

What's something that you KNOW, but you need constant reminders of to not forget? What's something that you have heard over and over, but that you need to keep hearing over and over again?

Now, look, this isn't a mean-spirited question. I know that as most of us age, it's just harder to keep track of things. But, all through our lives, there are things that are just hard to keep on the front burner.

EXAMPLE: You know what comes to my mind? Flossing. For WAY too many years, I've struggled to floss regularly. It's an embarrassing 6 month cycle of forgetfulness. Maybe you know the drill (dentistry pun). I have my 6 month cleaning, the hygienist RAVAGES my unsuspecting gums, my eyes roll back into my head with pain, and then a total stranger gives me a lecture that only my mother would dare give about flossing regularly and doing better next time. I leave chastised and adamant that it won't happen again. And you know what happens... I floss faithfully for the first two weeks, irregularly for the month following that, and then forget...until... a few days before next six month appointment. And the cycle begins again.

It's terrible. I feel like a man-child even bringing it up. But, Romans 7 tells us it is human nature to KNOW the good that we ought to do and yet struggle to do it. We all have things that we NEED to be doing, that we WANT to be doing, but that get crowded out by other things clamoring for our attention.

The passage I want to explore with you today is not new. You've heard it before. You KNOW this. But, my hope and prayer is that God will use our time together as an encouraging reminder to DO it more often, and to keep it front and center in our lives. (Let's pray??) Reading from Hebrews 3, verses 12-14...

"See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today,' so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end." – Hebrews 3:12-14

This daily encouragement, this maintenance of a believing heart, this holding firmly to our conviction... it's an active engagement that the author of Hebrews calls us to. All the reasons why are in the text here. The believer is called to be on guard because hardness of heart produces unbelief. And this verse also says that hardening takes place by the deceit of sin. Sin lies to us, it deceives us & hardens us. What does our sin tell the heart that draws it away? Same thing it has told people since the garden. It tells us not to believe in the living God, that God is not trustworthy, that sin is more desirable. **Hebrews 12** describes the "sin that so easily entangles." It trips us up and keeps us from running our race.

Tim Keller explains the deceit this way: **"Sin isn't only doing bad things; it's more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God. Whatever we build our life on will drive us and enslave us. Sin is primarily idolatry."**

How does this passage say we'll counter this deceit?

We're going to encourage each other by pointing each other to God. To His desirability. That the Promises of God and the scripture are better than the promises of sin.

So we have a mission and a mandate: Part of our job as the Body of Christ is to help each other stay strong in our faith by speaking the words of God to each other, by encouraging one another with spiritual truth.

Last time I was with you, I preached on 1 Peter 4:9-11 “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.”

Our job is to speak God’s Word to each other.

Ephesians 4:29 – “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.”

I heard a pastor share this quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer several weeks ago, and God has brought it to mind over and over in the last month. It’s from his book, “Life Together” written while teaching in an underground men’s seminary in Nazi Germany. He writes,

“God has put this Word into the mouth of others in order that it may be communicated to us. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find his living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of a man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth.

He needs his brother as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ.

The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

Isn’t that extraordinary? He’s saying that we can lend our faith, our confidence in Christ to our brother and sister. They need us to bolster their faith, and we need them to bolster ours.

So, where do we get those words of faith? Where do we get the right things to say to our family and friends, our SP staff, and the people we meet at Publix?

You know the answer: We need to have His Word IN us. And Daily, as long as it is called today.

Jesus says in Matthew 12:34-36 “the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.”

Jesus says there’s a special connection between my mouth and my heart. Part of walking in the Spirit, staying in step with the Spirit is stewarding my heart → Attending to the condition of my heart → What am I filling my mind and heart with? What its full of is what will come out when I speak.

When I think about stewarding my heart, my passions and attentions, I think of it in terms of a somewhat strange image....I see pots on a stove...

Pots on a Stove.jpg



First, there's only so many burners. My emotional energy has finite capacity. I can only care about so many things. And the passion and attention I give to one thing DOES limit how much passion and attention I can give another.

There's also special attention given to the front burners. They get the most attention. Unless something's been allowed to boil over.

Recently, on my stove at home, we had one of the rings on our burner go out. And for now, my capacity is even a little less, so now we REALLY need prioritize.

That's not unlike our hearts and minds. Some of us are in a season where we're down a burner, am I right? After COVID and Ian, I only got so many burners.

Satan loves to slide things on the stove that don't belong. Remember what Keller said, sin is making good things into ultimate things. Passions and interests that pull our attention and energy away from God.

If I have a four burner stove, friends, politics has to come off my stove. It boils way too hot and consumes too much energy. Community issues, culture wars, controversies and complaining...I can't afford it. Can you?

I need my relationship with Jesus to have first place. No competition. My family ... right now, it needs a bigger pot... my daughter just celebrated her 13th birthday on Thursday...we're officially in the teenage phase. My son is only a few years behind her...I'm not going to compromise my attention to family for things that won't matter in eternity.

By His grace, God longs to help us wisely steward our hearts.

Our passage this morning is clear: You and I NEED each other. We NEED each other to be encouraging one another, speaking words of life from hearts filled with God's goodness.

Remember what James says about our mouth?

James 3:9-11 "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. **10** From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, [c] these things ought not to be so. **11** Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? **12** Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water."

This means God has a HOLY purpose for that mouth of yours and mine. Our mouth that speaks the overflow of our hearts. It feels like James is saying that: The lips that share the Good news, that encourage and strengthen, that remind friends of the promises of God, THAT important purpose, can't SHARE time with nasty complaints and meaningless arguments. We can't vomit ugly criticisms of our political opponents or community leaders with the same mouth that would speak LIFE-giving promises of God.

Remember Isaiah 6? Isaiah standing before the high and exalted God, angels calling out "Holy, Holy, Holy" And Isaiah's first response is his mouth! He cries:

"For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" - Isaiah 6:5-8

Our mouth is consecrated for His USE. The purification of my mouth happened at least once when I was growing up, thanks to my mother and a bar of soap. It wasn't a hot coal, but I got the message loud and clear: The kind of language I was using isn't what this mouth was made for. There's a Holy purpose.

How do you use your words? What is the overflow of your heart saying?

We can pray Psalm 141:3 "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!"

Earlier in James, he writes, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19) God make that so in my life.

So this is our mission: To encourage one another with God's Word in our hearts, to lend the strength of our faith to one another, to protect against the hardening of our hearts by sin's deceitfulness.

Friends, this is a DAILY work. God can use you ANYWHERE and at any stage of life. The doctors office, at the restaurant, the grocery store, anywhere people are....If you're the Larsen or Assisted Living, God USES care receivers just as much as he uses care givers. BELIEVE that He wants to use your voice and your heart to bless those who are serving you. Those people are YOUR people, He's entrusted to YOU.

I know SO many of you are already doing this...You're partnering WITH me in ministering to those around you INCLUDING the employees. THANK YOU!

Here's a beautiful example: A couple weeks ago, a sweet resident at one of our ALFs was excitedly sharing about how God had spoken to her (at 4 in the morning) about making daily ministry visits to our residents at the Larsen. She said she used to mail lots of cards, but now more and more of her friends were needing skilled nursing, and she felt like God was calling her to be visiting regularly.

As she was sharing about hearing from God and His new assignment, my heart was so GREATLY encouraged and I found my faith and love for God bolstered and strengthened. That's how it works!

Just one more encouragement for you and your ministry to those around you...

One of the really fun parts of my job is that I get to work alongside tremendously capable people. Shell Point has very experienced Safety and Security personnel, very talented medical staff – Many of our employees come from previous careers in the military, in law enforcement & first responders. They've seen combat, they've saved lives, but now are enjoying a different pace and role at Shell Point, enjoying the opportunity to serve this special community. You can often recognize these folks just by the way they carry themselves. There's a confidence and cool-headedness, a posture, that accompanies that experience. They KNOW how to handle themselves, if stuff goes down. And when they're around, I feel more comfortable and confident. They lend their strength to others, without even knowing it.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, does your heart believe that you have that same superpower in you? Your life experiences, your victories and heart-aches, the sleepless nights and most frustrating struggles, the times of loneliness and doubt, the mistakes and greatest regrets, God has use of all of that.

What is it qualifies us to help people with their hurts and struggles? What gives us the right to speak into someone's life? I ask that all the time, as someone with a kinda made-up title.

The only apparent qualification I see has come from turning into my own suffering and need, and allowing Jesus to help me.

I have a growing and deepening awareness of my need for Jesus. And a willingness for Him to have His way in me. And friends, I know that's so many of you too. Even when you can't see the fruit, God is using you to strengthen others.

Later in Hebrews, the author writes the words that can be our closing thought...

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as

some are in the habit of doing, but ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER – and *all the more* as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:23-25)

[PRAYER]