

# Perspective

## *The Life of a Believer*

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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One of my biggest frustrations in life is the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Let me tell you why. This law states that the entropy of an isolated system always increases. And for those of you that speak in plain language, this means that the universe continues to move towards greater disorder. We are constantly moving toward disorder, and without some outside force, it will eventually reach a state of maximum disorder.

This wouldn't bother me so much because I know where I am going to go when I die. But in the meantime, this makes life extremely difficult for us. Let me tell you the ways it makes it difficult. Because of the second law of thermodynamics, I have to keep putting fertilizer on my yard to stop the weeds from coming. Because of the second law of thermodynamics, things on my vehicle continually wear out and break and have to be replaced. That's not my vehicle, by the way, in case you wondered.

This is why there's always something broken or not working in my home. It's why my body no longer does what it used to do, and it's only going to get worse. This is why I don't remember names as well as I used to. This is why I have hired Chuck at the church to keep things working around the building because things break. It's why I hired Elise to clean the church on a weekly basis. And I bless Elise for her time and energy.

Could you imagine cleaning up after 900 people every week? It's not fun, all right? I'll just tell you, it's not fun. She cleans the same thing over and over again. And actually, we are in need of another part-time cleaner. So if you're interested, come talk to me and you can help me work on this second law of thermodynamics in the building, right? It's because of this second law of thermodynamics that we have this check engine light on our vehicles to tell us when something is wrong.

It's the reason why when your kids are born, you have scheduled well-child visits at the doctor to make sure that things are progressing how they are supposed to. It's the reason that when you turn 40, you are supposed to get blood work done, which I haven't done yet for three years now. I'm sorry, Dr. Miller, if you're here today, but you retired and now it's somebody else's problem that I need to go do that. It's the reason why we get a colonoscopy at the age of 45. And I'm so glad they moved that back from 40 so that I have some years.

And if it took me this long to get blood work, I'm not sure how timely I will be with that test. As much as we don't like these procedures, as much as we don't look forward to them and we get frustrated when we're driving down the road and our check engine light comes on, if you ignore them, things only get worse. If you ignore those check engine lights, if you ignore those tests and things that you are supposed to do, things will only go from bad to worse.

It is actually healthy for us to keep those things in mind to prevent them from getting worse than they already are. It's always better to catch the problems earlier and treat them earlier rather than later. And this same rule applies not just to our physical lives, but also to our spiritual lives. As we continue in our series that we've now been in for three weeks called Perspective, I want to give you a chance to do a spiritual checkup.

You guys are coming and we are going to look in the mirror and Scripture is going to be our mirror. And we are going to ask ourselves, "How are we doing? How is our heart today? For your spiritual well-being is just like your

physical well-being in that you need to work on it in order to keep it healthy. And if you stay stagnant, things can spiral out of control really fast.

So we're going to pray, and then today we are going to all take a spiritual physical, and I promise it will be less awkward than a physical physical. All right? So let me pray, and then we'll jump in. Heavenly Father, we come before you today, and I do thank You for Your Word, which You have given to us that can serve as that mirror, that we can hold up to our lives, and we can ask some questions. How are we doing in these different areas?

And so, Father, myself included, as we hold up Your Word before us today, I pray that You would reveal those things that maybe we need to work on a little bit, that you would reveal those things that maybe we are not living up to. And Father, of course, my prayer is that we would be drawn closer to you and that we would help others to take their next step towards you so that you would receive the praise.

We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. So last week and two weeks ago, we began talking about these traits, these things that define a believer of Christ. So if you're here this morning or you're watching online or listening on the radio and you are just kind of checking these things out, if you're not a believer, you've not kind of given your life over to Jesus yet, these things don't need to define you, but they should define us.

They should define those of us that have submitted to Christ, and you should see these character traits in us. And if you don't, we're doing something wrong. These are the fruits of the Spirit that we talked about love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. And so first, we're not going to go through all of them. But first, I want to talk about this idea of loving others.

The characteristic of a believer is that we love others, not just those who love us, but even our enemies and those we disagree with. Scripture says, "It's easy for us to love those who love us. It's easy for us to love those that think like us and act like us. It is difficult to love those that disagree with us." So much so that we are truly unable to do this on our own. We have feelings.

We have emotions just like everybody else. Even if you have submitted to Christ, you still get frustrated. You still get hurt. You still get mad. But at the same time, you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you that reminds you that you should offer forgiveness. You should offer grace. You should offer love and care for those around you even when they don't deserve it because we didn't deserve it either.

That's why we can show that grace and that love and that compassion even to people that don't deserve it, even to our enemies because we recognize that when we stood before God and when we stand before God, we didn't deserve His forgiveness and love either. One of the things that always gets confused when we talk about this idea of loving others and forgiving others and caring for your enemies is this idea of what does that mean that what they did wasn't wrong?

Does that mean that we just forget about it? Understand that with sinful actions, there will still be consequences for our actions. It's true to the world that we live in, but we can choose to forgive where we mentally say, "You know what? We are going to offer them our forgiveness." But forgiveness doesn't mean that things go back to normal. You don't have to continually put yourself in a position where you're going to be abused or taken advantage of.

You can still offer forgiveness, but there's consequences for people's decisions. When we forgive others, even our enemies, we are following the example of Jesus. When Jesus was on the cross, he prayed for those who put him there in Luke 23: 34, "As Jesus is hanging there, looking around at those that put the nails in his wrist and in his feet," He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing." This is a love that truly surpasses understanding and comes only through Christ.

Peter commands us in 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 8 through 11, telling us, "Finally, all of you, followers of Jesus, be like-minded. Be sympathetic. Love one another. Be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or

insult with insult." On the contrary, repay evil with blessing because this, to this, you were called so that you may actually inherit a blessing.

For whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good. They must seek peace and pursue it. As human beings, our natural response when someone hurts us is to fight back. When we are hurt, we want others to hurt. When we have been wounded, we want other people to be wounded.

When someone takes advantage of us, we want them to pay for what they have done. We understand the idea of justice really well. From a very young age, anybody that has ever had children and has had multiple children, has certainly had them look at you and say, "But mom, but dad, that's just not fair." We learned that very young. This idea of justice. But as believers in Jesus, we also need to understand the idea of grace and mercy and find the balance.

There are consequences to our actions, but we should exhibit forgiveness and compassion and humility. Peter says that when we actually respond by blessing those we disagree with, instead of bringing hate to them, we will inherit a blessing. As much as I studied this passage of scripture throughout the years and try to understand what that blessing is, I'm still not exactly sure the blessing that Peter is talking about.

But I can share from personal experience that one of the blessings of forgiveness is the freedom you feel when you allow that burden to be taken off. I have heard it said that when you don't forgive, it is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. It only hurts yourself. When you offer forgiveness, you are freed from that burden.

1 John 3:11, John tells us, "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning. We should love one another." The second trait that should define us as followers of Christ, we should be viewed because of our kindness and our generosity to others, especially to the vulnerable.

When the apostle Paul met with the religious leaders of the church in Jerusalem as he was trying to gain the approval from them to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, they authorized Him and said, "Yes, you may do that." But in Galatians 2:10, Paul tells us, "All they asked of Paul, yes, you go ahead and share the good news. But make sure that you continue to remember the poor, the very thing that I had been eager to do all along.

Dare I say, it is impossible to follow God and not have compassion for the less fortunate. When you submit your life to Christ, there is something that burns deep inside of our heart. And what that is, is the heart of the Father. It's the heart of Jesus. It's the compassion that He has for the sick and for the suffering.

This was taught by Jesus so often that the disciples caught this in such a vivid way that James writes in chapter 1 verse 27 that religion, that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless as this. To look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world, it's as if James is saying, "As a follower of Jesus, you can almost not go wrong if you are living a life of kindness and generosity." Taking care of others and providing for the hurting becomes part of who we are.

Sometimes we don't know what to do. Sometimes we don't know how to help. But I can tell you, with those of you that are part of Fairview Missionary Church, I know you have the heart of Jesus because if I present something to you that actually is helping the poor, the orphan, and the widow, you are the first to jump on board. You are the first to give to it with a generous spirit, with a kind heart and say, "I want to make a difference." Think about the world in which we live.

Think about all of the hospitals, the orphanages, the food banks, the medical clinics, and the schools around the world that were started and are run by Christians. This is the heart of God, and you can see it through His people when you think about all of the organizations that exist because God's heart is working through them. The third

characteristic I want to talk about of the life of a believer, which we have already mentioned in this series, is the ability to have peace in the midst of life storms.

There is a peace that is available to us when we recognize and admit we aren't in control. Think about all the things that you do in your life and all the things that I do in my life to try to gain control. It's why I put fertilizer in my yard so that I think I can control the weeds, but I can't. It's why I try to maintain my vehicles and take care of my house and keep it clean so I can control one little area of this world, but I can't control it.

This peace that we can receive from God is finally coming to that understanding that life and this world don't depend on me. One of the most freeing things for me as a pastor and as somebody that tries to be a good leader was to recognize the fact that I'm replaceable. And so are you. We are all replaceable.

We don't need to carry that burden that I somehow need to fix everything or make everything right and to come to that realization that God is the one who is in control and He knows much better than I do. And so I can put my trust in Him. When the storms of life come, we can have peace because we know who is in charge of the storm.

In Mark chapter 4, many of you remember the story where Jesus is in a boat with His disciples in the Sea of Galilee, and a storm quickly comes upon the sea, and the disciples are scared, and they run to Jesus who is conveniently asleep in the boat while the storm is going on. The disciples fear that they are going to drown.

And Mark tells us in Mark chapter 4 verses 39 and 40 that Jesus got up after His disciples woke Him up, and He said to the waves, "Quiet, be still." He rebuked the wind, and then the wind died down, and it was completely calm. And he said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" You see, faith takes away fear. If we put our faith in God, then our fear has to flee because we know the end of the story.

Now, I am not saying that as followers of Jesus, you are never afraid and you never worry. Being human means that we will have seasons of difficulty. We will have seasons of up and down. We will have seasons of fear, seasons of worry. But we can have peace that surpasses that worry.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:7, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." And so this serves as another opportunity for you and for me to witness to the world of God's greatness. You see, when wars break out, when murders take place, political unrest, and financial ruin are all around us, you and I can rest in the arms of our Savior and have peace while others around us begin to lose their minds.

In the midst of them losing their minds, they see the peace that we have, and we have the opportunity to share where that peace comes from, from Jesus. We continue to live in this world of turmoil, but I would make the suggestion that as we live in this world of turmoil, that you and I stand on the truth of God's Word, that we constantly point people back to Jesus.

I shared with you last week, and I say it again, that the problem in our world is and always has been a heart problem. And without a transformation of the heart through the power of the Holy Spirit, you and I are sinful people who do sinful things. Without a heart change, we are capable of anything.

And in this world in which we live, we should take it as our responsibility, our duty, our privilege in the midst of the turmoil to point people back to Jesus. I can tell you that the world around us is losing its mind. I cautious about even saying this, but in the world in which we live today, I truly believe that social media can be evil.

I really think it can be. And just I'm going to age myself. I'm still on Facebook. That's the social media I use that the Trine students laugh probably because that's so old or whatever. But I just want to let you know, I am mere moments probably away from just being off Facebook altogether. I go on Facebook as a pastor because it was a great resource to keep up with all of you. I could just scroll through and find out what you were doing and maybe what was going on in your life, good things and bad things.

But social media has now turned into a place where everybody gets to share their opinions. And there's nothing wrong with people sharing their opinions, but if you don't know the person and you read their opinion, it's

possible not to read it correctly. You know that, right? It's possible to read into it. And it's possible to shape that person, that entire person based on one little comment that they put. And that's not fair to any of us, is it?

And I think that social media has caused more harm than good, especially in the world in which we live today where there is so much division and so much unrest. I think it would be good for us to take a step back and to be reminded that I am not here to point people to me anyways. I'm here to point people to Jesus. Not to anybody else, not to a political party, not to whatever. I am here to point people to Jesus.

And we can get so worked up. And in all honesty, social media can take away our peace. And it should never do that. Jesus Christ is our peace. And we can have that peace in the midst of chaos. And I believe that if we keep that peace in the midst of what's going on in the world around us, it will provide us with many opportunities to share the love of Jesus with others. And so that's my prayer for us. It's my prayer for myself.

So if I stop commenting on your social media stuff or I stop wishing you a happy birthday, it's not because I don't like you anymore. It's because for me, I maybe just needed a break and I needed to be done. Peace that surpasses understanding. And finally, this morning, I want to talk about this idea of self-control. The final characteristic that I want to talk about for those that follow Christ as self-control, mature believers in Jesus as they're showing these fruits of the Spirit, self-control continues to reign in us.

There's something about a believer that gives them the ability to remain calm and controlled even when they are angry or frustrated. Notice I didn't say that believers don't get angry and frustrated because we do. We still get angry. We still get frustrated. The difference is how we respond in our anger and in our frustration. Through the power of the Spirit, He gives us self-control. And Jesus modeled this for us many times.

But on one occasion, when He was being tempted by Satan in the wilderness in Matthew 4:8, we read that again, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain, and he showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. And he said, "All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me." And Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan, for it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." How did this show self-control?

It showed self-control in such a huge way because Satan was offering Jesus a different route to gain what he wanted anyway, which was our hearts, that he wouldn't have to go and suffer the death on the cross, that there was another way, but it was not God's way. And so in his self-control, he said, "Away from me, Satan, it is written. Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." Stephen shows self-control as he is standing before the Sanhedrin, proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah all the way to His death.

In Acts chapter 7: 59, we read that while they were stoning him in the midst of him being killed, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and he cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Without the Spirit of God resting upon him, I believe that he would have been accusing them for their wrongdoing. But instead, he follows the model of Jesus and asks for their forgiveness.

Paul shows self-control over and over again as he would stand before the authorities, and they would make accusations against him that were not true. As Paul stands before Felix in Acts chapter 24, when the governor motioned for Paul to speak, he said, "I know that for a number of years, Felix, you have been a judge over this nation, so I gladly make my defense." In verse 16, he says, "So my goal, my desire," Paul says, "is that I will always strive to keep my conscience clear before God and man." There were so many other things that Paul could have said, accusations that he could have made.

I could keep sharing story after story in Scriptures where we see the people of God showing self-control. And it's not easy, but through the power of the Spirit, you and I can stand out in how we respond to the world. Living a Christian life and following Jesus is truly a lifelong journey as we trade our selfish pursuits for the things of God and what He has in store for us.

We are transformed, the Word tells us, into new creations that allow us to love God more and to love others more. And maybe you're sitting here and you say, "Pastor, that's all great, but I'm certainly not perfect yet. I don't have that all figured out." And I say, "Neither do I. This is why we have the opportunity to do the spiritual checkup, to look into the mirror of God's Word and say, "How am I doing? I'm continuing on this journey. God, will you continue to transform me?" And so I encourage you don't give up.

Today is as good a time as any to do the spiritual checkup, to ask yourself some difficult questions. How are you doing in these areas? Do you need help? Is there an area that you need to submit to? As the Word is the mirror that is held up to us and we can see ourselves for who we are, you need to ask the questions. Are you loving others well? Can you forgive your enemies? Remember, this doesn't mean condoning their actions.

I didn't say that. I just said, "Forgive your enemies." Is your love different from the love of the world? It's easy to love those who love you. It's difficult to love your enemies. Are you being kind and generous? Is this how others would describe you that you have a generous heart? Are you simply kind toward others even when you're having a bad day? Isn't it hard to be kind when you don't feel well?

Isn't it hard to be kind when you're just having a bad day. Something happened. Somebody did something to you. You're just having a bad day. Can you still be kind in the midst of that? Would others describe you as a kind person? Does your heart break for the less fortunate? When you see others that are hurting, does your heart break for them? Do you have peace? Have you realized that this world is run by somebody who knows better than you?

And this world cannot take away your peace. Have you put your hope and your trust in Jesus the right spot? And when the world is losing its mind around you, can you remain calm? Can you read social media and remain calm and not have to type something back and defend everybody or do whatever it is that we do? How are you when it comes to self-control? Are you able to process your anger and your frustration in a healthy way?

Are you able to keep your cool when everyone else is shouting around you? And if you have to answer no to any of these questions, remember it's a process. I'm not here to judge you or to condemn you. Keep taking steps in the right direction. Keep relying on God to walk this path with you and understand it is a path to being different. Because as followers of Jesus, we are called to be different, not for us or for our glory, but for His glory, so that He would receive the praise from our lives.

That is our goal. And we sang that song again. His glory is our good. When He receives glory, it is good for us. And so that is our goal. There's going to be people up here that would love to pray with you if you want prayer this morning for anything. If you just want to do some business with God, the altars are open. You can feel free to do that. Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word, which continues to speak truth to us in a world that often doesn't believe in truth.

I pray that we would continue to be transformed into your image in every area of our lives so that we could live in such a way that you receive the praise of others. May we be willing to take that next step towards you. And Father, maybe our next step will help somebody else take theirs as we desire to grow closer to you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.