

Howdy. We are in James 1 tonight if you want to turn there. I will also be heavily referencing Matthew 26 and 2 Timothy 2. So if you want to try to find all of those, blessings to you. While you're turning, let me say again, it's a blessing to be here among you. I was reading Romans 1 today where Paul told the Romans he longed to be among them that "we might be mutually encouraged in our faith." And I have to say that in my time visiting, filling in for Matt and being among Village folks again, it has certainly been mutually encouraging for me. It's been great to be here.

With that said, let me read to you James and then I'll read the other two as well. James 1:14-15, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." 2 Timothy 2:22, "flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart."

Let me pray for us. "Father, I want to pray and ask You again that, in these few minutes as we gather around your word, You would do something bigger than us, You would make this a communion with the Almighty, that You would give us eyes to see Your plan for this world, Your hope for us. I pray that we would see the devastating reality of sin and the bright light of hope of redemption and we would run with You. Show us how to run as we look at Your word. Show us what it is to be people who move through life with You." And I ask you, if you're up for it, to just take a minute to yourself and just ask Him, "Lord please teach me tonight." And if you would, please pray for me, that God would speak through me tonight and it would make sense. "Father, we love You and we trust You. Do with this time what You will. And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen."

Stephen Ambrose wrote a novel called "Citizen Soldiers," and it chronicles the Allied victory in World War II. And in the book, there's a moment he describes, right on the heels of D-Day where a Brigadier General named Norman Coda came across a group of infantry who were pinned down by a group of Nazis firing upon them from a farmhouse. And so Coda went and found the Captain of this infantry to inquire of him why they were making no attempts to take the farmhouse. And the Captain's reply was, "Sir, there are Germans in there, and they're shooting at us." And so Coda unbuckled a couple of grenades from his vest and said, "Well Captain, why don't you fire back at them? And then you and your men watch me and mine, and I'll show you what to do with a farmhouse with the enemy in it." And so as the Captain began to fire, Coda took a group of his men and they snuck around on this hedge row, right up as close to the building as they could get. And then all of a sudden, in a moment, he let out a whoop and then went running towards the building at full speed. His men following, throwing grenades into the windows, Coda ran to the front door, kicked the door open, threw some grenades in, waited for them to go off and then ran into the building, all while the Germans went fleeing out of the back running for their lives. Coda came back to this Captain, still breathing hard and said, "Did you see that? That's what you do to a farmhouse with the enemy in it. Can you do it now?" And the kid said, "Yes sir."

Now, why am I telling you this? As I thought about that Captain, I've wondered to myself, "What got him so afraid that he wouldn't move?" And I thought, "Maybe it was just the situation, that being in a battle early on, it was just the reality of 'I'm in a war and life is at stake' just kind of paralyzed him. Maybe it was the situation." But then I thought, "Or maybe he was ready to fight, he just didn't have a strategy. He wanted to go but he's like, 'I have no idea what to do about this farmhouse,' and he needed somebody to show him." And I thought about this for tonight because I thought, as we

entered into a series last week, we talked about the reality that spirituality is a battle, it's a warfare. And what I want to talk about tonight is, what strategy can we use to win?

So last week, if you can remember was the situation, and we talked about how our Bible will present spirituality in warfare terms. And when it talks about the arrival of Jesus on the planet, it speaks of it as a landed invasion. As much as He came to be the Lamb of God and to be a shepherd for His people, He came to be a warrior. 1 John will say the Son of God appeared for this purpose, destroy the works of the devil, that His arrival was a landed invasion. And it was to be a rescue operation. And we looked at Hebrews 2 where it says, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." He came as Colossians said to rescue us out of the dominion of dark and into the kingdom of the beloved Son. Jesus came to invade, to conquer and to buy out a group of people that would run with Him, no longer slaves to sin, now slaves to righteousness. And now as we look at the reality of our spiritual life, our Bible will present to us that it's not only a battle that happened, it is an ongoing mission. C.S. Lewis said it this way: "Enemy-occupied territory--that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage." He is beating back the darkness, and He is calling a group to join Him in the fight. And we talked last time about when Jesus redeems a group of people, on the cross is where He took away the penalty of sin, that those who by faith would come to Him, are rescued by His grace where He removes us from this enemy kingdom and we begin to move with Him in His journey and His mission. And we talked about how the Bible will paint it as a picture of a triumph. It says that Jesus on the cross made a public spectacle of His enemy, triumphing over him. We talked about a triumph, how a king would ride up victoriously with those he had redeemed in tow and they would mock the defeated king who had been dishonored and made a spectacle of. And so, we talked about how that's a picture of Christianity. When Christ redeems me and I associate myself with Him, I ride out with Him and I mock the enemy He shamed. And yet our Bible will tell us that God, in His wisdom and His sovereignty, has allowed this enemy to remain. And while we go about the work of calling others to know this Christ who saved us, we have an enemy who hates our king and therefore hates us.

I remember my first day of 6th grade. I was very excited about it. I mean, I was sad because elementary school was over, so no more recess. I was mourning the loss of that. But in 6th grade, you get a locker, that's kind of cool, and I was getting to go to school with my older brother, which was a big deal. And so, we were walking to the bus, and I was excited about that. And I remember the bus pulling up, getting on and he began to walk to the back of the bus, because that's where the cool kids sat. And I began to walk after him because I was his brother and therefore by proxy, I could join those who were cool. And so, I was on my way, and yet as we walked through the bus, suddenly a student stood up in between us and got right in my face, this guy named Martin. Now, I didn't know it at the time, but Martin was a bully. He was a guy who found his emotional satisfaction by picking on little kids. That sort of met a need in him. But this particular bully had one problem and that is he had chosen, the year before, to play football and so had my brother. And the problem is, my brother had really hurt him out there. My brother was a tailback and on two occasions, was running with the ball towards Martin who was on defense and hit Martin so hard that this young man went flying into the air and hit the ground and started crying and was sort of squealing like a piglet through the whole event, which is a bad scene if you're trying to bully. It kind of hurts the image when they all get to see that, right? And so Martin understandably didn't like my brother. So back in this moment on the bus, my brother walks by, he gets in front of me and begins to get his face right up against mine. And this is before I really understood that this is what some guys do when they want to fight. I just thought he had personal space issues. And I'm like, "Our noses are almost touching. You smell like Funions. Stop it. What are you doing?" He got in my face and he said, "Are you Cole Stuart's brother?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "I hate your brother." And I said, "Um okay. That's tough but fair I guess. You have that right." And then he said, "So I hate you." And then he put his finger right under my eye and said, "You'll look good with a cigarette burn right here." And at that

moment, we heard a voice from behind him go, "Martin!" and he backed up. He sat down and said, "It's going to be a long year, little brother." Now why did he hate me so much? Because I looked like the one who had shamed him. And the reality our Bible will present is that when our glorious king, Jesus Christ, rescues us and we take His name, we look like Him. And the one our king has shamed really doesn't like us. And so, we're part of a battle, and we have an enemy.

And what I want to talk about tonight is strategy. If Jesus destroyed his work, how do I join in that destroying work of the one who my king hates? So tonight is a strategy talk. How do I fight sin and find victory. That's tonight. Tonight is not the emotional pump up speech; this is a strategy session. This is not the pre-battle pep rally, this is not me trying to get you riled up so you leave pumped up going, "I'm never going to sin again." That's not this. This is not pre-battle talk. This is not me, with face half painted blue, going, "Freedom!" and you all beating your swords, ready to go. This is not me, right before the game, doing the final huddle going, "You guys know what to do. Get it done." That's not tonight. This is not Thursday night of camp where everyone's emotionally hopped up, we've done "friends are friends forever" for the tenth time, everybody's signed a commitment card to be celibate going into the mission field. I'm not going to call somebody up here who goes, "I'm never going to sin again," and have others go, "He's not. He's had such a good week. He'll never do it." No one's going to come up here and go, "I just want to keep this Christian high going." As if God's a bong hit. No, that's not tonight. It doesn't work that way. The Bible will never compare spirituality to bong hits. What it will compare it to is a battle. And it will say spirituality is hard, and we have an enemy who longs to pull us into activity that dishonors our king. And so we need to fight. So tonight, in a very unemotional way, I want to talk about strategy. What tactics can I employ to beat sin. And so, we have three things to discuss: the battlefield, our enemy and our strategy.

So, let's begin with the battlefield. If I could summarize the goal of spirituality, I would say this: it is one movement with two parts. Spirituality at its most simple form, after we have come to know Christ by faith is one movement with two parts, a movement away from isolation and towards intimacy. If I could illustrate it using hula hoops, I would do it this way. I would say on one side, there are activities and environments that would isolate me from the Lord and dishonor Him and there are certain activities that I could participate in that would help me enjoy Him and nurture an intimacy with Him. And so, spirituality is one movement where I am fleeing one set of activities to move towards another, away from isolation, towards intimacy, which is Him. The theologians have a big word for that. It's called sanctification. To be sanctified or made holy, literally means to be sanctified apart from, to be made holy away from a certain thing or its activities and to be made holy unto, consecrated unto, sanctified unto One and activities that honor Him. Sanctification is the movement away from and the movement towards. That's sanctification. Theologians have two big words for those pieces. They call this piece "mortification." There are certain activities and feelings that I want to mortify, to kill. And this, they call "vivification." There are certain activities and affections that I want to see rise up and grow. In the illustration we used last week of a garden, this would be the idea spiritually of pulling up weeds. Of that which displeases my God, I'm removing them. This would carry the idea of planting grass, that that which pleases Him grows up in my life. If you want to use marriage, these would be the activities that cultivate intimacy with my wife, taking her on dates, listening to her, writing her notes. That's this kind of activity. This would be not doing things that dishonor her, like not yelling at her or not dating other people. It would be a movement away from that, away from the things that isolate, towards the things that cultivate intimacy.

Now let me make this note. I'm not saying, "Now, this is the devil's circle and that's God's circle, and you want to get in that God circle, buddy." That's not what I'm saying. Because to paint it that way, paints the picture that God's over here, looking at you going, "Hurry up and get over here. I want intimacy, but quit sinning so much and maybe we'll hang out." And that's not spirituality. The Bible tells us that when Christ has redeemed us, His Holy Spirit lands in us. And Jesus says that even when we're faithless, He remains faithful and He will never leave us and never forsake us. So even if you look and go, "I'm over here. My life's a mess," if you are in Christ, He's rescued you, then He is never far off from you. I'm not talking about running to try to earn His attention, you have it.

What I'm talking about is moving away from the activities that dishonor Him and ultimately wound me and moving toward the activities that cultivate the intimacy with Him I have the blessing to enjoy. My wife can be right next to me in a room and my marriage is not in jeopardy, she would never leave me, but I can feel a million miles away. And I have to fight sometimes to participate in the activities to cultivate intimacy with this woman I love. Do you see what I mean? That's the idea. I don't want to do these things; I want to do these things because I want to enjoy Him. Francis Chafer called these the "big no and the big yes." Does Christianity have no's, things we can't do or shouldn't do? Absolutely. And some people overemphasize that, "Christianity's a bunch of 'you can't do this, you can't do that.'" Well yeah, there's a lot of that, but it's freeing me up from those things so I can chase after these things. Do you see it? One movement, two parts. That's the battlefield. Paul told Timothy this in 2 Timothy 2:22, "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace." That's the idea. I'm running from, I'm running towards to cultivate intimacy with my king.

Now this movement is not done in a vacuum. We have an enemy who wants to get us right here. His goal, if you remember from 1 John last week, is to get us to sin. That is his work. He's been sinning from the beginning. Success for him is to get a group of people to participate in activities that dishonor our great Lord and drive us away from Him. He wants to get us to a place where we will believe lies, that we will find life by running from the author of life. And he will try to get us to participate in that which dishonors our king and wounds us. This is what he wants. And he has a tactic to do it. And so, what I want to do in this second part is look at it. What does he do? Because if we can see his strategy, we can see how to beat it.

For those of you who haven't seen the movie, "Patton," it tells the story of General Patton in World War II, and one of my favorite scenes shows one of his first great battles. It's against Rommel, and there's a lot of tension in that moment as you see their armies come up because Rommel was a highly decorated German officer who had literally written the book on warfare. And so as the battle comes up, you can feel the tension, but then as it engages, you Patton's army completely rout Rommel's. And as Rommel's troops flee, you're wondering, "How is that possible?" And in this grand moment, the camera sweeps over to George C. Scott, who's playing Patton, and as he sees his army victorious, he lifts a hand and looks out across the battlefield and says, "Rommel, I read your book." And he had! And so, he knew what was coming, and so he knew how to beat it.

I want to look at our enemy's book, his objective to get you to sin. I want to look at what he knows and what he does. And he knows three things. Number one, he knows his tools, he knows what he's got. Most simply, he's got a voice in your head. He can solicit thoughts to you, and he knows he has a sympathetic ear because for all of us, no matter how spiritual you are, there is some part of you that still longs for the very things that God set us free from. All of us are "prone to wander, Lord I feel it." And he knows that, and he has a voice in to that. That's his tool.

The second thing he knows is, he knows his target, he knows you. He knows your wiring and he knows your tendencies. By wiring, he knows that every human is built pretty much the same way, that we have a mind that is a cognitive process, this reasoning mechanism. We have affections, our likes and our dislikes, that which we're drawn to, that which we're adverse from. He knows we have affection, and he knows we have a will, a decision making mechanism that chooses particular activities. He knows that about us. We have a mind, affections and a will. In our modern vernacular, we typically ascribe body parts to these aspects of us. I have a brain to think with, a heart to feel with and hands and feet to move into a given activity.

And he knows our tendencies, that each one of us with this makeup are inclined toward certain things and adverse to others. Each of us is unique and has our own tendencies. For example, if I were to just give you the phrase to lay out in front of you the mental picture of the word "romantic comedy," as your mind took in that word and began to consult your

affections, there would be different responses. For some of you, when you take in that data, "romantic comedy" and it consults your affections, you go, "Aww," because you think of Matthew McConaughey, and you're like, "I love Matthew." And it begins to stir in you to affect your will. You're like, "Maybe I'll rent one tonight. I'll rent a million and watch them all, even though it's the same plot over and over and over. I just it." You know, he knows that inclination. For others of us, that phrase lands in your minds, "romantic comedy," and as it consults your affections, you go, "Oh God no." If somebody was to say, "Why don't we go see a romantic comedy," you might go, "No, I've got to mow my lawn or lance a wound or anything but that because I hate it." And that's just kind of how you're wired. So every single one of us, he knows our wiring and he knows your tendencies. He knows you, what you're inclined to and what you're adverse to. He knows you. He's watched the film on you.

And so, what's his tactic? His tactic is to create an environment where he can solicit your mind with thoughts that will stir your affections in the hopes that you will enact the will to participate in activities that lead you away from our great king in dishonor. He solicits the mind in the hopes of stirring the affections that you will enact the will, and when you enact your will, that is sin. But he knows that what you think about is what you care about. And what you care about, you will chase. And when you chase, you sin. This moment of stirring your mind and affections, the Bible will call temptation. He wants to create temptation, because in that moment, he can lead you to sin. Now, where do I get that? James 1:14, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." He leads us to a place where we were never designed to be, far from the One who is truly the satisfaction of our souls.

And that's how he works. Temptation to sin, he moves us. And so ladies, for many of you there might be a moment where you get up, and as you're getting ready in the morning, he will just solicit a thought to you very simply, "You are single." It's just a fact, and you'll go, "I am not married nor currently dating anyone." And yet as he continues to solicit that thought, it begins to stir your affections, "But I want to date somebody...but I want to marry someone." And as he continues to move that, maybe you get in your car and a Sarah McLachlan's on, you see a couple walking by holding hands, the animals are moving two by two. And you see it all, and it continues to stir your affections, "Everyone's got someone but me." And in that moment, he will proposition you. Because of all this that you're moving towards, he will entice you to date a loser. And he's morally beneath you, does not have in his heart the interests of our great king, but at this point, he's got you thinking, "This is the best you've got." And so, you'll move to a place you never should be. Or some of you, he'll get you thinking, "I've got to get their attention." And so, he'll start to get you to do crazy thing, wearing less and less clothes, participating in activities to draw people's attention to you, that when you walk into a room, it has nothing to do with trying to encourage other people to know our God and to enjoy Him. This is far from you, because all that he's got you thinking about is, "I've got to do things and present myself in a way that gets attention for me." And he leads you to a place you should never be. For guys, he'll say, "You should think about naked things." And we go, "Naked things!!! Yeah!" And that's about it. Because he knows that what you think about is what you'll care about, and what you'll care about, you'll chase.

Now, some of us in here might go, "Hey, loneliness, lust? I don't wrestle with that. That's not my issue. So I don't know what you're saying. That's nice for some people, but I'm fine." That's okay, he knows you. And so, it's a lot like fishing. Maybe some of you do this out at the lake. You want to catch a certain fish, and so you get a lure that you think they might find attractive. Maybe it's one that looks like a frog. And you just sort of present it in front of them to solicit their mind in the hopes that as they see it and maybe you bob it along the bottom so it looks like it's hopping or maybe you just sort of swim it at an angle so it looks injured and delicious, but as you present it, what's your hope? That it will stir their affections, that they'll go, "Mmm," and that they'll enact the will, and you've got them. Now, there might be some other fish that go, "A frog? Seriously? That's dirty. You're attracted to that? That does it for you? You're sick. And you know what? I don't even want to be around you. That's gross." And so you go, "I don't wrestle with that." That's okay. He

just pulls out a different one for you. And he'll just dangle that, and you'll go, "Ooh! Shiny." If anyone says he's without sin, he's a liar and the truth's not in him. All of us wrestle with sin. He's got a lure for all of us. The trick is to be honest about yourself and to say, "Where does he get me?" Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, he said, "Timothy, watch your life and your doctrine closely. Persist in this because you will rescue both yourself and your hearers." He said, "Timothy, watch your doctrine closely, believe the right things about our king." And then he said, "Timothy, watch your life, know how I work with you, know how He works with you. Know how you work, Timothy, because if you know that, then you can do something about it. And if you have a proper knowledge of yourself, it will save you and it will save the people who look to you for counsel."

So, what do we do? How do we defeat this tactic if this is how he works? 1 Timothy says we know ourselves. I make a ruthless self-examination, "How does he get me?" And then Jesus gives us the answer in Matthew 26:41. He says, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." If it's temptation that leads me to sin and I don't want to sin, Jesus says, "Watch and pray that you would not enter temptation." If I don't want to go there but this is what leads me there, let me get away from this, let me move away from the environments that entice me to participate in activities that dishonor my king and lead me to a place I don't want to be, where is temptation and let me move away from that.

I had a friend who one time told me about this time in his life where a buddy called him, just in desperation. He came to his house and sat with him and said, "I'm destroying my marriage." And he said, "Why?" He said, "I'm getting into fights with my wife, I'm shouting at her, I'm beginning to get violent. I am ruining my marriage in these moments where I'm very harsh with her." And he says, "How does it happen? What gets you to that place where you're doing those things?" And he says, "I don't know." And he goes, "Well let's just think about it. How do you get there?" And he said, "About once a week, we go to this bar and drink tequila. And she doesn't wear a lot of clothes and guys will hit on her and she isn't dismissing of their advances to the degree I think a married woman should be. And so I get angry, I begin to yell and it just moves from there." And so my friend told him, "Have you considered removing from the equation tequila?" And the guy said, "No, I mean it's Thursday. We always go there Thursday." My buddy's like, "Yeah, but what if you went to a restaurant, what if you went somewhere else? If that's what leads you to sin, get away from there."

I talk to a lot of young men who will come to me and say, "I'm hooked on pornography." I'll say, "Where does it get you?" And they'll say, "In my bedroom, late at night. I'm tired, I'm alone and it's available. And it gets me to this place, and I don't want to be here." And so I say, "If that's what gets you there, why don't you get the computer out of your room? Just remove it. Cut the internet cord. Don't check your e-mail there." And you know what often happens? They go, "Huh, I never thought about it." And some of them will maybe be like, "Yeah, but I get a lot of work done there. It's a real productive place for me." And I'm like, "Bro, it's not worth sinning over. It's not worth sinning over. Check your e-mail at work, do it all at the school and then put it away and make your house a safe place. If that's what leads you here, get out of there. Romans 13 will say, 'make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.' Make no provision."

So, I talk to young couples a lot. And they'll come to me and go, "We want to maintain purity. We know that honors the Lord about marriage. We want to be pure sexually, but we keep messing up, we keep doing things we don't mean to. I don't know how to stop." And I'm like, "How do you get there?" And I love it when the guy says to me, "Well, I don't know, dude. I mean, we were at her apartment, it was like midnight, all her roommates were out of town, we were watching this movie on the couch and I don't know what happened, man." And I'll say, "Bro, if you're not tempted in that moment, you've got a whole different set of problems. If that's the moment, don't go there. And so, when your girl says, 'I don't know. Let's watch a movie,' there will be a part of you that goes, 'Yes! Movie night,' because you know where that's going to go. And you need to know yourself well enough to know. Say, 'You know what? Movies aren't evil, apartments aren't evil, but I can't go there because if I get there, I get evil. And I just can't do it. So let's go to a public place like a coffee shop where I can't grope you.'" For me, my courtship with my wife, she lived in the suburbs and I lived out of town, so I



would fly in on weekends. I would always get there late, and by ten o'clock, everything was closed. The only place we could hang out and talk was IHOP. I wasn't going to go to her apartment because I was attracted to her. And so, our whole courtship took place at IHOP. And we would just sit there, 80's music playing, going, "So, do you like Phil Collins? Another pancake? Blueberry? Can I tempt you?" We just sat there, but that was a safe place for us to get to know each other. If that leads to sin, I get out of that place. I don't go there.

Now, some of you might be going, "Okay Ben, that's great. Insecurity, that's what gets people, that sort of thing. Hey Ben, I'm insecure everywhere. I mean, what am I going to do? Just walk down the street and be like, "Don't lust. Don't be insecure?" Are you telling me to not be around people? Like in a padded cell?" Well, no. Because for some of you, alone is a tough place to be, and the thoughts when you're alone in the dark is the most distressing place for you. And so, I'm not necessarily talking about a room on campus or in your apartment. I'm saying he creates an environment where he solicits your mind to stir your affections. And so, where is that environment? And let me clamp that down. And it might be physical things you can do. We had a girl in our ministry whose insecurity about her looks had led her to start cutting herself. And I've met a lot of girls who will do terrible things to themselves because of the way of thinking he'll get them to do. And so, one of our girl ministers went to her house, so she was praying for her and counseling her. And at her house, she found a bunch of fashion magazines everywhere and said, "Hey, maybe you need to cancel some of these subscriptions. If you're surrounding yourself with this, maybe you need to get it out of there and think about something else." So for some of you, it might be very physical. Move the computer, break off that relationship, move away from that crowd, cancel that subscription, turn the TV off.

It might be that, but some of you might say, "But I'm insecure everywhere. I'm lustful everywhere. What do I do?" I watch what I think about. For me, I remember in college, there were many times where depression, lust, many manifold temptations would assail my mind and I could be anywhere. It was difficult. "I don't know how to think about positive things here." And so, I'll never forget one time walking on campus going, "I'm tired of thinking this way, and I don't know how to stop." And then I thought, "Do I know any Scripture?" And I was trying to think if I had any memorized. And I couldn't think of any except for the 23rd Psalm, because when I was a little kid, our worship leader used to sing it as he played the accordion. And so in that moment of desperation, in college, I started to sing, "The Lord is my shepherd.... shall not want..." And that was sort of...well, that's what I still do....always to the accordion. But I find that I can't think about two things at once. And so, I can get out of that environment, wherever it is by putting something else in my mind. And we'll talk more about that next week as we wrap this series up. But I say, "Where does he get me? What am I thinking about? And let me move away from that environment where I think about those things."

For some of you, it might be very physical, very tangible. I meet with a lot of students that wrestle with depression, and I say, "What gets you there?" And they don't have an answer. So I start asking them, "How much do you sleep? Are you eating well? Are you exercising so you can release endorphins?" For some of them, it's very simple things like that. "I've created a lifestyle environment that wears me down and I get depressed." And I say, "If that's the moment, change it." And so, I see if temptation leads me to sin. Jesus tells me to watch and pray that I might not enter into temptation. And I would say, even further past that, it really gets exciting when you go, "Okay, if this leads me there, what are the things that lead me there? If temptation leads to sin, how do I get to temptation?"

I remember a professor telling us about a doctoral student doing his interview, and they came to him and said, "What are some issues you struggle with?" He articulated some lust filled issues. They said, "How do you get there?" It was through certain means. They said, "How do you get there?" And he said, "Truthfully? It starts about two months before. If I don't plan my schedule right, I start studying late at night, I get stressed out and that mixture of stress, late nights, no sleep leaves me susceptible for temptation in this particular area that leads me to sin." And so for him to beat sin starts months before and getting a calendar. And for some of you, you need to what Jonathan Edwards says to do, and this has

been radically helpful to me. He said in his Resolutions, "Resolved, whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, to trace it back until I come to the original cause; and then, both carefully endeavor to do so no more, and to fight and pray with all my might against the origin of it." What leads me there? Let me watch my life, let me paddle upstream and see where the sickness comes from and let me strike at it there. Let me hit the root.

I watched an interview once with a porn star. And they asked her, "How did you get into this lifestyle?" And what was interesting was, I don't think many people had asked her that. It took her a while to figure out the answer. She said, "Well, I can tell you how I got from here to here and different activities, but when I trace it all the way back," she found not a calendar or anything like that, she found herself as a child where she was raped. And she said, "If I look at how all this was started, I think it was there. And all of this has been a fight to retain something I lost." And some of you, maybe tonight the best thing you'll do is to go, "Here's the sin. Here's how I get there. God, where does it come from?" And some of you might find it in a deep, far off place, that your insecurity rests in a relationship with your father, with your mom. Maybe your drive for success that leads you to alienate relationships comes from a sad set of events from when you were a kid. And some of us need to trace it back that far and to see, "When I was a child, I dealt with this in a childish way, but I'm an adult now. And so, I need to look at the things that wounded me and let them affect me no longer." Can I give you some advice? That's not something to do alone. Paul will tell Timothy, "Flee from youthful lusts, pursue righteousness along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." He says, "Get a community that loves God, Timothy, and run with them." So for some of you, maybe the most Christian thing you'll do this summer is get a great counselor. Start going to CR. Get into a small group, where you can get around some people who love God and love you and will help you move away from the things that will catch you, see it at its root and help you process it and move past it.

Now, two implications and then I'm done. The first is this. Some people look at this and might be tempted to say, "Ben, is this legalism to say, 'I don't want to sin, so if there's anything that might lead me to sin so let me get away from that.?' " No. Because legalism says, "This is something that might tempt me to sin, therefore nobody can go there and if you ever do, you're evil." That's legalism. Wisdom says, "This is where the enemy gets me, and so I have to avoid this." Example: I had a friend one time who bars are not a source of temptation for him. He's never wrestled with alcohol. It doesn't phase him to go to one. Someone will call him and say, "I need your help. I'm stuck here," and he can drive there, there's no temptation for him in that arena. He can hang out with people there and visit with them with no temptations moving him in any unhealthy direction. It's not an issue for him. But that same guy can't go to bookstores. Because when he was young, he would typically go to sections and look at books he shouldn't. And so for him, anytime he walks into a Barnes & Noble, thoughts start getting solicited, that stirs some affections. And he just can't go there anymore. And so for some of you, spirituality might look like bars but no bookstores. For some, it might look like bookstores but no bars. And the trick is to be wise enough to say, "Here's how he gets me. Let me have a ruthless assessment of myself," and to say, "Yes, God should minister to those people in that place, but the truth is I'm not a minister in that moment. When I get around that person, when I get around those temptations, when I get around that issue, it ceases to become ministry and I'm just getting pulled in." And so, I look at that and go, "I can't do that," and I move away.

The last thing I would say is this is not something we can do in our own power. It was Jesus who had to rescue us from the penalty of sin, and it's Jesus that will rescue us from its power. All of our hope comes by grace through faith. None of us can beat sin on our own. So if you're sitting here going, "Okay, I got to work hard and burn all my CD's and throw away my TV," alright you might need to make some changes. But ultimately this movement away from isolation towards intimacy is something gracious that He has to do in us. We can't earn it on our own.

Last story: There's an old American folk tale about an orphan who, through a tragic set of circumstances when he was a kid, lost both parents. He lived in a very desperate and desolated place until a very wealthy benefactor rescued him



from his despair and made him his son. And he became the heir of a great billionaire. And then, through an odd set of circumstances, he found out that his billionaire father was not just a wealthy man, he was also a crime fighter named Batman. The little guy was Robin. And do you remember, his life from that moment on became not just an enjoyment of the billionaire's benefits, but he joined in the work of destruction and liberation. But how did he do it? Do you remember? When he stuck close to Batman. I mean, how many of you got so frustrated whenever he would try to go off on his own? Do you know what I'm talking about? When he'd be like, "I got this. I can handle it." He wasn't Boy Wonder, he was just Boy Hostage at that moment. Everytime, he was like, "I got this...owww," and he was tied up and Batman had to save him. Every episode it's like, "Dude, you're a liability by yourself. Stick close to the man. He's been doing this for a lifetime, he's very skilled. Just follow him." And they would always take that utility belt off him, and without that equipment that Batman gave him, what is he? He's just this weird kid running around in his underwear. It's not scary, it's just awkward. When is he successful? When he admits his weak estate and when he moves toward the one who can outfit him, provide for him and protect him. When are we effective? When we see our enemy at work, we know where he wants to lead us...and not just things that God thinks are bad but things that lead us away from being intimate with Him and wasting our life. And we say, "This is what gets me there. I want to see that. I want to watch. I want to flee. And then I want to call upon the Lord out of a pure heart. I want to pray and say, 'Oh God, move me away from temptation. Lead me not into it but deliver me from evil. And may Your kingdom, power and glory exist forever.'" That's the goal. How do we stir these affections? That's the end of our series next week.

Let me pray for us. "Father, I want to thank You that, though You are a mystery, Your will is made plain. I thank You that none of us can earn the approval of God it is a gift. And if you are in here tonight and thought that Christianity was just doing some moral things to impress a deity, may I encourage you, that is very wrong. It is the story of humanity held captive by our sin, and we cannot free ourselves. And yet, God in His mercy sent Jesus Christ to die for our sin, that all the penalty's taken away. There's no condemnation for those of us in Christ Jesus. And so, maybe success tonight for some of us is just to say, 'I'm not condemned. It is a battle, it is hard and my God's not far from me. There's no condemnation, and though I fall, I will rise.' And so, some of us need to cry out and say, 'Jesus rescue me,' maybe for the first time, 'I can't beat sin, but God has sent a hero to rescue.' And God, for those of us who know You, who are called by Your name, might we look at our life tonight, even now, and ask you, 'God, where does the enemy tempt me? What are the lures he uses on me?' And I'd invite you to pray that. Ask Him to give you a picture of it, and then say, 'Lord, how do I move from that? How do I flee? And Father, would You help me, by Your grace and for Your glory, run from sin and pursue righteousness, love and peace? God, we look to Your grace. Command us and give us what You command. And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen."