

5 Lessons God Has Taught Me this Past Year

by Santosh Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of surrendering to God, focusing on the need to examine our hearts in the light of Christ, avoid deception, and seek the anointing of the Holy Spirit for guidance. It highlights the significance of being prepared to meet Christ, abiding in Him, and practicing righteousness to avoid shame at His coming. The sermon also stresses the need to seek God's mercy, be softened by encouragement, run to win in the spiritual race, and hate our own lives to follow Christ wholeheartedly.

Scripture: Matthew 11:28, Psalm 139:23, Mark 9:24, John 14:1, 1 John 3:2, Ephesians 4:11, Psalms 95:7, Hebrews 3:13, 1 Corinthians 9:24, Acts 20:24, John 12:25, Matthew 5:11, Philippians 3:13

Topics: "Surrender to God", "Spiritual Preparedness"

Description

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Transcript

Good morning, family. It's good to be together again. I had initially thought I would finish the messages I've been speaking on, the mark of God's presence in the church, and we've looked at prophecy and spiritual songs.

I want to speak on spiritual authority, but I'd like to do that later. The Lord laid a burden on my heart last night and even this morning. As I reflected, as most of, probably all of you know, it's my birthday today, and it's a good time for me to reflect on what the Lord has done in my life, to examine my heart in the light of Christ, because one day we will all be examined in the light of Christ, and when we set our hearts to be prepared for meeting Him, you know, we sang, soon He is coming, O happy, glorious day.

It is going to be a wonderfully glorious day for certain people. Some of my favorite verses are in 1st John 3. Maybe I start there. If you turn with me into 1st John chapter 3. Verses 2 and 3 are some of my favorite verses, but I'd like us to begin in chapter 2, verse 28 actually, which is where we should begin, or even verse 26.

He says, I'm writing these things that I'm about to say because there are some people trying to deceive you, and there is a version of Christianity that's a deception. It's not a version of some other religion. It's a version of Christianity for it to be deception.

It has to be Jesus, but it's another Jesus. It's the Bible, but it's another twisting of the Bible, and so he says to avoid this deception, verse 27, you know this verse as well. As for you, the anointing which you receive from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you.

Is that true? Is it really true that the anointing is in you, every single one of you who are born again, brother or sister, and that you don't really need anybody to teach you? Now, thank God that He's given teachers to the church. He says in Ephesians 4, but is there really an anointing that you shouldn't need to be spoon-fed? Imagine if here I was in my 40s, and you still saw me being spoon-fed by somebody. Maybe Megan had to spoon-feed me every day, my food.

It's a sad thing when it's physically the case, because there's a disability. They don't have the motor skills or the ability to feed themselves. We can't despise them at all.

We shouldn't despise them, but we are without excuse if that's the case spiritually. When we have the anointing of the Holy Spirit available to us, we have the Word of God available to us, if it can't be said that the anointing is in me, and I don't need anybody to teach me. I'm hearing from God every day, and I'm able to feed my wife based on what I'm hearing from Him.

Or if your husband is backslidden, you're able to feed your husband, and you're both able to feed your children. And as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true, and is not a lie, just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. So now little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence, and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Which means there will be people who will shrink away from Him in shame. It won't be happy, glorious day for a lot of people, including some people who sang, soon He is coming, oh happy, glorious day, but lived in a way that they weren't ready for His coming. And so when He comes, they shrink back.

The anointing was not in them. So let's abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence, and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God. And such we are, for this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we what we will be.

But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him. That's why this is one of my favorite verses. Santos will be like Jesus.

And most of you don't know my past. Most of you don't know the corruption of sin that dwells in my flesh, even now that I'm discovering. Unconscious sin that God is revealing to me, constantly.

And every time He shows me more un-Christ-likeness in me, that I repent of, and fall on my face, and say, Lord help me to be more like You. The more I just say, Wow, what love that Santos will be like Jesus. And you must put your name there.

What love you will be like Jesus. Children, remember this. This is your destination.

It's not to become great in the eyes of the world, not to have a lot of money, not to have a successful job. Children are a blessing of the Lord, but it's in the Lord's hands how many children you may have. That's completely up to Him.

But there's one thing that cannot be taken away from you, except by your own unbelief. And that is that when you see Him, you can be like Jesus. And if you will read your Bible carefully, it says you will be like Jesus.

And you can take that promise to the bank, to God's bank, and say, Lord, this has got to be true in my life. When I see You, I must be like You. But He says, we will see Him just as He is.

Verse 3, the proof that you're really living in such a way that you're ready to meet Him is that everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. That means you're not judging other people. You're not pointing fingers.

You have no finger to point in accusation at even one other person. No complaint, no grumbling, or anything against anyone. Because you say, I have, doesn't matter what they've done to me, or what they haven't done for me.

I want to purify myself as Christ is pure. And then when I see Him, I will be like Him. The rest is up to God.

You purify yourself. You examine your heart and see, Lord, is there any un-Christ-likeness in me? That prayer I prayed earlier when we were praying is from Psalm 139. Another prayer I pray frequently, Psalm 139.

It's a wonderful psalm where it talks about how God has planned for our lives from before we were even born. While we were in our mother's womb, He wrote every day of our lives, wrote it in detail. What's going to happen today has already been recorded in God's book.

What's going to happen tomorrow, and the rest of this week, it's already been written down. It's already recorded. Trust Him.

The protection of His child is a care that He's taken on Himself. That's why He took such pains to write your book of your life. And I like to think of it like this way, so don't read too much into it, that God wanted to write such detail about your life that He took nine months to do it.

That's why He had you in your mother's womb for nine months. Maybe in some cases a little bit less than that. But He wanted to, you know, how quickly would it take for God to write? I mean, He could write in a moment.

But it took nine months or whatever number of months you were in your mother's womb to write in detail. April 3rd, 2022. April 4th, 2022.

You picture God writing while you were in your mother's womb. You didn't even know all He was planning for you. And at the end of this wonderful psalm that I hope you know well, He says this, So Lord, search me, verse 23.

Psalm 139, verse 23. Search me, O God, know my heart. You know, it's true that God knows all things, but there's a sense in which He wants you to open your heart, to let Him search you.

He will not take over your free will, even though He is God. We will have free will even in heaven. But He invites you out of your own free will to open your heart and say, Lord, search me.

You know my heart, Lord. I want you to know my heart. And then tell me about it.

Those things that I don't know, because they're too deep for me to even figure out. My thoughts, they're too complex. So Lord, you come and figure out my heart and you show it to me.

Isn't that wonderful? God doesn't ask you to figure out your own complexities, your own doubts, your own fears. He says, you just open up your heart to the Holy Spirit. Let me search you.

We read in the book of Corinthians that it's the Holy Spirit who searches the heart of God, searches our hearts and reveals to us the mind of Christ. So search me, try me and know my anxious thoughts and see if there is any hurtful way in me. The hurtful ways in our hearts are not the ways, the things that we do to hurt others.

That we do with our words, with our hands and hopefully we're done with all of that, right? But the hurtful ways in our hearts speak of our attitudes and our motives, our ambitions, those things that hurt God when nobody else can see, or when I have a lofty thought that exalts myself. It hurts God. Maybe I had a proud thought and I didn't hurt anybody, but you know how it grieved God? That self-ambition you had, that high thought about yourself.

Search me Lord, show me if there's any way that causes you pain. The Living Bible paraphrases it. Is there any thought I had, a fleeting thought that just pricked your heart? Oh Lord, that's what I want to know.

And so Lord help me to cleanse, purify myself as you are pure, so that my heart is like yours and lead me in the everlasting way. So I thought I would speak today on some lessons that the Lord has taught me this last year and share them with you briefly. If you can pull those up.

The first one I'd like to share with this first lesson is this. The more you gaze on your father, the more you will radiate his joy. The more you gaze on your father, the more you will radiate his joy.

Let's turn to Psalm 16. As we were praying even yesterday morning, we shared some on this as well that as Christians we ought to exemplify to the world around us that God is a tremendously joyful God. He's full of joy.

In fact Jesus said in John 15 that he has spoken these things to us so that our joy may be made full. If you've been coming to RLCF for a few months or even a year, has your joy been made full? Have you more full? Let's say maybe not fully full, but more full. If not, you're missing something dear brother, dear sister.

And I'm willing to take responsibility that as one of the elders I'm not doing my job faithfully enough to represent a joyful God. And I hope to do so better in the years to come. But I do believe that for those of us who have been willing to pay attention, we have seen a more joyful God.

Not the temporary pleasure and passing excitement that comes from the things of this world, but a joy that comes from being in the presence of God. Are you more joyful? I'll tell you I'm more joyful, but I'll tell you what the Lord has convicted me about is I need to show it more. I want to show the joy of the Lord more in my countenance, in my face, in my words, even in the strictness with which I preach God's Word.

I want people to see God is a really joyful God. Because sometimes he's a really joyful person and he seems to be taken up with God. Psalm 16 verse 11, you will make known to me the path of life.

In your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand there are pleasures forever. And this other verse in Psalm 34, I'd like you to see as well.

Psalm 34, the more you gaze on your father the more you will radiate his joy. Now we were out in the sun quite a bit yesterday because we had a whole hours and hours of soccer games for the kids. And you can't tell it as much with me because I'm already pretty dark.

But if you look at some of my kids and Megan you see, you can tell we were out in the sun quite a bit. And I always think about that. You know they turn reddish.

If you have a lighter skin complexion you're out in the sun you'll turn red. Tan they call it. I've thought about that like that.

When you really look at the sun and God's, the son of God, the light of God is shining upon you. You should be tanned with his joy. That's the way I think of it.

There should be, oh he's been in the presence of God. He looks so joyful. Covet that dear brothers and sisters.

I do. I want to come out and I never want to leave God's presence. But I want people, when I interact with people, to see me there's like, wow he's been in the presence of God.

He's so joyful. I know what he's going through. I see that things are not hunky-dory for him.

I hear what all they're saying about him and those accusations and the names they call him. But I see a joy in his life. And it's not by the things of this earth.

And it's not in religious things either. It's a joy that comes from dwelling in the presence of the Lord. If you're really in the presence of the Lord, you would have been at his right hand and experienced that joy that is there at his presence.

Psalm 34, we read in verse 5, Santosh looked to him and was radiant. And his face was never downcast, is how I read it. His face was never like, oh yeah bro I'm kind of having, struggling, bitter about this, or disappointed about that.

No, that's a mark that you're not dwelling in the presence of God. They looked to him and their faces were tanned with joy. I want that.

I hope you do. I've experienced a little bit more of it this year, I can tell you honestly. But I want more.

I want my whole being to radiate. You know what radiate is? Where there's a light that's shining on you and you're reflecting it back. It's not my own, it's not a manufactured pleasure.

See a manufactured pleasure is one that comes from things going my way. I'm doing what I like and everything's as it should be and I like my friends and all these wonderful things. But radiating is that the light is coming from some other source.

It's the light of God that's shining on me that is just bouncing off of me. I'm radiating it from here because I've been in the presence of God. And the secret to having the joy of God radiating is to come into his presence.

But it begins with repentance. You know if you turn to Luke chapter 15. Let's turn there together.

Luke chapter 15. There's a number of names that you could call this chapter. Luke chapter 15.

My Bible has a caption or a title at the top saying the lost parables. Like the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son. I like to think of it as you could also think of it as the chapter of repentance.

Because the prodigal son came back. But I like to think of it as the chapter of joy. It's a chapter where the joy of God is manifest as being triggered by that which was lost being found.

And that's common in all three of these chapters. You know when you want to get to the point of the story you go to the end right. You want to see what happens at the end of the story.

You go to the back at the end of the book. You see oh that's how it ends. Okay so if you really want to understand this story you can skip ahead to the end.

Dear brothers, dear sisters, dear children. And see what was the point of the story all along. This isn't a true story.

It's a parable that Jesus told. And when Jesus went to great lengths to say it this parable there must have been a reason for it. And so I want to know what that reason is.

The story is not as important as the lesson in the story. And the lesson in the story you'll find out you can be absolutely certain about because it's the same lesson in all three stories. Luke 15 verse 7 or verse 6. When he comes home after finding his sheep he calls together his friends and his neighbors saying to them rejoice with me.

That's the point of the story. Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost. And I tell you that in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.

He says the same thing in verse 9. When this woman who lost her coin found it she says calls her friends and neighbors saying rejoice with me for I found the coin which I had lost. In the same way I tell you there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. And then the last story he says verse 32.

Listen this is the father telling his older son who doesn't know the joy of God. He's very religious comes to all the meetings but he's got this sour look on his face like I've been serving you all these years and what have I got out of it dad. Didn't know his father.

And here was the son. What do you think you know here in this situation at the end of the story there's three people. There's the father radiating joy out of his face and then there's two sons.

And if you look at the countenance of the two sons you can tell who has been with the father really. Here was the son who lived in the house but had not really dwelt in his father's presence you can say. He was in the house.

He obeyed his father. He did all the things that his father told him to do but he was not in the father's presence. His countenance showed it.

He was downcast. He was upset. He was bitter.

He had a grumble in his heart like how dare you throw a feast for that young son of mine. He's jealous. He's envious.

In the house but not in the father's presence. And there was a younger son who had spent years away from the house. But in that moment of repentance he had come into his father's presence and oh you should have seen his face.

We're not told what his face looked like but I can imagine it. Can you for a moment pause and imagine what that younger son's face looked like. Radiating joy.

It's like are you kidding me. I was expecting to sit there in the servants quarters and just at least have a piece of bread which was better than the pig's food which I couldn't eat. But you're kidding me.

Really lamb roast and a ring on my finger and a wonderful robes on me and sandals on my feet. Really. And this must be how we must represent God to the world around us dear brothers and sisters.

Not this grumpy Christianity that a lot of people have. The holiness of God is truly represented in his joy. I believe that.

We never compromise his holiness. I'm not for a frothy smiley Christianity that I see in the world as well. That doesn't proclaim the holiness of God but the holiness of God is most accurately represented by his joy.

And you can't separate the two. A joy that comes from repentance however. It doesn't condone sin.

You see this verse in Hebrews chapter 1. I believe not because I think it but because God's Word says so that the happiest man that ever walked the face of this earth bar none was Jesus Christ. And he showed it on his face. Now he wasn't always with a plastic smile.

He wept in John 11. He grieved over Jerusalem and and and when they pressed the crown of thorns on his head and they beat him and there was blood streaming down his face. He was still the happiest person that ever walked on the face of this earth.

Why? We're told in Hebrews 1 verse 9. Because he loved righteousness and hated sin. And so God poured joy over him. You know if you really want the joy of God it can't be something you'll manufacture.

You can't say okay I'm gonna try to be joyful today. You tell your wife honey I'm gonna try my best to be joyful today. I guarantee you will fail in a matter of time.

I've tried it. I didn't actually say it to my wife but I'm gonna try to be joyful today. Next thing you know something comes along the way that just irritates you and the devil will bring exactly the the temptation

that will get you right where you didn't expect it and there goes the joy.

But you know the joy of God is something different. It's a joy that's an anointing over you. Well you don't have to try to manufacture it.

It's it's dripping down you and it's a fragrance that comes out of you. Where you know when when he pours that. Imagine if somebody poured sweet fragrance over me this morning.

You could be the back of the room and you could smell it from there. What's going on? Something like you put too much cologne on man. I mean I want joy like there's too much cologne on me.

That's what I want people from far away to be able to smell and sense that joy. Therefore God your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions. Why was Jesus the most joyful man and or human being that ever walked the face of this earth? Because God poured his father anointed him with the oil of gladness.

Oh seek for that. Instead of saying I'm gonna by hook or crook be more happy today. You say Lord I fall on my face before you and say Lord I want to hate sin.

I want to love righteousness and oh he will pour the oil of gladness over you. As he did for Jesus he will do for you. He will.

That's why Jesus is our forerunner. So the more you gaze on your father the more you will radiate his joy. Secondly the more you become like Jesus the more merciful you will be to others.

We sang a number of songs about mercy today. Again I didn't pick the songs but there they were. He's planned a special mercy for each hour.

You know you've probably heard the story of a man who took a saw a snake in a fire. It's a parable and he saw the snake suffering in the fire and so he grabbed the snake and picked it out with his hand. You know risked his hand.

What did the snake do? Bit him. And so he dropped the snake because the snake bit him and the snake fell right back into the fire. So what did the man do? He says uh-huh see serves you right.

You bite the hand that feeds you go back into the fire. But this man you know what he did? He took a little metal pole and stuck it into the fire and took out the snake and rescued it. Somebody asked the man why did you do that? This was a snake that bit you.

The man said you know it's the snake's nature to bite. That's what snakes do. They bite.

It's my nature to be kind and just because the snake is true to its nature in biting doesn't mean that I should be like it in its nature. And who you are especially in how you respond to how others treat you is an indication of the nature that you have. When others treat you badly what should you say? Oh she started it so it's his fault and you return evil for evil.

No do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with I would say mercy. This is a mark of God's goodness. Mercy.

The more you become like Jesus then you partake of his nature the more you will be merciful to others. Let's turn to Matthew chapter 9. Matthew chapter 9 we read in verse 10. It happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house right after he called Matthew.

Matthew was so excited that Jesus had called him. Matthew was not a compromising tax gatherer I believe. Otherwise God wouldn't have called him.

There was a righteousness about Matthew that God saw and Jesus used to call him. But Matthew said listen Lord you've called me to be a disciple but I've got a whole bunch of ungodly friends of mine, co-colleagues, co-workers of mine. I need to throw up.

I want to throw a party in my house not to have a good time but for them to meet you Jesus because now I have met you and you've changed my life and I'm following you as your disciple. I want all these colleagues of mine to also come. That's what's going on here.

Matthew threw a party to try to draw his the people in his circle to Christ like Christ had drawn him. And here's Jesus sitting at the table and there were tax collectors and sinners we read in verse 10 and they were dining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisee saw this they said to his disciples why is your teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners? But when Jesus heard this he said it is not those who are healthy who need a physician but those who are sick.

But go and learn what this means. I've read this verse many times and some years ago this this is how this verse spoke to me when it says go and learn what this means. It was like the Lord was telling me go and do your homework.

You know you ever tell the teachers the teacher at the end of the day the teacher will tell the kids go do your homework now then you'll understand all that I taught you in class. Now you could sit there in class and listen to all of it but you don't go and do the homework then you never learn it. And there were a lot of Pharisees in Jesus day almost all of them who sat in the synagogues and read God's Word and prayed long prayers and all of those things but they didn't do their homework.

And if you don't do your homework one day you will face the final exam and you will flunk it. And it's like Jesus was telling them I want to tell you now go do your homework because this is what I'm going to ask you on the final exam. What is God going to ask us on the final exam? Children we must know this too.

Brothers and sisters we must know this. What is God going to ask us on the final exam? It's right here in verse 13 Matthew 9 verse 13. Go and do your homework this is what I'm going to test you on the final day.

I desire compassion. I desire mercy. Is there mercy in you? Not a not a mercy that sweeps sin under the carpet.

That's a false mercy. Not a mercy that just ignores sin. It's a mercy that comes from knowing God.

Now the mercy of God is far too complex to understand I believe. It's a merciful God. It's a God full of mercy who has created a place who has allowed for a place like hell.

It's a merciful God who has allowed suffering to go on even in the place in the on the face of this earth. Think of what's going on in Ukraine right now and other parts of the world that we don't hear about as much perhaps. It doesn't mean that God is any less merciful.

But God is full of mercy and he wants us to represent that mercy and the mark that we are really partaking more and more of Christ's nature is this that we are becoming more and more merciful. Now what Jesus was saying here when he says I desire compassion and not sacrifice for I did not come to call the righteous but sinners. He was quoting from Hosea chapter 6. If you turn there with me Hosea comes right after the book of Daniel.

He's the first of the minor prophets. So you get you know Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea. Hosea chapter 6. Jesus is quoting.

Now sometime it's useful to look at where all Old Testament passages are quoted in the New Testament and how they're actually very often quoted differently in the New Testament. It's quoting but it's kind of like there's a little twist and if you're just ignore it you'll miss it. So we let's read carefully again.

I desire compassion and not sacrifice where we read in Matthew 9 verse 13. This is Jesus himself. He's not misquoting Hosea.

He's not misquoting the Old Testament. He's clarifying. He's shining the light more clearly so that we can understand what is the new covenant meaning of what Hosea told us in the Old Covenant and we're told in Hosea chapter 6 verse 6 that God in loyalty rather than sacrifice and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

So Hosea said I desire God's God spoke through Hosea saying I desire loyalty and the knowledge of God and the Pharisees thought okay so that means you tithe the mint and the cumin and you pray long prayers and you give a lot and you sit there and study the Torah and you you're disciplined and you're exact with God's law that's loyalty to God and the knowledge of him and Jesus said no I'm gonna show you what loyalty to God really is. Loyalty to God is being true to his nature who he is and Jesus said that's compassion. Loyalty to God is being merciful to others when when you're merciful to others out of the mercy of God coming from within your heart God says there's a man who's loyal to me.

There's a woman who's loyal to me because I am merciful. Loyalty means you stand with who somebody is and the Pharisees thought that means the law of God and the Sabbath and you don't even let your you know lift a finger to help a man in need and you don't perform miracles and the guy who's been paralyzed now is carrying his bed and so they pick on that says loyalty to God loyalty to God loyalty to God and Jesus said let me explain to you what loyalty to God really is it's mercy let's be loyal to God in mercy and we sang that song a special mercy for each hour can we start planning for our spouses a special mercy for each hour like hey it's 10 o'clock let's plan a new mercy for my wife it's two o'clock let's plan a new mercy for my husband something new in which I can be merciful or my children or that person who's being unkind to me my co-worker who's ungodly when his mouth and his speech and and just you know make makes me do more work or or that other neighbor who's always you know irritating me or that person who speaks evil me let me plan a special mercy for this hour because that's how God is when you know a God who's silently planning for you and love out of his mercy can you likewise silently plan in love and mercy for those whom God wants you to be merciful to be merciful as your heavenly father is merciful you know that verse Matthew 5 it says be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect and the parallel passage in Luke 6 we can read Matthew 5 48 is the parallel of Luke 6 36 again it's you see one side of the coin the other side of the corner and says therefore you are to be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect the Pharisees were the Pharisees of the new covenant you know there are Pharisees in the new covenant to the Pharisees of the new covenant say okay your dress must be this long and you must not do this on

Sunday and you cannot have this other thing and you do on these laws laws laws laws laws you must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect and those who really understand the new covenant who want to know Jesus who are becoming like him say okay well what did you really mean we'll compare scripture with scripture and I read Luke 6 verse 36 which says you must be merciful this is the perfection of God perfection and mercy you can be merciful you don't have to wait to become you know a mature Christian to be merciful you can be perfect in mercy today is there anybody that God wants you to be merciful at this moment be long-suffering and be patient in that mercy long-suffering in order for you to really be mercy you must be willing to be long-suffering make allowance be slow you know when you think about mercy here's a verse you should think about because this is how God's mercy is Psalm 103 Psalm 103 verse 8 the Lord is compassionate this is what he wants I desire compassion and God says that's how I am the Lord is compassionate and gracious and here's what that means slow to anger when your children don't do what they what you ask them to do and or they break something they're careless they didn't listen to you they're being too loud and you've got a headache and you're doing something else that's annoying you say Lord I want to represent you now you could stand on the on the law that says children obey your parents in the Lord you haven't obeyed me children and you laid on the law like the father does you say Lord I'm just upholding the perfection of your law and God says oh you've missed it yes uphold the perfection of the law but will you be merciful to them be long-suffering be patient work with them sit next to that child sit next to that daughter or son of yours sit next to your husband sit next to your wife the Lord is compassionate and gracious slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness and mercy abounding that was one of the lines we sang as well I hope you didn't miss it abundant in mercy mercy abundant so be patient and long suffering in your mercy you know I thought about this verse recently 2nd Peter chapter 1 2nd Peter 1 I want you to see a progression here I'm not going to make this a strict interpretation or time I hold doctrine on to this but I want you to see he does build a little bit of adding on for us to be made perfect beginning in verse 5 he says you start with faith and apply diligence in your faith so be diligent in your faith you know we sang in one song I can't quote it exactly because help me not to lose the consolation of my faith in your word that really struck me as we were singing it Lord there's a consolation of faith in your word that I could lose Paul says and to Timothy that some have lost faith and a good conscience and suffered shipwreck do you believe it's possible to lose your faith which means you had it at some point you can't lose something you didn't have you could have faith in a living God and lose it oh does that bring a reverence and a fear of God into you it does for me Lord I want to do everything I want to apply diligence into my faith to make sure I don't lose it now for this very reason also applying all diligence in your faith add to it moral excellence or virtue the literal meaning there and your moral excellence of virtue add knowledge and in your knowledge self-control verse 6 and in your self-control perseverance that means keep self-controlling to the power of the Holy Spirit for as long as it takes years decades however long perseverance perseverance means it doesn't plan on the end it keeps enduring perseverance and in your perseverance godliness and you think oh I must have reached the end I've reached godliness he says no there's more when you think you understand godliness guess what's the next level mercy brotherly kindness brotherly kindness loving kindness it's in a sense it's like when you think you've understood godliness this is you realize even deeper have you dug deep into God to understand who he is and know who he is wait wait what you thought was godliness well it's like that's godliness I'm a pretty godly life I'm living in a godly home or building it says oh but Lord you wanted me go deeper I see that true godliness is actually built on brotherly kindness mercy which if you don't have that it makes everything else false brotherly kindness and then he says that's the mark that underneath it all is love to your brotherly kindness love so the more you become like Jesus the more merciful you will be to others the third thing I want to say is third lesson that God's taught me this year is that today you will either be hardened by bitterness or

softened by encouragement certainly Hebrews chapter actually let's start in Psalm 95 we read the psalm at the prayer meeting yesterday and I've been thinking about it some more Psalm 95 you will either be hardened by bitterness or softened by encouragement I've got a picture you know when you put a piece of clay out in the Sun and you put an ice block out in the Sun the same Sun will have different effects on the two things think about it a little piece of clay a little clump of clay and a square block of ice both sitting out in the concrete you come back after an hour and you'll or let's say six hours you'll see that the same Sun is shining on both objects one has become harder clay hardens under the Sun becomes a brick hard piece of clay and this ice is just melted it's what's in it that makes a difference and you can say you know some people say well go why did God harden Pharaoh's heart you know Pharaoh didn't have a choice did he I say he did was there an opportunity for Pharaoh to repent sure was there an opportunity for Judas to repent sure but it was what they had their heart bitter and that's why the point of what I'm saying here is this dear brothers and sisters sisters beware of bitterness that will harden your own heart bitterness that comes from maybe maybe God didn't you're unhappy with your lot in life or people have treated you a certain way or you have expectations of others that don't meet that you're they don't live up to your standards that results in a little bit of bitterness and I tell you that bitterness will be like clay that the Son of God will harden you can say the Sun hardened the clay but sitting next to you or even in your own home will be somebody else that was also hard like a block of ice but they were melted by the same Sun shining on them Psalm 95 it says oh come let us sing for joy to the Lord let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation verse 3 the Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods let us worship and bow down 6 verse 6 let us kneel before the Lord we are the people of his pasture verse 7 the sheep of his hand and then he says you're the sheep of his hand he's he's holding you but right he doesn't even finish the sentence when he says in the middle of verse 7 today if you hear his voice don't harden your heart as at Meribah and as at Masa when your fathers tested me and tried me though they had seen my work there was Moses and Joshua and Caleb like blocks of ice their hearts melted can you picture Moses when God tells him Moses you've walked with me faithfully for almost a hundred years but you're not going to enter the land of Canaan because I got to hold you to the highest standard you made one mistake Moses and that's it for you you know what Moses could have done he could have become like that piece of plain says fine God I'm done I'm not gonna go in you take somebody else to lead these people what did Moses do for the next dozens of years after God told him that you're not going to enter the land of Canaan yourself he faithfully led God's people because Moses was more humble than anybody else on the face of the earth the Son of God the fierceness of God the discipline of God had softened Moses his heart not hardened it and I met plenty of people who's that for whom the discipline of God has hardened their heart like ah God I had this bitterness against you you did this to me are you allowed that to happen I was tested in that four years ago here in this church and the Lord laid this burden on my heart says Santos you have two ways to respond what people are doing to you you could become hardened and bitter by it and carry that bitterness till the end of the line end of your life and you will be the loser in eternity or you could come to me and say Lord break me break my heart let me be like a block of ice that the more you shine on me the more fiercely the heat bears down on me the softer I become today if you hear his voice today will determine all eternity today he doesn't say tomorrow or wait for a year and finally get over your bitterness and soften your heart today I tell you this dear brothers and sisters you're listening to this and those listening online if in the light of all that I'm saying you still don't soften your heart you will probably have a hard heart for all eternity I don't want to condemn you I don't want to predict the future but if as much as and I'm not preaching anything new these words have written in God's Word for thousands of years David wrote this hundreds of years before Christ it's even and then Hebrews repeats it read chapter 3 three times I think maybe more he says today if you hear his voice today if you hear his voice today if you hear

his voice and as much as he has said that if today I still don't soften my heart and I don't resist hardening my heart I'm probably going to be hardened for all eternity it's a sad reality I want to say it as plainly as possible so that I don't let today pass me by because if I put off till tomorrow the softening of my heart the devil will find another way to put it off yet another day and yet another day the devil's heart is hardened it happened when he was cast down from heaven and it will never be softened again and there are serious warnings in Scripture think about Pharaoh think about Esau whose heart had become so hardened that he couldn't find place for repentance think of Judas even though he returned the money we've been studying about that in our Wednesday meetings even though he returned the money and he went and hung himself and wept his heart was hardened he refused to repent repentance dear brothers and sisters when God disciplines you when God corrects you when God rebukes you when God allows circumstances that are trying for you repent fall on your face and say Lord I come to you will you melt me will you break me when God allows you to fail it's not to harden you now you can choose to be hardened but that's your choice that's my choice and I refuse to today I want to choose to be softened now let's turn over to Hebrews 3 and he says here that one of the ways that can help us sometimes you may come up you may be in a place in your life we're just like I don't even know how to be softened I'm just like I find I'm just so hardened what shall I do he tells us thank God for his word Hebrews chapter 3 he says in verse 15 first of all verse 14 if we have for we have become partakers of takers of Christ listen there's a verse many people don't know you have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end so don't today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as when they were provoked me he's quoting from Psalm 95 but I want you to go back earlier he starts by saying in verse 12 take care brethren that there not be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the Living God a heart that becomes hardened over time take care God's not gonna change it for you you must come to him and say Lord I give you my heart change it break it but what can we do to help each other then that's in that context that he says verse 13 you brothers and sisters whom God has out of his mercy softened your heart you encourage your brother if you see that your brother or your sister your spouse your children or your parents or your co-worker has a hardened heart towards God encourage him don't despise him don't look down on him encourage him that's why we have these meetings that's why we meet as often as we can and we have text groups that we can encourage why because if we're not careful any one of us let's read the whole verse encourage one another today day after day day today after today encourage one another today after today as long as it is still called today so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin all sin is deceitful and if I think I won't be hardened I'll be the first to fall let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls so encourage your brother encourage your sister encourage your wife encourage your husband because the devil's trying to harden their heart and we're all being tested for our hearts to be hardened encourage each other speak words of encouragement speak words of life yes speak foreign words when necessary but let it be encouraging words let's say brother come let's do this let's one after Jesus more wholeheartedly this is what it means to be knit together to encourage one another while it is still called today so today you will either be hardened by bitterness or softened by encouragement it will happen today and I'll tell you this like everything else it's the more you do it the easier it is to continue down that path you could spiral down a path of continued hardness or you could fall before God today say Lord Jesus pour out your Holy Spirit upon me you are the baptizer and the Holy Spirit will you come and lay your axe to the root of this bitterness take care that there be no root of bitterness in you which will spring up and defile many number four you always win if you side with God this is something the Lord's taught me over and over again for the last few years and reminded me off even in this last year I think it was John Knox who said one man it was a godly Presbyterian man hundreds of years ago who said one man with God is a majority are you all alone in standing for the truth but God is with you that's the majority

even if the entire world is against you all of Christendom is going a different way but you're standing for the truth you say it is here in God's Word I'm not gonna buy well it's for this culture that culture well what about all the other churches are they really not I don't care I'm not here to look at other churches I'm here to look at God's Word and to fix my eyes on Jesus and if Jesus has revealed himself to me in his Word plainly and clearly as he has then I'm gonna stand with Jesus even if I'm the only one one man with God think about Elijah think about Elijah says there were 450 prophets of Baal another 400 prophets of Ashtaroah on Mount Carmel I think maybe it was just Baal of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel I can't remember but hundreds of them on one side and all of Israel including the king and the queen against him and there's Elijah the lone man who won children you know the story Elijah won well not because Elijah is so special because he was on God's side God won you can say God will always win and one man with God is a majority 2nd Timothy chapter 4 Paul writes perhaps the last words of Paul Paul served God at this point for about 30 35 years towards the end of his life look at what he says you know you would think you know you read about many other famous and some good some bad people who are well known as preachers some ended their life badly some ended their life well but many of them almost all of them were revered and spoken well of and a few were reviled and reproached and here's Paul a wonderful example for us 2nd Timothy chapter 4 these are perhaps this is the last paragraph that Paul's writing of inspired scripture as far as we know 2nd Timothy was the last letter he wrote look at what he says 2nd Timothy chapter 4 it's he almost writes it to the point where you want to feel sorry for him it's like really this was the greatest man that ever walked on the face of this earth I believe after Jesus the most mightily used Apostle and look at the state of his life at the end of his life after 30 35 years of serving Jesus faithfully he says listen Timothy can you try your best to come to me because Demas who was one of my close co-workers he loved the world and he found some other church that will hire him to preach for money and he's still yeah preaching he's got his own following but he loved the world Demas having loved this present world has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica to do what I believe to set up another church in Thessalonica the church of Demas followers of Demas loving money loving popularity the things of this world Crescent's has gone to Calatia Titus has gone to Dalmatia now these are not all bad they just left only Luke is with me pick up Mark and bring him with you etc and then verse 13 I left my jacket I take some comfort in Paul because I sometimes I'm forgetful I leave my jacket at one of your houses and so if you get a text from me and says hey I left my jacket your house I'm following Paul's example no he says when you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Karpis he left it at Karpis's house so Paul was human too and the books especially the parchments Paul loved books Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm the Lord will repay him according to his deeds be on guard look at how Paul writes you know some people say why do you have to expose the false workers so it's because Paul did somebody who was once alongside Paul Paul had to expose him says be on guard against him for he vigorously opposed our teaching he spread rumors about Paul and called him a cult leader and all these things so watch out for him and then he says in verse 16 at my first defense no one supported me this is Paul not one person supported him everyone deserted him may it not be counted against them there were certain people God told Paul no you know don't let it be counted against them but the Lord stood with me verse 17 one man with God is a majority the Lord stood with me so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished and that all the Gentiles might hear and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom to him be the glory forever and ever amen you see Paul he's content that God is with him that's it or somebody else left you okay that's fine I want to stand with God I'm not gonna be offended or bitter or upset or try to appease people you know that Paul could have done something to keep Demas absolutely he could have compromised and Demas would have stayed in his church Paul said no I'd rather God be here and

nobody else with me than a packed congregation the Lord stood with me what a wonderful thing so the implication for this very practically I want to say is two things one is never defend yourself this was the Lord has told me never defend yourself when people accuse you falsely or say all things let them you know even a few days ago I received a text message from somebody saying about how people have somewhere else people don't even know us have been calling us cult leaders and things like that cults and stuff like that the Lord said Santosh what are you gonna do if you want to defend yourself you could write back to this person who said hey is this true you're doing all these cultish things I said Lord I'm not gonna answer it not gonna defend myself anybody who wants to see how we live our lives can come in come into our homes come into our church meetings and see what we stand for never defend yourself and secondly never seek to impress people the more you see this is what the Lord really clearly spoke to me the more you see God's glory the less you will be affected you will think about impressing people the more you see God's glory for who he really is the less you will care to impress people by your life by your ministry by your preaching by your church by your singing or whatever and I pray family that River of Life Christian Fellowship will never be a church that's trying to impress people that we have something wonderful to offer no we have nothing we want the glory of God in our midst we're content that he is pleased by our gathering that's enough and if there are others who want to join in in that pleasing of him then come let's run together let's be knit together in fellowship the more we seek God's glory the less we will try to impress people you know sometimes I come across other people other people who are in ministry and often they want to talk about what they're doing and I never I don't want to judge any of them and or even you know you you see Facebook posts people new churches coming up we're doing this we do that other thing and we've got this new ministry and all these other things and we wanted to spread across the whole country or global or whatever yeah it's good if the Lord calls them to do that that's wonderful but I tell you more and more God has impressed on me as one of the leaders in this church that we will only seek God's glory only seek God's glory and be taken up with that alone and so somebody comes and asks us hey what's impressive about your church I says there's really nothing we're just a small group of people we gather here but we want God's glory we want his presence here in our midst we really want to learn how to love our wives and love our husbands love our children and to live quiet simple lives honoring God the more we see God's glory you know it says turn we sing turn your eyes upon Jesus and the things of this earth what things hopefully by now money mammon success all of those things have completely faded away what is it now then that we want to go straight grow strangely dim the reputation the opinion of others what people think of you this is ah unimpressive okay Lord I want that to grow dim what people think of me I want you to be so dim because I've seen I've turned my eyes upon Jesus I'm reflecting on him I'm meditating on him and his the light of Jesus and who he is to me and what he means to me is so bright that I have no place for any other light what people think of me to shine okay the last one to run to win Christ you must hate your own life Paul says in 1st Corinthians 9 1st Corinthians 9 let's look at that 1st Corinthians 9 verse 24 do you not know that those who run in a race all run but only one receives the prize run in such a way that you may win I want to I want to make a very plain bold statement you must be the most spiritual person in this church and that's something that all of us must take to heart you must be the most spiritual person in your home if your husband is more spiritual than you you must say Lord no I must be more spiritual not in a competitive way please bear with me I want you to understand that if your wife is more spiritual than you don't just sit back well I guess she's most know that should never be an excuse in Lord I must be the most spiritual person in my home children you too and every one of us in this church so Lord I must be the most spiritual person to this church that's what Paul is saying here run so as to win you say well no it's fine let the elders be the most spiritual I'll kind of settle in for bronze medal no there's no bronze medal you're either running to win or you're going to be disqualified that's as plain as God has made it and so all of us

must be running to win to be the most spiritual and we're not looking to others I'm running to run faster after Christ than anybody else has ever run and your wife is doing the same thing your children are doing the same thing every brother and sister in the church doing the same thing this is the church that is pleasing to God run in such a way that you may win everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things they then do it to receive a perishable wreath but we an imperishable therefore I've run in such a way as not without aim a box in such a way as not breathing the air but I discipline my body and make it my slave I make it do that which it does not want to do discipline your body be careful in your eating habits be careful what you spend your money on be careful what you spend your time on be careful what thoughts you allowed to go through your mind this is disciplining your body lest after I have preached to others Paul says I myself will not be disqualified lest I will be disqualified after preaching to others discipline my body you know Paul says and I want to show you another verse in Acts 20 how we finish dear brothers and sisters the past doesn't matter how we finish is what will matter that's why this is a message of hope that's why as I look forward to another year I have I have a path set out for me and I want to run even faster than I've run yet and I hope you'll run with me Acts 20 verse 24 Paul says I want to finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God verse 24 Acts 20 verse 24 he says beginning the wind in the middle I want to finish my course and the which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God in light of that what did he do he says in the beginning of verse 24 I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself he hated his life Jesus said John 12 25 he who hates his life in this world will find it to life everlasting but he who loves his life will lose it do you love your reputation you love what people think of you when somebody says something good about you do you see it as them saying something good about somebody you hate it says I hate that person that you're speaking so highly of now you don't have to say it out loud to be religious and superficial but in your heart I do this when people praise me or say something good about me say Lord it's a test now do I really hate that person they're speaking highly of they're exalting him on my birthday I get a lot of wishes from people okay now Lord that person they're speaking so highly off do I really hate him that's what will matter that's how I'll finish my course it doesn't matter that everybody else spoke highly of Santosh but he loved his life and then he stands at the judgment seat of Christ and everybody says you mean Santosh lost his life too because he loved it when nobody else saw he loved his reputation he loved it when people spoke highly of him and so the test my dear brothers and sisters is when they speak highly of you Jesus said beware beware when they speak highly of you because that's how they spoke about the false prophets who loved their reputation read Matthew 5 I think it's verse 12 11 and 12 but you are blessed when they speak evil of you and reproach you and revile you because so they treated the true prophets who didn't care about their reputation when I read the Old Testament prophets I see men who didn't care what people thought of them they were one man with God or in our case even now one woman with God stand with God so I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself yeah so in closing let me just close with this first Philippians chapter 3 what shall we say then dear brothers sisters it's my birthday but it's a it's a new day for all of us it's a new today for all of us you don't have to wait for your birthday to set your course set the path of your life on these things but today what shall we all do verse Philippians chapter 3 verse 13 brothers and sisters I don't regard myself as having laid a hold of it yet but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus I press on I run for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus amen

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