

Living the Applied Life

(Module 202)



Applied to Our Life Purpose



Discovering Your Fire Within

The overwhelming majority of people on this planet never really discover the unique life purpose for which God created them. It seems that the materialism and the pursuit of all things good in this life have overshadowed the deeper meaning of our life's purpose. Few people, even serious Christians, are tuned in to the idea of finding and fulfilling their life purpose and divine destiny.

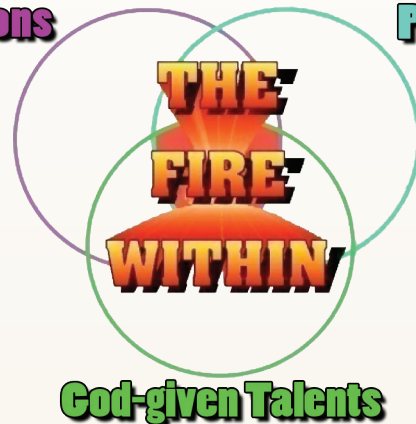
I think this is the reason Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life* was such a runaway best seller even in secular circles. His book touched a nerve in all of us who want to believe that life in general—and our individual lives specifically—must have some greater meaning and purpose. Oliver Wendell Holmes described the sad futility most people experience when he wrote, “Many people die with their music still in them.” In other words, what all these people could have been, and should have been, was never realized.

In the story of Esther, during a secret meeting, her Uncle Mordecai reveals to her a plot to kill all the Jews (of which she is one). What he said to her was hugely profound. He connected this crisis of extinction for the Jews to her unlikely rise to become Queen of Persia. Mordecai asks her, “And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). He was basically saying, “Could it be, Esther, that the reason God made you Queen is because He wants you to save His people from destruction?” Talk about feeling a sense of destiny.

There is something deep within our very beings that nags at us to find some meaning and purpose for our lives. Too often, we try to satisfy this nagging need for purpose by making lots of money, accumulating lots of nice things, being a workaholic, pursuing power and prestige, etc. A multimillionaire told me some years ago—after spending a lifetime dedicated to climbing the ladder of success—that once he had finally reached the top he discovered, to his bitter disappointment, that “the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall.” All that he had gained in the climb to “success” was totally overshadowed by what he had lost in its pursuit—his health, his wife, his family, and his friendships.

**God-given
Passions**

**God-given
Purpose**



So, how can we discover what God has really created us to do? There are three areas that must be considered if we are going to find our life purpose.

1. **God has hard-wired into each of us certain God-given passions.**

These God-given passions are the things that excite us, motivate us, and bring us enjoyment. It may be sports, building things, some moral or social cause, learning, or the arts. Each of us possesses a

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unique combination of God-given passions. God gave us those passions to point us towards a specific purpose and enable us to fulfill it.

2. God has given us a unique set of talents.

These God-given talents are the things that come naturally to us. For some, it is the ability to sing or teach or an athletic ability or some mechanical insight or understanding. Some people are incredibly artistic, while others have a natural ability to dream of what could be. The way to know you have a God-given talent is that you are better at it than you should be for the time and effort you have put into it. The youth who picks up a basketball and right from the first time he touches the ball he is above average at the game. Or the young lady who captivates all by her singing and yet has never once taken a voice lesson. I had a friend in college who had never taken one piano lesson yet he could sit down and play the piano like he had been taking lessons all his life. He could not read a note of music, but if he could hear the music, he could play it. God has given each of us a unique set of God-given talents for a purpose.

3. God has planted within each of our hearts some God-given purpose.

This God-given purpose has some divine, eternal intention for which we have been created. I am not talking about a general purpose like worshiping Him or living a godly life. These things apply to all of us. I am talking about some specific purpose that He wants us to accomplish for Him with our lives.

When you find something to do with your life that is fueled by your God-given passions, utilizes your God-given talents, and accomplishes a God-given purpose, you will find what I call “the fire within.” Engaging in this activity will bring complete fulfillment and will leave you totally energized. It is like when you hit the sweet spot on a baseball bat—you hit a homerun! Now do not think that in order to find your fire within, you need to go into some fulltime Christian work, become a pastor, missionary, or Bible college professor. Obviously, those are worthy life purposes for those whom God has given the passion, talent, and calling to do those specific kinds of ministries.

Instead, you may be like one Christian man I know. Since he was sixteen years old, he felt called by God to be a businessman. He used his passions and talents coupled with this God-given call to build a very substantial family business. He and his family are now impacting people worldwide with their Christian witness. They also have millions of dollars to give away from the success God has given them. I know another commercial real estate developer who is using his passion for real estate and his talent for making multi-million dollar deals so he can support Kingdom causes that God has laid on his heart. This is his God-given purpose.

Most of you have seen how Tony Dungy, retired coach for the Indianapolis Colts, has used his God-given passion and talent for football as a platform to share the message of Christ with literally millions of people all over the world who would otherwise never step foot into a church building—another worthy God-given purpose.

If you do not want to die with “your music still in you,” then I encourage you to discover what God created you for by identifying your God-given passions, your God-given talents, and your God-given purpose. Find something you love and are gifted to do that will fulfill a calling and have an eternal impact. In so doing, you will indeed discover your fire within.

Life Application Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this video?

2. Share some of the things that you are currently involved in that you are passionate about?

3. How is the story of Esther such a great example of realizing your destiny and finding your fire within?

4. What would other people who know you best say are your greatest talents or gifts?

5. How are you currently utilizing those talents in a way that are useful to the Kingdom?

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6. Have you discovered your God-given purpose for your life? If so, share what it is. If not, share why you think you are yet to find it?

7. What can you do in the future to use your God-given passions and God-given talents to achieve your specific God-given purpose?

8. What do you think are some of the hindrances to people discovering their “fire within”?

9. Discuss what it might look like for someone who lives his/her entire life and never discovers his/her life purpose?

10. What are the obstacles that keep you from being able to pursue what you are MADE to do?

11. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?

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Applied to Our Bodies



Housekeeping Matters

Many of you have likely attended a conference where someone gets up at the beginning of the conference to go over important housekeeping matters you need to know. Housekeeping matters are often important minor details that will help the conference run more smoothly – like hotel checkout time, restroom locations, scheduled break times, airport shuttle departures and so on.

However, I would like to suggest an alternate understanding of the phrase, that being “it matters how we keep our house” – in other words housekeeping really matters. The house I am suggesting that we need to be keeping is not the one made of wood and bricks that contains our stuff, but is the one made of flesh and blood that houses us and the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells us in I Corinthians 3:16, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” Notice our body is God’s temple and as such we need to treat it as our mutual dwelling place.

There are three important reasons why it really does matter how well we are keeping our house.

1. Housekeeping Matters Because it is Commanded

I often hear people make off-handed comments suggesting that God isn’t all that concerned about what we eat or how well we take care of our bodies – because, after all, we are going to get a new, perfect one later.

They will often quote Romans 14:14 where Paul assesses food in general, “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself...” They conclude that anything that can be chewed up and swallowed is acceptable fare for consumption and God really doesn’t care what we consume.

Regarding exercise I hear frequently mentioned I Timothy 4:8 where Paul says, “for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things...” They conclude that because spiritual exercise is of greater value than physical exercise, physical exercise is unimportant.

But as caretakers of bodies that do not belong to us, I would like to suggest that we consider a broader perspective on the feeding and exercise of the bodies that God has entrusted to us.

Most believers are quite familiar with I Peter 1:15-16 which says, “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” Few realize that this is actually a quote from the Old Testament. And it may surprise you to know the context of where this phrase “be holy for I am holy” comes from.

In Leviticus 11:44-45 God is giving dietary directions to the children of Israel, “For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. For I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of

Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

This concept of being holy for I am holy comes right out of the middle of a chapter where God is telling His children what to eat and what not to eat. Keep in mind the word “holy” also means “pure.” Apparently God does not want his children to defile the houses He has given them by consuming things that will physically defile (pollute/abuse) those physical houses.

We must understand that how we feed our house is not a means to spiritual approval. Paul points this out in I Corinthians 8:8, “Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off (spiritually) if we do not eat, and no better off (spiritually) if we do.” How we keep our house will have no affect on us after we leave this life. However, it can and will have a massive and often long-term affect on us while we are still in this life.

In spite of his comment, Paul still understood the need for strict physical discipline and the tragic, spiritual ramifications for failing to maintain such discipline. In I Corinthians 9:27 he says, “but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

What we eat and drink and how much we eat and drink has continually been an important physical issue with considerable spiritual ramifications for many centuries. It was as far back as the 4th century when the church first listed gluttony as one of the seven deadly/cardinal sins.

Physical housekeeping really does matter.

2. Housekeeping Matters Because it is Worship

Paul gives us a second perspective on the extent that housekeeping matters when he challenges us in Romans 12:1, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”

Paul makes this same point in answering his own rhetorical question in I Corinthians 6:19-20, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” We are to be glorifying God with and in our bodies.

In both these passages Paul connects our physical and spiritual lives together. He tells us that how well we keep our house should glorify Him and be an outward, physical expression of our worship of Him.

Is how you keep your body an act of worship for you? Does the current condition of your house bring Him glory? Is your housekeeping a clear demonstration of your loving and careful management of the dwelling place He has entrusted to you?

Physical housekeeping really does matter.

3. Housekeeping Matters Because it is Smart

Even if God hadn’t commanded us to take good care of our houses and even if He hadn’t told us

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that we worship Him by what we do with our bodies, there is still a third entirely pragmatic reason to take good care of our bodies that should itself be a compelling enough reason to be responsible housekeepers.

It has been my observation over the years that any asset left unmanaged becomes a liability. I have found no exception to this maxim whether it be materials things, relationships or businesses. You name it. If you buy a new car and never service the car, your asset will eventually turn into a liability. Likewise, if you do not properly “service” your body, it will eventually become a liability too – sooner than it should.

The Center for Disease Control’s report on the health of Americans is staggering. It estimates that of the 300 million Americans, 63% are considered overweight or obese; 80% of Americans over 25 are overweight; 78% of American’s are not even meeting basic activity level recommendations.

According to former U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. C. Everett Koop of the 2.4 million deaths that occur in the United States each year, 75% are the result of avoidable nutritional factor diseases. In other words, 75% of Americans are suffering and ultimately dying prematurely from self-inflicted degenerative diseases due to the poor care and feeding of their houses.

Can you imagine the hundreds of millions of dollars of God’s money God’s people are needlessly spending on drugs, surgeries and healthcare to attempt to recover from the physical maladies that they have brought upon themselves by failing to make good long term lifestyle decisions? God’s asset has been turned into a liability.

It is just smart to do whatever we possibly can to allow our houses to retain their vigor, their health and their vitality as long as possible. Because of the curse of Adam, all of our bodies are going to eventually wear out and cease to operate. But doesn’t it make sense to postpone that time as long as possible by taking good care of our houses so they remain an asset that God can use for His purposes and His glory? The more healthy we remain, the more useful we can be for God’s Kingdom and for His purposes.

If you knew that the next car you bought was going to be the last car you would ever own; if you knew that it was going to have to last for decades and even though there are some replacement parts available, you were going to have to live with whatever condition it was in, would you care for your car differently? I would. How much more should we treat our most valuable physical asset with meticulous care? This is the only body we are going to get this side of glory.

If you would like to develop a healthier lifestyle – become a better housekeeper, I would suggest you start with the book, *The Maker’s Diet* by Jordon Rubin and then go from there. And don’t forget the Owner’s Manual. You would be absolutely amazed at what God has told us in His Manual about health, disease, diet, exercise, etc.

I hope as you pray and seek the mind of the Lord on this important but often ignored area of stewardship that you will come to agree with me that housekeeping matters.

Life Application Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this video?

2. I Corinthians 3:16 says, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?" What excuses or justifications have you made in the past to not care for the temple that God has entrusted to you?

3. I Corinthians 6:19-20 tells us, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." How well are you doing in glorifying God in your body?

4. Have you ever noticed how being in good shape physically actually helps you to be in better shape spiritually? Share some personal examples of this.

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5. Have you ever participated in an extended fast (more than 24 hours)? Why do you think the physical and spiritual exercise of fasting has been virtually abandoned by Christians today?

6. Romans 12:1 states that you need to be “presenting your bodies as living sacrifices . . . of worship.” Have you ever thought that how you feed and care for your body is actually a form of worship? Does that give you greater or less motivation to take better care of your body?

7. Is our relationship to Christ affected by our care and feeding of the temple that He has entrusted to us? Is our salvation at stake if we do not take good care of our body? If not, then why should it matter how well you care for it? Isn't salvation all that really matters?

8. If you knew you were only going to get one car to drive for your entire life, would you care for it differently than you would if you knew you could trade it in on a new one in a few years? How, then, might we need to be more careful about how we care for our bodies since it is the only one we get for our entire lives?

9. What do the statistics mentioned from the Center of Disease Control tell us about how well we are taking care of our bodies and our health? Why are they so ominous?

10. Should a follower of Jesus be more or less concerned about taking good care of his physical body than an unbeliever?

11. Why are Christians as a whole in just as bad of physical shape as unbelievers?

12. With all this new information on good housekeeping and its importance, what changes do you intend to make to do a better job of caring for His temple? What are you going to start doing differently?

Applied to Our Children



Our Struggle With Their Struggle

The statement, “When you give, you will take away” is an intriguing maxim, isn’t it? It at first blush almost sounds contradictory. Let me give you some simple examples to illustrate its truth. If you give food to a man, you will take away his hunger. If you give love to a child, you will take away his loneliness. If you give the gospel to a woman, you will take away her “lostness.” When you give work to a man, you take away a feeling of uselessness. When we are talking about giving someone “life essentials,” this does not seem like a particularly profound truth, does it? In the giving, there will always be something gained and something lost. In the above cases, what was gained was good and what was lost was bad.

What makes this statement anything but simple, however, is that once you go beyond “life essentials,” it is often a considerable challenge to be sure what you give is good and what you take away is bad. Without careful attention to this maxim, we could easily find ourselves giving a bad gift because it will take away more good from the recipient than it bestows. This is where God has a decided advantage on us. James 1:17 says, “Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights...” God knows how to give the perfect gift. If we were all-knowing and all-loving too, we would be a lot better at this gift-giving than we are. But as mere mortals, this can prove to be a very tricky business.

Let me tell you a story. I live in a pretty blue-collar, interracial, tract home part of town. Last summer, I was standing in my driveway sweeping up some yard debris when up my road, driving very slowly comes a man and his young teenage son in a brand new, black, convertible, BMW sports car. I am not a car enthusiast at all, but even I could not help but notice this very noticeable car coming towards me especially since this is not the kind of car you ever see in our part of town. I had no idea who they were, but I still smiled in their direction as they drove slowly towards our house.

Then, to my shock, they turn into my driveway and pull right up to me. I am now feeling real pressure because I am sure I should know them. Yet, seeing their faces clearly only confirms I have absolutely no clue who they are. The dad is sitting there smiling at me like we are old friends. (I just hate it, when this kind of thing happens to me!) I walked slowly around the car over to the driver side intentionally eyeing this shiny automotive masterpiece trying to buy myself a few extra seconds for my aging, mental hard drive to find the file on who this guy is that is sitting in my driveway smiling at me.

I walked over, smiled and said in a friendly tone, “Nice car.” He said, “Yep, just drove it off the lot. I bought it for my son who is turning sixteen next week. I am showing him what all it does.”

It was obvious. He didn’t know me from Adam. He simply pulled in my driveway to impress me, a total stranger, with the car he just bought for his son. His son, sitting in the only other seat in the car, didn’t look like he was more than thirteen. He just sat there looking more overwhelmed than delighted by all this attention. I was so taken back with this spontaneous encounter that the most profound thing I could think to say in response was, “Well, this is a really nice first car.”

The dad beamed proudly. “Yep. Well, gotta run.” Putting the car in reverse, he backed out and drove

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off in the same direction he came – making it seem like he had driven over from wherever it was he lived for the express purpose of showing me the car. Now, with his mission accomplished, he was going back home.

As he drove off, I just stood there. What was that all about? And then as almost always is the case with me, I come up with the definitive response of what I should have said to this father, unfortunately, about three minutes too late. (If this ever happens again, however, I am ready!)

My response to this proud father should have been, “You realize that by giving your son this as his first car you are going to ruin him for the rest of his life.” I doubt my wise and insightful response would have made any difference to this dad, assuming he even understood what I meant by it. But I have thought often that I might have been the only person in this part of town that could have seen his gift for what it really was. Of all the driveways he could have pulled into to show off the car, he picks my driveway, and I was just too slow on the draw to think how to warn him. But maybe all this happened for your enlightenment, not his.

Back to my maxim. If you give your son a brand new BMW convertible for his first car, you will take away...what? This dad has likely taken away his son's ability to ever be content with any less of a car. He probably has taken away his ability to set realistic controls on his spending, not buying what he cannot afford. He certainly has taken from his son the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of working hard and methodically saving up to buy his first car and appreciating what it really costs in time and money to own a car like this? He may have also taken away his son's ability to appropriately connect a healthy work ethic to its corresponding material rewards. He might have taken away any sense of humility in him now that he owns the nicest car in both the student and faculty high school parking lots. (I don't know about you, but it would have been very hard for me as a sixteen year old to be driving a brand new, BMW convertible sports car and remain humble.)

You see, the first car this boy will ever own will be the finest car he will ever own. His “car life” going forward will always fall below the standard now set for him by his father.

Admittedly, this father was giving his son a very generous gift. In so doing, however, he was likely taking away several experiences that would be far more valuable to his son in the years ahead than the car. This gift, by my calculation, will produce for this young man a net-loss life-effect (i.e. more loss than gain). I have seen these kinds of gifts made many times by oblivious, well-intentioned, loving parents and doting grandparents who have given generous and loving gifts to their heirs that only ended up producing a net-loss life-effect for them.

Before we decide to give something to someone beyond “life essentials,” it would be in our and the recipient's best interest to carefully consider this maxim and whether the gift we are considering might produce a net-gain or a net-loss in the life-effect on the recipient.

Remember the maxim, “When you give, you will take away.” Make every effort in your giving to ensure that your gifts do not unintentionally take away more than they provide.

Life Application Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this video?

2. How did the story about the young teenager getting a brand new BMW convertible strike you? What observations can you take away from that story?

3. Share an example of a bad gift you personally gave that ended up taking away more good from the recipient than it bestowed?

4. In what ways do you see our nation's welfare system supporting this idea of "giving that takes away more good than it bestows?"

5. Share what you have done right in this area of giving that gives more than it takes?

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6. Have you considered your motives in providing for your children? Is it sometimes motivated by pride?

7. How can you enjoy some of the fruit of your financial success without getting your children accustomed to a lifestyle that exceeds what they can continue when they move out and start living on their own? Where is the balance?

8. How can you invest your time or talents in giving the things to people that adds to the quality of a person's life?

9. James 1:17 says that "every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." How can we convey this idea of where the gift is coming from when we are giving to help others?

10. Will cash given with no strings, conditions, relationship, love or accountability accompanying it more likely or not produce a positive outcome in a person's life? Why or why not?

11. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?

LESSON FOUR

Applied to Our Minds



What's on Your Mind?

Have you ever been asked the question, "What's on your mind?" Usually, the questioner wants to know what you are thinking about at that very moment. However, from a spiritual perspective, this may be a question we should be routinely asking ourselves. The truth is that what is on our mind is a very accurate indicator of who we really are.

Solomon says it this way in Proverbs 23:7, "For as (a man) thinks within himself, so he is." In other words, you are what you think about. Paul is much more direct in Romans 8:5-6 when he declares, "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace..." And because of this he adds a strong exhortation in Colossians 3:2, "Set your mind on things above and not things on earth."

With all this said, we see that the real spiritual battle is in the mind. The fact is by the time our sin manifests itself in actions, it is already too late - the battle is already over. We have lost before we actually even committed the sin. Jesus shared this profound spiritual reality in Matthew 5 when He tells us that sin does not begin with the act of murder, but rather with the mere thoughts of anger. He also adds that sin does not begin when one commits the act of adultery, but rather when one lusts over the woman in his mind.

There is an old gospel song entitled, Old Man's Rubble which poetically expressed where the spiritual conflict really rages. It says, "Deep within you there's a spiritual battle. There's a voice of the darkness and a voice of the light. And just by listening, you've made your decision. 'Cause the voice you hear is going to win the fight."

So, with the sobering reality that the front line of the battle is in our mind, not our behavior, we must carefully assess how we are managing what we think about. We must recognize that what is on our mind is the most accurate indicator of our real, spiritual health. So, let's evaluate what kind of mind we might have.

A Carnal Mind

Paul describes the unconverted, carnal mind in Philippians 3:18-19, "For many walk ...that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."

One of the primary characteristics of the unbeliever is that his mind is set on earthly things. This word "set" carries with it the idea of being "intent on or fixed." Their singular focus is on earthly things.

Any unregenerate mind left to its own unrestrained devices will focus on the here and now – what is immediately present. And sadly our world is filled with masses of carnal minds that are set on earthly things and are constantly enticing us to join them in their fixation on earthly things.

A Conflicted Mind

It is with this conflicted mind that we may see shadows of ourselves. Sadly many churches, as Alistair Begg expresses, are filled with what he calls “unconverted believers.” They profess Christ, but are not changed. They have the talk of a believer, but their mind and actions are that of an unbeliever. This is not a new phenomenon.

Do you remember when Jesus was informing His disciples of His pending death and Peter (in his typical impetuous fashion) objected to such a possibility? In Mark 8:33 Jesus makes a striking statement to him. Jesus orders, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” Peter, devoted as he was to Jesus, still struggled with a conflicted mind. His mind was flip-flopping between earthly things and heavenly things. And Jesus called him out when it had “flopped” on earthly things.

James describes an unconverted believer in 1:8 as, “being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” The conflicted mind waivers back and forth from a carnal mind to a converted mind, making him “unstable in all his ways.” On Sunday morning his mind is on spiritual things and by Sunday afternoon it is back on earthly things. He reads the Word and his mind is on spiritual things. He then reads the newspaper and it is back on earthly things. Back and forth. Up and down. In and out.

I fear that for far too many of us, this may be descriptive of our common state of mind – continually waffling between heavenly thoughts and earthly thoughts – “a double minded man, unstable in all his ways.” Hence, Paul’s exhortation to “set your mind on things above and not on earthly things.”

You might ask how can we possibly live in a material world and not find ourselves thinking about earthly things? It is not whether you are thinking about earthly things or not, it is rather how you are thinking about these earthly things that is so important. Do you think about earthly things within the context of heaven and eternity or simply within the context of yourself, your own pleasure and merely the here and now? We need to be continually in a heavenly state of mind even while we are in the midst of earthly things.

A Converted Mind

Our goal must be to allow the Holy Spirit to take such total control of our mind that regardless of what we are in the midst of, He is controlling our thoughts. Paul expresses this objective in II Corinthians 10:5 when he says, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” Every single thought captive.

Paul lists for us what we should be filling our minds with on a daily basis in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell (take an inventory) on these things.”

A young granddaughter sitting on her grandfather’s lap asked curiously, “Grandpa, do you think I could live my entire life and not have a bad thought?” Her grandfather replied, “No, honey, I don’t think anybody could do that.” She then asked, “How about a year? Could I go for a year and not have a bad thought?” Her grandfather again shook his head, “No, honey, not even for a year.” Persistently,

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she inquired, “How about a day? Could I go for a day?” Again her grandfather answered sadly, “No, honey, I don’t even think you could go for a day without a bad thought.” Not giving up, the little girl pressed, “How about a minute? Could I go for one minute without a bad thought?” Her grandfather smiled and nodded approvingly, “Yes, sweetheart, you could go for one minute without having a bad thought.” “Then, grandpa,” she answered, “that is how I want to live my life – one minute at a time.” Maybe that is how all of us should start living our lives – one minute at a time.

I love Isaiah 26:3, “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you” (esv). The word “stayed” means something that is fixed in place or immovable. We want to have our minds immovably fixed on Him – regardless of our immediate earthly environment or our current life circumstances.

How can we successfully maintain a completely converted mind? The words of the great old hymn by Helen Lemmel remind us, “Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim. In the light of His glory and grace.”

May we all keep our eyes and our minds fixed firmly on Him (Hebrews 12:2).

Life Application Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this video?

2. Why is what is on our mind such a good indicator of our spiritual health?

3. How do you react to this statement? “We see that the real spiritual battle is in the mind. The fact is by the time our sin manifests itself in actions, it is already too late – the battle is already over.”

4. What are some of the ways I might see in my own life a “Conflicted Mind?”

5. Describe your greatest struggle in terms of a conflicted mind? (Romans 8:5-6)

6. What is Paul’s prescription for a conflicted mind? (Philippians 4:8)

7. Most of us are familiar with Isaiah 26:3: “You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” How can you practically apply this verse to your life?

8. What things would be best for you to avoid, in order to avoid flip-flopping back and forth from a conflicted mind to a “converted mind?”

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9. What do you think is the key in your life to “keeping your eyes on Jesus?”

10. If our mind is the battleground, how can we proactively and successfully wage war and win the war?

11. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?

LESSON FIVE

Applied to the Gospel



Our Ultimate Stewardship Priority

Of all that God has entrusted to us, what do you think should be our ultimate stewardship priority – our money, our time, our talents, our families, our careers, our bodies? What would God put at the top of His list? May I suggest that none of these, as important as they all are, would be ranked first on God's list of top stewardship priorities? In fact, what is at the top of His list might not even make it on many of our lists at all.

Paul knew what was at the top of God's list. He says it this way in I Thessalonians 2:4, "...we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel..." It is not our gospel - it is God's. We were not the ones crucified, buried and raised from the dead - it was Jesus. It is not our salvation - it is His.

For whatever reason, God, in all His infinite wisdom, chose to entrust to mere mortals his top eternal priority. Candidly, I marvel that He would assign to such fallen and selfish creatures as us, the task of bringing the world to Him.

In God's mind is there any greater priority than the proclamation of the death, burial and resurrection of His only begotten Son?

Paul repeatedly identifies sharing the gospel as a top stewardship priority. In each reference he gives us a slightly different focus on why our stewardship of the gospel is so critically important and of the utmost urgency.

1. The Gospel Saves - "God's Grace"

In Ephesians 3:2 Paul writes, "...you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you..."

We all readily accept that "...the gospel...is the power of God for salvation..." (Romans 1:16). What we may not be as aware of is that when we accepted the gospel we also accepted the responsibility of being stewards of "God's grace," now offering this grace to the lost world from which we have been rescued.

Remember, Matthew 28:19-20 is called the Great Commission, not the "Great Suggestion." Just as with everything else our Father has entrusted to us, the gospel carries both a privilege and a responsibility. In this case it is the honor and the challenge of disseminating His good news. We are to be ready and willing to both proactively (Mark 16:15) as well as reactively (I Peter 3:15) share the gospel with unbelievers at every opportunity.

It is not enough to just intellectually agree that the proclamation of the gospel is our top stewardship priority, we must live like it is. The latter, I think we would all admit, is where the "rubber really meets the road."

2. The Gospel Matures - “Complete”

Paul says in Colossians 1:25-28, “...I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God...to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

It is commonly believed that the gospel is for the unbeliever. Once sinners accept the gospel, they then need to move on to the “meat” of the word and leave the “milk” (of the gospel) behind (using the language of Hebrews 5:12-14). The implication is that there are more “meaty” things in the Christian life that need to be pursued and developed to become a mature Christian.

But according to Paul, he intends to present every man complete in Christ by proclaiming Christ to them. The gospel is not just the beginning of the Christian life, it is also the end. What in your life should not be radically affected by your acceptance of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ? I have now been a Christian for over 50 years and I can still be easily brought to tears when reminded of what Jesus did for me at Calvary. In fact, the older I get the more moved I am by it all.

Paul reminds the Philippians in 1:27, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ...” He is telling us that our daily behavior should be a consistent representation of the foundation of our faith – the gospel of Christ.

The gospel must permeate every aspect of our lives: how we spend our time and our money, how we use our talents, what we allow to entertain us, how we raise our children, how we treat our bodies, how we give, when, where and how we work. Absolutely everything should be impacted by the good news of what Jesus did for us on the cross and the price that was paid to redeem us.

No matter how long we have been following Jesus, the gospel must remain the immovable foundation that leads us “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

The gospel is not just for the sinner who needs to be saved, it is also for the saint who needs to be made “complete in Christ.”

3. The Gospel Motivates - “Compulsion”

In I Corinthians 9:16-17 Paul confesses, “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.”

You might conclude that after the third beating with rods and a life-ending stoning (II Corinthians 11:25) Paul might be getting a little bit weary of this stewardship of the gospel that God had entrusted to him. He endured more than any of us will likely ever endure and it really didn’t matter whether he liked the job or not. Paul is saying, “Want to or not, easy or not - I’m all in.”

I think Paul could echo the words of Jeremiah 20:9, “But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,’ Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am

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weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.”

We are all called to be stewards of a gospel that is burning so hot in our bones that we cannot hold it in. We should be compelled, willingly or reluctantly, to share this good news with both sinners and saints, because we have a “stewardship entrusted” to us to share it with any and all who will listen. I think that is what Paul is talking about when he is telling Timothy, “be ready in season and out of season...” (II Timothy 4:2). In other words, be ready to share when it is convenient and when it is not, when you feel like it and when you don’t, when it is safe and when it is not.

The slogan of Nike might be the charge Paul would give to us today regarding sharing the gospel either voluntarily or as a duty - “Just do it!”

Conclusion

In I Corinthians 4:1-2 Paul tells us what God is looking for from stewards of His gospel, “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.”

I think there is one unavoidable question that we all must honestly ask ourselves, “Am I being a trustworthy steward of the gospel He has entrusted to me?”

Proverbs 11:30 tells us, “...he who wins souls is wise,” and might I add is also a trustworthy steward. May we all be found trustworthy in this – our ultimate stewardship priority.

Life Application Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this video?

2. Discuss how and why some people might see their ultimate stewardship priority as being our money, time, talents, families, careers or bodies?

3. How does it make you feel to know that God has entrusted the salvation of mankind to you? Share your thoughts on this statement, “Just as with everything else our Father has entrusted to us, the gospel carries both a privilege and a responsibility. In this case it is the honor and the challenge of disseminating His good news.”

4. Describe how if we really believed that the proclamation of the gospel is our top stewardship priority it would influence our lifestyle?

5. Relate how “the gospel permeates every aspect of your life” (how you spend your time and your money, how you use your talents, what you allow to entertain you, how you raise your children, how you treat your body, how you give, when, where and how you work)?

6. Discuss how the gospel not only saves us, but also matures us? How has it matured you in your own personal spiritual walk?

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7. Why could someone conclude from observation that Christians must not really believe that people will actually go to hell without the Gospel?

8. How well are you doing managing this ultimate stewardship responsibility?

9. What does II Timothy 4:2 mean to you: “be ready in season and out of season?” What can you do to be better prepared to share the gospel?

10. Discuss the responsibility that comes with fully understanding that God has commanded with all authority in Heaven and on earth to preach the Gospel.

LESSON SIX

Applied to Our Earth



Dominion: Man's First Stewardship Assignment

Have you ever felt like you were about to walk into a den of hungry lions? Well, in addressing man's first stewardship assignment, I sense I am about to do that. And I expect by the time I am done, many of you may think I sound like some flaming radical, liberal, vegetarian, environmentalist.

As much as I bristle at that thought, in this one area of earth stewardship, I think the liberals actually have a more sound position and more appropriate concern for earth-care than most born-again believers do.

Please keep in mind, however, the liberals' underlying motivation for carefully stewarding our earth is fundamentally different than ours. Liberals are compelled to steward our planet because they believe that earth is our Mother. Believers, on the other hand, should be compelled to steward our planet because we believe that God is our Father.

Even though the recommended action steps for earth-care may be identical with both ideologies, the foundational reason for our deep concern and respect for the earth will be strikingly different.

Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge." Unfortunately, their planet can be too. So, let's expand our knowledge and see what we might need to do with this important first stewardship assignment.

To Serve and Preserve

There are actually two creation accounts of man – a general one (Genesis 1) and a specific one (Genesis 2). In 1:26 God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion (rule) over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

2:15 adds more detail. Here, God puts Adam and Eve in the garden and directs them "to work and to keep" (esv) the land. The words translated "work" and "keep" can be misleading and seriously understate the fuller meaning of their assignment. The Hebrew word for "work" is actually a word used to describe the service a slave gives to his master. And the Hebrew word for "keep" means to preserve something for future generations. So, a more complete expression of our earth-stewardship assignment would be "to serve and preserve."

What has gone wrong is that fallen man has mistakenly replaced the idea of dominion (to serve and preserve) with exploitation (to use and abuse). Man's incurable lust for more, bigger and better has led him to view the earth as nothing more than a natural resource to be harvested for profit and pleasure. And then once he has extracted from it what he wants, he moves on often leaving the land and waters polluted, denatured and scarred beyond repair. We unconsciously consume our natural resources as if there is an unlimited supply. Because of our preferred lifestyles, hundreds of God's created species have and continue to become extinct with little thought or concern on our part as to what that might mean to the earth or to their Creator. We contaminate our lands and waters with little consideration

of the long-term impact on the planet or those who will come after us. We vehemently object to how our government borrows money leaving our children and grandchildren to figure out how to pay it back, yet we seem quite oblivious to the environmental destruction we are leaving behind for future generations to try to repair and/or clean up. Neither is likely possible.

Ezekiel 34:18 confronts this “I’ve got what I want - I’m not concerned about the rest” attitude when he asks, “Is it not enough for you to feed on the green pastures? Must you also trample the rest with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink pure water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?” Is it any wonder that God’s “whole creation is groaning” (Romans 8:22) under our abusive exploitation?

Think about it. Should we not, as good stewards of our Father’s world, do all we can to reduce our current “consumption footprint” on earth – in order to better serve and preserve His planet?

Calvin Dewitt, a Christian environmentalist, said it well in his book *Earthwise*, “all the things we use, all the things we make, everything we manipulate, everything we accumulate, derives from the creation itself. If we learn to seek godly contentment as our great gain, we will take and shape less of God’s earth. We will demand less from the land. We will leave room for the other creatures.”

Give it a Rest

Let’s consider just one area of our earth stewardship assignment. One of God’s foundational commands to Israel was that the land was to have a Sabbath rest every seventh year. The lands were to lay fallow and not be worked (Leviticus 25:1-7). But as was often the case, the Israelites ignored this command. What is fascinating is that the amount of time the Israelites were forced to spend in captivity in Babylon (seventy years) is equal to the number of Sabbath years they failed to rest their land. God was clearly not happy with how they failed to handle their stewardship assignment.

He tells the Israelites, “I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be appalled over it. You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it” (Leviticus 26:32-35).

As Keil and Delitsch, the Old Testament commentators say, “By causing the land to remain uncultivated for seventy years, God gave to the land a time of rest and refreshment, which its inhabitants, so long as they possessed it, had not given it.”

Allowing fields to periodically lay fallow has long been accepted as beneficial to the land. Why then, don’t today’s farmers allow their land to occasionally lay fallow instead of keeping it under constant production as they do? The answer is painfully simple. They just can’t afford to. Modern agriculture is so expensive – the machinery, fuel, pesticides, fertilizer, and even seed – that farmers have to keep every inch of their farmland in full production just to pay their debts and make a modest living.

To better understand this situation and the causes for it, consider the following staggering statistics:

- 80% of the US farmlands are being used to raise food for the animals that we eat. (Major Uses of Land in The U.S.)

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- 30% of the world's entire landmass is in production to feed the animals that we eat. (Livestock's Long Shadow)
- 70% of all grain grown in the U.S. is used to feed the animals that we eat. (Plants, Genes and Agriculture)
- Nearly 50% of the fresh water used in the U.S. is used to raise the animals we eat. (The Food Revolution)
- It takes about 2,500 gallons of water to produce a single pound of meat. It takes only 25 gallons of water to produce a pound of wheat. (Newsweek)
- Animals raised for food produce about 130 times as much excrement as the entire human population and animal farms pollute our waterways more than all other industrial sources combined. (U.S. EPA)
- More than a third of all raw materials and fossil fuels consumed in the United States are used in animal production. (Ecological Cooking)
- Seven football fields of forestlands are being bulldozed every minute to clear more room for farmed animals and the crops that feed them as emerging nations adopt our western, meat-eating diet. (Smithsonian Institution)
- It takes 16 pounds of grain to produce one pound of meat. (PETA)
- It takes four acres to feed a meat eater and only ½ acre to feed a non-meat eater. A ½ acre can produce 5 tons of apples and ten tons of potatoes. That same ½ acre can produce only 100 pounds of meat. (FAO)

Do you see the close connection between our appetite for animal flesh, which was not part of man's original Garden of Eden diet (Genesis 1:29), and our exploitation of the planet we are to serve and preserve? We could easily give all the farmland a periodic rest if we simply ate the food we raise instead of feeding it to animals and then eating the animals. If we did this, we could also totally wipe out world hunger without needing to plow even one more new acre of farmland. As Jeremy Rifkin poignantly observed, "Meat makes the rich ill and the poor hungry."

Can you see the close connection between these two stewardship responsibilities? By choosing to be better stewards of His body, we will automatically become better stewards of His earth. It is all tied together.

Unfortunately, I have only scratched the surface of this massive, earth stewardship responsibility. But here are a few key questions I think we ought to ask ourselves. Will this new knowledge and awareness actually change how I live? Will I choose to do anything differently that will reduce the size of my current consumption footprint (1.) for the good of this planet, (2.) for the sake of those who will come after me and most importantly (3.) to show respect for the Landlord who entrusted this planet to me to serve and preserve?

As Jeanie Greenough recognized, "I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything; but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." May this become our attitude as we each seek to be good stewards of our Father's world.

Life Application Questions

1. What is your initial reaction to this video?

2. Do you have an “entitled attitude” about natural resources or regard them as God’s creation?

a. When your region suffers a severe drought and water restrictions have been put into place, do you react by cutting back water consumption in any way you can or complain because you can’t water your grass?

b. What efforts have you made toward reducing gasoline and energy consumption?

3. What are you teaching your children by example in the area of conservation of natural resources?

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4. What are you teaching them in regard to a frugal versus an indulgent lifestyle?

5. Explain your ideas on a believer's responsibility in establishing healthy eating choices and limiting portion sizes?

6. Share some things you are doing or could start doing to make an effort to better "serve and preserve the earth?"

7. Describe how you could improve your efforts toward consuming less (a smaller consumption footprint) and preserving more for those who will come after you?

8. As believers, do you think this idea of earth stewardship ought to be a matter of serious concern for believers? Why or why not?

9. Share about how stewardship of our bodies and stewardship of the earth are connected? How could you change your diet to be a better steward of the earth?

10. Share how you think Hosea 4:6 illustrates where Christians are in this matter of earth stewardship. He says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

11. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?
