

Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

October 4, 2016

The last two editions of this column have been pretty heavy, so I'm at least not going to ask you to read as much this week.

The picture to the right was taken this morning through one of the new windows I've recently had installed. After the installation, I had them all spotlessly clean, but it's rained a bit since then.

If you look at this photo, most of the window still looks nice and clean . . . except the part on which the sun is shining, where a fairly amazing mess is visible. (This is more or less a "man cave," after all.)

This photo is actually quite a challenging parable. You who take the time to read this column are among "the best of the best" churchgoers (of course ;) – and we who are the "core" members of our various congregations have generally cleaned up our lives of the most obviously egregious sinful behaviors. We look pretty good at first glance, like the window unilluminated by the sun. But in the Light of the Son, things almost always look very different.

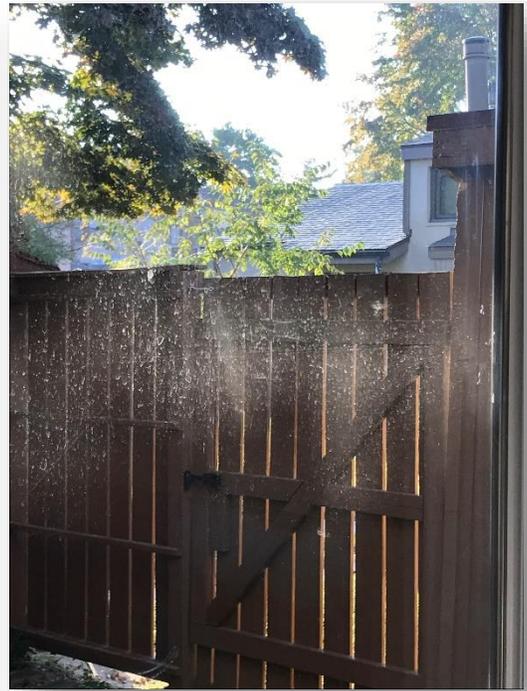
So long as we're breathing, we will always be sinners, and we will never outgrow temptation, but the things that tempt us frequently change over time. Part of our problem is often that we don't really—*really*—want to escape temptation *completely*. Our sinful nature tries to persuade us to follow a policy of **Sin Management rather than Sin Eradication**.

Jill's sister's family was on vacation and ended up staying in a motel that was less than a 5-star enterprise. As they unpacked, a rat ran across the floor of their room. When they complained to the management, the response was "Are you *sure* it was a rat? It may have just been a mouse."



You and I often tend toward similar rationalizations with respect to the sins that tempt us—"It's just a *little* mouse, after all." But in the world of the Spirit, "mice" have a way of becoming "rats." James, our Lord's brother, put it this way:

*"For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but **each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death**"* (James 1:13b-15).



Rick Warren restated these verses memorably when he wrote that “The battle for sin is won or lost in your mind. **Whatever gets your attention will get you.**”¹ But Rick also reminded us that “Every temptation is an opportunity to do good. On the path to spiritual maturity, even temptation becomes a stepping-stone rather than a stumbling block when you realize that it is just as much an occasion to do the right thing as it is to do the wrong thing. *Temptation simply provides the choice.*”²

Because all of these things are true, even we who are the “core members” (and perhaps *especially* we) do well to frequently join the psalmist in crying out to God, “*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting*” (Psalm 139:23-24).

Attached with this *Laptop* is a set of questions for self-examination that may be useful in allowing God to reveal “the smudges on the glass” of your heart . . . and mine.

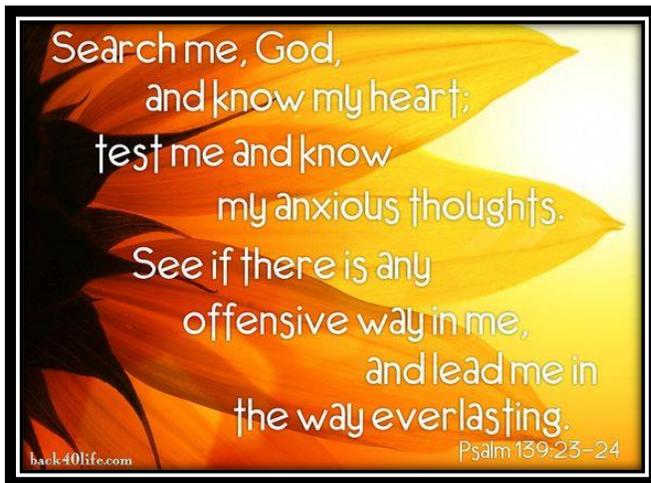
God’s invitation to us is always and forever
“Come closer! Come in farther! Come up higher!”
 May it be so for us in this day.

Dave

Questions for Personal Examination

As we make our way through Passion Week, it's pretty easy for those of us who are reasonably active churchgoers to "go through the motions" without taking our own Sin as seriously as we need to do in order to have clean hands and hearts before the Lord. For that reason, I invite you to join me in asking ourselves the following questions in the spirit of Psalm 139:23-24: Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

1. Am I absolutely honest in all of my dealings?
2. Am I an encourager?
3. Am I critical of other people?
4. Am I harboring resentment?
5. Am I impatient?
6. Am I irritable or easily offended?
7. Am I jealous when others succeed?
8. Am I nurturing my relationship with God through prayer and the Word?
9. Am I prideful?
10. Am I too concerned about "things" and "stuff"?
11. Am I trustworthy?
12. Am I willing to do anything God wants me to do?
13. Am I willing to leave a wrong impression uncorrected?
14. Are there any habits from which I need to be free?
15. Are there persons from whom I need to ask forgiveness?
16. Are there persons I need to forgive?
17. Are there persons to whom I need to make restitution?
18. Are there secret sins I excuse but should forsake?
19. Do hurt feelings keep me from serving God?
20. Do I "blow up"?
21. Do I bear grudges?
22. Do I become angry easily?
23. Do I complain and whine?
24. Do I have a right attitude toward church leaders?
25. Do I have a right attitude toward other church members?
26. Do I have anything that doesn't rightly belong to me?
27. Do I honor my marriage vows in every way?
28. Do I keep my mind pure?
29. Do I keep my promises?
30. Do I really believe in God's power to cleanse any sin, to change any life, to heal any heart?
31. Do I seek material blessings more than spiritual ones?
32. Have I been dishonest with God?
33. Have I broken any promise or pledge I've made to God?
34. Have I hurt other church members by talking about their faults?
35. Have I paid my debts to others?
36. Is my home a testimony for Jesus?
37. Is the reputation of others safe in my hands?
38. Is there anything I would be unwilling to give up if God asked me to do it?
39. When I "speak the truth," do I do so in love?
40. Am I willing to do what I need to do to allow God to correct these faults?



¹ Rick Warren, *What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Zondervan, 2002, 2012), p. 209.

² Warren, p. 200.

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For the word of God is full of living power. It is sharper than the sharpest knife, cutting deep into our innermost thoughts and desires. It exposes us for what we really are. Nothing in all creation can hide from him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes. This is the God to whom we must explain all that we have done.

That is why we have a great High Priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God. Let us cling to him and never stop trusting him. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same temptations we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it (Hebrews 4:12-16).

If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong (1 John 1:9).

Our Father, You who are the Light of our lives and our only Source of Hope, we come into your Presence in memory of Your incredible love for us as expressed on the Cross of Jesus. To be honest, though, we also come with our hearts in that rather constant state of inner noisiness that characterizes our lives.

We come because there is a part of us that hungers to experience the quiet center that Jesus demonstrated long ago . . . though honesty compels us to admit that we also fear such quietness and silence. We resist bringing to You our anxiety, our self-centeredness, our worldliness. We fear the purity and the power of Your Presence. Frequently we even resist being loved.

Help us as we struggle toward honesty and openness with You. Guide us as we move from *What Wondrous Love Is This* through *Thou are Worthy* to *Hallelujah!* *What a Savior!* Amen.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Words: Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
Music: Lowell Mason (1792-1872)

