

“Navigating the Fog of Uncertain Times”

Proverbs 4:20-27

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Sunday, May 31, 2020 (The Day of Pentecost)

Pentecost Introduction

Good morning, and welcome the online service for Redeemer Christian Church!

Today has historically been viewed as a holy day on the Christian calendar. It is Pentecost Sunday!

It is the day we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to God’s people, the church.

On the first-ever Easter Sunday, Jesus Christ rose from the grave and appeared to his disciples. For forty days, he taught them about the kingdom of God and prepared them for the mission of the church. He then ascended to the right hand of his Father in heaven. But before ascending, he commanded his disciples to wait for what he called the “Promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4).

Although Christ would no longer be on earth, he was not abandoning his people. He would send them the gift of his Holy Spirit to empower them for the mission of God.

So, on that first Pentecost, nearly 2000 years ago, as the people of Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of Weeks, the first one hundred and twenty followers of Jesus waited in prayer. And then the Holy Spirit descended upon them [show “Pentecostés” (1597) by El Greco]. Flames of fire appeared over their heads. And they began to speak in foreign languages and tongues, testifying to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-4).

It was a sign and a wonder that pointed to the reality that God’s gospel would not only be the good news of salvation for the Jewish people. Rather, the gospel of Jesus Christ was to be the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both Jews and Gentiles. Through the Holy Spirit, God’s grace was to break into every language, every culture, and every continent of this world.

When the people of Jerusalem heard the voices of the first Christians, some were amazed, but some mocked them, supposing they were drunk. But the Apostle Peter stood up with the other eleven Apostles to preach one of the most history-shaping sermons of all time. Here is a sample of that sermon, spoken in various languages by various members of our congregation.

May these words call us to worship today as we worship the Lord in Spirit and in truth!

Welcome

Again, welcome to the online service of Redeemer Christian Church.

Redeemer Christian Church exists to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words and display the gospel of Jesus Christ with our lives to our neighbors and the nations.

Our mission has gone forward in profound ways, even in the time of Coronavirus. Christians believe in a radically generous God, and one of the ways we worship God is through our generosity. And if you have given to support our mission financially, I want you to know that your generosity has impacted our city and our world.

In fact, since the pandemic began, Redeemer Christian Church has given away over 80 thousand dollars to help serve people who are the most affected. Through organizations like Christian Relief Fund, Crisis Aid, Snack Pak 4 Kids, and High Plains Food Bank, we have been able to help feed the hungry in our own city and across the world. Through the Acts 29 Churches in Hard Places and Rural Collectives, we have been able to resource local churches who are ministering in the most economically impacted communities around the globe.

To be able to give this much, in this time, through our church, is radical generosity, and I thank all of you who have helped in this regard.

If you want to help resource our mission, I encourage you to give online by going to **RedeemerChristianChurch.com**. You can also give via text message by texting “**Redeemer Gives**” to **77977**. You can also mail a check to our physical address at **3701 S. Soncy Amarillo, Texas 79119**.

Every dollar given goes directly to empowering the mission of the gospel going forth. In fact, one exciting way that our church’s mission goes forward will be by bringing on a new church-planting resident. We are a church that firmly believes not only in growing our church, but in multiplying the Church through church-planting. So, it is now my privilege to introduce you to J.R. Favela.

If you would like to meet J.R. and learn how you can support him, I encourage you to participate in today’s digital foyer immediately following today’s serve. To Joel and Megan, we love you, and we are excited to partner with you for the sake of the gospel.

Without any further ado, I would ask you to open up your Bibles to the book of Proverbs, chapter four. Today’s reading will be found in Proverbs 4:20-27.

Scripture Reading

“My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil” (Proverbs 4:20–27, ESV).

This is God’s word.

Almighty and Everlasting Father, give us grace to order our lives in such a way that we live for your glory. Help us to see what you see. Help us to love what you love. Help us to hear what you are saying. Help us to respond to the leading of your Holy Spirit, as we live in an age of anxiety and anger. Help us to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, your Son, and our Savior. It is his mighty name, we pray, AMEN.

Introduction

We are in a time of transition as individuals and families, as a church and as a society.

Kids are out of school. Workers are returning to work. Things are starting to open up. Nevertheless, there is a *fog* of uncertainty concerning our collective future.

Expert sea captains will tell you that whenever you ship enters into a fog [[show image of a boat in fog](#)], you have to be mindful of the challenge that lies around you. You have to slow down. You have to open your eyes and look around. You have to pay attention to your navigational equipment in order to see what your eyes cannot see. Most of all, you have to be deliberate in your actions and choices if you want to find your bearing and make your way to a safe haven.

We, too, are navigating a fog of sorts.

Many of our long-term plans feel contingent and unsure. What will the summer look like? What will the fall look like? What will our economy look like? Will there be another surge of COVID-19, and if so, how will our society respond?

The truth is, we don’t know. No matter how much we might *want* life to be normal, life is not normal. And it may not be normal for some time. Our rhythms have been disrupted. Our routines are off. And many of us feel that as individuals, communities, and societies, we are off-kilter.

And if we are not careful, this season of fog could lead us to a place of spiritual shipwreck.

Since today is Pentecost Day, wherein we joyfully celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, I thought this would be a good time to interrupt our journey through the book of 1 Peter for a bit of a Spirit-led intermission of pastoral encouragement and exhortation to the people of our congregation.

I want to address the fog of confusion, frustration, and exhaustion, many of us feel in the present moment.

And I want to encourage us to turn us to the wisdom of God's word found in the book of Proverbs as we navigate through this fog.

Particularly, I want to look toward four simple, but profoundly important, commands of Proverbs 4.

Exposition

1.) Keep your heart

Verse 23 of our reading today says, **"Keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life" (Pr 4:23).**

Growing up attending youth ministry, I often heard this verse applied to the realm of taking things slow and steady, as in the realm of dating. But as I studied the Bible more, I have come to believe that this is *one of the most important verses in the book of Proverbs*, and it contains truth that applies to the whole of Christian life.

In fact, this verse contains one of the most important correctives to the modern, post-enlightenment view of humanity. In the time of the Enlightenment, there was a French Philosopher named René Descartes (1596-1650) **[show image of René Descartes]**, who wanted to find a firm foundation for what is true. He believed that the religion of the church or even the observations of men were unable to provide this foundation because these things could be doubted. Descartes even doubted the reality of his own existence.

For Descartes, the only thing that could not be doubted is that he was *thinking*. This was to be his foundation for all that was true, so he wrote the famous words, **"I think; therefore, I am."**

Now whether or not you have ever heard of Descartes or agree with Descartes, you have been affected by Descartes and his worldview. Ever since the time of the Enlightenment, most people in the Western world think of themselves as *thinking creatures*. We believe, "we are what we think." If we want to change the way we act, we have to change the way we think.

But according to the Bible, that is an *incomplete and flawed* way of understanding the human person. For the Bible, the center of the person is not the mind, but the "heart" (לב). We are not primarily what we think. Rather, *we are what we love*.

We are desiring creatures. Our desires form our thoughts, our thoughts form our actions, and our actions form our lives.

That is why we must *“Keep [our hearts] with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life” (Pr 4:23).*

The image evoked in Proverbs is of a watchman guarding a city wall (מְכַלֵּם-מִשְׁמֶרֶת נֹצֵר). In the same way, as an ancient watchman watched over a walled city, we are to “keep” watch over our hearts. We are to actively and routinely be on the look-out against anything that compromises the health of our hearts. We are to mindfully and vigilantly examine what comes in and out of hearts.

Can we honestly say that we are mindful of the condition of our hearts on a regular basis? How often are we willing to be still enough to engage in the often-painful work of self-examination? And, if we are aware of the deepest desires of our hearts, how often are we willing to critique those desires instead of immediately running to something or someone that will validate us?

But here, we are reminded of our need to silence ourselves before the Lord and the truth of his word for reflection, repentance, and change.

What have you allowed your heart to desire as the highest good? We might intellectually believe that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We may have pristine, gospel-laden theology that we can articulate with great clarity and fervor. But our habits, our inner dialogue, and our functional priorities of life reveal that our lives are allegiant to lesser gods; the god of being perceived as significant, smart, desirable, or powerful; the god of feeling like “I am in control!”; the god of seeking comfort; the god of wealth.

Be honest with yourself; what have you trained your heart to desire? Even more, for the parents of our church, what are you training your children to desire? In this time of uncertainty, what are you teaching your children about what is most important?

Parents, your children need to know that things like athletic achievement, academics, body image, wealth, and popularity can be good things, but they can never be ultimate things.

Train your children, by example, to desire to dwell in the house of the Lord and to gaze on his beauty (Ps 27:4). Train them to abide in him (Jn 15:3), so that they might glorify God and enjoy him forever.

2.) Put away crooked speech

According to the Bible, words matter. In fact, according to Genesis 1, the entire cosmos derives its being from the power of God’s spoken word: *“And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light” (Gen1:3).*

Men and women are created in the image and likeness of God. And as creatures made in God's image, we have the unique and extraordinary capacity of language. Now, there is a distinction here. Our words are not in the same universe of power as our Creator, but our words are powerful, nonetheless.

Thus, we are commanded, "*Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you*" (Pr 4:24).

I want to consider this from two angles: *external* words and *internal* words.

Firstly, what are the external words you are listening to and exposing yourself to? I have heard you cannot out-exercise a bad diet. In the same way, you spiritually out-exercise a mental diet that leads you toward anger, fear, lust, or an entertainment-sedated apathy.

Most healthy people would recognize that there needs to be a limit on how much fast food or candy they are allowed to eat. But have you ever thought about putting a limit on how much time you allow yourself to spend looking at social media, or surfing the web, watching television, or even watching the news? Have you considered those sources – and the *words* that come from those sources – might be forming your soul to be more concerned with things of this world rather than the things of God?

If you are in the habit of reading social media, checking your email, or watching the news the moment you awake from sleep, you will interpret your reality through those lenses for the rest of your day. In other words, your habits are not just neutral activities. They are in the realm of spiritual disciplines.

This is why I want to commend to you the crucial spiritual disciplines of reading your Bible and praying on a daily basis. We read our Bibles and pray, not to earn spiritual favor with God. We read our Bibles and pray because we need the truth of God's word and the grace of God's presence to frame our reality.

We need the Holy Spirit to give us eyes to see ourselves, our world, and our story in the light of God's plan. We need the peace that passes all understanding to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7). We need to remind our hearts of his power, his goodness, his grace daily.

If you need a place to start, start reading along with the Bible reading plan and prayers that our church is sending out on a daily basis [**display: "If you want to receive these daily bible reading plans and prayers, send an email to contact@redeemerchristianchurch.com"**]. But whatever your plan is, be consistent. Draw near to the Lord, and he will draw near to you (James 4:8). Put away the crooked speech of the world. And be attentive to the word of the Lord (Pr 4:20).

But before we move on to the next point, in addition to the external words you are allowing to speak to your heart, I also want to consider the power of your *internal* words.

No one talks to you more than you do. Your inner dialogue matters because it helps form you.

If you were to read a transcript of your inner-dialogue, how would it sound?

For some of you, your inner dialogue is composed largely of *self-condemnation*, wherein you beat yourself up with words of cruelty and hatred so as to coerce yourself into changing. But shame-motivated change never works in the long-run. And our cruelty to ourselves inevitably overflows onto the people we love the most.

For some you, your inner dialogue is composed of *self-justification*. You constantly judge others and blame-shift any pain you might feel onto someone else because you cannot endure the pain of any suffering you might be responsible for. But deep down, you know it is a farce that leads to a never-ending downward cycle of bitterness. You can never know joy and peace if you live this way.

This is why we must deny the temptation toward both self-condemnation and self-justification, and instead, we must learn the art of preaching the gospel to ourselves.

The gospel tells us that our sin was great that it demanded the death of Christ to atone for it. But the gospel also tells us that the love of God was so great that he was willing to pay that price. Only in the gospel can we be fully known – even in the depth of our sin – yet truly loved. This is the message we need to preach to ourselves on a daily basis so that we might know both transformation and joy.

As the great Protestant Reformer Martin Luther once wrote: *“The highest of all God’s commands is this, that we ever hold up before our eyes the image of his dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He must daily be to our hearts the perfect mirror, in which we behold how much God loves us and how well, in his infinite goodness, as a faithful God, he has grandly cared for us in that he gave his dear Son for us. Do not let this mirror and throne of grace be torn away from before your eyes.”¹*

3.) Let your eyes look directly forward.

Verse 25: *“Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.”* (Pr 4:25).

This a verse about the spiritual power of vision. More than the mere faculty of eyesight, *vision is the capacity to imagine a better future so that you can make necessary changes in the present to help get to that better future.*

Do you have a vision that you can proactively seek? Or are have you succumbed to a self-inflicted cycle of sedation and constant reaction?

¹ Martin Luther. *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*. Ed. Theodore G. Tappert. (Auckland, NZ: Muriwau, 1955, 2018), 116.

Here, the book of Proverbs challenges us to break out of a way of life that is one reaction after another. We are challenged to prayerfully seek vision for our lives, our vocations, our marriages, and our families.

Some of you might not even know where to begin when it comes to building a vision for your life. So, I want you to consider a few questions for reflection.

Where do you want to go in your life? How has God created and gifted you? What are your unique desires, abilities, and opportunities? What needs are there in this world that maybe call has called you to meet?

If a vision for a better future seems impossible to achieve or even imagine, consider some short-term goals that you could strategically and realistically set for yourself. You may not be able to see clearly how to get from A to Z, but maybe you could make a realistic plan to get from A to B.

But even more than these practical considerations, how might *God* be actively leading you in this season? Today, on Pentecost Sunday, we remember that we are Trinitarian Christians! We are not deists! We do not believe in a distance, uncaring, unknowable God! We believe in a God who has not left us alone. We believe in a God who is our comfort and strength. We believe in a God who interacts with us, leads us, and guides us. We believe in the Holy Spirit.

As such, we are to be a Spirit-led, Spirit-dependent people.

How does the Holy Spirit lead his people? He leads us toward repentance, toward Christ-like righteousness, toward truth in the word, and toward the worship of God.

The Holy Spirit not only gives us vision to see *where* we want to be, but also *who* we are called to be in Christ.

4.) Ponder the path of your feet.

If verse 25 teaches how considering the future gives us insight on how to steward the present, verses 26 and 27 teach us how to consider the present so that we might have insight on how to steward our future.

The text says, *"Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil"* (Pr 4:26–27).

Take some time to audit the habits of your life. Think through the hours of your week and how you spend them; not how you think you spend them or intend to spend them, but how you *actually* spend them. Are your habits taking you to where you want to go in life?

Even more, what kind of person are your habits causing you to become? Are you sowing into the flesh or into the Spirit?

As Paul writes to the Galatian church, *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up”* (Galatians 6:7–9).

C.S. Lewis says gets at a similar idea in *Mere Christianity* when he says, *“Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different than it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices...you are slowly turning this central thing into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself. ...Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state of the other.”*²

Perhaps the most important question we can ask is: *“Are the habits of my life leading me to a greater worship of Jesus, a deeper closeness to Jesus, a more enduring love of Jesus and his people?”*

Conclusion

The pandemic has been exhausting. It has made us weary in body and soul. But what we must know is that true rest is found in Christ alone. To paraphrase Augustine of Hippo, *our hearts will be restless until they find their rest in him!*

We so often seek restoration and rest in things that rob us of joy and peace. We scroll endlessly on social media. We binge on Netflix. We keep the TV on a 24-hour news channel because we don't want to miss the latest piece of breaking news. We obsess about working out, about activities for our kids, about the next vacation, the next holiday, or the next big thing. We run ourselves into the ground with worry and work.

But it is here that the voice of Christ calls to us in the midst of the fog: *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Mt 11:28–30).

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. This is the mystery of our faith.

The gospel is not just historical reality, although it is the most important fact of history. It is not just a doctrine, although it is the most important truth you can ever know. The gospel is an invitation into the resurrection life of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

In a world filled with death and darkness, we can be a people of resurrection and light.

² C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1952, 2001), 92.

So, Redeemer Christian Church, on this Pentecost day, let us consider our lives in light of Christ. May he be the desire of our hearts, the proclamation of our mouths, and the vision that is ever-before our eyes.

AMEN.

Prayer

Almighty God, we come before you your throne of grace, because we are a people in need of that grace. Our world is weary and broken. Many of us are weary and broken.

This week we have been reminded by the news that we are not just struggling with a sickness of the body, but we are struggling with a sickness of the soul. And so, we pray that the healing hand of Christ your Son would touch us. Heal us of COVID-19. Heal our economy. But even more, heal us of hatred, of division, of racism, and of oppression. Heal us from the dominion of sin that casts such a dark shadow over our nation and our world.

But in the midst of this darkness, we thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Thank you that the resurrection life of Jesus Christ dwells within us and empowers us! Thank you that your presence of peace abides with us and sustains us! Thank you that you have given our lives meaning and a mission.

Help our lives display a shining glimpse of the kingdom that is coming in Jesus. Help us to guard our hearts and be mindful of your words. Help us to see Christ as our vision. And order our steps that we may be more and more like him.

In the mighty name of Jesus, we pray, AMEN.

Gospel Community Discussion Starters

1. Read Proverbs 4:20-27. Which of these sayings do you find the most helpful or constructive, and why?
2. What is the relationship between keeping our hearts and putting away crooked and deceptive speech far from us?
3. Do you have a goal or vision for your life, and are your habits taking you where you want to go? Are those habits leading you to a greater love for Jesus and his people?
4. As we live in times of an uncertain future, how might the Lord be challenging you to draw closer to him? What is your plan to navigate the fog of the present moment?