

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message

May 31, 2026. "*Fight Club: Fighting stagnation*"

I Intro.

We're finishing up May and heading towards summer. Our schedule will slow down a bit, but there are still things happening. You'll want to keep up with everything that's happening at NCC. Stay connected through our social media to keep up with everything that's going on. This is 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. If there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know.

II Recap.

This is the final Sunday in our series; "*Fight Club*". The birthplace for these specific things came from Maria Popova who publishes an online curation of content called; "*The Marginalian*". A while back she published "*18 Life Lessons I've learned*". For the month of May, we're hitting five of these important life lessons. The first week we talked about fighting "*unnecessary urgency*". We live in such a fast paced society that values efficiency, speed that pushes this sense of urgency over quality and even emotional and mental health. We learned we have to trust in the timing and work of God. The second week we talked about fighting "*aloneism*". The very real danger of not having, being in community. Having several communities we belong to are necessary for our emotional, mental, spiritual, and even physical health. The third week Katie did a fantastic job talking about fighting "*cynicism*". That place we often find ourselves when the world just seems out of control. Last week we talked about fighting "*blaming others*", taking control of our lives. And we finish the series today with, "*Fighting stagnation*".

III Sunday.

I want honesty here. **Has this ever happened to you?** You're moving through an argument with another person. Your spouse, a friend, a co-worker. You had this brilliant attack, and several points to support your position. You're doing this great job holding your own really well. You're countering every argument they make. You're even crossing them up a bit. You can see them sputter. You're finally winning that argument with your wife, husband, that one co-worker. And then...in the middle of this fairly 'lively discussion' you realize something. It's that- you're actually wrong. **Now what?** You've invested a lot in defending your point and stating your case. Not only did you have this belief you've been holding onto your whole life. Over a period of time, you've collected a bunch of information, data, and evidence (it may be a little sketchy, but it was still evidence) and your entire argument falls apart. Like a house of cards- in slow motion. And you realize this before they can see it in your face. You have big questions now.

What do you do now? Do you just throw all that away? Admit defeat?

Or...do you keep plowing forward even though you know you're wrong?

This is the age-old struggle: **Do I hold onto a belief, an idea I've had for a long time, even though it may not be right?** This struggle is called 'sunk costs'. It's like a bad investment or insurance policy. It's not worth much. But if you get out now, you'll lose everything you put into it. It's why Janet is still married to me. It's just not worth starting it all over again. **Or will I do whatever I need to do to open myself up to exploring and considering something new?**

Considering something new can be terrifying. Believing in a wrong thing sometimes feels better than not believing in anything at all. It's Tarzan letting go of the vine he's swinging on hoping to grab a new one. You may end up just hanging out there. You're feeling stuck, even possibly stagnant. And not knowing what to do with it. Having to push past fear, uncertainty, the unknown, is so difficult. I want you to be able to learn how to let go of what doesn't work anymore. And fully lean into trusting God. What you know about God now. And trusting enough in God that you can allow yourself the luxury of changing your mind.

Two scriptures that can help us move from an old, possibly outdated place, faith, both beliefs and practice, into a new, fresh place. One O.T. and one N.T. To fight the curse and trap of stagnation. **O.T. passage.** Remember, this instruction from God is in the middle of an incredibly difficult journey. And very symbolic of life itself.

Deuteronomy 1:6-8 "When we were at Mount Sinai, the LORD our God said to us, 'You have stayed at this mountain long enough. It is time to break camp and move on. Go to the hill country of the Amorites and to all the neighboring regions—the Jordan Valley, the hill country, the western foothills, the Negev, and the coastal plain. Go to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, and all the way to the great Euphrates River. Look, I am giving all this land to you! Go in and occupy it, for it is the land the LORD swore to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to all their descendants.'"

I want to break this passage down, moving from the surface details to the deeper truths. What God was telling the Israelites specifically. And then the issues and truths can be found deeper in this passage. We're unpacking the exact words we find in this passage.

1. You have stayed in this place long enough. Feel free to say that with all the sassiness you need to hear to get you to get off your backside and get going. This observation is that stagnation has settled in. You've become content with 'good enough'. It's time to break camp (take down everything you set up that has caused you to become stagnant). All of the stuff you've accumulated for survival, to handle life, and everything around you. Dismantle it. And move on. Scripture is so fascinating to read, to apply, when you allow it to speak to your life directly.

Which brings us to these questions we can pull from this passage.

What place have you stayed in long enough? Where do you need to break camp? Has your faith, walk with God, become stale? ? You haven't been experiencing growth? What have you built up that's kept you in the same place, and you need to take it all down. To break camp? What would it take for you to "move on"?

The way to fight stagnation is to identify and admit that wherever we find ourselves, we may have stayed in that place long enough. Time to break camp, and take down all the things that have caused stagnation. And know that this isn't always a physical location.

2. Go to this new place. After you accept the truth that whatever place you find yourself in, you've built up, is no longer the place you need to stay. You're growing stagnant. You are now being called to go to this place you are unfamiliar with. **Why?** *"Because I am giving it to you."* **Do we have an intimate enough relationship with God to feel him calling us to something new?**

Unfamiliarity is not the measurement of whether we should move on or forward. Comfort, familiarity is an easy, non-threatening place to stay. **Do you have a handful of restaurants that you eat at? Do you have only a couple of things you get every time you eat at your favorite place?** There's nothing inherently wrong about that. We all do that. This work we do to go to a new place is identifying and calling out our tendency to allow ourselves to stay in the 'old place'.

We go 'towards' God's new calling, because we know it's time. I was always told in ministry, don't run from a place but to a place. To fight stagnation, be willing to go to this new place, even if we're not familiar with it. This new place may be unfamiliar, but God is calling us into this place.

3. And occupy it (this new place). Explore everything about it. You don't know ANYTHING about this new place, but fully occupy it. Get to know it. Fill it fully to the edges. Explore it completely. The concrete slab my house is on has pitted marks all around the edge because they didn't push the concrete to the edges when they poured it. This may be just how things are done. And I'm learning to be cool with that. But it doesn't have to be normal and accepted. God is saying; push yourself to fully explore and get to know this new place. Janet and I when we move to a new place, we always press outwards to things around us we want to learn about. We love to constantly explore the edges of where we are. We can discover who we are in those places. More importantly, discover something holy and sacred too. To fight stagnation, we have to grow the ability to find joy and God's pleasure in discovering all the new and fresh things, and truths, God wants to share with us.

N.T. passage. This passage helps us see the practical mechanics of *"fighting stagnation"*.

Philippians 3:12-14 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not yet achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

The passage almost preaches itself.

1. Forgetting what I knew. This one is particularly difficult to do, but it's essential for the first step. Honest question. **Do you have a tendency to hold onto unnecessary things?** Not always actual physical objects. It could possibly be; hurts, memories, practices, habits, old beliefs. This isn't 'not remembering' anything anymore. It's not holding onto things we use as excuses to keep us from moving forward. To fight stagnation we have to be willing to 'forget' how we expect things to be. And that expectation is often based on how things used to be.

2. Not looking back. This is actually *"looking forward"*, but to look forward we have to stop 'looking back'. This was Lot's wife. Nostalgia, looking back, is toxic. Nostalgia is different from reminiscing. Reminiscing is reflecting fondly on the past. Nostalgia is wanting to actually go back to the past. Looking back is an idol, and a curse in our society. We see political ads where each candidate tries to outdo each other about how humble, traditional, Americana, their upbringing was. Harkening back to

some past that never really existed, and none of us have personally experienced. But we're all drawn to it. To our own detriment.

Embrace remembering. But: Remembering the goodness of God. Not just expecting God to keep doing the same things in the same way he did in the past. To fight stagnation, we have to fight the inner urge to keep expecting God to keep showing up in the same way he did before. God made Joshua cross the waters on his journey differently than he did for Moses. We constantly need to be challenged to expand our understanding of what God is calling us towards.

3. I press on. When I first met Janet she had a saying for when I was being too much, or asking for something she already told me she wasn't having it. She would say; *"Press on Mary"*. Which meant; *"We talked about this, you know what I said, I really meant it. Now get on with your bad self."* For Janet, when she said; *"Press on"* it meant she was done, finished, the conversation was over. It was time for something new. Do you need further explanation what Paul meant when he said; *"I press on"*? To fight stagnation we have to be open and willing to know that moving towards new requires an inner toughness and intensity. To be able to *"press on"*. We have fully heard, received, and incorporated this new understanding into our life.

4. I have not achieved it– yet. This point is not in the order of the passage. I wanted to place it here as a gentle reminder. *"Dearest gentle reader"*. With nearly every one of the passages we've read in this series, there was an element that oozed the grace that only God can give. This reminds us this work is hard, can be exhausting, and never ending. So, it comes with a message from God. We are not measured by just the results, but by the effort we are committing to this work. That doesn't mean we can just be busy about being busy. There has to be forward movement. We are continually working towards a "well-formed maturity", embracing the journey, constantly being surprised by where we find ourselves. But we live in the God-given grace of "yet". *"I'm not there– "yet" but I can see and feel myself getting closer."* To fight stagnation we have to give ourselves grace when it's not going like we think it should or want it to. We will live in the land of "yet" until our journey is finally finished.

IV Challenge.

This sounds harsh, but I can't help but believe it's true. A lifeless, stagnant, stale faith is worse than no faith at all. It's more difficult to unlearn an unhealthy habit, practice than it is to start from scratch. A person with a lifeless faith thinks they just have enough faith to get by. It's the 'ole inoculation truth. Just a right amount of the dead virus to keep you from getting the real thing. This work is about staying fresh. It's about movement. It's about growing a vibrant, fresh, expanding relationship with God, no matter how erratic it looks or feels. To fight stagnation you have to do intentional work to let go of those things we tend to hold onto, and be willing to move into unfamiliar, possibly uncomfortable new spaces.

There must be constant testing, and awareness when your faith is drifting into lifelessness. These are some things that help you fight stagnation. God has such an amazing and fantastic life for you. Your best days are ahead of you. Develop the courage to break camp, pack up your stuff, and obey the command to go to this new place that God has already prepared for you. And FULLY occupy it. If you are looking to take a 'next step', just contact us, and we'll walk with you..