

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Jonathan “JP” Pokluda
Series: Ephesians
April 21, 2024

A Changed Life

Ephesians 4:17-29

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Church, how’re we doing? Let’s go. It’s so good to be with you. We established last week that I love coffee; I have for a long time. I also love chocolate, by the way. There was a season in my life where I’d have a chocolate bar for breakfast; don’t judge me. I love coffee and I love chocolate.

Monica and I were going to visit my friends--some of our friends from college in Houston. We drive over there—we’ve got some Houston people here; welcome! We’re glad you’re here. We drive over there and they are playing street football. I pull up; they’re all in the street playing football. I’m like, “Great: a moment to relive the glory days.” I just jump out the car and I’m like, “Hey guys, I’m in—let’s go.” We huddle up there with the quarterback. I’m like, “Hey, just hit me on a post route,” because my buddy Murphy’s guarding me and I’m a lot faster than him—at least I was in college. “Down-set-hut.” I run that; I’m showing that 4.9 [*second*] 40 [*yard dash athleticism*]; I’m going. Then, in an amazing display of athleticism, I jump up, and turn to catch the ball, right? But all my momentum is going that way, and so I just jump up, turn to catch the ball—and my heels hit the concrete and my back hits the concrete. My head just kind of slingshots; I’m knocked out cold. I wake up to all my friends huddled around me. I’ve been there 37 seconds, by the way. The car door is still open. I wake up. I’ve got my tongue hanging out of my mouth and this glob of slobber on the side of my cheek and I’m like, “Where am I?” They’re like, “You’re in Houston and you just hit your head. We need to go to the hospital.” We get in the car; they load me up. We’re driving to the hospital in Houston, and I keep having this moment: “Where am I?” They’re like, “You’re in Houston.” “Who has my wallet?” “Hey, I’ve got your wallet.” “Okay, okay. Where am I?” “You’re in Houston.” “Who has my wallet?” About the fourth time I asked that, Monica started getting worried. “Hey, do you remember who I am?” “I think so.”

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I go to the hospital; I have a concussion. They give me a regimen for recovery. I go home and rest. I stay in bed for a while. Then, it's time to come back to civilization. I go about my morning routine and make my coffee. I have a cup and I spit it out. I said, “Oh, goodness, that's bad. That is terrible.” It's funny because everybody else says, “No, it tastes fine to me.” I'm like “No, no, no; the coffee's gone bad.” At some point, I eventually have a piece of chocolate. I'm like, “Oh, what is that?” It was the most bitter taste. Whatever happened to my head changed the way things taste. It changed my senses. Another really strange detail is when I would smell a skunk driving down the road, it smelled good--like potpourri. It was the weirdest thing. I was like, “Wow, what is that?” like some Le Labo or something. “That's amazing.” It was awful, according to others, but to me it smelled good. It was strange--something happened to my head that changed my taste. It changed my appetite. It changed the way things appeal to me. This is where we're going to be at in the scripture today in Ephesians 4. I said, “Hey, if you want to change your life, change your mind. If you want to change what you do, change what you think. If you want to change how you live, change what you're learning, your input, what you're taking in.” That is what the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul as he writes this letter to the church in Ephesus, is going to teach us today.

If you're new with us, if you're a guest with us--we've been traveling through the book of Ephesians. Chapters 1 through 3 contained no imperative commands, no instruction, no “this is what I want you to do.” It was just, “This is who God is; this is who you are in Christ. This is the gospel. This is who you are.” **“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. It's not of yourself. It's the gift of God”** (Ephesians 2:8). Right? These are the things that I want you to dwell on. We turned into chapter four last week and it was like, “Boom. This is the way you walk in. This is how you live. Now we've got lots of instructions.” Chapters four, five, and six are, “Hey, we told you who God is. We filled you with doctrine and theology. Now, here's the orthopraxy. Here's what it looks like to live and to walk in this.”

Last week, we talked about how to grow as a mature Christian, to be a part of a body, is growing in maturity, which produces unity. Maturity produces unity. A sure sign of a mature believer is the fact that things around them are unified, especially in the body of Christ. Today, we're moving toward this text where he talks about the things that start in our mind and how our lives are different. Being a Christian means radical life change. You think differently; you act differently; you buy differently; you go to different places; you have different kinds of friends; you do different kinds of things with those different kinds of friends. You steward your time differently. You start your day differently. You work for different motives. You have different priorities. Now, everything else in the world is going to say, “This is the way to go.” You get sucked into it and they say, “Hey, this is how you win the game.” Then, all of a sudden, you're competing in a game that has nothing but losers. Whoever has the most still dies, right? We've been called to a different game, one out of the world. We're to be different, look different, act different, talk different, dress different—all because of what you and I know to be true from this Word. Life change means that, once, you had an appetite for the things of the world, but the Holy Spirit came into your life and is changing that. What once was appetizing is now repulsive. Why? Because of what you know. Because you know where it goes. As you fill your mind with what you know, then the things that you loved, you no longer love. You have a new affection.

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You have new desires. You say, “Wait a minute--what about me? I've been a believer as long as I can remember, ever since I was young. I don't really have that story of life change.” Your story is that you have lived your life radically different from the world because, as long as you can remember, you understood that you belong to another kingdom and that you're just here temporarily, momentarily, for a short time--as you're waiting to be with God forever, bringing His kingdom here.

As we move through Ephesians 4:17-29, we're going to look at life change--where it starts, how it continues, and where you see it most clearly. It's this idea; your strategy is different because your thinking is different. Because your thinking is different, your life is different. He says this, **“So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord”** (Ephesians 4:17a). This is a very strong man; it's an urging. There are times where Paul writes, like in 1 Corinthians 7:12, where he's like, “This is I, not the Lord. Hey, I'm giving you my opinion here.” It's still Bible; it's still scripture; it's still inspired by the Holy Spirit. There are times where he softens it. This is one where he doubles down. He says, “No, this is the Lord. With all the authority of the Creator of the heavens and the earth, I'm telling you this: you must no longer live as the Gentiles do in their futility of thinking.” What does “Gentiles” mean? Anybody remember? What is it? That's right: “nations,” as everybody said. “Gentiles” means “nations,” the people around the world. You are not to live like all the other people in the world. This is a story, a narrative of the scripture. I think it's lost here in the Bible Belt a little bit, where “everybody's a Christian.” No, you are called to be so different than everybody else in the world. Why? Verse 18: because **“they are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality and so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.”** (Ephesians 4:18-19). That sensuality is licentiousness. They have a license to sin. They are looking at the world as their playground and they're saying, “How can I squeeze as much pleasure out of it for me? I'm looking for personal gratification to do whatever feels good with little regard to others.” You are a taker. You look at the world and you think, “How do I gamify it? How do I get ahead? How do I get mine? How do I live for the next moment that's going to feel good? I live for the vacations, man. I'm looking for all-inclusive in every moment. I want to find a joy from the world in every moment.”

There's a pattern here in this text; he describes a different way of thinking and a different way of living. Verse 17: he says, “The way you live comes from the way you think.” In verse 18, he says, “They have a dark understanding: ignorance, a hardened heart—and, therefore, they are separated.” In verse 19, he says, “There's a loss of sensitivity; they indulge in this life and they're greedy.” I love how it says “loss of sensitivity.” I think children are born with a real openness to the things of God. God gives them a creativity so that they can imagine the realities of the kingdom of heaven. As parents, it's our job to feed that in them--to foster that so that it would grow. But something happens. If you do not feed that, you will lose that sensitivity. For kids, it's no problem to imagine a man coming down their chimney bringing gifts. God has given them a sense of creativity, a sensitive to the supernatural. If you don't foster it, if you don't feed it, it's lost. It will be lost. My first point this morning:

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1. *Thoughts take you places.*

Simple idea; it's true. It comes from this idea in the text that life change starts in your mind. Thoughts take you places. You will never commit a sin that didn't start up here (*points to head*). Every act of disobedience started from a thought that you fed that turned into a strategy of rebellion. This is how James says it; he says in chapter 1 verse 14: **“But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desires and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death”** (James 1:14-15). You have desires that are not good for you. I hear all the time: “If God didn't want me to do it, why would he have made me feel this way? Why would he have given me this desire?” You have all kinds of desires for things that are harmful to you. You have appetites and tastes. If you had complete freedom, you could eat ice cream for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, only to die early. There has to be some sort of constraint that comes around that, some sort of wisdom, some sort of knowledge that you learn.

Here's a way to describe how this happens; I'll go with something that's not necessarily sinful. Think about the way you buy something--maybe a big purchase. It starts with an idea. You pull up in the carpool line or at a stoplight and you look to your left and you see your friend in the brand-new, whatever car is appealing to you. I'll go with a brand-new suburban. It's shiny on the outside. It's leather on the inside. It's got the TVs, the entertainment system, and the 22-inch rims. You like all of it. You keep going and you start to imagine your life: “Man, if I had that suburban, everything would be different. I bet my kids wouldn't fight in the back of that suburban. They would just get along. My marriage would be happier. We'd take it on date nights. I bet we'd have more date nights if we had that suburban. It would be an investment in my marriage.” You start to rationalize it and think about it this way. “I could take all of our friends. We could bus the neighborhood to church on Sundays if I had that suburban. More people would come to know faith and Jesus because I bought that suburban.” All of a sudden, this expense that didn't make sense is something you begin to research. You're looking at gas mileage. You're looking at the cost and the first cost barrier of entry; “That's too much.” But then they tell you they've got 2.5 percent financing right now. “With that kind of interest rate, it's essentially financially irresponsible of me not to buy that suburban. To be a great steward, I've got to jump on this.” You start looking at it. You start doing the research. It lives in the back of your mind. Then you have it. You got it. That's one I think everyone can relate to. You could swap out the suburban with whatever your deal is. I'm telling you: affairs start the same way. “Their marriage just seems __. She just seems not __. Wow, the way she __, man. She's always willing to help. She sure does look pretty. And that dress looks so good; the eyes just pop. I wonder what it would be like. I shouldn't think about that. I don't know; nobody can see my thoughts.” You start feeding them. “I just go to this website; nobody's gonna know. I can look at this.” “If I just buy this thing real fast and I don't give a lot of thought to it, then it's just gonna show up and I'm gonna be like, ‘Oh, how'd that get there?’”

People don't ruin their lives. There are no blowouts. It's “Oh, I was driving down the road and hit a nail and blew out.” No--that nail has been in your tire for six months. You've been ignoring it, fidgeting with it, and then the blowout happened, right? What he describes here is what the

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Calvinists would call total depravity. Prior to knowing Christ, you were just given to sin. I get that. My life changed. Even though I grew up in church, my life changed as a young adult. I can look back and see when sin was sport. I didn't struggle with pornography; there was no struggle at all. I was proud of it. I would tell you; I wasn't embarrassed about it. I had no shame about it. I would tell you anything. "What did you do last night?" "We went to the strip club. What did you do last night?" There was no shame there. There was no remorse--nothing whatsoever. There was no conviction. It didn't feel bad. I just went for it. We partied; "Man, I'm so hung over right now because we partied." I'm boasting in my shame. I find glory in my shame. **"Their enemies are the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction. Their God is their--? Anybody know? "Their God is their stomach"** (Philippians 3:19). They eat what they're hungry for. He says in Philippians: **"Their destiny is destruction"** (Philippians 3:19). Christ comes in and begins to change this. What I'm trying to tell you is this: if you want to change this (*waves hands to indicate point 'what you do'*), if you want to change where you go, what you do--you change this (*points to head*). You change what you reflect on. Be purified from the inside out. You **set your minds on the things above** (Colossians 3:2), **not conforming any longer to the patterns of this world** (Romans 12:2 paraphrased).

I'll say it like this; you can write it down: pay attention to what you pay attention to. Why? Thoughts take you places. Thoughts take you places. Some people feel like you can't control what you think. Some of the latest scientific discoveries we have of neurology tell us otherwise. I want everybody to think of a pink elephant. Can you picture a pink elephant? See the elephant, see the trunk, see the big ears, see the tail. It's pink. Do you see it? You've never seen a pink elephant--not one of you. You all just controlled your thoughts. That's what you just did. You thought about whatever you wanted to think about. You can control your thoughts. If you feel like you can't, I'll say it like this: you control what thoughts you feed. You control what thoughts grow into actions. They *will* grow into actions.

Verse 20 (*starts telling people to underline certain words in the text*): **"That, however, is not the way of life you learned. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught with regard to your former way of life, to put off the old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness** (Ephesians 4:20-24).

Last week, we had that little joke here about you taking in your theology from TikTok. You start scrolling away and then all of a sudden you're going to think Princess Kate and P. Diddy are on some island with the Illuminati. Everybody's saying, "ha, ha, ha," with nervous laughter, because I did. Here's what I would just tell you: man, I learned that the hard way. I was a follower of Jesus, a believer surrounded with mature Christians. We started listening to this guy's podcast, watching his videos, reading his books--not someone you've heard of or would know. We went all in. He had these prophecies that had come true. It was just fascinating. It wrapped up into 9/11 and there were all these things. It just became more and more interesting. He had more and more authority in our lives. All of a sudden, before you know it, we were buying life straws and

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gold. We're thinking that the end is near. “How much does it cost to put a bunker in the backyard?” You're like, “Man, how did you get there?” We just fed an idea and it grew. Some of this, you see this in your parents. Some of this, others see it in your life. “They're getting weird. Why are they getting weird?” They’ve just got this one source of information. They're going deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper on it all by themselves in isolation and those idiosyncrasies grow in that way. Why? Because you're learning a way. You're being disciplined. That is classic discipleship. God made us that way. You think, “Man, that's so dumb.” No, no--it's not, actually. Statistically speaking, members of cults have higher IQs. They are smarter than most of us because their brain says, “Hey, there's got to be something else out there. It can't just be the fairway ‘death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins.’ There's got to be some other stuff. ‘Gospel of Thomas’ stuff. ‘Da Vinci Code’ kind of stuff. ‘Let's find the conspiracy that's not a conspiracy.’” Right? You get in weird places.

The second point: you're learning a new way. That's what he's saying. You say, “Hey, but that's not the life you are to live.” You've learned a new way. Life change continues as you learn a new way.

2. *You are learning a new way.*

It is sometimes endearing to have conversations with new believers that just don't know. I was talking, when I moved here a couple of years ago, to a high school student who had just like, they just discovered the gospel. You just saw the sparkle in his eyes. He said, “Man, this is amazing. This is such good stuff. I'm reading the Bible for the first time. This truth is great.” He's talking about his girlfriend. I'm like, “Hey, let me ask you a question. Are you sleeping with her?” He says, “Yes.” “No—are y'all having sex?” “Yes, yeah, uh huh. What?” You almost have to start in a new place. You can't go, “Oh, that's wrong. You need to stop.” You go, “Oh, man, okay. You just hadn't gotten to that chapter yet. There's a God. He loves you so much He actually invented sex. He put it in the safeness of marriage. He made it for that: for procreation and to bond a husband to his wife and a wife to her husband. When you take it outside that safe haven, it can be really destructive in your lives and the lives of others. There are consequences that aren't simply the judgment of God. It's just the way that He put this; He created it for this safe place.” You can't give them the “what” without the “how” or the “why.” This is like, “God loves you.” He's not trying to keep pleasure from you; He's trying to multiply it and give it back to you. He's trying to spare you of shame and hurt and heartache and an attachment in a place where you shouldn't be. You're teaching, you're training, you're equipping, you're discipling.

This is why, when we meet with our Life Groups, we ask three questions: 1) How did you feed your soul? 2) How did you feed others? 3) How did you feed your flesh? “How did you feed your soul?” Podcasts? Books? What are you reading in the scriptures? “How did you feed others?” Discipleship? Evangelism? Who are you talking about the things of God with? “How did you feed your flesh?” Confession? Where did you willfully disobey? Then, the next person prays. Input, output, confession. The input is so important. As we're doing life with one another, we understand what you're feeding your brain. Everybody is in the classroom; you just have to figure out who the teacher is. For the rest of your life, as long as you live, as long as you walk

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the earth--you're in the classroom. Who's the teacher? Who's informing your heart? Who's instructing? What you believe to be reality: that matters. This is what he says in Romans 8: **“The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so”** (Romans 8:6-7). That's a commentary. That is some of what you see here in Ephesians. What are you feeding your mind with? Here's the application for today: what plans will you make right now to make sure that, every day of your life, you are feasting on the things of God? That you are feeding your mind on the thoughts of God, the ideas of God, and the realities of God from the Word of God and the people of God? How will you make sure that's your baseline? That more than you know about sports, or what players, or statistics, or the stock market, or cryptocurrency, or real estate, or whatever else you might be interested in--that you learn and feast on and grow in the things of God? What's your plan? You've gotta have a plan. What's your plan? You start making that plan right now. Colossians 3 says, **“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge and the image of the Creator”** (Colossians 3:9-10).

How is your life different from an atheist who seeks to do good? How is your life different from the moral atheist? From the one who says, “There is no God, but I want to seek to do right by my neighbor and make the world a better place?” How is your life so much different than theirs? Parents, I will just tell you: ask your kids. They're going to always do what you do. You're becoming your father and your mother; just ask your spouse. You've gotta give them that baseline of belief. You can't just come here for an hour and a half on Sunday and pretend there's this invisible God that we worship and sing to and learn from, when it doesn't mark the rest of your life. If that's been you, I'd repent. I would sit the family down; I would hold the meeting; I would ask for forgiveness, and I'd course-correct really quickly. It's gonna start here (*points to head*). It's gonna start here (*points to heart*). That's what the text is saying. Eighty-five percent of Christians become Christians by the age of 14. Your worldview is determined by the age of 13.

Speaking of students, I went to Midway's prom last week. The prom game has changed, man. It is different. Monica was like, “Hey, so we're going to prom tonight.” I was like, “Oh, yeah? I feel like I should have asked you or something.” And I was like, “Why are we going to prom? I went to prom. My parents were not at prom.” And she says, “No, this is a big deal; we've got to go; there's a red carpet.” I'm like, “Red carpet? What in the world?” Sure enough, I thought, “Maybe we're first-timers,” but no, sure enough, all the other parents were there too. It just brought back all the insecurities for me of high school. I just remember walking through the high school cafeteria with all the cliques and all the different things. High school, for me, was a straight identity crisis, okay? An absolute total identity crisis. I started out as a skater. I had my vision streetwear shoes with the ollie pad and my skateboard that I would take everywhere I go. I worked at Gadzooks, if you remember that. I had JNCOs, if you know what those are. They were like bell bottoms—throwback. The really baggy jeans. That was my world. Then I realized, “Oh, there's something to athletics; I need to figure that out.” I went all in on the team, the jerseys, the letter jacket. I'm wearing what the team wears because we're a team and I've got the buttons and all of the things that go around that. I failed miserably at that. Then, I decided I'm actually a gangster. I went gangster. I'm sagging the pants. I've got both ears pierced. I got a tattoo at

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fourteen, okay? That’s illegal. I’m all in; I’m going there. When that didn't work out, I went 4-H and FFA. There were some pretty radical shifts here, guys. I’m getting the Justin lace-up ropers, the wranglers. I think this shirt’s (*points to his shirt*) actually from high school. I was all in with the cowboys. I didn't enjoy that. Then, I rounded out high school with the Dawson Creek era with popped collar polos and Tommy Hilfiger tucked into some cargo khakis, right? The preppy. It's just like a constant identity crisis, man. What described each one of those phases is if you think, “Man, how did it describe your identity?” What you wore, how you talked, and what you did with your time. What you wore, how you talked, and what you did.

The most important thing about you is that you are a child to the Creator of the heavens and the earth. You're gonna be with Him forever; you're gonna give an account for everything you've done under the sun. You're His. You've been purchased by the blood of His own Son, Jesus Christ. It's true. It's all true. You're gonna be with Him forever, and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever. That needs to impact what you wear; you clothe yourself with humility, patience, gentleness (Colossians 3:12 paraphrased). It's gonna impact how you talk. You're gonna see that in just a second. It's gonna impact everything that you do, everything you buy, everything you say, everywhere you go, and what you do when you get there; that's what he's saying. What is the chocolate that is repulsive today because Jesus Christ came in your life?

I'm going to start in verse 25. What you're going to see is a rhythm here. There's a negative command, a positive command, and the reason for the positive command. He says in verse 25, **“Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body”** (Ephesians 4:25). He's saying, “You're to conform your words to reality. If something comes out of your mouth, it needs to be absolutely true. You speak the truth.” **“In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry”** (Ephesians 4:26). He says, “You might get angry at sin. There's a righteous anger. You may become angry at something that somebody is doing that is wrong. If you don't do something righteously with that anger, the enemy is going to take it and the anger is going to control you; you're not going to be in control of the anger.” The anger will control the believer, not the believer in control of the anger.

“Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need” (Ephesians 4:28). You are to become a generosity machine. Prior to Christ, you take; you optimize; you live your life to get as much as you can, as though this world is all you've got. You build castles here for yourself to enjoy for about 76 years. When you come into a relationship with Christ, you think, “How do I give as much as I can possibly give for the goodness of others to build kingdom machines? Things that prosper the gospel. Things that make disciples, create disciples.” One minute you take and the next you create. You make and you give. You are a conduit, not a container; a pipe, not a pail—getting God's resources wherever they go. You may think, “I don't lie and I don't steal, so that's not really talking about me.” There are things that are totally normative in our world that are lies that you don't realize because it's just the air you breathe. If you tell your friend, “Man, my house, because of all that's going on and the imprint, it's worth \$500-grand now.” Then you walk into the tax appraisal office and you say, “No, I

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think it's worth \$300 grand.” That's a lie--and it's totally normative. It's inconsistent with the Spirit of God. If you look at your taxes and you think, “Hey, where can I fudge some of these numbers just a little bit so that I can save \$10,000?” I want you to know your soul is not worth \$10,000. It's not worth it. You live above reproach. You operate in pure, total, complete, utter righteousness--completely different than what the world does. You've been called out of the world. You've been called to stand apart from the world. What you do is different than what the world does.

Verse 29: **“Do not do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”** (Ephesians 4:29). What do we use our words for? Some of you parents have had this conversation lots of times with your kids. “What do we use our words for? Building up. What else do we use our words for? Not much of anything. Is that clear?” I'm driving for the sake of clarity, believing that clarity is kindness. We use our words for building others up so that it may encourage those who listen. We don't use our words for much of anything else, certainly not to lie, cheat, gossip, or talk about somebody who's not present. “That's a really high bar.” You're right. It's a really high bar. I don't want to normalize. I think the reason that people don't become Christians in our culture is because it discredits their testimony. For them to become a Christian, they'd have to say they weren't one, and they're just unwilling to do that.

The true test--you're probably like, “I don't lie, I'm not angry, steal, speak unwholesomely.” The true test for the believer is in trials. If you're thinking, “Hey, I'm not really given to these things,” you're really going to see what it looks like in the trials. That's my third point:

3. *The true test comes in trials.*

You'll see life change most clearly in the trials. You may be like, “Man, it's not like I use the F-word.” I did for a long time, just as a noun, verb, adjective; it was just common. You're like, “I don't really.” But if you walk into your house at night and you stub your toe and it comes out of you, it's in you. It's just hidden under a veil of righteousness. It's just hidden under a, “Hey, let me try to polish up my heart and act a particular way because it's good for society.” That's different than being purified from the inside out. What comes out of you when you're squeezed is what's inside of you deeply. It's in the trials. That's where you're going to see who you really are. I know that the text doesn't use the word “trial.” I just want to acknowledge that. I'm taking these things that you might be thinking, “Hey, I don't do those things.” I'm saying, “Well, sure, when you've got \$20 in your pocket and the sun is up and things are going well, great—but what about when it's not?” Anger is a test. How quickly can you resolve it? He says, **“If you let the sun set on your anger, you're giving the devil a foothold to carry you away”** (Ephesians 4:26-27 paraphrased). When you feel angry, you need to think, “What can I do productively with this anger? What can I do that's productive with this anger? Who do I need to talk to? Who is the person that I should have a conversation with? Let me not have a conversation with anybody else but that person,” because anger is a test.

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Growing up in school, I was really, abnormally tall my whole life and not super athletic; I was bullied, picked on, made fun of. My mom was a teacher, which is *super* cool; “Hey, my mom is your teacher.” I think that put a lot of bitterness inside of me. When I finally grew into my height, I could use my size and my voice as an intimidation and manipulation tactic. There was so much anger in me that going out on the weekend was really just an exercise of violence. It was like, “Hey, who can I prove myself to?” Someone invited me to church, I surrendered my life to Jesus, and the Holy Spirit began to work on that, to kill that sense of vengeance. When somebody cuts you off or flips you off on the side of the road and you think, “This is my moment to really show them out,” you instead think, “Man, who cares? Lord, would you bless that person? They're clearly in a hurry. I don't know what's going on right now with them, but they're probably having a bad day or maybe they have a bad dad. I don't know what it is, Lord, but You know. Would you bless them? Would you protect them? Would you bring them into a relationship with you?” It's just different, man. Only the Spirit of God can do that. You're not going to be able to leave here and just do that to yourself. The Spirit of God has to do that. When you're done wrong, make it a game; how low can you go? Before you bow up, bow down. Operate in humility. **Clothe yourself in humility** (Colossians 3:12).

In summary, change begins in your thinking. Change begins in your thinking with this idea that thoughts take you places. When you become a Christian, you are learning a new way to live, one different than the world around you. The true test of the changed person is what comes out of them when they are squeezed, when they're in a pinch. The true test is in trials.

I was sitting at my desk one day. My desk phone hardly ever rings and it did, which I thought was weird. I answered it. There's a guy with a really thick accent and he was just super confused. He wasn't belligerent. There were a lot of curse words, but you could just tell it was really casual in nature. He was like, “I just don't understand.” He goes, “Are you, JP?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Are you the one with videos on YouTube?” “Maybe—probably. What's up?” He goes, “I'm watching this one where you're talking about relationships and talking about waiting until married to have sex.” He goes, “I just don't understand why anyone's there.” Here's the backstory: he's calling me from Sweden. Sweden's one of the most atheist countries in the world. He literally has never been in a church his entire life. He's just lived his life as, “Hey, I'm going to do what I want to do and I want to do it.” He's confused that anybody would come into a room and listen to difficult instruction like that. He's just baffled by it. I began to share the Gospel with him; there's lots of F-words and “You're crazy.” The next day, he calls back. We talked some more for an hour and a half. He hangs up. Then, a couple days later, he calls back, just interested. The Spirit of God—the hounds of heaven are just after him. He's interested in God. He doesn't even know of a church in his town. There on the phone, he prays to receive Christ; he surrenders his life to Jesus; he understands that He died for his sin and He raised from the dead. That was the beginning of a relationship. He would call me and we found a church near him, 30 minutes away. He actually started a young adult ministry there all because he thought, “Hey, I'm watching these YouTube videos and, man, y'all have got to watch them.” He's never been in church, not for a wedding or funeral; never in his entire life had he ever set foot in a church. Now he's starting this ministry. He calls me and he says, “Man, I can't even enjoy the pub anymore.” I'm like, “What do you mean?” He says, “When I go, my friends want to talk about their

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conquests. Their language is so bad. I can't even enjoy it anymore.” I'm like, “Yeah, I get it.” “My girlfriend—we had to break up. I don't know how to do this as a Christian.” “Yeah, you're going to learn.” He continues in that way. He calls me two years later and he says, “Hey, I'm moving to the Philippines as a missionary. I'm going there to take the Gospel and I'm going to give my life to this.” Only God does that. It's what God does. You see it with him so clearly because he hadn't been inoculated to these ideas. He came into it and it was new and fresh. We don't have that benefit. You've been surrounded by Christian ideas your whole life. “Move to the Philippines? Why would I do that?” Why wouldn't you? We should have a good answer. If you don't, then you should move to Waco, Hewitt, Lorena, Hidden Valley, Badger Ranch, Twin Rivers, or McGregor, and be a missionary. I pray you would.

Lord, would you make us missionaries? Just take us—take a group of nominal believers and make us radically sold out for you. Would you start with the leadership of this place? Would you start with our thinking? Would you help us to consume the realities of you? To live in right relationship with you through your promises that you've given us? Help us to know who you are and all that you've done for us. We're so thankful for your Word that does not return void. Pray that even as we sing this song, that it would just continue to go deeper and deeper in our hearts.