



Feb 4: Reset Values | Galatians 5:24-6:10

Did you learn this story in grade school?

A scorpion wants to cross a river but cannot swim. So, it asks a frog to carry it across. The frog hesitates, afraid that the scorpion might sting it. But the scorpion promises not to, pointing out that it would drown too if it killed the frog while crossing. The frog considers this argument sensible and agrees to transport the scorpion. Midway across the river, the scorpion stings the frog anyway, dooming them both. The dying frog asks the scorpion why it stung despite knowing the consequence, to which the scorpion replies: "I am sorry, but I couldn't resist the urge. It's my character."

This story teaches a particular value.

We are to pay attention to people's basic characters and be wise. The tragedy of the story stuck with me at a tender age.

I learned not to trust scorpion-like characters in life. Learned it is my responsibility to pay attention to these things. Because the scorpions of this world won't.

I still live by it. In a less sinister, more positive way.

As in, you don't ask someone who isn't good at say paying attention to the clock, to be a timekeeper in a meeting. It would go against their basic personality or character.

What do we value? As we think through another angle of resetting ourselves back on God. Reflecting on our values and maybe doing a reset. All so that we hold on to our Biblical value of discipleship and following Jesus.

We hold values around time. And when we started the Dynamite Prayer group three weeks ago, I was reminded of that. We were scheduled to gather at 12:15pm.

I had a 20 second commute. So, when did I show up? Noon. But I wasn't the only one. So, as we waited, I piped up, "Hey, is being "on time" for you mean being 15 minutes early?" Some heads nodded. We held a value in common around time.

We hold values around our physical space bubble. Everyone has different comfortability with proximity to others. It is very noticeable in different cultures.

One evening in college, I went to a Foreign Exchange Student gathering. I was conversing with a wonderful woman from Japan. As she began talking, she stepped into, invaded my space bubble a little bit.

I gave it a reasonable pause...and then stepped back, unconsciously at first. Re-establishing what felt comfortable to me. Not paying it much attention.

Until she stepped forward again, to close the gap, re-establishing what her value was, her comfortability on physical space.

Much more conscious now, I kept talking but backed up a step. As she shared, she advanced a step.

We ended up doing this strange space bubble waltz, backwards, all around that meeting room. We did not hold the same value on physical distancing.

Last example, I keep the inside of my car decluttered. I learned once that, "You can learn a lot about a person by how clean the inside of their car is." And I translated that to mean clean car equals being organized.

Kept my car decluttered and felt organized. Felt good about myself. For a few years.

I still keep my car decluttered, but I am no longer deceiving myself. Because I'd just shove everything into the trunk. I'm not as organized as I thought.

We have values and sometimes we are clear and aligned. We live by our values. I am on time by being early.

And sometimes we say we have values. But we really don't. Like looking organized but I'm not. Don't look in the trunk!

It is not a bad idea to periodically stop and see if we are in alignment with the values we espouse. And reset ourselves as needed, to do a values reset.

After all, in the Frog and Scorpion story, we learn it is ultimately the responsibility of the Frog to do this reflection work. And it carries some big consequences, significantly impacting the quality of our lives.

It's on me to make sure I am living into my values. In general, this setting...am I valuing following Jesus? Specifically, in this text, using Paul's words, am I living by the Spirit? Am I walking in step with the Spirit?

Am I sowing to the Spirit and spiritual life or am I sowing to my flesh, my own life? Am I walking the talk of being a Christian?

We all aspire to live by our values. We'd say that we do. But when was the last time we took stock?

That's basically the heart of why Galatians was written in the first place. The book where we pulled our text from.

These young Christians, they all were young at this point, were trying to live like God wanted them to. But Christianity was a new way of living, a big step off from living by the Law.

The Galatian believers were learning how to follow God in this new freedom and grace in knowing Christ. It gave them great joy!

But sometimes they still got confused. In their confusion...they had written Paul about whether the men should still be circumcised?

Basically questioning if Christ makes us 100% okay with God? Are you sure Jesus made us 100% okay with God? Couldn't we just cover our bases and add the circumcision thing back in? Surely God would be pleased with that?

Paul's calling and life's work was explaining how we are fully justified before God through faith in Christ, apart from the works of the Law. Any striving we do.

And they were to value following the Holy Spirit to live this new life in Christ.

No more special foods, no more sacrifices, no more circumcision, no more temple tax...on and on. No more of following the law to make you right before God. Jesus makes you right. And it is a wonderful freeing experience. Following the Law leads to death, following the Spirit leads to life.

Right before our passage for this morning, right at the end of Chapter 5. Paul is again teaching the value of following the Holy Spirit. In big brush strokes, painting the big picture...Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit that should be evident and growing in a believer's life.

If a person is growing and following the Spirit...these are the fruits that should be more and more evident: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. Big concepts.

And then Paul replaces his big brush with a smaller brush. He moves from big picture to application, narrowing it down to more concrete realities of life.

He gave a list of activities for doing good in Galatians chapter 6 verses 1 through 10. But in each instance, the action is paired with the Spirit's help.

The list of actions at first seem random and disjointed. But if we look carefully at Paul's teaching, we see that the unifying underlying theme that ties all these activities together...? They are all held together by following the Holy Spirit.

It's not about rules anymore.

It's...whatever you do, do it with the Spirit's help.

Listen to Paul's list, paraphrased a bit...and listen for the help or fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Restore a believer caught in sin...but gently.

Restore with wisdom and humility...realizing how easily it is to be tempted.

Carry each other's burdens...in love. We know this fulfills the law of Christ. "A new command I give you: Love one another."

End the comparison game, value yourself but avoid being conceited or prideful...be humble.

Learn and receive spiritually...but be generous.

Again, the macro idea. Whatever you sow to is what you will reap. Sow to the flesh, reap from the flesh.

Sow to oreo cookies and you will reap an oreo cookie body! Not complicated.

Sow to the Spirit, and you will reap a spiritual life and eternal life, rich in the Spirit's fruit.

Be gentle, wise, loving, humble, and generous...whatever you do make sure the fruit of the Spirit is attached. Value reaching out for and asking for the Spirit to help you.

For us today, we aren't struggling with issues like circumcision, temple tax, or offering up a burnt offering.

Instead, our concerns might sound more like this...do I really need to go to church to be a Christian? Do I really need to read my Bible or pray for others?

Why is serving one another in love so important to God? Or will God really take care of me financially if I tithe?

In all of this, I feel like I am preaching to the choir. You have done some thinking, you hold the values of attending, and growing, and praying and serving.

Because I believe, we value listening to God. And God's Spirit whispers to our hearts and minds. Go to church, it's good to worship. Give of yourself and watch how I will bless you.

And almost unconsciously, we receive the Holy Spirit's help to follow God. And we value this wonderful church family! Doing our part to keep this family wonderful.

All that's proof the Holy Spirit is quietly but powerfully active in our lives. So splendid!

Let's revisit the Frog and the Scorpion story. But re-telling it through the aid of the Holy Spirit, opening my thinking.

Now it's me standing at the edge of a river. The river of life. And Jesus is there too, standing there with me silently.

And I'm thinking to myself, I want to get across this river. As in, I want to live a good meaningful and significant life! But as I scan the riverbank, there are no kayaks, no pontoons, not even a life vest. I can't swim that far!

In desperation, I ask. "Jesus, will you carry me across?" Did Jesus pause?

Without hesitation, we head out together. I'm holding his shoulders as he swims. All is well.

Until we are about midway. It took that long for it to dawn on me. I realize I am the scorpion in this scenario. I've never been the innocent frog. No, my sin is as real and consistent and as deadly as the scorpion's sting!

Realization sinking in. Have I now doomed us both to die?! Panic rising, thrashing about, are we sinking!?

But Jesus just keeps swimming and responds calmly, "Oh Amy, there is nothing to worry about. Dying and rising again, offering forgiveness, daily extending grace and carrying you through life...well, I'm sorry, but I couldn't resist the urge to love you. I guess you could say, it's just in my character." Amen.

As we turn to our time of reflection...I would simply ask, "How are you going through life?" Do you value your own strength to get you through? Or will you value and put your trust in Christ and the Holy Spirit, God's strength, to get you through life?