

This week, between Christmas and New Year, it always reminds me of when I was teaching in Abilene. And here's why: at the beginning of every fall about a week before classes start, and all the students started getting there, or even in the spring, there was an optimism in the air that could literally be felt. I mean, everyone regardless of background, regardless of past academic achievements—everybody came in feeling like that semester was the semester. And there was a fierce commitment to academia. That week leading up to actually having it. There was this, "I'm going to get my paper done early. I'm going to do the reading assigned to me and ace my quizzes. I'm going to take this seriously and I'm going to get the 3.8 to the elusive 4.0 this semester. I'm going to do it." And optimism was crazy. Now all of it evaporated by week three when intramural football started, but for that week leading up to when you got the syllabus, there was this anticipation that we as students—and even we as teachers—could be more than we'd historically been. If we'd been just a little more disciplined, if we would just think a little more, that we would not do this more...there was an optimism about this semester. And I think what happens this week, this week in American culture is the adult version of that. And I know that to be true because I'm going to go to the gym like I always do, at the same time I always do next week, and there will be 400 new people there. And they will not be there in February, alright. But they're going to be there. They're going to be misusing equipment. You're going to have to tell the one guy, "That's a water fountain, buddy, alright. You can't tell that when you push that bar water's coming out of the deal? Seriously, alright?" And then come February all of them will be gone, maybe four of them will stick and become part of the early, early, early morning crew.

If there's only one week a year that we have any kind of introspection at all, any kind of, "Who am I? Could I better? Could I walk deeper? Could I...?" If there's only one week, if I could only get one week of that, then I want to take a shot at it. I wanted to do whatever I could as long as you are thinking deeply about your life, to try to engage you to think even deeper than deep. And so that's what brings us to 1st Timothy 4.

Starting in verse 1. "Now the spirit expressly says that in the latter times..." Or later times. Now let me stop and clarify here. This is not talking about the 6 weeks leading up to the return of Christ, alright? Latter times, this little Greek phrase has to do with a period of time between the ascension of Christ and the return of Christ. So it's been called if you have any kind of seminary background, it's called the Church Age, the age of the Church. We are in the latter times, a thousand years ago was the latter times. Look at what's going to happen in the latter times. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons." Now, I want to stop there and just tell you that whether it's business or whether it's the church or whether it's an athletic team, the second you're trying to go back to the glory days instead of press forward, it's over. Alright? Two reasons for that. One, there's never been glory days. Ever. Anyone who says there has been has never read any history. Like even some of my heroes, real, you know kind of brilliant kind of theological kind of cats, they would say, "Oh, I long for deeper days," and then they reference this period of time like 2% of the population could read. So just because 7 people on earth thought deeper at that time, doesn't make it a more deep-thinking time. And you start referencing the Reformation and Edwards and—the deepest thought most people had was, "Stay alive. Don't get killed." And so... this is, the fact that people fall away from the faith, it's not a modern issue. It's not like just in the last 50 to 100 years people started going, "I think something might be wrong with Christianity." No, it's always happened. It happened in the New Testament, it happened even while Christ even walked on the earth, and it continues to happen today. And here's why. There will always be those who intellectually grasp the gospel, and because of aptitude or discipline, live conservative moral lives. Do you understand what I mean by aptitude? Like there are certain children, certain people

who are born and they don't need to learn the hard way. You can just tell them, "Don't touch that—it's hot." Their thought is, "I shouldn't touch that,—It's hot." But then other people are born and you say, "Don't touch that—it's hot," and they'll go, "We'll see about that!" And I say that because I have two kids. There will always be those who grasp the gospel intellectually, who are conservative and bent behaviorally, morally, but in the end they do not have a heart that longs to please God. So although they can grasp a religion and they live well, in the end they have no intention, no thought, no heart to live in such a way that pleases God. Are you tracking with that? And I'm not talking emotion. I'm not talking any of that. What I'm saying...because I think you can be living in a way that's not pleasing to God and feel the weight of it and have a heart that wants to but be struggling. Okay. I think that's absolutely legitimate for anyone who's ever tried to follow Him. But there are those who grasp it intellectually, live it out conservatively, in terms of morality, but don't have a heart that loves God.

Now, Hebrews 3 says that that type of person is in a lot of danger. It doesn't say that they're going to fall away. But it does say that they're in a lot of danger. And there are 2 views of how you should preach and teach people. There are people that would never make you question your salvation and make you feel good about yourself and want you leaving here chipper. And I want to leave here chipper, alright? But in the end, it's been my thinking that the largest act of love that I can give you is to just preach truth to you unapologetically and that means you leave here questioning. Because if you leave here thinking deeply about where you are, where you land, where you stand, and what's really going on in your spirit, then that's a win far more than you feeling good about yourself if you're in danger. Are you tracking? So there's going to be times that we leave here and it feels weighty, and we feel a little dirty, and we feel like we were happier before we came. There's gonna be those times, if you can't live with that...you're in the Bible Belt, so...2 blocks in any direction. Now. Let's get back to the text. So like, if we were in Seattle or somewhere like that,—there ain't no where else to go baby, you're comin' here. But, that's not the case here—all around you (referring to churches everywhere in Dallas rather than somewhere like Seattle.). But that's always been my philosophy so, if you leave here—so I have an intellectual understanding and I try to live a good life but I don't know if I have a heart that pleases God and you're nervous about that, I'm okay that you're nervous. If it helps you really look deep in your heart. But now these people aren't led astray by like a demon popping up in their room and like going, "Come on let's get outta here. Because all of us would be saying, "No, you're a demon I'm not following you, alright? So, this works itself out in a certain way. Nobody goes, "Oh the devil. Sure—I'm right behind you."

So, let's look at how it happens. "Now the spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through"—how's this happening—"through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared." So men and women are being led astray, away from Jesus, away from the gospel, by liars who have insincere spirits, whose conscience has been seared. Now, I'm learning this as I mature. I am learning that when I flip through the channels, don't stop on religious television—just get to sports center and let it alone. Alright? Because I, there was about a year and a half ago, Lauren and I were sittin' on the couch, I was flippin' through, I was like, "Oh, let's see what this guy has to say," and one of the things he said was, he was talking expressly to widows and said that if they were afraid of not being able to pay their rent and not being able to survive, that if they would in faith sow into this ministry—and if I said his name, most people in here would know who he is—then God would overwhelmingly provide. And I started splotchin' up and thinking obscenities. I confessed them, alright. And I thought to myself, "This fool has no fear of God." And I did that thing where I was like, "God why don't you kill him? Like why do You let this guy on television, why don't You kill him?" And then God came by with a real nice, "Why don't I kill you?" and I was like, "Mercy, mercy, I love Your mercy." If you've ever wondered—and this isn't just religiously, we won't just speak religiously here—if you've ever wondered how a grown man, a grown woman can look you in your face, and with what feels to be authenticity, absolutely lie to you—lie to you, lie to themselves, be a wicked person and have no concept of it, the reason is their conscience has been seared. The conscience is that thing inside of us that goes,—behavior: is it either correct or incorrect. And once that has been seared or scarred, and people no longer have capacity to go right and

wrong, they're capable of in all authenticity in them, to lie to you. And this is what's happened theologically here. By the way, when this is full blown we call in psychology a sociopath—people who can murder someone and then go home and kiss their wife and play with their children. They're gone.

So the men who are teaching in this time period, they're leading people astray by being very insincere, being liars, but not having a problem with it. And let's look at what exactly they're teaching. And I giggled when I read this because it sounds a lot like evangelicalism at times. Alright, listen to what he says—not the exact commands, but what's behind them. "...through the insincerity of liars whose consciences have been seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods." Now I'm going to stop there. What they're doing is defining spirituality by what you don't do. They're saying what gives you right standing with God is that you don't do this. Does that sound familiar? If you have any background in church it does. Now, "...who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods..."—now this is Paul—"...that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." So Paul basically says, "Didn't God create Eve? Didn't God say in Genesis 2 that for this reason a man would leave his mother and father and cling, cleave to his wife? Didn't God say be fruitful and multiply?" Great verse. He's saying marriage is God's idea. How can God forbid what was the first covenant He built?! And then it's obvious these teachers are trying to drag them back to the Jewish dietary laws, and he's going, "No, no, no that's over." I remember at children's church they had the felt board. I can just remember this story on the felt board I don't know why, but the story of Peter taking a nap on his roof and God lowering a blanket filled with what was at that time viewed as unclean animals. There was an alligator and a pig. I don't really know that those two were really in there, it's not in the text, that was on the felt board that I saw when I was a kid. There was an alligator out of the blanket. God says, "Peter get up and eat and make yourself something to eat." And Peter's like, "Never! I would never eat unclean food." And God's goes, "Who decides that it's unclean? I'm God, I made it." The gospel now makes it so that food is redeemed, marriage is redeemed, it is sanctified. This goes back to what we said last week at our Christmas services, that when Jesus is ultimate reality everything has a depth to it. Food has a depth to it, marriage has a depth to it. It's not just the eating and living with someone. It has depth, it has meaning, it has weight. So now all of a sudden there's 2 things that should happen at lunch today for those who believe. One, there should be an unreal gratitude because you're going to eat lunch in a way that most of the world won't. And then the 2nd bit of thanksgiving that comes in is how creative and brilliant God is that He created those flavors. I mean that's God's idea. God thought up the fajita. I mean it is, it's God's idea. God's like, "I'm going to make that part of the cow, with these herbs, with guacamole, taste brilliant." So that now all of a sudden there's thanksgiving for what we've been given, but thanksgiving on the creativity of God even behind that. Right? And now marriage—let me tell you something about marriage. Marriage in the end isn't, when all's said and done, about my happiness, but about my sanctification. God's going to put me to my death in my marriage, 'cause that's where life's found. It's a common misconception in American culture that marriage is for happiness. You can't put two sinners together and get happiness for 40 years. Are you serious? Like, raised differently, think differently, testosterone (talking about man on one hand). Raised differently, think differently, estrogen (talking about women on the other hand). Let's throw them in the same house, lock 'em in. See what happens. You can't go into that going, "You know what, I'm going to get happiness every day, all day, for the next 40." Uh uh! But what you will learn is that you're selfish, self-seeking and most of the time wicked. And because that gets revealed to you, you got a chance of healing and giving those things up. I might have just broken off a few engagements, but let's get going.

So He redeems it. Let's look at verse 4. "...for everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it has made holy by the word of God in prayer." Once again, Jesus is behind it, ultimate reality. We have time for this so I'll do it. I preached out of this text years ago at Metro, about 2-3000 20-year olds. And I walked off stage and a kid came up to me and said, "What about weed?" And I said, "What?" "If God makes everything and it's good and it's okay as long as it's received with thanksgiving, what about weed?" And so I'm like, "Am I on a hidden camera show for pastors?" Ya know? "Am I getting Punk'd? You know, what's happening here?" So I'm chatting

with him just for a second and I was like, "Okay a) are you high right now 'cause if you are I'm not havin' this discussion right now, and b) if you're not, okay good we can chat." The problem is that according to the scriptures you're to obey the laws of the land as long as it doesn't keep you from serving faithfully and following faithfully in Christ. The law says that it's illegal. So we're done. Now when, the Senate, when Willie Nelson finally gets his life-long mission of making that available to all of us at the 7-Eleven, then we can have that talk. But until then it's illegal—quit buying nickel bags and walk away. I have no idea why I told you that. Let's go.

"If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus." So that's what I'm tryin' to be today. I'm tryin' to be a good servant of Christ Jesus and preach and teach His word. That's what I'm trying to be. You'll be the same if you'll say these same things to the brothers. So that if those around you, if you say to them, "Spirituality is not determined by what you don't do, but rather by submitting your heart fully to Christ." That's the message of this text so far. "Being trained in the words of faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed." Verse 7. "...have nothing to do with irreverent silly myths"—or some of your versions would say "old wives tales," or "wives fables." That was an intellectual put-down in the philosophical debates in the first century, if someone said—that's an old wives tale. They would—I'm not even going to get into what's behind that because I'd get in trouble. Instead of doing that, let's do this, listen to this: "...rather train yourself for godliness." That word "train" is the Greek word gymnasium, it's where we get our word gymnasium and it literally is translated "to sweat." Sweat yourself to godliness. Now the reason why there's a lot of weight in this text is because this just said that godliness doesn't just randomly happen. That nobody stumbles into or falls into depth with Jesus. Godliness is never an accident—it's worked for. Now, be careful on that. We'll get into that more in a second. Here we go, "...rather train yourself for godliness. For while bodily training is of some value..." Now I want to stop there. Physical training—there is a way to live that brings energy and brings an elevated emotional state that's good. Like if you go for a brisk walk, get a light sweat going, eat some fruits and vegetables, you're going to feel good an hour or two after that. If you sit on the couch and eat a one-pound bag of peanut M&Ms, an hour later you're not going to feel like you would if you would have gone out for a brisk walk and eaten healthy. You're gonna feel shame over here, you're not gonna feel that over here. There's a way to live that's wise in regards to what we eat, in regards to how we live, how active we are, but bodily training—physical training—is limited in its value. And it's limited in 2 ways. First, it's limited in extent. And what I mean by that is you can eat completely healthy and can be a chiseled Adonis and still have a broken soul. Exercise and food will do nothing to remove bitterness, anger, resentment, unforgiveness, loneliness, despair. Bench pressing isn't going to take care of that. And so although working out and eating right can increase levels of good emotion and can bring about energy and self-esteem or whatever, in the end, it's inadequate because it cannot affect the soul. The second way it's limited is in duration. And if you've ever worked out or had a period of time where you were in great shape, you absolutely know this to be true. In May, June, July and August, me and a buddy were training for a sprint triathlon. A sprint triathlon is a short triathlon. I'm not Type A enough to do a full one, but I didn't get hugged enough by my dad growing up so I'm an achiever so I gotta do something. So sprint triathlon's a perfect deal. So we trained, five, six days a week, we were biking, swimming or running; one of those three. In September about three weeks before the triathlon I got on a plane for a 10-day trip, got very, very sick on that trip. Returned home 10 days later and would get winded walking from my living room to my mailbox and back. Four months of training disappeared in 10 days—it's limited in duration. You might get to the place where after 15, 16 months you can see a six pack of abs, but you're a 1/2 gallon of Blue Bell and 2 weeks away from having an ab. You gotta keep going. You have to continually work out. You have to continually watch what you eat. And even then, if God grants you years, even then your body will eventually start breaking down and it will be over then. It's limited. Now it's important...I'm not trying to...you are responsible, to steward the body you have been given for the glory of God. So, there should be at least some effort put into physical training. It does have some value, but it's limited in value. Now look at what he says next. "Have nothing to do with irreverent silly myths, rather train yourself for godliness. For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way." And so what we love to do, we love to compartmentalize and go the physical is over here and the spiritual is over here. But he's saying, the spiritual training, training in godliness has effects on everything,

even the body. And while training the body has no effect on the soul, training the soul does have an effect on the body. Here's where you see that playing itself out in Scripture: King David, when it came to sin, was varsity. He was a man who slept with somebody else's wife, got her pregnant, and then had him killed so he wouldn't get caught. And he hid it for quite a bit of time, and honestly, got away with it if it wasn't for a prophet that God told, who came out and busted him. Now, here's what David would say years later about that 8, 9, 10 months of hiding his sin and having this dark secret that nobody knew about. He said, "When I kept quiet about my sin, my body wasted away." The darkness secret wickedness inside of us, shame fear, guilt, anger, that it takes a toll on our physical being. So godliness—let's keep reading because he finishes it out. "...rather train yourself for godliness. For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for both the present life,"—that's now—"and also for the life to come." Alright, now, at the gym next week most people aren't gonna make it because they come in and they don't really know what they're doing. They just come and have this, "I'm gonna get in better shape." And I see a couple of the trainers in here from Lifetime. I mean people are gonna come in there and they're just not gonna know what they're doing. And so, they're going to get on the elliptical machine, because that's the easiest one, and they're going to do a little bit of elliptical and they're gonna—if they're a dude they're gonna bench press. Guys can't help it. It's just like a tractor beam to the bench, alright. And they're gonna do a little bit of this and a little bit of that, but there's gonna be no plan, there's gonna be no idea, there's just an idea that I wanna be in better shape. And that's why over a period of time they're just gonna drop out, because there's no regimen to it, there's no sense to it. they just kind of wander around with their new iPod shuffle, and then they disappear. Now, I think the same thing holds true spiritually. I think what happens—I'm guessing— that a good bulk of you in here, not all of you, some of you got drug here by your wives or husbands and some of you got invited by a friend, but the bulk of us in here, I think we want to be godly and we want to know Him and we want to know Him deeply and we want to be affected by Him and we want a heart that beats for Him. We want that. I don't think you're consistently at church if at some level you don't want that, but I think wanting is inadequate. I think wanting is inadequate.

And so here's what I want to do. I want to talk about training in godliness. And I'm gonna do it very, very quickly because I think there's three ways you train yourself in godliness; and they're big and they're broad and they're somewhat ambiguous, but I'll do my best to get to, so you've got a little bit of understanding of them. And at any given time in these three ways you need to be in at least two of them. I think each one individually is strongly lacking. But if you're in at least two of them, you'll be doing real well in terms of growing spiritually. But I also want to throw this at you: spiritual growth is not a superhighway, it's a crawl. And anyone who says, "Hey you just do this for two weeks and you'll be floating around just kind of glory-healing people's diseases," is a liar. They're a liar. Spiritual growth is slow. There are some that have this miraculous, powerful, road to Damascus, Holy Spirit, powerful conversion where one day—I mean one day they go from being absolutely pagan and the next day having the Scriptures memorized. That is by definition miraculous. And it's not most of our stories, is it? No. No. Okay, here are the three ways that you train yourself for godliness: the first one is the one you know about if you've got any kind of church background, we'll call it the personal spiritual disciplines. If you've ever read, there's a great book on the personal disciplines called Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*. He's a Quaker, so if you get it, there are some weird deals in there alright. Like he'll be like, "Wake up in the middle of the night, light a candle and stare at it." Maybe not alright, just, I tried it, it was just weird, I got spooked out, blew the candle out and went back to bed. So he's a Quaker so there's weird stuff in there, but the personal disciplines are this: prayer, fasting, solitude—not isolation, solitude, those two ideas are different—sabbath, simplicity, study. These are the personal disciplines. If you have any background in church you've been told to read your Bible from day one. You should read the scriptures, that there should be prayer in your life, that there should be—we've given it all kinds of these goofy names like—quiet time or devotional life or you know, we kind of give it those phrases that all of them sound which like punishment, but the disciplines are one of the paths to spiritual growth that I believe you should consistently be on. I don't know that there'll ever be a time in your life where in bulk you're nowhere near scriptures, prayer, meditation, solitude, those kind of disciplines. They are a staple, a must, they are meat for the Christian heart and mind. But here's what I would tell you—that is historically where the thing shuts down. And the problem with that is the spiritual

disciplines are insufficient on their own. And I know I've got a DTS guy in here that's going to e-mail me, "Are you saying that the scriptures aren't sufficient?" No. I'm saying the sufficient scriptures say that there's more than just the personal disciplines. Because the Bible on top of saying that we should pray, we should study, we should be in the Word, also says to not neglect the gathering of believers. That on top of the personal disciplines, we need to do life authentically and honestly and deeply with other believers. And I'm not talking about guacamole and a game. Now guacamole can be holy if prepared correctly, but you hanging out with people who moderately like Jesus like you do is not going to magically produce some kind of spiritual depth. It's just not. You need deep relationship with other believers. And I'll tell you where it rears its head more often than not—it rears its head in the good times but it really rears its head when things get difficult: the need for fellowship, the need for one another, for not a philosophical/theological lesson, but empathy. The day after Christmas, Shane and Jewel Steinbach's 15-month-old daughter, Eva, had a massive seizure that deprived her brain of oxygen for quite a bit of time and killed large sections of her frontal lobe, they call them farquas. They just, it's dead, it's not coming back. The frontal lobe is where your personality is and where your motor skills are. So we got the call and hopped in the car and ran over to Children's in Dallas and, we walked into that waiting room and it was packed. People from their home group, people they've done life with, and members of their family and everybody's doing the same thing—crying. I'm not trying to make sense of it because I don't know that you can. Just crying. You would be a word that I won't say while being recorded to walk into that room and try to hand out a theological lesson. So we cried. Anyway we went in and laid hands on her little body, and asked Jesus to do the miraculous. And we prayed, and prayed, and prayed and cried, and cried, and cried and prayed and cried and prayed and cried and then went home. We did, they're still there. And then when, if she wakes up from her coma, if she's got zero personality, if she's got no ability to move, then we'll continue to pray. And we'll continue to pray and we'll continue to pray because the thing that sets us apart is hope. Or the Ledbetter's, Jon and Lexi, whose son Caden, two years old, has an advanced cancer and on Friday had all of his stem cells replaced. He's in the hospital right now with a white blood count of zero, which means any little bug will take his life from him. Two weeks ago we prayed for little Caden in this back room, me and the elders did. And we lay hands on him and asked for the mercy of God over him, Christ to heal him and protect him, and you know that room was packed with people who loved them and people who longed for them and the thing we all had in common again was tears. The personal disciplines, they're profoundly powerful and in that moment I believe they're a fuel cell that you draw off of, but in that moment what you want is empathy— someone to hurt with you not someone to make sense of it. You don't make any sense of that. Presence, presence is unbelievably powerful in that moment. We need each other. We're all going to have days that we doubt. We're all going to have days that we hurt. We're all going to have days that we just question the validity of any of this. It's why we so desperately need one another—fellowship. So, we need the personal disciplines. We need fellowship with one another. And then we need the third line...is what I call biblical counsel. This is people who can guide you into real personal introspection. They can help you see how you got to the idolatry that you got to, or got to the pride that you got to. And although I think fellowship and I think that discipline should be constant, pretty consistent, counseling is one of those deals that can come and go. It can come and go. Listen, sometimes you hit walls and you need a guide. It's just the truth man. Sometimes you hit a wall and you need a guide. That's what Recovery does, that's what the steps do, what counseling does—sometimes you just need a guide. Now, all three of these in and of themselves are lacking. The disciplines tend to not push real, deep, authentic relationships. And like I said man, a deep mind and deep thinking that doesn't lead to deep living is perfect for an author but nobody else. Like I'm grateful for the desert fathers who went out and did nothing but think about God and then wrote books on it. I'm very grateful for those guys, but all of us can't head to the desert now can we? So I'm grateful for those guys. But deep thinking needs to lead to deep living. And the disciplines on their own tend to not produce deep relationships but deep thinking—what I like to call theological assassins. I don't know if you've run into those yet; stay in church long enough, you'll find them. The problem with fellowship, is that fellowship in and of itself is not going to produce deep growth. It's just not. And honestly, I think this is the mistake that most evangelicals make more than it is the disciplines. We know we should do the disciplines and don't, but we love fellowship. So we can get together with our home group and we can get together with other people, but you and I both well know that that doesn't bring about

spiritual depth. And the problem with counseling is you usually do it outside of the church over here, and what ends up happening is you have somebody you're honest with over here that's helping you work through your issues, separate from your actual life. And so if you're still living the lie over here, but being honest over here, this might be good for a season, but eventually you're going to need to be honest over here too. Yeah, 'cause no man can truly be alive if he's lyin'. Alright, so each one of these has its merits, each one of these has their drawbacks. Okay. I was a horrible student growing up. I even spent a little extra time in the 8th grade. I mean I was just never good at it, man. I was just never good at it. It just wasn't my thing, which is problematic when school's not your thing and you're a 4th grader. I don't know why, my mind works in a weird way. I've never been lazy, I'm a reader and a studier, and a thinker but I just didn't do well in school. I have these—not so much anymore but, I used to have these—I'd go back and think, I'd dream and fantasize about what my life would be like if I'd played it out differently back there. Anybody else guilty of that? Like simple example, I've been tryin' to learn Spanish for like 2 years. It's not goin' well for me; two years in I'm still pretty much where I was when I began, except now I can point to stuff and say what they are. But I still can't (laugh), I still can't have a conversation, and I can you know... I mean I can say, "Como se llama? Me llamo Mateo. Uh, you know I can do things like that, but I mean there's no, there's been no real growth and so I think back and go, "Man, if I had taken that more seriously in high school and college, I'd be fluent right now. how great would it be to be fluent right now in that? And I spent all my time, you know, in my mind thinking about how much better I'd be at 33 if I had played my cards different back there. Anybody else guilty of that? Yeah, all of you, except you liars. Now, here's what I realized, and I'm ashamed to say this, here's what I realized three years ago: I realized that that doesn't have to be how the rest of my life plays out. I realized that I can start making steps right now that are gonna drastically affect 5 years from now for me. Like I can start, like 2 years in trying to study Spanish, I feel like I'm no better off. But three years from now, maybe, just maybe I'll be able to put together sentences and I can just point and say the word, "mirror."

Here's what sets apart godly deep men and women from people who go to church.. You ready? 'Cause I think this is profound, maybe it's not. The "want to" doesn't set 'em apart, because we all want to: we've either been guilted into it, or we want to—we want to know Christ, we want to have a heart that beats for him—we want to. The difference isn't the "want to." The thing that sets men and women apart when it comes to depth of life and depth with God, is the question, "How? How will I?" Because people aren't gonna get in shape because they're thinking,—I'm going to get in shape this year, but have no plan, no—how that that's going to happen. And as I've talked with a lot of believers over these last five years that I've been here, most of them have the same journal entry day: I need to do that..., I need to quit doin'..., I need to stop..., I need to start... And the thing about spiritual growth is the impetus or the desire to has been given to you by the Holy Spirit so that...that's an invitation by God to grow into the fullness of Him. And so He who invites will absolutely provide the path. So I think the question we gotta answer is, "How? You can't go, "Man, I just feel like I need to know the Word better than I do, I need to pray more than I do, I need to...I need to get involved, I need to plug in..." and then just walk out of here knowing that you need to. You're not gonna accidentally stumble into that. And there's no preacher alive who's good enough to be adequate for spiritual formation in his 45 minutes with you a week. And if you're viewing this as spiritual formation for you (Matt is referring to only attending church), this is horrifically lacking. And give it time. I will eventually bore you. Give it time. You will eventually grow tired of me. Once again, great news: there's a thousand other churches you could move on to. Live vicariously throw their pastor, never learn to feed yourself, do it again, do it again, do it again, die. Or you can finally own it. You can finally own it, and I'm not saying that you start reading the Bible in January, that by February all of sudden there's gonna be all this depth and meaning and all these-- no...we're just obedient today. We're just obedient today. That's what it is—just today. I have guys that call me all that time, that are like, "How do you prepare? How do you teach? How do you preach the way you preach? How do you do.." I mean, in the end I'm like,—man, I've been doing this for 15 years at least twice a week. That's part of it. I've been reading my Bible for 18 years now, at least 3 or 4 times a week—that starts adding up. I've been in aggressive counseling during at least 3 seasons of my life. I've hit walls that had no answers, got very confused, didn't know what to do with it, needed a guide.

I've tried to build deep, deep relationships with other men that I can do life with deeply and I don't have to pretend, I don't have to lie, I don't have to be Pastor Matt to.

But I didn't do that '07. I've been trying to do that since '94! Alright, so how? I mean that's the question you gotta ask yourself...how? Alright, so here's the great news if you're a believer: the grace of Christ covers it all, man. You're gonna stumble and fall. You're gonna stumble and fall. You're gonna blow it—it's comin. Huh? I mean some of you ain't gonna make it to your car. That's what makes grace so profound. I'm tellin' ya the best imagery, the best imagery of the grace and mercy of Christ that I've ever seen is my daughter learning to walk. 'Cause she didn't really walk. She stood up and she let go of the coffee table and her fat head fell forward, which created momentum. So she stuck out her foot so she wouldn't die. And then momentum really got goin, she stepped, stepped, stepped and fell on the ground. So I mean really she took 2 steps and fell on the ground. You know what we did? Exploded! E-mailed, called, "She's walking, she's amazing, she's tearing it up, she's...I clocked her at 4.2, alright, she's gonna be a..." All of a sudden I've got nothing. I mean, do you remember, for those of you who got kids? You remember that—proud! And there's this joy! And just this amazing thing that just happened! No, her fat head pushed her forward! There's nothin' to be celebrated, the kid just—momentum got her. I just remember all of that, just God goin', "What immense joy for 2 steps. You trackin' with Me Matt?" Immense and penetrating joy over two steps. Ah, it's just so hard to get it in our heads that He loves us isn't it? Like that He loves us now. The fact that I'm gonna screw up really bad this week doesn't put Him off towards me, but that the cross of Christ paid that bill and there'll be an explosion of joy in Heaven over two steps. That Jesus, He loves me now, that He's not disappointed with me, He's not disappointed in you. We might not be where He wants us yet, but you know what my son is still in a diaper but I change the diaper and I don't get enraged by it. I know one day he won't be.

How? That's the question you've got to answer. It's what sets godly men apart, godly women apart from neat Christian church folk. The- HOW. The how! The How? How? How? "How?" is the obedient word. "Okay Lord, how?" And it's why the road's so narrow because nobody likes that question. Let's pray.

We need Your help. We're prone to wander. We like this world more than we should. We're lazy and I could go on and on about the issues we have. Help us, Jesus. I pray that maybe just a few would ask, "How?" I'm not naïve enough to think that we will in bulk, but maybe one, maybe two? Maybe a few men who ten years from now become elders of this place or because they ask, "How?" Now, help us, we need You, and it's for Your beautiful name. Amen. I love you. Have a good New Year's! Don't get in trouble. I'll know. I'll hear. I will use you as an illustration. Love you, Brad.