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Who then will condemn us? No one. For Christ. Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us. And he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

A few weeks ago, I think it was Sunday. I know it was a Sunday that a lot of you are at Springmill Park I talked about my involvement in the development of a 12 step program in Bloomington. And we have a pilot group of about 15 of us going through Regeneration. Regeneration. It's based on AA and then celebrate recovery.

It's a very much a biblically based Christian discipleship and recovery program that uses 12 step principles to bring about healing and freedom from destructive things, hurts, habits, hang ups, whatever. And it utilizes obviously Jesus and a community of people that can share life together. And the goal is heart transformation, not behavior modifications. Where it differs from some other recovery programs. I'm going through it for real and I'm finding it really helpful.

It's not just for the classic addictions. It's for anything that we struggle with and we all have something. The 12 steps regeneration are rooted in scripture. They come from scripture. They're full of biblical concepts and ideas.

And here they are, the 12 steps. Admit you're powerless over your brokenness. Believe God can restore you. Trust God with your life through Jesus Christ. Make a moral inventory of yourself.

Confess your sins to God, to yourself and to another person. Repent and turn away from your sinful patterns. Follow God's path for you. Forgive those who have harmed you. Make amends to those you have harmed, except when to do so would cause further injury.

Continue to take a personal inventory and confess your wrongs immediately. Seek to understand God's will through prayer and meditation, asking for the power to carry out his will. And have a spiritual awakening from these steps. Stand and then carry this message of hope to others who are struggling. So we're several weeks in with our group.

We meet on Tuesday nights from 6:30 to 8 roughly and we're several weeks in. We started in August and we're now on step four, which is we make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. It's

the longest step and in some ways it never ends. Because step 10 is we continue to take a personal inventory initially with step four, we take six weeks, which is by far the longest amount of time we spend on any step and what it is. It's a God guided research with penetrating, challenging questions.

And it guides us deep into our souls in a lot of different categories. And we don't go and relive stuff, but we look and see what happened there. We look at where we failed and where we sinned and where we made a mess and where others maybe made messes for us. We just look at sin, we look at the shame, we look at all the stuff around it. And we do so on purpose, with a purpose.

Because sometimes we find things that just weren't resolved and they still bite us pretty hard. And I know the resistance. I saw it firsthand, I felt it firsthand. People say, well, why go back? Why go back to stuff that I've been forgiven of?

Why would I do that? And I've used expressions and I've heard them, well, there's a reason that the windshield's this big and the rear view mirrors this big. Have you ever said that, Tim? I would like to use your voice saying that, but I couldn't quite. Okay, the point being that we're going forward.

Why go back? Why go back? Well, I understand that and I agree, mostly. But I'm also aware of a lot of other stuff that I've learned over the years. And I'm aware of what Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 13:5, where he says, examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine.

Test yourselves. I don't know about you, but I think I do. Many of us have a tendency to ignore stuff that's happening in our lives. We have some things and. And so we fill our lives with all kinds of distractions.

And today it's just scrolling and scrolling and scrolling. Maybe even while we're binge watching Netflix or whatever, whatever app you have that you look at. And so we'll do just about anything to keep from being still and being silent and thinking about our lives. And when something unpleasant happens, I think a lot of us just like to stuff it down or move it away or build a wall around it. And that's what Marlene did.

I guess it was nearly 30 years ago. Marlene worked for me when I had a non secular or a secular job, non ministry job. And Marlene, she was outstanding. She was probably the best worker I had. She was dependable, she was loyal, she was professional, she was polite.

She was strictly business, very walled off. Well, one day something happened. I don't remember what it was, but I remember this. Marlene was visibly shaken by it, and I had never seen her like that. And so I

just asked a gentle question, and immediately she got defensive.

So I asked another gentle question, and it was like I had accidentally opened a door that she had spent years nailing shut.

And with tears almost squirting out of her eyes as she was trying to hold stuff back, she said, I don't talk about that. I don't talk about anything like that.

I was a little stunned, to be honest. And I just instinctively, quietly asked another question, and she cut me off. She was mad. She said, I build walls around stuff like that. I don't go back there.

I don't talk about it. I don't think about it. I just wall it up and leave it there. Leave it alone. Do you understand?

Yes. Okay. I wanted to say, well, how's that working out for you, Marlene?

Because here's the truth.

We are as sick as our secrets. Meaning that when we build walls around our stuff, our sin, our shame, when we build walls around unresolved past, when we build walls around things that happened to us and things that we did that we never really dealt with, then those things become detriments to our mental, physical, and spiritual health. They really do. The things that we wall up, the things that we stuff down, they don't stay contained. We may think they do, but they don't.

They seep out, they leak out. They come out in one way or another. And whether we're aware of it or not, they shape our reactions to things. You ever seen somebody overreact? Like, what was that about?

Well, it was about something they walled up. It affects the way we do relationships. It even affects our faith. That's what I'm most concerned about today. Unresolved things.

Things that we don't deal with, whisper and maybe shout lies about who we are and who God is. And Satan loves to take those things and from the wall. He loves to exploit our secrets and things that we won't even admit to ourselves. He uses those against us.

Unexamined and unresolved things lead to feelings of anxiety. They lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation, shame and guilt, among other things. They keep us. They keep us from the deep relationships that we all desperately want. Satan just uses and exploits our unresolved stuff to constantly condemn us.

You're not good enough. If people really knew what you were like, you know what would happen. And so this constant condemnation from Satan,

using our six secrets, keeps us from enjoying a life of peace and joy and confidence. The very thing that God wants us to have the abundant life through Jesus. Have you ever heard the expression, the unexamined life is not worth living?

Who said that?

Socrates.

Do you remember when Socrates lived? I was not around, okay?

I had a conversation with him once. He lived 500 years before Christ. And he says, the unexamined life is not worth living. It's just another way of saying that we need to deal with who we are and what we are and the reality all around us as broken people in a broken world. And so the goal, and this is what God wants.

He wants us to live humble, authentic lives of freedom in Christ, where we are truthful and appropriately transparent. If we fake it, we'll never make it. We are to examine our lives, to use the language of regeneration in a thorough and fearless way. And that's the present. And systematically and carefully the past and the way to do this is from a secure platform of God's love.

So as we stand on the love of God and we stand in the love of God, the first thing that we do is to become secure in that. And I love the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3 comes to my mind when I think about this. And just imagine that he's writing this to the Ephesians, but he's also writing it to you today. And he's writing to me. Just listen to what he says.

He says, I pray that from his God's glorious and unlimited resources, he will empower you with inner strength through his spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts. As you trust in him, your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it's too great to understand fully.

Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. Paul is just bursting out with praise. And he's saying, listen, I want you to stand in the love of God. And I want you to grasp how unlimited it is. I want you to imagine, no matter where you stand, no matter which direction you look, you just can't see anything but the love of God as seen in Jesus Christ out there, over here, down there, up there, everywhere.

It's just I'm surrounded by this love of Christ. And he's wanting us to see that God's love is unconditional. It's unstoppable. It's uncontainable. It's unending.

And it's through that lens. Once I'm secure in that lens, then I am ready to go back and do this inventory. And I'm doing it. I'm doing it. I've got a mentor that's part of regeneration.

You have a mentor that helps you, you can talk to. And I've got a good friend who is my mentor. And so I'm looking back at my life and some categories and I know this is shocking to you, but I see some things back there, some sin that I committed. And I see. I see shame that came from, that I'm not going back and reliving, but I note that it's there.

And then what I'm seeing through that lens of God's love is I see it. And then all of a sudden I see God's mercy meeting my mess. And I see God's mercy destroying that mess and transforming that message. The other night we were in the men's group of regeneration. We meet together for a while and then we divide into men and women.

The other night in the men's group, it got really, really real and really messy. I mean, some really messed up stuff was shared and it was emotional.

One of our guys who's active in AA, and I think this is an AA saying, as we all process that mess, he said, you know, our messes become our message.

Our messes become our message. Because when God's mercy, quickly followed by his grace, meets our sin and our shame and our mess, it's exposed, it's out there. And then the light floods in and destroys the darkness. And we are forgiven, we are redeemed, and we can use our messy experiences to humbly help others. Wounded healers are the best healers.

I was working through this and I thought, you know what? This is the woman at the well, isn't it? In John chapter four, you remember her. Maybe you don't know it, but you can read it later. She's a woman that I would assert is living a life full of shame based on sin.

She seems to avoid all social interaction. She goes at the well at a time when nobody else will be there. I think she avoids all people at all costs. Well, Jesus on purpose goes literally out of his way to make sure he's there when she shows up. And as he engages her, he reveals to her what he knows, which is everything.

He knows the messes of her life. He knows she's been married five times. He knows that she's living with a guy. Now, that's not her husband. And as he reveals her messes, his mercy just comes in and meets her messes.

And she sees it. She sees love like she's never seen. She sees mercy,

she sees grace. And she just can't contain herself because her mess becomes her message. And she literally runs to town to the people she's avoided for I don't know how long.

She doesn't care anymore. And she shouts out, come and see a man who's told me everything I ever did.

And they're thinking that's a lot. And I don't think she. It's not recorded, but I think she says, come and see a man who told me everything I ever did. And he still loved me. He still loves me.

I am fully known and I'm fully loved. That's the thing I've always wanted in my entire life. So her mess becomes her message of God's redemption. Well, I'm finding going through this searching and fearless moral inventory is quite revealing. Stuff that I thought was all fixed and done in a lot of ways is.

And I don't need to go talk to people again, but I'm also seeing that there's some residual stuff there that I just need to work through and confess. And I am. And I have. It's a little scary, but it's so liberating. And the key is remembering how much God loves me.

And the key is Remembering how Romans 8 starts with which says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And then our passage for today.

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these?

If God is for us, who can ever be against us?

Since he did not spare even his own son, but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one. For God himself has given us right standing with Himself. Who will condemn us?

No one. For Christ. Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

I think probably the reason that most of us don't want to face our sin and our messes is because of fear.

We're just afraid of what we'll see. Were afraid ultimately of rejection. If people really knew me, that'd be it. I think we're not only afraid of rejection from people, but from God.

Paul understood the mercy and grace of God better than anyone else. You remember his story.

Paul the Apostle was active, actively involved in killing Christians.

He hated Christians. And then one day on the road to Damascus to round up some more Christians, Jesus appears to him.

The mercy of Jesus met Paul's mess and that whole message on the road to Damascus and turn that mess into this powerful message. God is for us. God is for us. Paul explains. You want to know how God is for us?

Well, first of all, he gave up his son who willingly died on the cross for our sins, even though when we were enemies he still did it. And if God's willing to do that, isn't that enough to say that he's going to take care of you? Well, how do we know God is for us? Well, Jesus was resurrected, Paul says, and we too can have a resurrected life now and forever. How do we know God is for us?

Jesus ascended to the right hand of God's throne to represent us, to say, hey, I understand what it's like. And to say I've forgiven them, constantly pleads and intercedes. And in light of this, Paul says, there is nothing, there is no thing, nothing that can ever separate us from God's love. Nothing can change the fact that God is for us, not against us. No sin, no shame, nothing, no thing that Satan or anyone else can say or do can change that status.

So we can do a fearless and searching moral inventory again to clean up stuff that's still biting us, that's still oozing out. It's not about going back and reliving the past. It's more about going back and letting those walled off areas be expressed, exposed to God's love and light so that we can live free, fully free. If you belong to Christ, your sins are forgiven completely. There's no need to go rehash and relive and replay or repunish.

But revisiting our past with honesty and humility, making sure that we've dealt with it is about freedom. It's about remembering mercy, meeting our messes, grace giving us new hope and a new life. A moral inventory isn't a guilt trip. It's a grace trip that leads to gratitude as we're reminded God is for us.

So as we come to communion, we're going to do something very similar to what Paul and regeneration invite us to do. We're going to examine as we remember. Communion is not a ritual to rush through. It's not a box to check. It's a sacred moment to pause, to breathe and to bring our whole lives, our sin, our shame, our, our gratitude, our hope, all of it, to bring it before Jesus, bring it for the one who loves us and gave himself for us.

In First Corinthians 11, Paul kind of resetting the Corinthians in communion, he says, listen, this is the way it should be. And he says, on the night Jesus was betrayed, he was eating the Passover feast. He took bread and he gave it new significance, saying, this is my body. And he broke the bread and said, eat this and do so in remembrance of me. Then he took the cup of the Passover feast and he said, this, this

is the blood of the new covenant and I want you to drink it and remember me.

And then as he wraps up his discourse about communion, Paul says this, Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. It's a fearless, honest, humble look while remembering God is for us. So as we prepare to share the bread and the cup, take a quiet moment to let God search your heart. Not to shame us, but to free us. Let his mercy meet your mess.

Let his grace remind you that you're chosen, forgiven and loved. God is for you. Let me pray. God, thank you for being for us. It's so hard sometimes to know that, to remember that because there's just so many, so many challenges and so many things that take us away from that thought and just help us to rest in your love, to see it every direction, every dimension and help us to just soak it in, to allow your mercy to meet our messes in the past and in the present, to know that we are truly loved and we are your children.

Thank you for this time of communion, which powerfully and tangibly reminds us of the body and the blood of Jesus and just what that means and how he understands us and lived for us, died for us, and lived again. So we just thank you for all that in Jesus name.

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