

***Eyes on Jesus:
Having a Spiritually Focused
Holiday Season***



Quiet Time and Devotional Series

Inner Action Ministries
Minneapolis-St. Paul Church of Christ
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Eyes on Jesus: ***Having a Spiritually Focused*** ***Holiday Season***

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All Eyes on Him - Day 1

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

I went upstairs the other day to grab my water bottle because I was working in my office and was quite thirsty. Once I got up there, I saw a few things out of place that needed to be put away so I did that. Then I realized that there was a box that was sitting out that needed to be put in the closet downstairs. Then I thought that I really kind of wanted a snack so I made myself a quick snack and put it on the box to carry both downstairs. Once I got downstairs I went to put the box away but saw that the closet into which I was putting it needed to be re-organized. So I did that quickly, went in my office to have a snack, started to sit down and realized that I had never gotten my water bottle, which was the very reason that I went upstairs in the first place.

It is so easy to take our eyes or minds off of the things that we need to be focused on. We are so easily distracted. It's not that big of a deal when it comes to a water bottle, but it can mean the difference between spiritual life and death if we forget what we need to keep our hearts, minds, and eyes focused on. That is especially true during the holiday season.

- Read Matthew 14:25-31
- Why do you think that Jesus called Peter to get out of the boat?
- Why do you think Peter was willing to get out?
- What might the other disciples have been thinking as he was getting out?
- What caused Peter to start sinking?
- Do you think the wind and waves were always there or did they just kick up the moment he began to walk?
- Where was Peter's focus when he sank? Where was he forgetting to focus?

Peter often gets a bad rap here. We shouldn't forget that at least he had the courage to get out of the boat. He may have sank but he was the only disciple to actually walk on water. But he made a crucial mistake in his attempt. He took his eyes off of Jesus. Regardless of whether you are walking on water, trying to make it through another week of work, or spending the holidays with your relatives, if you take your eyes off of Jesus you will sink rather quickly.

- Read Hebrews 12:1-2
- How can the crowd of witnesses of those that have gone before us in the faith, as well as the brothers and sisters who are in our lives on a daily basis help us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus?
- What are some of the things that can hinder you from following Jesus consistently and faithfully?
- Are there any things specific to the holiday season that can hinder you, any sin that has entangled you in the past, or anything that you suspect you might need to be careful of in the future?
- How does keeping your eyes on Jesus and what he endured on the Cross help to keep you focused spiritually?

The trouble with most distractions, of course, is that you don't see them coming ahead of time. That's why we need to stay determined to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus throughout the holiday season and beyond. I forgot to get my water bottle the other day because I did not keep my thoughts fixated on that. I did not prepare myself for the distractions that might come. The same principle is true when it comes to Jesus.

- Read Hebrews 3:1
- The term translated "fix your thoughts" or "consider" means to think about deeply or even "meditate" on something.
- Why is it important to keep your thoughts fixed on Jesus?
- What happens to you when you stop keeping your heart and mind focused on him?
- What are some of the things that fight for your attention during the holidays?
- One of the difficulties during the holiday season is that our schedules change and can become quite hectic and unpredictable.
- Take some time to look at each day during your holiday season and ensure that you have a good spiritual plan to have time studying the Bible, praying, and getting together with other disciples (even if it's over the phone because you are out of town).

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on Psalm 10:4 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.

Everything You Do - Day 2

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

I went back to my home town with my wife and son for our first Christmas as a disciple. I had been baptized for nearly a year and had learned the importance of prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with believers. I had grown over that year in my faith and faithfulness. But that all seemed to go awry quite quickly when I went home. After a few days, I found myself suddenly sleeping in late, getting up to big breakfasts that my mom had cooked for us, and just generally falling into my old way of doing things. After a week, you could have barely recognized me as a disciple at all.

Maybe you can relate to that in your own way. The holidays seem to have a special way of yanking us out of our walk in following Christ. They can bring out the best in us but they can also bring out the worst. The thing that I had truly forgotten was that I was to be the light of Christ everywhere I went. That's not a part time job. I had lost sight of bringing God glory in everything.

- Read 1 Corinthians 10:23, 24
- In these two verses Paul gives three important principles that help guide our actions wherever we might be:
- The first principle is that everything we do should be beneficial
 - What do you think Paul means by “beneficial”?
 - What are some things over the holiday season that you could do that would be beneficial?
 - What are some things that you really need to avoid that would not be beneficial?
- The second principle is that everything should be constructive for the body of Christ
 - That means that we should always have our family of believers in mind
 - Even when we're not directly with them our actions either build up the body (directly or if nothing else in reputation and association with our actions) or tear it down
 - How can you have a holiday season that is constructive to the body of Christ even when you're not with them every moment of the day?

It is very easy to get off track over the holidays. Life becomes more hectic than normal, we can begin to feel great stress and pressure, routines change, and we often find ourselves around people that we don't see all that often. Reminding ourselves that all of our actions and thoughts should remain in obedience to the Lordship of Christ is vital. Isn't it ironic that the season that we choose to remember the birth of Jesus is often the very season where our culture acts the least like he is Lord? We want to make sure that everything that we do is beneficial for God's Kingdom and edifying for the body of Christ. But there is one more important principle that Paul gives us in 1 Corinthians 10.

➤ Read 1 Corinthians 10:31

- Some of us need a special reminder over the holidays that we need to honor God with whatever we eat and drink.
- How can you glorify God with what you eat and drink? What are some ways that we can fail to glorify God in what we eat and drink (and there are some ways beyond just eating meat sacrificed to idols, which is the main focus of this passage)?
- Can you name anything you do during the day that does not fall under the category of "whatever you do"?
- What does it mean for you to bring glory to God in everything you do?
- The last important principle is to bring glory to God in everything that we do.
- What are some specific areas in which you need to watch closely because you have a tendency to fail to bring God glory? Is it what you say; how you spend your time; how you spend your money; the way you treat those that might annoy you, etc.?

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on Acts 2:36 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.

Operation Servant - Day 3

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Like most people I'd like to think that I work hard all year round. Most of us look forward to vacation time because it usually promises a period to take a little time for rest and relaxation; it's a time to re-charge our batteries and prepare to go back to the hard work that characterizes our lives. That's part of why so many of us love the holiday season. Most of us get at least some time of break from work or school and we look forward to relaxing. But for many we can easily lose focus during those times of relaxation and forget that Jesus has called us to be servants wherever we go and whatever we do.

- Read Matthew 20:25-28
 - What did Jesus say that he wants his people to become in the world around us?
 - What was the purpose of Jesus' life according to this passage?
- Read Philippians 2:1-8
 - What does this passage tell us about the nature of Jesus?
 - Why is it important to note that Jesus was a servant in nature and that it was not just something that he did or actions that he took?
 - What are we called to do and to be in response to the servant nature of Jesus?

Taking time off, some vacation, time, or a little time to rest is not a bad thing. We need time to rest and recharge that does not mean that we stop being a servant. If we feel that we are merely called to serve others then we don't see a big problem with taking a little time off from that. But if we realize that we are to become servants in our nature, then we realize that we cannot stop being what we are. Even when we're on vacation we can be a servant.

For me, it is easy to go back around my relatives for the holidays and suddenly revert to the lazy ways of my youth. I have had to take extra care to continue to be not just a servant of the Lord but also a servant to those around me.

- Read Ephesians 6:7-8
 - What important principle does this passage tell us about being a servant?
 - Why do we serve others?

- Why would God call us to serve others as though serving him?
- Are you a natural servant or does serving others come more difficult for you?
- If you are a more natural servant at heart, what are some of the dangers in that for you?
 - Do you truly serve others to please God, do you do it for the praise of men, to impress them, or for some other similar reason?
- If being a servant is not so natural for you, what do you find most difficult about it?
 - How does this verse help motivate you to be a more consistent servant?

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on 1 Peter 4:10 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.

The Pull of Laziness - Day 4

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

The other day I saw a commercial for a product that you strap around your abdomen that is supposed to help you get incredible looking abs. The amazing part of this device is that you don't have to do anything. You strap it on, turn it on, and it actually contracts your muscles for you, and wham-bam-kalashazzam, you've got a six pack. I knew that we are a culture that is quickly spiraling into laziness but this is definitely a new high, or should I say low.

For some, the holidays are a time where we get incredibly stressed and busy and that is why we need to keep our eyes on Jesus. But for others, there is temptation the other way. We get incredibly lazy and self-focused. Good thing for us, the Bible has much to say to help those that struggle with that temptation.

- Read Proverbs 24:30-34
 - What did the author see when he went past the field of a sluggard?
 - What lesson did he learn from that?
- Proverbs 19:24
 - What principle does this passage teach?
 - Does this ever sound like you while you're on holiday or vacation?
 - What do you think the biblical balance is between resting and not becoming a sluggard (thinking of yesterday's devotional might help)?
- Read Proverbs 6:6-11
 - What lessons can be learned from the ant?
 - Is it wrong to take some time off of work and rest?
 - What are some things that we still need to do to be obedient to God, to be actively close to him, and to put his Kingdom first while on vacation or break?
 - The ant doesn't need an overseer telling him to take wise action at every turn:
 - Is that true of you? Do you act wisely and avoid laziness even if your spiritual leaders aren't right there telling you exactly what you could be doing?

When we become spiritually lazy it is usually because we have taken our eyes off of Jesus and put it on other things, namely ourselves. Do you look for

warning signs of laziness or selfishness in your life? One of the wise things that you can do this year if laziness and selfishness can be a struggle of yours is to have a plan. How are you going to stay focused on God? How are you going to involve other brothers and sisters in helping you to overcome?

➤ Read Hebrews 6:11-12

- According to this verse, what is one of the things that can lead to laziness?
 - The point is that if we lose sight of the hope of resurrection and living the resurrected life now, we can become quite lazy
 - If “lazy” here is used as in the opposite of the resurrected life, then what might the author mean by laziness specifically in this context?
- What are some of the other ways that we can be lazy and what can cause those types of laziness?

Read 1 Timothy 4:7

- What are some ways that you can train yourself to be godly?

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on Proverbs 12:24 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.

I Should Have Known - Day 5

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

I distinctly remember this Burger King commercial for the Whopper that used to play for awhile when I was a kid. All it did was show a Whopper and slowly get closer and closer. While the camera panned in, the song "Temptation" played in the background. The lyrics still stick in my mind: "You came, I was alone. I should have known you were temptation. . . . Temptation, I am yours." The commercial must have been effective at some level because I remember it clearly almost 30 years later. But it speaks to a truth. Temptation rarely just nabs us out of nowhere. We see it coming. We should know better but we don't take proper safety measures, and eventually wind up giving in way too often.

The holiday season can be full of temptations of all types. It might be to become too busy, it might be worry, it might be over-indulgence in food, it might be materialism, it might be family gossip, the list is almost endless. The Bible does not leave us on our own, gladly. We are told that God always gives us the tools to escape temptation (1 Corinthians 13:10). Today we will look at some of the most important biblical tools to make sure that temptation never gets off the ground and in to our lives.

- Read 2 Corinthians 11:3
 - How was Eve led astray?
 - The battle of temptation is almost exclusively fought in our thought life. That is where Satan and the principles of the world will attack.
 - Every sinful action that you have ever taken goes back to the seed of a tempting thought
- Read 2 Corinthians 10:4-5
 - What does this passage urge us to do with our thoughts?
 - We have to measure every thought against the word of God like a ruler
 - We cannot keep thoughts from coming but we can keep from dwelling on them
 - "We can't keep birds from flying above our head, but we can keep them from nesting in our hair"
 - We have to be extremely careful with our thoughts because most of the time they sound rational and appeal to our emotions

- Most of us go to great lengths to protect ourselves from viruses and we lock our doors to protect our belongings and yet we naively assume that we can expose our minds to anything we desire without having any negative effects whatsoever on us
 - What sorts of potentially dangerous things do you expose your mind to (TV, movies, music, friends, books, worldly ways of thinking)?
 - It's not that these things are automatically wrong in and of themselves but they can be dangerous if they contain things that expose our minds to ungodly ways of thinking and influence
- Taking every thought captive and measuring it can be time consuming but which takes more time:
 - To consider every thought and make sure that it is righteous
 - Or to clean up the mess from not controlling our thoughts
- Read Romans 12:2
- What areas of your thinking do you feel most need to be transformed?
- Read Philippians 4:8
- Before we allow ourselves to dwell on any thoughts, they should meet the standards of all eight of these things
 - Something could be "true" (at least in our mind) and not meet the other seven criterion, for example
- Here are seven practical ways to keep our thoughts focused on the right things:
 - Read the Word
 - Our minds will never be more holy than our knowledge of the Scripture will allow
 - Memorize the Word
 - Use the Word and obey it
 - Watch and pray
 - Use prayer as an inoculation (before infection) rather than an antibiotic (used after an infection)
 - Substitute evil thoughts for righteous ones
 - Romans 12:21
 - Be honest
 - Be realistic about your temptations, the truth of them, and the reality of obtaining them
 - Confess to one another
 - James 5:16 – Practice confessing your sinful thoughts and not just our sinful actions

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on Proverbs 12:24 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.

Being a Light - Day 6

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

A few months ago I had to run into a back storeroom in the basement of a building and grab something quickly. The problem was that the room was virtually pitch black and I did not know where the light switch was. I tried to find it but I couldn't and so I had to just slowly feel my way to the room and to the part of the room where I thought what I was looking for might be. It took me longer than I would have liked and yet, feeling my way around the room I could not find either the item for which I was looking or the light switch. Just as I was about to give up, someone who knew where the switch was walked into the room and flipped the light on. Instantly I could see the entire room, including what I needed. It was only then that I realized that I had a cell phone in my pocket that has a rather bright flashlight app on it. I could have used it the whole time but instead I kept it in my pocket and stumbled about.

The Holiday season is a unique opportunity in our culture because it is a time when relatives and families seek one another out and spend special time together. For many people, including disciples, we have relatives that we see at Christmas time that we might only see once or twice a year. It is a unique opportunity to reflect the light of Christ to those relatives and the rest of our families. But just as it was unproductive and silly for me to keep the light that I had unused and in my pocket, so it is unproductive and silly for us to keep the light of Christ that shines through our lives, covered up during the holidays.

- Read Matthew 5:14-16
 - What did Jesus mean when he called his people to be the light of the world?
 - What are some ways that we can put our light under a bowl during the Holiday season?
 - What are ways that we can put our light under a bowl when around relatives, co-workers, out in public, etc.?
 - What happens when a light is not covered up but is put on a stand?
 - How can you specifically be a light to those around you in the various situations that you might find yourself during the holiday season?

There are many reasons that we put our lights under a bowl. For some they get around relatives, co-workers, or whomever it might be and find that it is awkward to share their faith and be a light so they shrink back. For others, they fear reprisal and so they shrink back. For still others, they are yet unfocused on God's will and the conviction that the lost need Christ and so they shrink back. For whatever reason it might be, we must realize that God has given a great deal of responsibility to his people. He has given us the vocation of being a light to those in the dark. Until the light is flipped on, those around us will be unable to see. God has called us to be the conduits of his light that we might represent him to those around us.

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
 - What compels us to share the light of the Kingdom of God with others?
 - What does verse 15 mean? What does it mean specifically for your life?
 - What does it mean that the "new creation has come" when we enter into Christ?
 - What is the ministry of reconciliation?
 - What does it mean to be an ambassador?
 - What does it mean to be an ambassador of Christ?
 - An ambassador is someone who represents his/her country of origin, so to be an ambassador of Christ means to represent the Kingdom of God to those around us?
 - What opportunities do you think you will have this Holiday season to serve as an ambassador of Christ to those around you?
 - What can you do to prepare yourself to be an ambassador and a light?
 - How can the love of Christ compel you personally to do that?

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on Luke 9:26 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.

Doves and Serpents - Day 7

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Abraham Lincoln has developed an almost mythical reputation over the decades as one of the most pure and good-hearted leaders in American history. We think of him as 'Honest Abe'. And while there are many stories from his life that demonstrate his integrity and commitment to the truth, we would be incorrect if we thought that this meant that he was naively innocent and ineffective in the political world. In fact, he was also as shrewd as they come. I dare say that there have been few politicians in the history of our country that have been as shrewd in the political world as was Lincoln. He never surrendered his honor and integrity, but he was as wise as could be and there are also many stories from his career that demonstrate that. It could be said that Lincoln was as innocent as a dove but as shrewd as a snake.

That is exactly what Jesus called his people to be in Luke 10:16. He was sending his disciples out among the "wolves" of the world, he said, and he wanted them to be "as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." What he meant was that he wanted them to be pure, focused on the Kingdom, and full of integrity. But at the same time he didn't want them to be naive. He wanted them to be realistic about the world into which they were heading and what it would be like as they went about proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

As we head into the Holiday season, we will have plenty of opportunities to share our faith with friends and family members that we might not have throughout the year. We want to be pure of heart, full of zeal, and focused on that mission, but we also have to be wise. We have to know the situations into which we are heading and we have to take great care to make sure that we don't wind up doing more harm than good.

- Read Acts 4:29-31
- Why do you think they prayed for boldness rather than to not have any tough situations come their way?
- Can you think of any situations coming up during the Holidays where you might have a chance to share your faith but will need boldness that can only come from God?

- What is your evangelistic plan with your friends and relatives that need Christ over the holiday season?
- How can you be bold, creative, and shrewd in sharing your faith?
- Read Proverbs 12:18
 - Have you ever been reckless with your words when sharing your faith?
 - What are steps that you can take to try to make sure that you avoid being harmful, as much as possible, in your evangelism?
 - We want to be honest and direct but not unnecessarily hurtful or foolish
- Read Proverbs 27:14
 - Sometimes things that seem good, even blessing someone, can be really annoying or taken the wrong way if not timed well. That is the point of this Proverb
 - What are some places and times over the holiday season that might not be the appropriate point for engaging someone in a deep spiritual conversation?
 - How can you be shrewd, wise, and effective in sharing your faith and not be obnoxious and annoying during the holidays?

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on Galatians 2:20 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.

More Stuff - Day 8

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

A somewhat famous American comedian once did a memorable comedy routine where he poked fun at the materialistic nature of Americans. He noted that we have houses full of stuff, mostly that we don't need. We then have to go out and work more, to make more money, to get bigger houses to store our stuff, all so that we can then get more stuff. Then we get more stuff and we realize that we need a bigger house for our stuff and the cycle starts again. All the while he points out the irony of the fact that we didn't really need any of this stuff in the first place.

We are a culture that has nearly perfected greed and materialism. Black Friday shopping on the day after Thanksgiving has become the perfect symbol of that. It has eclipsed Thanksgiving for most Americans and kicks off a shopping season where people tend to go out and buy stuff that they don't need and often can't afford. As disciples, we had better think long and hard about our own level of materialism. Jesus and his followers warned about materialism and the worldly desire for wealth more than almost any other temptation. The fact is that just because we are disciples we cannot overlook the fact that we have been well trained by a culture of greed and excess, and that we have certainly been infected with that disease too. It will continue into our lives as disciples if we don't intentionally and systematically go after our heart, minds, and actions.

➤ Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10

- What do you think Paul meant by "godliness with contentment"?
- What does verse 7 mean practically for you in your life?
- Do you struggle with materialism?
- Can you truly say with Paul that if you have food and clothing, you will be content with that?
- What traps do those who want to get rich fall into?
- What foolish and harmful desires do those that get rich plunge into?
- What are the types of ruin and destruction to which Paul refers?
- Do you think people who wandered from the faith because of their love for money, did that intentionally or was it a slow process?
- What, do you think, are some of the warning signs of materialism that could be evident in the life of a disciple?

➤ Read 2 Corinthians 10:12

- The principle that Paul provides here is that it is unwise to compare ourselves to others to find the godly standard. We must measure ourselves against God's standards alone and not our society or what we used to be like
- When you do that, do you find yourself to struggle with materialism?
- Have you been wise and godly with money this holiday season or have you let our culture define what you need and what you purchase?
- Read Philippians 4:10-13
 - Are you truly content with whatever you have or have you been infected with our culture's need to constantly have things that are new, better, the best and latest, etc..?
 - What is Paul's secret to being content in whatever situation we find ourselves?

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on Matthew 23:25 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.

Be Careful Little Eyes - Day 9

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Imagine you were outside for several hours on an extremely cold day. You got a pretty good chill and finally were able to come inside to the warmth. As you came inside I handed you a cup of nice hot, steaming hot chocolate or coffee (whichever you prefer). As you were about to raise the cups to your lips, already imagining the soothing warmth slowly radiating down your body from the inside out, I tell you that I dropped one tiny little drop of a potent virus into the cup. Now it might not be a problem because in drinking the cup you only had a 50/50 chance of actually catching the virus (none of this is probably scientifically sound, by the way, but I'm making a point not writing a science book). Would you drink the cup?

I'm guessing that most of you would take a pass. We seem to recognize with our physical bodies that we don't want to even take a chance on getting sick. Yet, when it comes to our spiritual states we are often more than willing to pour all kinds of garbage from books, magazines, television, movies, and other worldly influences into our minds and "hope" that it doesn't make us spiritually sick. Of course, we need to be careful of our influences at any time of the year, but there seem to be special opportunities during the holiday season to allow worldly influences into our lives.

- Read Haggai 2:11-14
 - In this example from the Lord, what happened if holy or consecrated meat touched food that was not holy? Did the unholy food become holy?
 - But if holy or consecrated meat touched unholy meat did the holy meat become defiled?
 - What did Haggai mean when he said, "so it is with people"?
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:33
 - What did Paul mean by writing "bad company corrupts good character"?
 - What does that mean if we apply that principle to the things that we allow influence over us like friends, media, etc.?
 - This doesn't mean that we cannot have contact with non-believers but it does mean that we have to be extremely cautious about being around things or people that can influence us or "defile" us.

- Are there any areas of influence around which you need to take extra caution because they might influence you negatively?
- Read 1 John 2:15-17
- Are there things in the world that you know are bad for you but you just cannot give up your love for them?
- Are there any things that are not bad in and of themselves but in which you partake to a degree that is not healthy or glorifying to God (the amount of time you spend watching TV or playing video games for example)?
- What will it look like for you to be completely focused on the will of the Father during this Holiday season?

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on Philippians 4:8 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.

Pray Without Ceasing - Day 10

Colossians 1:16-18

¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

There is a workout regimen called “Insanity” that has become wildly popular these days and is based on the concept of maximum interval training. If you’ve ever seen or done any of this type of workout you know that it is an incredibly stressful mix of plyometrics, body strength training, and grueling aerobics all done at full speed with virtually no rest time. Many of the moves in these routines are aimed at strengthening the core but what strikes me is that even moves that don’t seem directly core related, the instructor makes core related because he constantly reminds you to keep your core tight and engaged. Even during the stretching and relaxation time at the end of the workout he keeps urging to keep your core engaged. There is never a time that your core is not working and that makes a big difference in developing strength in that area of the body.

In a similar way, most of us start our days out with a good “quite time” with God. We pray and spend time in the Word, but then what do we do? Do we quickly jump into the day and let our spiritual core muscles relax or do we keep them engaged? Do we stay in a mindset of prayer and devotion to God throughout the day in whatever we are doing?

- Read Ephesians 6:18
 - What does this passage tell us about prayer?
 - Do you use prayer as a constant weapon throughout the day as you face the spiritual battle?
- Read Colossians 4:2
 - What does this passage tell us about prayer?
 - Are you devoted to prayer?
 - What does it mean in your life to be devoted to prayer?
 - Do you stay in a state of connection to God throughout the day in your heart, thoughts, and actions?
 - Do you pray throughout the day as you face challenges and trials or do you tend to limit prayer to one big time during the morning?
- Philippians 4:6
 - What does this passage tell us about prayer?
 - Do you feel that there is anything you can’t take to God in prayer?

- Take some time to think about if there are things that you don't take to God in prayer but trust yourself to handle, and don't even think about stopping to pray.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17
 - Obviously this doesn't mean that we should do nothing all day but be on our knees with heads bowed in reverent prayer.
 - So, what does it mean to pray continually or "without ceasing"?
 - How would constantly remaining in a connection with God and a spirit of prayer throughout the day help you survive the crazy holiday season?

Time to Ponder

- Read and meditate on Matthew 6:25-33 today.
- Write out one way that this passage challenges you as read it today.
- Write down one conviction that you can either make or renew in your life based on this study.