

All right. This morning, if you want to get out your Bibles, we're going to be in Zechariah chapter seven. As we continue our study through Zechariah. You guys are making your way there. Let me inform you that there will also this week, just like almost every other week, be baptisms after service. Yeah. That's awesome. I just want to let you know so that you can maybe be put a little bit of ease. I know it's crowded in here this morning. It's been the last few weeks. Which in the kingdom of God is. These are good problems to have, right? The kingdom of God is multiplying. But I do understand that at the same time can be uncomfortable. So we're trying to accommodate what God's doing. The building that is in, you know, in process of being finished to the back or where we enter, that's going to be a youth room and an all purpose room. So primarily to deal with the youth who have outgrown their room, we're going to give them a space and then we can take the youth room and make it into children's classrooms so that the children can have enough space. And once you know how it is, your parents, many of you, once you deal with the little children's, you get to take care of yourself. So then, Lord willing, if we can accomplish all that, we're hoping by Thanksgiving or Christmas that building will be done. Then at some point next year, we're going to expand the sanctuary so it won't be quite as crowded. So I do appreciate your grace. And if you could pray for us, you know, every time we expand something, it's the first time we've done it this way. And there's always stuff that pops up. So I appreciate your grace. And, you know, if it's if it's bothering you, I hope it puts your mind at ease a little bit to know we're trying. Okay, so we'll get it done sooner or later in the Lord's timing. Okay. So Zechariah chapter 7, for some historical context, because you have to have it to understand the book in 536 BC. You guys, if you've been here, you know that 42,000 Jews, which the Bible calls a remnant, just a little group of the million or so that were deported in 586, they returned from Babylon. And their one mission was to rebuild the temple. And they started the work the same year that they arrived, and everything was going swimmingly until they experienced opposition. And then the work stalled. In the same year that it started. And it stalled not just for one year or two years or three years, but for 16 years. And so, as is often the case when we think God has something for us to do and then it doesn't work out the way we think or we run up against opposition, we kind of just get back to life, back to reality. They start paneling their houses, they start living for themselves. And so 16 years later, in 520 BC, God calls two prophets in tandem Haggai and Zechariah. We have their books back to back in what we call the minor prophets, and they were called to encourage these people to start again, rebuilding the temple. So they're saying to the people, look, it's time to focus on God. Get the first things first, and then get that right, and all the rest will follow. So Zechariah encourages the people in the first six chapters through eight visions that are strung together. And really what he's doing is he's encouraging

them as he pulls back the curtain for them to look into the heavenlies or into the spiritual realm, to say everything that you need in this project that's bigger than your ability is going to be provided supernaturally by God. And then also you're a part of something that's much bigger than what you can actually understand at this point. That's the case for each of us. While we're faithful in our generation, that part that we play is much bigger than just our generation or our piece. So in chapter seven, then we have this transition into the second section of the book, and that second section is going to look forward or towards primarily what God's going to do when he restores them eventually. And so that's what we're transitioning into. As he does that, then he's going to answer some questions that they have this morning in the seventh chapter. So verse 1, now in the fourth year of King Darius, it came to pass that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month. That is Chislev when the people sent Sharezer with Regem Melech and his men to the house of God to pray before the Lord, and to ask the priests who were in the house of the Lord of hosts, and the prophets, saying, should I weep? In the fifth month, and fast as I have done so for so many years, the years 518 BC, in the fourth year of King Darius, the rebuilding of the temple started in 520 BC, and the building will be completed in 516 BC. So we're right in the middle of this building project, and what we find is that the people sent a group to the House of God. Some of your translations probably do a better job than mine. It says the people of Bethel sent a group, so Bethel actually means House of God by definition. We've talked about this before. This little town you can see on the map, it's just about five miles north of Jerusalem. It was named House of God from the time of Jacob, when he had an encounter there with God. But the house of God had become a center for idolatry. And so from the times of Jeroboam, when the kingdom split, Jeroboam set up golden calves there for the people to worship, so that they wouldn't go back down to the southern kingdom and Jerusalem. And he would lose his constituency. So a delegation here from the house of God, there's a word play, a delegation from the House of God, which is Bethel, came to the house of God, which is the temple in Jerusalem, to ask a question. So that's what's going on. So the question that they have as they come really to appeal to the Lord is the idea. Or they came to pray before the Lord to entreat his favor is kind of the idea. They came and they said to the priest and to the prophets, to the godly men, should we weep. In the fifth month, and fast as as we have done so previously, in so many years? Now, the fifth month is important because it commemorated the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, and so to understand the sadness, the extreme grief, the pain that the exiles in Babylon felt over the destruction of the temple and their removal from the land, you have to read one of the Psalms, and I would refer you to Psalm 137, because it poetically pins the pain that these people felt as they were deported from the land, and how that affected all that they did. And so Psalm

137, verse 1 says, by the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion, or Jerusalem or Israel. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For those who carried us away captive, ask us of a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth, saying, hey, sing us one of your songs of Zion. So their response, verse 4. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. If I do not remember you. Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth. If I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy. This nation, these, this people group who's known for their singing and their dancing and their joy, they got no songs left in them. Like how can we sing when we've been taken away from everything that we love? And so the sadness of these exiles had led them over the 70 years in captivity to create these fasting days. One for the remembrance of the temple, when it was torn down in the fifth month, and then in the seventh month, we notice we'll get to this down in verse 5 that they had another one that's mentioned here, and that one is from the times of Jeremiah chapter 41, where after the people were deported away from Jerusalem, there was this little remnant left there, and they were appointed a governor. This godly guy named Gedaliah. And everybody was like, man, it's been bad. But God, he's blessing us. He left us one kind of seed of hope. And then the people promptly murdered get Elia. And so they they're remembering like the pain of these situations, the people that have been taken. Now before we move on, I think the real question they're asking is, now that we're back in the land, should we continue to fast for the past? We got these days of fasting that are meant to commemorate these key events in our life. These seasons or these times of loss? Should we continue? And I think that this question really begs a couple more questions that I'll present to you as we consider this and study it as to apply it to our lives. I think the first question is how long should I actually hold on to losses in life? Persons, places, things there probably is an acceptable or healthy season, but it may be that I can hold on to losses too long. And secondly, along that same vein, should I have ever been actually memorializing a person, a place or a thing to begin with? And I say that to say it's quite possible that, like these guys, if I hang on to the past loss in some way, I might miss out on everything God's doing right now, okay? And that's really what they're trying to figure out. It's it's a real dilemma for them. And it's not always an easy answer. And so they're doing some deep, you might say soul searching. Well, here's here's the Lord's answer to them as they ask this question. Then verse 4, the word of the Lord of hosts came to me saying, say to all the people of the land and to the priests. When you fast in and mourned in the fifth and seventh months, during those 70 years, did you really fast for me, for me, when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves? Should you not have obeyed the words which the Lord proclaimed through the former prophets? When Jerusalem and the cities around it were

inhabited and prosperous, and the south and the lowlands were inhabited, and so the question is, should we continue this fasting? And so God actually answers their question with more questions. We mentioned this before. One of the things that's so intriguing about Jesus is that Jesus is always getting asked questions, and more often than not, he answers questions with questions. Okay, not me. You ask me a question, I'm ready to fire, I got answers, okay? I got this thing all figured out, but Jesus, he asked questions with questions. If God gives me a few more decades, I might someday learn to answer questions with questions. But God asks them and answer this question. Well. When you fasted and mourned for those 70 years, did you did you really mourn for me? And then he repeats it for me because, you see, fasting to begin with is a practice that denies the flesh in order to feed the spirit. And as we maybe you'd say, quiet the flesh, the intent and the hope is that we will then be able to hear from and connect with God. And so it's a practice to connect with God that he gives us in our spiritual lives. Well, they're mourning. He gets down to the heart of the matter very quick. By the way, the heart of the matter is always the matter of the heart. And so he presses down. He says, well, have you been fasting for for you or me? And the answer was obvious. They were fasting for their losses, the loss of their land, their temple, their family members, their leaders, like they had stuff taken away that drastically impacted their position in life and their emotions. I mean, real tragedy. But they didn't. They didn't fast or mourn for the fact that one of the reasons that they experienced so much of that is they hadn't obeyed God's Word. They didn't mourn for their sin against God or how it hurt God's heart. And so he's getting their attention. He goes on to ask them the question you should be asking is, should we not have obeyed? Or should our ancestors not have obeyed the words that God proclaimed through his prophets? One thing you need to know about these particular fast days that they're asking about is these are days that God did not establish. Now he established plenty of days for the Jews to remember a feast days or festivals. But these days he didn't establish. These are days that they established in order as to not forget these monumental events that had so impacted their life. In fact, when you think about fasting, there's only one fast in the Bible that you could even make a case for. As it pertains to the Old Testament Jews, that they were mandated to observe. And I'll take you back to Leviticus chapter 16. And verse 29. I'm going to read down to verse 30. This shall be a statute forever for you in the seventh month, on the 10th day of the month, you shall afflict your souls and do no work at all, whether native or your own country, of your own country, or a stranger who dwells among you. For on that day, verse 30, the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord. Now we don't see anything of fasting in that passage. This is speaking of the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, the highest holy day in all of Israel. And on that day they were told to

afflict their souls, which actually, in the Hebrew conveys the idea of humbling oneself. But somewhere, way back in the beginning, the Jews decided that it pertained to fasting. And so that's how they lived this scripture out. So God didn't actually command it. But that's how they interpreted it. So in that sense, there's only one spot where they thought God told us we had to fast, but they had added all these other fasting days. And when I think about the fasting on Yom Kippur, I think about I used to live in San Diego, in this neighborhood, and we had quite a good sized Jewish population. There was a synagogue right down the street from my house, and every Yom Kippur on sundown, you could not find a seat in the upscale, all you could eat Chinese buffet just down the street, because all of the Jews that had fasted according to this scripture on Yom Kippur had afflicted their souls, were now breaking their fast with all you could eat. Chinese seems like a really bad idea, actually. I had a friend. He would afflict his soul or fast on Yom Kippur and he'd get cranky. Have you ever noticed if you've tried to fast, you're like, this thing's supposed to be quieting my flesh so that I can hear from the Lord, but yet the flesh always rears up on you, so you tend to get cranky when you're fasting. You know, you tend to get just a little sideways. And he was complaining to me and I because I don't answer questions with questions. He's like, is this why does it always happen like this? I get cranky instead of getting more spiritual, he said. I don't like being cranky. I said, look, I really do believe that this is going to pass over. Well, look, most most religious practices, ones that aren't actually in the Bible, that that people that worship God institute in their lives begin with sincere intentions and serve a practical purpose. And so this happens in faith tradition.

People are like, hey, we want to combat something or our or we want to do something new, or we want to remember something. So they add a thing and at the beginning it's good. It has a form, it has a function. It seems to have some Holy Spirit unction. There are a bunch of examples, depending on your faith tradition in our own time. I have them here for you. But when you think about them, don't get your feathers ruffled. Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Christmas. None of them are in the Bible. I mean, they're not mandatory. They celebrate biblical teachings and and things that happened events. But they're not biblical. God didn't mandate that we celebrate these. And what tends to happen if we don't watch it is these these forms without their original function and the Holy Spirit's unction begin to lack spiritual worth. And if you don't watch it, the thing that had such beauty and holiness and it had such purpose in the beginning doesn't. After several years or decades or even centuries, look anything like its original version? And Jesus actually said to those very religious Pharisees, the ones who just a few generations before had started the fasting on the day that the temple was destroyed, and Gedaliah killed, he said, you guys in Mark chapter 7 verse 13, with your tradition of men, you have actually made the Word of God no effect. That's the danger of

this type of deal. So in this case, fasting was to please God. But fasting is pleasing to God only when it's accompanied by obedience. Like when exactly matched with a good heart. Saul found this out in first Samuel chapter 15. He wasn't fasting, but he was sacrificing. God had told him to do something. He didn't want to do that thing. He did a version of it. And then because he felt disconnected from God, he tried to gain God's favor by sacrificing. So God sent Samuel in first Samuel chapter 15, verse 22. And Samuel said, this has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord. And then he answers his own question. He says, behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. That's the answer that God gives them. Well, verse 8, then. He goes on to say, then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, thus says the Lord of hosts, execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless. The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother. Now we think about fasting before we get to this next section, then fasting is a practice. As I mentioned before, that's a spiritual rhythm. Or maybe even you'd say a discipline. And it's not to get something from God. It's actually to to reconnect. As I mentioned, or to connect with God more deeply. So as we talked about in the Old Testament, there isn't any real Scripture that requires fasting. Fasting is actually in all of the Bible, a get to. It's not a have to. And so when you get to the New Testament, you think about Jesus. Then you have this one simple phrase from him that he seems to believe that we should fast because he says, when you fast. And yet he doesn't say you must fast, it's a get to why do I get to fast? Because as our key scripture is here in Mark chapter 9, verse 29 for this year at Parkland Chapel, I get to fast because some things only come out through prayer and fasting, right? So all that said, then think about this. These fast days were made in Zechariah's day in order to try to get something from the Lord. They didn't intend it that way, but that's what they're up to. And it it showed a bad heart that's hard for us to to not just come to grips with when the Holy Spirit shows us, but then figure out how to deal with it. But that's what's going on here. And so in some ways, they were trying to manipulate God, or at the very least, they were focused on themselves even as they were going through these religious rituals. Well, here, what God does is, again, he zeroes in on the heart and he indicts their forefathers, as he just has in the previous passages. Again, he now says, look, this is the real issue. I, I'm after this. This is what I'm seeking. I want you to execute justice. I want you to show mercy and compassion, everyone, to your brother. I don't want you to oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. What he's saying is, I. I don't not want you to fast, but I do want you to also care about people. And this has been an issue for religious folks since time began. In fact, before these people were ever carried into captivity. Isaiah chapter 58 addresses this issue. They were fasting and they were wondering why things

weren't changing. And in verse 5 of Isaiah 58, Isaiah writes, is it a fast? God says that I have chosen a day to afflict a man's soul. That's talking specifically about Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? This is a big display of mourning and fasting. Would you call this a fast and an acceptable day of the Lord? And their answer would have been absolutely. I mean, nobody else I know, even fasting. Lord, I'm fasting, I got sackcloth, I got ashes, I'm taking time out of my day to read my Bible, to pray to you. But then God answers. Verse six, is this not the fast that I have chosen to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out when you see the naked, that you cover him? And do not hide yourself from your own flesh. And then verse eight, your light shall break forth like the morning, and your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. And then you shall call, and the Lord will answer. You shall cry, and he will say, here I am, and here I am in the Hebrew is Hineni. It's when Isaiah had an encounter with the Lord, he saw the throne room of God. The Lord called and said, who will go? Who can I send? And Isaiah said, Hineni, here I am, Lord, send me. And so if you want to hear from the Lord and interact with the Lord, and be sent by the Lord, then there must be not just outward obedience to rituals, but an inward obedience to God's Word and the heart to love others. Hosea chapter 6, verse 6. When we were studying this, we talked about how mercy is the key word in Hosea. The key verse is chapter 6, verse six. The whole of the book is for God to say, for I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. When you flash forward to the New Testament, Pharisees, scribes, which were so good at the mourning and the fasting and the rituals and the praying, they were peppering Jesus with questions. And on the week before he went to the cross, he says in verse 23 of Matthew 23, woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, which were spices, and you have neglected the weightier matters of the law, which is justice and mercy, and faith. These you ought to have done without leaving out the others. He said. This is a good spiritual discipline to tithe. It's not that you shouldn't have tithed, even down to your spices, but you shouldn't have tithed without also having mercy and justice and faith. They were going through the motions with no spiritual and truly connected to God emotion. He goes on to say in our Scripture here that you shouldn't just execute true justice and mercy and compassion, but that should be towards your brother. He goes on to say, let no one plan evil in his heart against their brother. And when you think about that, then you have to ask yourself, what is it within me that is? Well, maybe I'm talking to to just myself. Probably none of you. But maybe you'd ask yourself the question I asked

when I read this. What is it within me that can be so? You might say petty. The petty places, the jealous bones, the irrational anger, even the corrupted competitiveness that makes me think evil things about my brother. The people in my family, the people that are close to me, the people that are my friends, the people that I have been born into their bloodline. The people that I go to church with again. Maybe it's just me. You probably don't have those problems, but. But there's a spot in us that if we don't watch it, then, then we think poorly of people here. They thought poorly of their brothers. And when we think poorly of those around us, it reveals something unhealthy in our walk with God. So how do we combat that? First we have to come to grips with it. We have to say, it's not okay for me. Why? Why is it that sometimes I just would really like to see that person? You know, I'd just like to see them get some of the lumps I'm getting. Why is it that we, you know, we don't want to see real harm go to, you know, somebody in our family. But, boy, Lord, if you just humble them a bit, you know, like David, you know, I just I'd like to pray, but I'd like to pray imprecatory prayers, which are. It's a big word for Lord kick their teeth in. You know, Lord, I they there's good dental work now. They can do miracles with dental work. Just kick their teeth and then give them a good dentist. Orthodontics, you know, just would you. And so there's that within us. And that's for the people that we love. We have we have these weird competitive spirits. And you know, oftentimes we're trying to keep up with who knows who impacts everything we're doing. And so he says, let none of you plan evil in your heart. Maybe, like me, you've wasted whole hours of your night thinking to yourself, man, I, I wouldn't probably actually do this, but I'm going down scenarios if I see this person or I did this. If I had this interaction and if I wasn't so godly. And praise the Lord, praise the Lord. They didn't know me. In 1989, when my mullet was flowing. Okay. It's in their. So first we have to say, yeah, it's in there. And second, we have to say it's not okay, that it's in there. It's not okay to just let it be in there. It's not good for me. It's not good for those around me. So how do we combat that? Well, one of the ways we combat that is to choose to focus on the good in people instead of the bad. And Philippians chapter four verse 8 says this. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there's any virtue and if there's anything praiseworthy meditate on these things, let's chew on those things. And in reality, there's almost always something noble in somebody or some situation. There's very rarely a person that we know that's without nobility or that we can't find something good to think on. The truth is, we just don't want to. I recall that several years ago, my wife and I were going to marital counseling and the counselor said, what? I want you guys to do is to appreciate one another. You guys don't appreciate one another. So here's a little exercise. If you go to counselors,

they're always giving you little, little, you know, little pro tips. Here's a pro tip. Why don't you go home and for the next week thank the Lord each day for five things in your spouse. Now, when we went home, I'm sure if you asked Lucinda, she had no problem finding 5 or 20 things to thank the Lord for me about. But I remember being. So overwhelmed by this project because my heart was so bad towards my wife. I couldn't think of one good thing to thank God for in her. Now, this will be more perplexing. If you've ever met my wife, because she's she's truly one of the sweetest people I've ever met and kind and loyal and obviously patient. She stayed married to me. In truth, almost everything I lack, she is almost every thing that's natural for me. She's not. And yet I was so messed up mentally that it was a mountainous project to begin with. And you know, I see that from time to time. I don't do as much counseling as I used to. But if if couples get to my my study, they normally are in a spot where they've lost the ability in large part to actually see any good in the other one, when you start doubting each other's intentions, you're in a really, really bad spot. When you start doubting people's motives, you know? And so it's easy for us to do, you know, I judge you on your action. I judge me by my motives. My motives were good, my actions were bad, my motives were good. Your actions were bad. It must mean your motives are bad. It gets broken very quickly. So how do you combat it? You start to. You start to thank the Lord and even speak thankfulness into others lives. And here's what will happen. Even if it doesn't change the other person, it will begin to change you. And that's for the people that we know and love. And if we don't watch it, the people that we love becomes they become our frenemies, and eventually they become our enemies. And so God wants to undo that stuff. And then past that, we all have people we would actually consider our enemies, people that whether they know it or not, they've done us wrong or they threaten us or our families, and then we we hold grudges. Our we're angry or we're defensive. And for those people, then Jesus says, if you truly have an enemy and the reality is most of us don't have true enemies, but some of you do. And in that case, Jesus, who had plenty of them, said in Matthew chapter 5 verse 44, how how do we combat those people? Well, he said, love your enemies and pray for those who spitefully use you. And so my default is to not pray for them for their good, but to pray for them to get theirs. That's not what we're talking about here. It's to pray for their good. And so here's something that happens. If you pray consistently for the person that you feel is your enemy. A couple things will actually happen. The first thing is you will you will find it very hard to hate someone who you pray for. You just will. It doesn't mean that they won't continue to spike your anger or to make you flare up, but when you feel that if you pray for them, you eventually won't hate them. And even if that doesn't happen, even if if the the simmer in your heart, you know it doesn't immediately go away. Here's here's what will happen as you continue to pray.

What you're doing is you're protecting yourself and others for growing bitterness. At least you're stemming the tide because bitterness not only hurts everybody around me, but who it really hurts is me. It just destroys my perspective. And so it might not change my relationship with this person. It might not mean that everything's hunky dory, might not throw group hugs when we see each other. We don't just bring it in. But what can happen is it can save me and others around me from myself. Well, I'm about out of time. So verse 11, here's the problem. They refuse to heed. Shrug their shoulders and stop their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. And thus great wrath came from the Lord of hosts. Therefore it happened that just as he proclaimed that they would not hear. So they called out, And God says, I would not listen, says the Lord of hosts. But I scattered them among the nations which they had not known. That's among the Babylonian Empire. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned, for they made the pleasant land desolate, and so here what we find is that they they didn't love others, and what it revealed was a heart problem, which may seem Captain obvious, except that not loving others the way we should reveals a gap in our experience of God's love. And that's really the key thing here. In fact, Jesus said in John chapter 13, verse 34, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also now love one another. And verse 35, by this all will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. And then John also wrote in his first letter the fourth chapter in the 19th verse, we love him. That's Jesus, because he first loved us. But my translation is it's probably not the best you could actually take out the word him. I don't think it's there in the original and it reads like this. We love because he first loved us. We're talking about mature love right there. So mature love is I've experienced God's love and then that's the only way I can love. But when I don't love, it shows a lack of experience, of God's love. And they had refused to heed God's word because they hadn't experienced his love, even though he'd done so many things for them. They'd stop their ears. This made their hearts like flint. So what God does is when we stop our ears and our hearts get hard, God allows difficulty into our lives to shake us up, to get us to repent. They ignored that. They refused to repent. So, as God foretold, all the way back in Moses's day, if they refused to listen to him, he would give them their desire and then he wouldn't listen to them. You want to ignore me? I'll set your decision in place and I won't listen to you. And so he eventually scattered them like the whirlwind and Hosea. Chapter eight verse 7 says, if you sow to the wind, you reap the whirlwind. The three laws of spiritual sowing and reaping are you reap after the kind that you sow. You don't. So tomatoes and get corn, and you reap later. We all like to reap. Today, having sowed yesterday. We reap later. And you always reap

way more than you sow. Which led Paul to write to the Galatians in chapter 6, verse 7, do not be deceived. God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, he will also reap. For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the spirit will of the spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good. For in due season we shall reap. If we do not lose heart, and therefore, verse 10, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Now in conclusion, I'll leave you with a couple questions that we've posed or framed in some form or fashion, and then just kind of try to sum everything up that we've talked about. As you're pondering this message. If you do so this week, then first question would be what parts of my past should I stop going back to? Second one might be who do I find myself thinking negatively about? And then, along with that, am I willing to actively engage in combating those negative thoughts and thinking good of that person when it pertains to spiritual rhythms in our life and spiritual growth? Some of us are lax about our spiritual formation. We're good with coming to church. That's a part of our life. We love the Lord as Savior, but truly, he's probably not really Lord. We don't really surrender our lives to him. We kind of flow in and out of church. Church is one thing. The week is another thing. I kind of really believe in God, but live practically like an atheist in a sense that I make all my own decisions and he can copilot with me. If we get into a wreck, I can scream, Jesus, take the wheel! But really, we don't have any sacrificial rhythms or rituals in our life that actually promote spiritual growth. So we maintain a a spiritual level of, of a baby, you know, carnal Christian is Corinthians word. Now, on the other side, there are people who become so focused on religious disciplines that they're fasting, they're praying, they're reading their Bible, and they're attending every Bible study in small group. And they love the disciplines and the system so much that they overlook the importance of loving God and loving others. And so they go through their life with their head in their Bible, while everybody that's in need and everybody that's hurting gets nothing, no compassion. It's all legalism. It's all law. It's all do this to produce this. But the truth in the Bible is often found somewhere in the balance. And so people who love God and stay connected with him through following his word and spending time in prayer with him and and assembling with his people, they tend to let go of sin. I have here for you, naturally, but it's actually supernaturally. And then as they experience the love of God, they're able to reflect that God and His love to others. So, Lord, may that be the prayer for us in our lives. Heavenly father, we just right now pray that for us, we pray you'd help us let go of some things in the past. We pray that you'd help us to. Not spend so much time thinking evil of our brothers and sisters. We pray that you'd help us focus on the good. We ask that for some of us, you would give us the discipline to see our souls formed, and for others of us that you'd give us the ability to let go of some of

these disciplines and truly experience God and His love. We pray that you'd give us the balance to know you and reflect you as is needed in our generation. And it's in your name we pray. Amen. Would you guys stand, please?