

## Financial

Hey Friends – last week Jim gave you a financial update and I'd love to just reinforce that for those who were missing and give a prayer. December is a double month – 1.1M is our goal to end in the black. Business owners, sales people, and people with tax concerns often lump large amounts of their tithe into December – and that is great. I am prayerful that we can end in the black. But did you know that our leadership dreams always outstrip our resources. And one of our team members said “Hey, how about if this year we tell people about some dreams that did NOT make the budget, but that would make the budget IF we can

- If we get more – **athletic fields** – 300 to 1000 kids served in Spring and Fall. Outreach soccer and more. Frisbee golf, maybe even pickleball.
- **Then infrastructure** – tech and building stuff. Projectors in last days.
- **Then rivercrest housing** – Help to buy some new housing for staff, assign staff housing to kids and bottom line: over 200 more kids can go to camp. 300 on waiting list this year. So give generously! Lets see what we can do!

**Response to a threat – My life and the church** – A little over a week ago, a terroristic threat against me and CCC was posted on our door. Thanks to the many who asked how I am doing and the answer is ‘fine’. Really. And here is why.

- 1) I have already died. When I was 19 I trusted Jesus with my whole life and by the age of 20 I realized that this meant to take up my cross and follow him. In other words, to be ready to die for him and any minute. In fact, Paul said “I am crucified with Christ therefore I no longer live, Jesus now lives in me.” So, when you are already dead and crucified, you aren't afraid of dying because you already died. Are you tracking? So I am just not afraid of dying and these kinds of threats bear small amounts of fear for me personally. In fact, when God called Kelle and me we said “we will go anywhere God... Botswana, Upper Slabovia, Communist Countries – you name it.” We will give our lives for him! But God called us to Omaha – and we have not had to give our lives up in that manner. But just in case, I am ready
- 2) Now, that being said, we are not welcoming of evil people who want to kill us. And we have a special passion around protecting the kids in the church. So I want you to know that we have had a security team in place for a long time. They are super well trained by the best pros in Omaha. These men and women are former military, police, FBI, Motorcycle gangs... heck even some who look like computer programmers and insurance guys. They are people you would guess and people you would never guess and they are here in plain clothes on Sunday and any time kids are here – they are ready to go. We take threats seriously, but are not scrambling because we have been prepared all the time. But if this has made you say “what can I do?” –

our security team is made up of highly trained volunteers. If you are compelled by this, go to the connections booth, tell them about your interest and they will hook you up. Plus, you should know the Police and FBI are taking this very seriously. I have been super encouraged that our team is already very competent and out local and federal law enforcement has been highly responsive.

- 3) We do not know if this is a credible threat, or someone posing as a terrorist organization to create fear. But God has not given us a spirit of FEAR, but of love, courage and a sound mind. He is good! And he invites us to follow him regardless of the opposition. Throughout history, and even today, men and women have faced fear and pain and even death and stayed true to Jesus throughout. May God grant us the same strength and wisdom for the days to come.
- 4) My apologies that this excursus will make us run a little long today, but I thought it important to bring an update. Now on to the message!

### **Internet Dangers**

Today, I am going to go down the road of Miscellaneous Internet Dangers. I know, it is not a compelling heading for a message. I had a compelling subject, but when I did my research, I found that my hypothesis did not fit the evidence. Honestly, I was just wrong. So, I just came back to God and said "What do you still want to say to CCC if I had a free week. And I got four things that don't fit together, but I could not escape when I wrestled with God. So, can you forgive me in advance and just take in four mini messages today?"

The past two weeks, we have encouraged you to be more thoughtful in the way you go about using the most powerful device gifted to humanity since Grog came up with the wheel - the cell phone. Packed with an amazing microprocessor, camera and wired to the greatest knowledge source in history, it is more than a phone with some cool apps. It is a sophisticated GPS tracking system that you occasionally use for a phone call – but usually texting.

Now, hold the advantages of the worlds of entertainment, information, and connection in this very cool device against the provocative question Jesus asked "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" Mark 8:36 And we have decided to be thoughtful instead of thoughtless in the use of this powerful piece of technology. To ask the question - what are the dangers to our soul as we put this in play? Are we gaining a world of information, connection, and entertainment, but losing our soul?

Alex and Jed took us to the ideas that we are more connected, but more lonely than ever. That the constant interruptions make us more distracted than ever and that the pressures, comparisons and 'always on' nature of the device have made us more anxious than ever before. And the theme verse for our series comes from Romans 12 – this time, from the MESSAGE.

**Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you..** Romans 12:2 MSG

Now, there are four ways that this device or your laptop or ipad or switch can take you to the internet, which is ripe with danger. Here's the first.

## 1) The Intellectual Impasse

- a. Kelle and I read the book "Stolen Focus" this summer. Rather, we listened to it as a book on tape on a road trip. It gave a fascinating proposition in one chapter. That is, the way you think is different if you are getting information from a book or if you are getting it from a screen. Some of you know, I learned to think in the era before information came through computers or actually, right at the transition. I was a part of a Christian movement – InterVarsity Christian Fellowship – that was a movement of readers. They always said "15 minutes a day is 15 books a year" and "Readers are Leaders". So, Kelle and I have always consumed high volumes of books a year. Here is my personal stash in my office. (I have not READ all of these, but displaying them is sure impressive!) And we have another huge stash at home. Stolen focus taught us that when you read books, you read left to right and top to bottom. Turn the page. Thousands of times and this programs your brain to follow logical sustained arguments over time. Books are, say, 150 pp long on average. So you are required to keep a thought stream over multiple sittings.
- b. Now, I am also an internet guy. In fact, I do most of my sermon prep now in front of a computer. Stolen focus points out that web pages are not designed to read left to right, top to bottom for 150 pages. But maybe 1-2 pages. I am struck when I find ten sentence news articles these days. And boxes all over the page calling you to click on the next article, or the next golf glove or the next home depot tool or cool blazer from men's warehouse... so your eyes scan. You look for ONE piece of data that kinda fits what you were thinking anyway. And you click here, click there without engaging in sustained thinking.
- c. Now, the first problem with this is it make us more susceptible to poorly thought through arguments. Memes become persuasive. Sound bytes get repeated. Thoughtless decision making becomes common. Proverbs 14:15 The naive believes everything, But the sensible man considers his steps
- d. Add this together with some of the thoughts we have already discussed – we are lonely, anxious, afraid of boredom and perpetually distracted – and can't think as clearly as a generation ago. It leaves us incredibly vulnerable to lies. Lies of the culture and lies of the enemy.
- e. Some of the most significant influencers who are dragging the next generation away from the faith are not academics writing lucid papers arguing against the faith. They are doing 60 second tik toks, creating memes, and writing 140 character slogans on twitter. And a generation that is not used to critical thinking is more susceptible to these slogans than ever before.
- f. And the second problem is this: the fattest, oldest, most difficult book most of us will ever read in our lives is the Bible. Let me say this again cuz I want it to sink in. The fattest, oldest, most difficult book most will ever read is this one. If you are not good at reading and understanding, you will not be good at reading and understanding the Bible. It is a muscle that needs to be worked in order to grow your thinking closer to God's thinking.
- g. So, what is the Biblical solution to this? This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do

according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Joshua 1:8

- h. Friends, there is no shortcut to thinking Godly thoughts on a consistent basis. It has to do with meditating day and night on God and his word. It is about being careful to apply what you know. Later in Joshua 1 it says “do not turn to the right or to the left.” Apply what the Bible says, think about it, do it, read it some more. Memorize it, meditate on it. Make it your every day diet. If you want to think like God – he has given you a big fat book to work on. Each of the 66 books within the big book is a treasure unto itself. But the treasure requires some digging... and some time... and some study. But we are programmed for instant input and need to grow in our thinking ability in general to know God’s word in particular.
  - i. Note that the result of this is that you will be prosperous and successful. The book is our guide – not just to pleasing God, but to prosperity and success. Want to succeed? Follow the book! God wants you to have a GREAT LIFE, a GREAT Business, a GREAT MARRIAGE, a GREAT SEX life, a GREAT Thought life... follow his word toward success.
- 2) **The perpetual pain puzzle** – Tragedies have always existed in the history of humanity. But the advent of Newspapers and The nightly news brought tragedies from around the world into your living room. Every day, the nightly news played in my house and my parents focused on tragedies local and global for 20 minutes – before the sports and the weather.
- a. Now the internet takes that to a new extreme. Tragedy is not packaged into 3 minute segments that are done before the husker report, there is infinite amount of information. Inside scoop. What this or that commentator said about the tragedy.
  - b. There are entire 24 hour news networks devoted to bringing the tragedy into your heart... and positioning the political opposition as totally incompetent or evil. And whether you get news in a 24 hour internet cycle or your TV is on all day blaring the latest headline, your soul was not designed to carry that burden.
  - c. A couple of years back, Kelle realized that listening to the news too much soured her soul. It created negative emotions and left anger in its wake.
  - d. We have a subset of our population who walk around with anger on a slow boil. They are offended and easily offendable. Say a word “Trump” or “Biden” and they just might (FUNNY HERE) blow a gasket. Friends, God did not design you to carry this level of burden for every tragedy, every war, every hurricane, every murder, every fire that happens in our world. It weighs you down and fills you with anger.
  - e. So, what’s the solution? You know what kelle did? She just shut off the news. Stopped watching, stopped listening. She wondered if she would miss it... and she didn’t she just found that her joy was restored, her peace level went up, and she was more content, more often. That may be too much for you. Maybe you just say “I am going to limit it to 30 minutes a day. Or certain arenas. Or from godly news sources.
  - f. **ChristianHeadlines.com** is one healthy non-politicized news source for Good information from A Christian worldview
  - g. **Psalm 55:22 MSG "Pile your troubles on God's shoulders—He will carry your load, He will help you out."**

### 3) **The Pornography Predicament**

- a. Pornography is nothing new. It has been around since pictures could be printed. Lust is even older than pornography. What's new is the idea that a monstrous library of porn is available in your pocket in a moment's notice. What's also new is that in the past, you had to GO to get porn. To the convenience store, to your friend's Dads closet.... But now it is brought to you. Available 24/7. And there are marketers who have you in their crosshairs and make massive \$ in the porn industry. Which is larger than MLB, NFL, NBA and NASCAR combined!
- b. 70% male, 30% female
- c. Kids get exposed to pornography at the age of 11 (psychology today)
- d. Is it destructive? The conclusions of both secular and Christian researchers is the same. Porn his highly destructive with few redeeming qualities.
  - i. Every click is a penny in the pocket of a sex trafficker
  - ii. Porn creates unreasonable expectations of a spouses body type or behavior. Porn always says 'yes' to the user.
  - iii. The spouse of a porn user often feels disgust in his behavior and shame or inadequacy in their sexual role or body image. Sense of betrayal is high even if another live person was never involved. Porn destroys marriages.
  - iv. Porn use is increasingly deviant – both on the screen and in behaviors in the real world.
  - v. Inability to perform with a human spouse. You become programmed to a screen rather than a human body.
  - vi. Impotence is hitting younger and younger and is at an all time high – because of pornography. Have you ever noticed the proliferation of MANTALITY and other male restoration processes, medications and procedures? I thought that perhaps internet porn would create a culture of ultra-sexualized aggressors, and while that is sometimes the case, the broadest impact has been the opposite – literally and figuratively creating a generation of impotence.
- e. So when Jesus says we should take lust extremely seriously, it wasn't because he is judgemental or a joykill. It is because he designed you and knows your operating system. He loves you and wants you to have a great life. There are certain viruses that just destroy you from the inside out. Pornography is one of them. So out of love, he says "watch out, be serious, be vigilant" and live as children of the light.
- f. If this struggle has become an addiction to you, we have an amazing renewal group called "Men of Integrity" who will walk with you as you work together to master your lust.
- g. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **Philippians 4:8****

#### 4) The Transgender Trouble

- a. In the last decade, diagnosis of "gender dysphoria" — severe discomfort in one's biological sex — has exploded across the West. I never thought in my life that I would

see a day when subjective opinion would trump obvious objective medical and scientific truth.

- i. I never thought that Bruce Jenner – the decathlete from the Wheaties box would one day be proclaimed the ‘woman of the year’
  - ii. When a biological man who claims to be a woman can play women’s sports and be lauded as the ‘greatest woman ever’ in his/her sport. Despite being male and having all of those physical advantages
  - iii. When a biological man who claims to be a woman commits a crime and is placed in a woman’s prison
  - iv. These are some of the most horrific, woman-hating policies of our day.
  - v. I never thought I would see a day when some public school administrators would advocate for training children in sexually deviant behavior and languages from an age as early as five. We used to consider people who did this predators and groomers, but some are advocating that this be normalized in school libraries and classrooms
  - vi. I never thought I’d see a day when counselors and schools hold a child’s desire to chemically castrate themselves or mutilate their bodies through top surgery as a secret from parents, while behind closed doors encourage them to destroy their bodies in these ways. And they accuse parents or other loved ones of being ‘toxic’ for not affirming their destructive choices.
- b. This really backward thinking is made possible by the internet and by a mass media that loudly proclaims that wrong is right, up is down and right is left.

**c. Abigail Schrier “Irreversible Damage”**

- i. Between 2016 and 2017, the number of gender surgeries for natal females in the US quadrupled; in the UK, the rates of gender dysphoria for teenage girls are up 4,400 percent over the previous decade. An ailment that typically began in early childhood, and overwhelmingly afflicted males, suddenly has a new dominant demographic: teenage girls. In 2016, Brown University public health researcher Lisa Littman was scrolling through social media when she noticed that a group of teen girls from her small town in Rhode Island — all from the same friend group — had come out as transgender.
- ii. Intrigued by the statistical unlikelihood, Littman began to study the phenomenon and, in 2018, published the results. She hypothesized that transgender identification had become one more peer contagion among adolescent females. Anxiety-ridden, middle-class girls who once engaged in cutting or anorexia were now wearing “binders” (breast-compressing undergarments), taking testosterone and undergoing voluntary double mastectomies.
- iii. Discomfort with your body and your identity is as old as puberty. But today, adolescents who are anxious and depressed will get online and find a sympathetic trans community who will place the blame on gender. They teach girls that being a tomboy or liking certain colors or sports or activities that are stereotypically male means that they are actually male. They tell them that the pathway out of their depression is to embrace this role,

suppress what their body is telling them and to consider as “Toxic” anybody who says differently. Teens, who spend far less time in person with friends that previous generations will spend hundreds of hours watching youtube trans heros and tic tok stars who will coach them how to have conversations with parents, cut off ties and even threaten suicide to move into their ‘new identity’. Before the internet, this was not possible.

- d. .3% of the world population is trans (World Health Organization). (Circle graph with tiny tiny slice) It is a tiny percentage of our overall population. But significant study has been done on this group.
  - i. Trans individuals are four times as likely to experience mental illness (Transgender Health, Jonothan Wonta) (Bar graph with “Mental Illness” as title and 23% of general population, 92% of trans population)
  - ii. Nine Times as likely to attempt suicide (Trevor Project)
    - 1. Bar graph with general population at .012% and Trans at .104%
  - iii. 50 times as likely to contract HIV due to risky behavior. (Science Daily)
  - iv. 60% more likely to struggle with depression (Science Daily)
  - v. There is a VERY high correlation with a trans identity and mental illness. Research is still not clear about the causal connection. In other words, does being trans drive mental illness or does mental illness make you more susceptible to a trans identity. I suspect it is a complex myth of both.
  - vi. Make no mistake, though, identifying as trans does NOT solve the mental illness issues that surround it. One significant question has been around whether ‘gender reassignment surgery’ will help a person be less suicidal. The theory is if their bodily appearance matched their internal inclinations, perhaps that tension would go away along with the self loathing. But the opposite is actually true. Before surgery, trans people are MORE likely by 9x to attempt suicide, but after surgery are 19X more likely. Ten years after surgery, they are 19 times more likely to attempt suicide (national Library of Medicine) Add to the graph another bar labeled “Trans post surgery” at a level of .224
  - vii. They realize that the extreme lengths they took in surgery did not solve the real problems in their soul.
- e. Christian friends - Our knee jerk reaction should be LOVE, Compassion, Kindness. If somebody is presenting as trans, there is a lot of pain boiling beneath the surface. And as followers of Jesus, compassion and not judgement should be our first response. So we need to be exceptional in our capacity to love people who are in pain. And be cautious around our initial reactions to them. To treat them as a human being with immense value created in the image of God.
- f. At the same time, it is UNKIND as a culture to play into this. At some point, it is not kind to tell a child that the tooth fairy is for real – even if they really, really believe it. Similarly, it is unkind to tell people that being a boy or girl is fluid and only in your mind. It is immoral to introduce sexual dysfunction to children at a young age. It is horrific to encourage body altering surgery or medication in teens. It accelerates dysphoria and confusion. It accelerates mental illness. It accelerates depression, anxiety and suicidal

tendencies. The prevailing cultural winds are to just buy into whatever fantasy a person has, regardless of whether it is connected to reality and how destructive it may be... and add fuel to the fire that is consuming them.

- g. If we LOVE people, we will not accelerate their dysfunction. Now, you may say “Mark, that is more complicated than you are making it sound.” And it is. I agree. It is a relational dance to continue to love and be in a relationship with anybody engaging in self-destructive behaviors. An alcoholic or drug addict or greedy person or narcissist or other mental disorders do not want to be confronted with their dysfunction. Same with somebody with gender dysphoria.
- h. So, we find loving, kindhearted ways to stay in relationships and speak truth when a person is open to it.

Friends, one of the internet dangers is the fundamental subversion of obvious truth – to the detriment of humanity. Saying that good is bad, black is white and male/female is fluid rather than designed. WE are in a strange confluence of untruth, slogans and longwinded persuaders.

I am struck at this Christmas time that Jesus came into the world that was a mess and John 1:14 says “The word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Friends – this powerful device opens up worlds to us – worlds of good and worlds of harm. Use it wisely... be sure not to let this word depart from you – to be prosperous and successful. Pile your troubles on God’s shoulders. Let your mind dwell on that which is good and right and commendable... And finally, be freed by the truth.

<sup>31</sup>To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup>Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32