

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

November 16, 2025 "Fighting Distractions. "What does a disciplined, conscientious life look like?"

I Intro.

We're flying through November. Advent begins in just two weeks. Stay connected to our social media to keep up with everything that's happening. Welcome to our companion devotional to Sunday's message. It's just a part of all we have to offer to you. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey. We don't want you to miss out on anything. We consider you part of our community. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are fully committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Recap.

We're doing a series about living a focused and intentional life in a specific direction, as we move towards the season of Advent. Asking a different question each Sunday to help us do some specific work about living this focused and intentional life. Because we've all chosen a path to direct our lives, we are talking about how to live a long life pointed in the same direction. By discovering and discussing what keeps us from living that way...distractions. As we journey towards Advent, we want to begin to clean out the clutter, remove the distractions, and things that would keep us from living a life in the same direction. We've talked about the nature of distractions and rewriting the story of our lives. Today we talk about developing the type of life that fends off distractions.

III Sunday.

I want to open up a real Pandora's Box; **What do you think we should be teaching kids today?** Not just education, in general. I will land on two in particular. The problem is, we want to reduce this idea to just content. A list of do's and don'ts...should's and shouldn'ts. We all have our own personal preferences we want to see practiced. We all have our own list of proper behaviors. We could bombard kids, people, with all sorts of specific rules and practices that reflect being considerate, thoughtful, and polite. This is what religion tries to do. Rather than the process of growing in maturity, sanctification, we just want to give you a list of the final product. But there's no way you could cover everything. So, we've got to come up with a couple of overarching values or principles that could guide others to live properly.

If you only have so many values, principles to live by, which ones would be the most comprehensive and universal?

B. Discipline and Conscientiousness.

In our **"Fighting Distractions"** series, we're talking about the things that knock our life off the direction we want to go. Here are two primary principles, values, universal enough (could be considered 'Super Habits' - habits that can grow other habits) These will be two truths that you can adapt to your own personal life

1. Disciplined life- to adopt specific intentional, sustainable practices and habits that grow a better us within us. These practices, habits create the process that will align our values and long term personal goals in a way that we can know how to handle every situation. Discipline is self-regulation that's not rigid dogma. This is an important truth. Discipline moves us to being proactive rather than responding reactively. It creates the integration we talked about in the Mary and Martha story. A disciplined life aligns what we value, who we want to be, with how we're constantly trying to figure out how to live. Because we intentionally create habits, practices that become routine, then our life can flourish over these practices.

2. Conscientious life- to constantly be thoughtfully aware of others when we're around others. This is accepting how our choices and decisions we make impact others. And taking responsibility for our actions. Not that we have to do everything others want us to. But we allow being with others to be an integral part of how we are in that space. Being attentive, noticing we are not the center of the world. And we do this in the everyday routine of mundane life. This honors the truth- we are all interconnected and interdependent. A conscientious life recognizes and examines how ALL our choices affect others and the world around us. Our decisions- economic, ecological, social, financial, just how we move through the world. It's living as if our choices and actions matter...because they do. In fighting distractions, things that would take us off the path of the direction we want our life to go. Learning to live a disciplined life (structure of practices) serves as a roadmap to how we live, being conscientiously aware ((actively attentive) what's best for everyone.

I want to hit what a "*disciplined and conscientious*" life looks like. When we talk about the direction of our life, this is what direction looks like. This is an unbelievably rich passage...and tricky to navigate **1 Corinthians 10:23-33** You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is good for you. You say, "I am allowed to do anything"—but not everything is beneficial. Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others. So you may eat any meat that is sold in the marketplace without raising questions of conscience. For "the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it." If someone who isn't a believer asks you home for dinner, accept the invitation if you want to. Eat whatever is offered to you without raising questions of conscience. (But suppose someone tells you, "This meat was offered to an idol." Don't eat it, out of consideration for the conscience of the one who told you. It might not be a matter of conscience for you, but it is for the other person.) For why should my freedom be limited by what someone else thinks? If I can thank God for the food and enjoy it, why should I be condemned for eating it? So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God. I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved.

Truths from this passage about living a disciplined, conscientious life. These are disciplined truths, practices that grow conscientiousness within us. They create a structure, a blueprint, we can adapt to add situational specifics to. When these practices and habits become routine (we can do them without having to consciously think about them) we are liberated from the struggle and anxiety of trying to remember if something is okay or not. This is growing wisdom with freedom within a structure. Parameters (not laws) create freedom because we know where the boundaries are. This is seen in the difference between a chain and a fence. A chain controls but binds. A fence sets the definition but still allows freedom within it.

1. Some things may be okay, allowable, but may not be beneficial. This is exercising freedom within wisdom. Freedom we fight for. Wisdom we live in a way to receive it.

How do we even begin to understand and practice this?

The perfect question when we want to live a disciplined and conscientious life. Don't ask what the right or wrong thing to do is. We can do mental gymnastics and justify almost anything. It requires moving past our 'rights' and towards our 'responsibilities'.

We ask; *"In light of my past experience, my current circumstances, and my future hopes and dreams, what is the wiser thing to do?"* -Andy Stanley.

This is the question form of the phrase many of us use. *"Just because you can doesn't mean you... should."* This will move you past the right or wrong thing to do which may be very situational. And help you stay in that direction, the better path. This will be a constant battle. The tension between being disciplined and conscientious will be case by case. There is no template, secret formula that will apply in all situations. This is the work of evaluating decisions to see if they can become a distraction.

2. Be sensitive towards the needs, the life situation, of others. This ISN'T being a people pleaser or enabler. This ISN'T always caving in to someone else's preferences. This is how you will make decisions about your life, based on how your decision will affect another person. This is the continual work of decentering yourself. It's the work of expanding our capacity for sacrifice. It's about a constant awareness of other people. We already do this regularly. The humor we use, stories we tell, what we watch when others are around, food and drink, etc. We have a heightened awareness of what may bother others around us. We call people who don't do this well; *"tone deaf"*. And we tell them to; *"read the...room."*

Always asking: **How will my actions, choices affect the more vulnerable who are around me?**

It means we increase, heighten, our ability to perceive a situation from everyone's perspective, and not just our own. Have an active awareness of how others are experiencing that moment. A disciplined and conscientious life is constantly checking to see if we're a distraction to others.

3. Doing what's best for the benefit of others. This one is particularly tough. Because we could end up just being at the mercy of everyone's personal preferences. We need to unpack the phrase *"try to please everyone"*. This is an active, action based, movement towards accommodating, making space for others. It involves discovering the other person's perspective, needs, sensitivities. It may mean making adjustments at the moment. Fully aware that you'll be fine, but the other person needs something different. But it's not to completely melt into the desires, wants, of the other person. Paul told the church in Rome. **Romans 12:18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.** This is living a life of sacrifice. It's doing your part putting other's needs, not wants, before our own. Not doing everything other people want. Making sure we're not a distraction to them. This is learning how to determine the difference between empathy and enabling. It's not to meet another person's unhealthy desires or every wish. But to live in a way that spiritually benefits everyone. A disciplined life is what helps you to live conscientiously.

4. Recognizing differences is important for a disciplined, conscientious life. Verse 32 of Romans 12 is fascinating. *"Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God."*

It identifies and recognizes real differences. I learned a while back that I have to see color, gender...differences. Our race, gender, upbringing, religion, marital status, family situations, and more have to be recognized. Because it enhances our sensitivity and relationship with others. Things I just accept as normal or are normalized for me, may be difficult for others. I want to be very vulnerable here. Using specific illustrations and examples in sermons always have the potential to alienate others. I can't completely avoid this. I will tell stories about family, marriage, kids, and different aspects of my life that I know others don't have. I wrestle with those in every message. Some of those aspects are just unavoidable. But many illustrations I can avoid. I remember listening to someone preach and use an illustration of their snow ski trip out west. Now there is nothing wrong about a snow ski trip out west. One day I would love to do that. But I had someone come up to me and literally say; *"They lost me when they talked about that. I will never be able to do that and it made me feel we're not the same."* That's a tough position to be in, but I kind of get it. We can't always know everything about someone else, or be aware of everyone's struggles. But having disciplined practices and habits will grow within us the ability to grow a conscientious sensitivity towards others...of all kinds. Living a disciplined, conscientious life means doing all I can to reduce the distance between myself and another. Which will allow me to do what's best for them as much as I am able. To not be a distraction, and have the most positive impact on them possible.

IV Challenge.

The passage doesn't tell the church at Corinth all the what to do's and what not to do's. Paul addressed one issue to teach a broader truth. There's no way you can cover everything. There are really no rules, laws, 15 things to do and not do. This is basically the process of disciplined decentering. I am not the center of the universe. This is how Jesus was described in **Philippians 2:5-8. *You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.***

We will never have to empty ourselves to this extreme. But we do see the key words in living a disciplined conscientious life. To ***"have this same attitude". "Did not think equality was something to cling to." "Gave up." "Took a humble position." "Humbled himself in obedience."***

All of this elevates others, and the health and needs of the community, over us. Living a disciplined, conscientious life helps us to actively be aware of our own tendency to get caught up in the distractions of life. And to make sure we're not a distraction for others.

And what I wish every kid would have to learn to do in education today.

1. Disciplined life- to adopt specific intentional, sustainable practices and habits that grow a better us within us.

2. Conscientious life- to constantly be thoughtfully aware of others when we're around others. How choices and decisions we make impact others. And taking responsibility for our actions. One of the best ways to fight the pull of distractions in our lives is to do the work of designing a disciplined life that grows a profound sense of conscientiousness within us.