

Take Stock – 2 Cor 13:5

Happy New Year; I trust your time over the holidays was well spent, and that enjoyed some good times with family and friends; I know we did, and we're thankful for it. I also hope that you're refreshed and eager to make the most of 2015. In fact, that's the purpose of the message this weekend. I originally intended to start our next series, but decided to push pause, and encourage you to take *stock* of your life. To examine yourself and test yourself, in order to ensure that you're living the way God wants.

So often in our rush from one thing to another, we utterly *fail* to assess ourselves. Especially when it comes to the principles of God's Word; We just don't do it. But it's a *good* practice, and a biblical one; And it's found in 2 Cor 13:5.

➤ Paul is near the end of his second letter in as many years to the church in Corinth . . . And he wraps up by addressing their tendency to look at everyone *else's* walk, instead of their own; To measure someone *else's* life, instead of theirs.

So he says in v5 – *Examine yourselves* [yourselves], *to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.* As in take your temperature; Take your pulse; Take stock. *Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*

Paul is saying that we not only have the *means* to live a godly life, but we're without *excuse* to do so; B/c we have *Jesus* living within us, his Spirit. Giving us all the power, ability, and impulse we need, to live his way. Unless of course you're not saved in the first place – *you fail to meet the test*.

But assuming you do, assuming you *are* saved – examining yourself and taking stock of your life, is part of living it for Christ. And to help with that, I have 9 questions; 9 questions that get at the basics of a life well-lived for Jesus; The first is this . . .

1. Is godliness your goal? (1 Tim 4:7-8)

That's the first question to ask yourself – “Is godliness my goal?” Are you striving to be holy as God is holy? Or are you just floating along, hoping your good *intentions* will carry the day?

I hope not; B/c **1 Tim 4:7** says – *Train yourself for godliness*; Get serious about it [8] *For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.* (1 Timothy 4:7-8). Godliness isn't just an *admirable* goal, it's a crucial one; Both for now *and* later. Later, b/c it stores up treasure in heaven; And now, b/c it's a pipeline for God's blessing.

➤ I received an email to that effect from a man in our church a few weeks ago, and I want to read it to you (B. Gammel)*****

Pastor Rob, I wanted to share an encouraging story with you of how God has used the delivery of His Word to make changes in my life, that have led to more of His blessing. On August 31, 2013 you preached a message on "Godliness in the workplace". I knew the

point that was coming and already felt conviction before you even got to it – “How am I using my time at work?” It's so easy at a desk job to drift off and waste time on our own interests and pleasures, surfing the web or whatever. I was certainly guilty of it, and still am at times. I already knew it was wrong, and if I thought about it enough I was already convicted of it in my heart. But the acuteness of conviction that your message brought, led me to talk with my supervisor about getting more work to do so that I would be more gainfully employed and less tempted to just coast. And he did. He gave me more work, and I continued to be proactive and look for more that I could be doing. Fast forward a year and a half, and I received a promotion last week to step into the very position my supervisor held. He is moving up also, and the senior leadership selected me from among my peers to fill the vacancy. Thank you, as always, for preaching God's Word without apology and showing the practical application to our lives.

That's someone with a goal of godliness, who found it valuable now – for *the present life*. How about you? Take stock.

2. Is discipleship your pursuit? (2 Pet 3:18)

2 Pet 3:18 says – *Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* That's discipleship – growing in your *knowledge* of God, and your *application* of it. Becoming more and more like Christ in word, thought, character, and deed.

The question is – Do you *pursue* it? Are you *intentional* about discipleship? Does your desire to grow, *show*?*****

Or does something else turn your crank? Like video games; Or music; Or leisure; Or work. There's nothing wrong with those things in and of themselves, unless they become your primary pursuit. B/c *what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul* (Mk 8:36)? Nothing; It profits him nothing.

But discipleship does; B/c it's all *about* your soul.

Which is why we offer *discipleship* groups of various sorts; Like Men's and Women's Bible studies, and Small Groups and Discipleship Classes. We want to spur you on, and throw *gas* on your pursuit of grace and knowledge.

➤ In fact, we just developed a new *series* of discipleship classes called **Frameworks**; And I want to encourage you to take advantage of them. Frameworks is the next iteration in our efforts to provide you with a systematic approach to growing and learning. For those of you familiar with First Principles, you might think of this as 2.0; We took the best of *that* curriculum, made some additions . . . And came up with a framework of 5 classes; The first of which is . . .

Exploring Your Faith – Designed to help new believers learn about the basics of faith, prayer, and the Bible.

Living The Life – Which covers what it means to Worship, Walk, and Work for Christ in every area of your life.

Knowing the Word – A class that studies the main themes, covenants, and storyline in both the Old and New Testaments.

Dividing The Truth – Teaching you how to interpret and apply God’s Word with consistency and confidence

Connecting The Dots – A deep dive into the doctrine and theology of the Bible

It’s a multi-year process, and would be a great way to *pursue* discipleship*****

So if that interests you, and I hope it does – stop by the table in the lobby, get some more information, and sign up; The first class, *Exploring Your Faith*, starts next week

3. Are you passionate about worship? (Ps 29:2)

Worship, as in the joyful response of your heart, when you focus on the awesome glory of God; Something we do out of *obedience*, and *desire*
Something we *get* to do, and something we *must* do
Like **Ps 29:2** says – *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.* It’s a command – worship

But far from a duty of drudgery, it *should* be a duty of delight; Something we’re passionate about; Like King David was in 2 Sam 6 . . .
Leaping and dancing before the LORD; That’s passion

Or how about Paul and Silas in Acts 16, who were *praying and singing hymns to God in prison*; Going on until midnight with their feet in stocks and their clothes torn off
Why? B/c they were *passionate* about worship
Passionate about expressing their *love* for God, and their *awe* of God, *to* God*****

➤ How about you? Do you love to ascribe glory to God? Do you love to credit him with the honor he deserves? Does your heart swell with it during the week . . .
So that you’re busting at the seams on the weekend? *Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your heart* (Col 3:16)?
Adding your voice to that of others, so that with *one* heart and *one* voice we can lift him up? Is that your passion?

I hope so; B/c it’s not only a mark of a life well-lived for Christ, but a mark of your *love* for Christ; Take stock

4. Are you committed to fellowship? (Heb 10:24-25)

I’m not talking about small talk in the lobby, or greeting one another after we sing
I’m talking about belonging together in mutual partnership
I’m talking about sharing your life, and getting involved in someone else’s
I’m talking about growing *together* as a community of believers, not just growing larger
I’m talking about coming to church; And plugging into a discipleship group

B/c **Heb 10:24-25** says – *Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

The day of Christ’s return

Is your habit the habit of some? Or are you *committed* to fellowship?*****

I hope so; For your sake *and* ours

B/c we’ll never belong together in a biblical sense, if we don’t meet together in a practical one; Take stock

5. Do you serve like you should? (1 Pet 4:10)

1 Pet 4:10 says – *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace*

Good stewards don’t just use their giftedness on a piecemeal basis; Or every now and then; Or only when it suits *them*

They use their gift *all* the time; Like they should

Even if others aren’t; Even if they lack the strength; Even if they’re afraid of what it might cost; Even if it doesn’t make sense

That’s the example of Gideon in Judges 6*****

He didn’t just serve, he served like he *should* have served

He didn’t just usher when he should have been in Harvest Kids

He didn’t just greet when he should have been a Student Ministries leader

He went all out to go all in, as a *good* steward of God’s varied grace in his life

Take stock; And get busy if you’re not

6. Do you pray like it matters? (James 5:16)

I love this clip from some of the pastors in our Fellowship, b/c it covers prayer as good as any I’ve seen (**HBF One Mission** – 2:20-2:50)

Prayer is the posture of a humble person in the presence of God, knowing God’s greatness and man’s need

And apart from the *power* of prayer, ministry, both corporately *and* individually, is all for naught; But *with* it, it’s miraculous

Like **James 5:16** says – *The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.* And James 4:2 says – *You do not have because you do not ask.*

So prayer matters; For sure; B/c God hears us, and acts

The question is, does it show? Do you *pray* like it matters?

In his book, Breakthrough Prayer (**Quote**), Jim Cymbala said . . .

“The first challenge is to believe that no situation, however evil or entrenched, is beyond the scope of prayer. In theory, we know that God can do anything, but many of us fail to trust him when it comes time to pray for specific people or situations. Instead of looking to the Lord for help, we keep our eyes on the problem, which grows bigger the longer we gaze at it.”

Do you pray like it matters, or fail to believe?*****

7. Do you faithfully tithe? (Mal 3:10)

IOW do you give a tenth of your income to our church? Like it says in **Mal 3:10** – *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.*

As in spiritual sustenance; And discipleship; And outreach; And fellowship

Is that your practice?

Or do you spend your time and effort trying to rationalize why it *doesn’t* apply to you?

Or ignore it altogether, hoping against hope that it doesn’t matter?

And miss out on the promise of God’s blessing in the 2nd half of the verse? (**Mal 3:10b**)

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

It's a promise – a promise of blessing

Which not only shows itself in God's provision for us as *individuals*, but his provision for our *church*; Faithful tithing leads to fruitful ministry

Not to mention increased joy in your heart, and contentment in your life, and confidence that you're squarely in the center of God's will*****

Take stock, and test yourself

8. Do you love your neighbor? (Mt 22:39)

Jesus said that the entire Law and Prophets are based on 2 commandments . . .

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength . . .

And *love your neighbor as yourself* (Mt 22:37-39); As in value them like you value yourself; Treat them like you treat yourself

Your *neighbor* referring to anyone with whom you interact; Anyone

Including the person on the other end of the helpline – who you love to berate

Or the person on the other side of the service desk – who you love to mistreat

Or the other side of the tracks – who you love to distrust

Or the other side of the field – who you love to hate

Or the other side of the office – who you love to despise

Or the other side of the street – who you love to ignore

Or the other side of the bed – who you hate to love

Your neighbor is anyone and everyone you meet, in person or not, whether for a moment or a lifetime; And God's command is to *love* them

Encourage them; Bless them; Pay attention to them; Pray for them; Get to know them;

Or at the very least, make their day a little brighter

If that's your heart and practice – you love your neighbor

If not, take stock, and make a change

9. Is your heart soft? (Eph 4:18)

Eph 4:18 says – *They [unbelievers] are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.*

If a *hard* heart leads to ignorance of all that's *important* in life, and estrangement from

God, and an inability to understand the *things* of God like the verse says . . .

Then a *soft* heart leads to just the opposite – understanding, intimacy, and knowledge

Which is it for you? Are you *numb* to the things of God?*****

Are you *calloused* toward the plight of others? Are you *deaf* to the feedback of friends?

Are you *blind* to the truth?

If so, your heart is hard; And you're storing up wrath for yourself; Or at the very least difficulty and discipline

But if you actually *desire* to hear words of conviction, like the man in the email I read

And you *want* to be sharpened by friends; And you *ache* for the plight of others; And

are *sensitive* to the work of God – your heart is soft

And a soft heart not only stores up blessing, but reaps it every day

B/c *the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.* (James 1:25)

➤ So take stock (**Summary**); And examine yourself

And if your answers to these questions are “yes” – keep on

But if they're not, now is as good a time as any to refresh and redeem the time

To do the *right* things, and reap God's blessing

Pray – Give us the strength, and courage, and faith to live your way this year; Fill us with your Spirit; Sanctify us with your truth; And use us for your purposes

We give now, not only b/c we should, but b/c we long to see more and more of your blessing in both our lives, and our church