting verses 22 to 25 but be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving yourselves for if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer he is like a man or woman who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like but the one who looks into the perfect law of liberty and perseveres be no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts he will be blessed in his doing so one of the tragic things for some people with dementia and it's a very sad moment when you're dealing with a loved one with dementia is when they no longer recognize you but there can be people with dementia who no longer recognize themselves you show them a picture of a birthday party from a couple of years ago and you can tell that they don't actually recognize themselves anymore and the

Bible says that's the human condition apart from the gospel and the word of God that we don't actually recognize ourselves we don't actually see ourselves and the way we begin to see ourselves is not just by listening to the word but doing the word means that if you think you can sort out moral dilemmas and temptations just by thinking you're deceiving yourself that we need to obey our way to clarity not merely think our way to clarity if we want to have clarity about a great moral issue but aren't actually willing to take a stand on the moral issue we will never actually understand the moral issue but that's not kissing your brain goodbye because as I said to listen well to understand well to read well involves the mind it involves patience it involves the imagination it involves compassion and entering into the other world it involves self effacing and the full aspect of the person to really listen well but as we listen well to even listen more deeply we need to begin to obey that which we begin to understand you'll never understand the biblical teaching on the hold of money unless you begin to give money away won't happen won't happen you'll never begin to understand you know the dignity of a human being without treating human beings well you'll never understand marriage without trying to be faithful in your marriage you'll never understand the sweetness of the word without reading the word and putting into practice

[ 39 : 55 ] I'm saying you but it's all me too I will never do those things as well I'm not above you in that type of sense and so the Bible says that actually as we read the Bible and this is where the gospel is so important you see if we just read the Bible and we understand we have to read the Bible to understand ourselves and we start to see really terrible things about ourselves like it can start to make you realize I didn't realize I was such a jerk I didn't realize that money had such a control in my life I didn't realize I was so consumed by vanity I didn't realize I was so narcissistic I didn't realize I was so bad at keeping my word I didn't realize I was so bad at being just preoccupied with my own needs and ignoring everybody like I didn't realize I was so bad at these sins of omission and that can be terrifying and we turn away from it but it's only as the gospel grips us and we understand that made right with God is something Jesus did for us and he knew everything there was to know about us when he made us right with him that as that truth becomes more precious and deep to our hearts that it can begin to give us the liberty to see ourselves in the word and say gosh

I do have an anger problem gosh I do have a greed problem gosh I do have a lack of compassion problem for the poor gosh I I do have a hatred problem of those who vote different ways on politics than me gosh I do have a listening problem it's only as the gospel grips us that we can then enter into the word and the word starts to reveal who we are so we can see ourselves and begin to work on it with others let's please stand stand let's bow our heads in prayer father we give you thanks and praise that you desire for your children liberty you desire for us to be free you desire us to have more life you desire us to have a good relationship with you you desire us father to be filled with gratitude and generosity to love the truth to hate lies we give you thanks and praise your desire for us is that we will leave self deception and deceiving of others and false fronts that we will know the truth about ourselves and not be deceived and know the truth about others and not be despairing or deceived we give you thanks and praise you desire these things for us in the security of the gospel and in the truth of your word and we ask father that you would make us disciples of

Jesus who are gripped by the gospel learning to live for your glory learning to live free as we read your word as the Holy Spirit does his work in our lives and father if there are any here who have not yet put their trust in Jesus father may this be the moment may this be the day may this be the time that they say Jesus I need you to be my Savior and my Lord and we give you thanks and praise that the whole truth about who he is and what he has done for us that truth will of your word and make that true of each of us and make it true of us as a church and all God's people said Amen