

FINISHING STRONG BY STARTING AT THE END

FINISH LINE

Finish Line Contents:

Finish Line Introduction.....	pg. 2
Week 1 Devo 1.....	pg. 3
Week 1 Devo 2.....	pg. 6
Week 1 Devo 3.....	pg. 8
Week 2 Devo 1.....	pg. 12
Week 2 Devo 2.....	pg. 14
Week 2 Devo 3.....	pg. 16
Week 3 Devo 1.....	pg. 17
Week 3 Devo 2.....	pg. 18
Week 3 Devo 3.....	pg. 20
Week 4 Devo 1.....	pg. 22
Week 4 Devo 2.....	pg. 24
Week 4 Devo 3.....	pg. 25



Emerge /Elevate Sermon Series
(Aug. 24 – Sept. 14, 2011)
By: Nathan Wilder

Finish Line...Finishing strong by starting at the end.

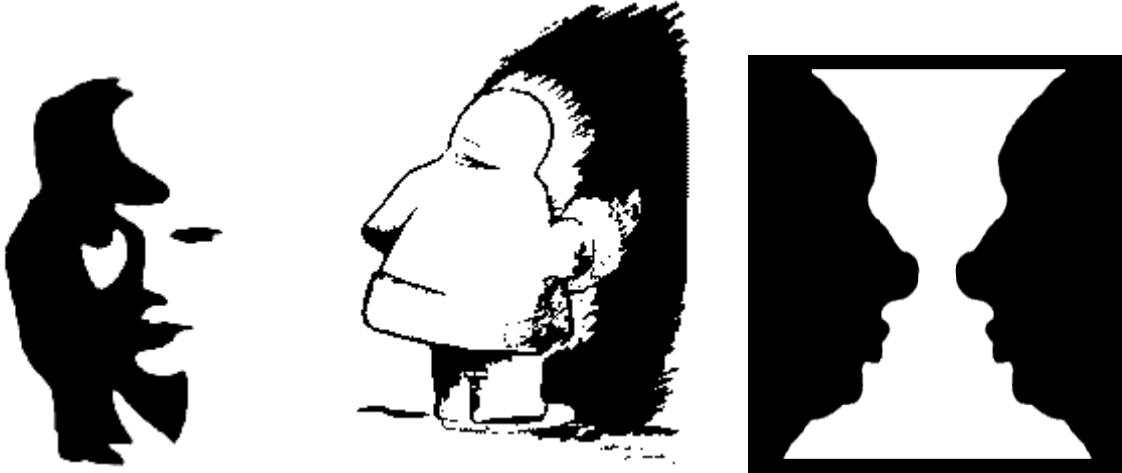
In student ministry, we are going to fast forward this year to the Finish Line (the end of the year). Determining how you want to finish will impact how you start. In order to run through the finish line spiritually strong, you need to know how to start and how to run the race...you need a coach...you need a motivator...you need a pep talk...a locker room talk...you need to hear from Jesus...Matthew 10...

Download Devotionals: EmergeCommunity.com
 ElevateCommunity.com

Week of August 24
Devotional 1

(sermon podcast: EmergeCommunity.com and ElevateCommunity.com)

Title- Finish Line...Running the race through God's perspective.
The Bottom Line- Are you looking at this world through your God glasses?



Allow each member of the family to look at the above optical illusions. Give a prize to the family member who found all of the pictures first! (and then give everyone a prize for doing their best!)

In the first picture, did you locate the man playing the saxophone? In the same picture, did you find the face of a lady?

In the second picture, were you able to see the face looking toward the left? Did you also see the Eskimo?

In the third picture, did you locate the vase? What about the two guys staring at each other?

Two people may be looking at the same picture but they see things differently. It all depends on your perspective, or point of view. *Perspective* is defined by www.dictionary.com as "a mental view or outlook." In other words, your perspective is like a pair of glasses through which you see the world. People with different perspectives, look at the similar situations differently.

The moment we became Christians, we have the opportunity to put on God's glasses and look at everything through His eyes.

One day you might have the opportunity to be a father or a mother. Think about this...one day you were not a father and then the next day you became a father. At the MOMENT of birth, you go from wife to mom or from husband to dad. Instead of just one title (husband), you now have 2 titles (husband and dad). Because of the birth of your new child, you now have a new title. Along with this new title, you now have a different perspective on life. Things that you used to think were important are no longer important. You used to be selfish, but now you care more about the baby than yourself. The MOMENT of birth changed your perspective forever!

In the same way, your spiritual birth (the moment you became a Christian), changed everything. You used to live for yourself, but at the MOMENT you decided to follow Jesus, you now live for Him. You now look at the world through your Jesus glasses and not your own glasses.

Your perspective changes the MOMENT you became a father or a mother. Your perspective also changes the MOMENT you became a Christian.

Christians (who have their God glasses on) should look at this world through a radically different perspective than non-Christians.

Read what 2 Corinthians 5:15-17 says about this different perspective:

Verse 15 lets us know that because Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and rose from the grave, He earned the right for us to STOP living for ourselves and START living for Him.

Verses 16-17 challenges us that as a Christian, we should STOP looking at everything with worldly glasses on and START looking at everything with God glasses on.

Discuss how Christians and non-Christians should look at the following areas of life differently:

Desires:

- a. World- Do whatever feels good.
- b. Christians- Deny yourself and take up your cross (Luke 9:23).

Materials:

- a. World- Get all you can while your on earth.
- b. Christians- Don't focus on earthly things, but on heavenly things and treasures (Matt 6:19-21, Ph3:18-20).

Motivation:

- a. World- Do everything for yourself.
- b. Christians- Do it for God (1 Cor 10:31, Col 3:17).

Acceptance

- a. World- Please others.
- b. Christians- Please God (Gal. 1:10).

Life and Death

- a. World- Live for now because everything's over when you die.
- b. Christians- To die is gain, because I'll get to spend eternity with Jesus in heaven (Ph 1:20-21).

It is becoming more and more clear that a Christian's perspective on life is radically different than a non-Christian's perspective. Non-Christians only have the world to look forward to. They do not realize that everything in this world is temporary. They do not realize that the only things that we will bring with us are the things that we have done that are in connection with Jesus. This is why Christians have a radically different perspective. Christians are more motivated by the things that come after this life (heaven) than the things during our life on earth. Paul encourages us with the same message in the book of Colossians. Check it out:

Col 3:1-2

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Our minds are transformed and renewed by reading the Bible. The more time we spend reading the Bible the more transformed our minds will be. The more our minds are transformed, the more we will keep our God glasses on. The more we have our God glasses on, the more our perspective is like Christ's. Take time to read Paul's challenge to us in Romans 12:

Romans 12:1-2

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ²

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

The Challenge: Everyday, put your God glasses on and see the world as God sees it!

Week of August 24
Devotional 2

Title- Finish Line...God Size VISION and FAITH
The Bottom Line- Accomplishing God size VISION requires God size FAITH!

Jerry Falwell was a man of God size VISION and God size FAITH to accomplish the God size VISION! Jerry passed away a couple of years ago. He accomplished more for God's kingdom than a thousand people combined! His legacy is absolutely amazing and its hard to fathom how he was able to do what he did.

Jerry was the pastor for Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, VA for 55 years! This church was planted with a gigantic vision. They envisioned a few of them would be able to reach thousands one day. The church has over 10,000 regular attenders today! Jerry also was the founder of Liberty University! This school started in the early 1970s with less than a 100 students. Today, the University has over 50,000 students enrolled with goals of reaching 100,000 students in the near future!

Jerry was a modern day example of believing in the Genesis 1:1 God. It has been said that if you can believe in the first 5 words of the Bible, than you can believe the entire book! If you can believe that "In the beginning, God created..." than you can believe God for anything. If He can speak the world into existence and create the heavens and the earth from nothing, than He can do anything. He is bigger than logic. He is bigger than, physics. He is bigger than what our little human minds can grasp!

As a family, let's look at 1 example of God proving His faithfulness to His people.

For the following example of God proving His FAITHFULNESS to His people, answer the following questions and be encouraged that God can make miracles happen, which leaves us in awe of our amazing God!

- a. What makes sense (logical from the human perspective)?
- b. What makes no sense (not logical from the human perspective)?
- c. What makes God sense (logical from God's perspective)?
- d. What leaves us in "Awe" sense (God proving His faithfulness...when it is humanly impossible...we are left in "Awe" of Him).?

EXAMPLE 1: Moses- God parted the Red Sea.
This account is found in Exodus 14 and 15.

- a. What makes sense? Read Exodus 14:10-12.

It would make sense for the Israelites to continue to serve and submit to the Egyptians. It made sense that they desired to escape from Egypt when they continued to get mistreated. So, this is what they did. The Israelites

left Egypt, but the Egyptians ran after them with the hopes of recapturing them.

- b. What makes no sense? Read Exodus 14:13-18.

The Israelites' backs were up against the wall. On one side of them, the Egyptians were running towards them and on the other side of them was the Red Sea! The Egyptians had the Israelites trapped. What would you do in this situation? I would probably jump into the Red Sea and start swimming...It did not make sense, or seem logical, for the Israelites to just sit there, to be still, and to trust God when the Egyptians had them cornered.

- c. What makes God sense? Read Exodus 14:21-30.

You see, miracles make sense to God, but not to us. God has the power to make supernatural things happen (things that are extraordinary). Israel chose to stray away from human logic (to run and jump in to the Red Sea in the hopes of escaping) and trust in the power of God!

- d. What makes "Awe" sense? Read 14:31-15:21.

The Israelites had to be nervous when the Egyptians had them cornered and were getting closer and closer. But, they trusted God to keep His promise...God was FAITHFUL to His promise! When the Israelites saw the Red Sea part, walked through, and saw the Red Sea crash down on the Egyptians, they were left in "Awe" of God! It was difficult for them to find words to express how awesome God was for coming through for them. God's FAITHFULNESS showed up in an undeniable way to the Israelites!

The Challenge: Pray for God's VISION on your life. Pray that God will help you to have FAITH to accomplish that vision. Now, go for it!

Week of August 24
Devotional 3

Title- Finish Line...Living Missionally
The Bottom Line- God Size Vision + God Size Faith = The Jesus Movement



Go around the table and ask each other to describe the above logos. For example, look at each logo and express the first things that come to mind when you look at a particular logo. For example, when I see the Golden Arches (McDonalds), I think of Ronald McDonald, Double Cheese Burgers, Happy Meals, and the Dollar Menu!

Just like a company has a logo, we have a life logo. When others think about us, our logo comes to their mind. Everything that we represent, believe, etc. produces our life logo.

So, spend a little time describing each others logo. Have some fun with this! For example, what are the first things you think of when you think of the personality qualities, character qualities and life ambitions of each family member? This is their life logo.

Now, spend some time talking about what you want your life logo to look like. For example, allow each family member to describe an area or areas of their life that they would like to improve. Maybe someone in your family wants their life logo to include that they are a patient person but this is an area they need to work on as they can't wait to be done with this devotional and go to the beach!

As a family, challenge each other to have the following three elements as a part of your life logo and join the Jesus Movement that is sweeping across this generation! After answering each of the questions following each element, you will be able to determine if you are already a part of the Jesus movement or that you need to jump on the J. train!

Three elements to a life logo that changes culture and furthers the Jesus movement:

Element 1: Continually falling in love with Jesus.

Read Psalm 78:1-7.

Litmus Test:

- a. If you care about passing the baton of Truth to the next generation, there is a good chance that you are in the middle of the Jesus movement.
- b. If it is a priority for you to see lives changed both now and forever, there is a good chance that you are in the Jesus movement.
- c. If your spiritual goals fade away faster than your last movie theater experience, there is a good chance you are not in the Jesus movement (Move Theater Experience- you know when you are all in to a movie and you walk out of the theater and you still feel like your in the movie. Well, usually this feeling fades within a couple of hours. The life change that happens within the Jesus Movement should not fade like this.)
- d. If you are reflecting Jesus by the way you live your life, there is a good chance you are a part of the Jesus movement.
- e. If you are more about your goals than God's goals and you find your goals is what wakes you up in the morning, you are probably not a part of the Jesus movement.

Element 2: Serving others to further the Jesus Movement (Matt. 13:1-9, 20:28).

Read Matthew 13:1-9. God multiplies spiritual seed that falls on good soil. It seems that serving others in the name of Jesus helps to create good soil. Therefore, the more that we serve others, the more seed will fall on good soil. When seed falls on good soil, spiritual mathematics occurs. Spiritual mathematics majors on multiplication while human mathematics minors on addition. In other words, when we try to grow God's kingdom ourselves, numbers may increase by addition. But when we trust God to grow the spiritual seeds and we do things His way, numbers exponentially increase and a movement begins that out lives your life.

For example, a couple of years ago, the 8th Grade Leadership team (E-Core) served the city of Miami with serve projects throughout the region for a week. One of the projects included giving a struggling family a home makeover which was very hard work in the Miami heat. When the

project was completed, it meant the world to this family. The local news heard about this story and aired it to 13 million people plus!

Do you see what happened!? God took this spiritual seed that was planted by a team who was farming in the name of Jesus and He multiplied it in a way that we never could on our own!

Litmus Test:

- a. If you are planting spiritual seeds by serving others and witnessing a multiplication of the seeds, than you are most likely in the Jesus movement.
- b. If you are serving your neighbor so that you can get something in return and you are not serving your neighbor for an eternal investment, then you are probably not in the Jesus movement.
- c. If you are reproducing disciples of Christ, you are in the Jesus movement (12 disciples to millions and counting)!
- d. If you are being entertained by Christianity and your life is not being changed, than you are not in the Jesus movement.

Element 3: Take risks like Jesus to further His movement (Mathew 27-28).

Read Matthew 27-28. These chapters are some of the most intense chapters in the Bible and in the life of Jesus. Jesus trusted in His Father so much that He was willing to risk it all of the sake of accomplishing God's will for His life! And God came through didn't He?!

How much have we risked for the cause of Christ?

There is a pastor in Miami that shepherds people that many pastors would not be willing to care for. These are the types of people that fall through the cracks of life, are lonely, have a very broken and unstable life, etc. This pastor somehow makes it happen with zero budget dollars and zero facilities. Time after time, he and his wife have seen God provide financially for them and the church. This couple has risked a lot and are living a difficult but blessed life because of it.

There was a commercial pilot that risked his occupation in order to follow God's leading. God wanted him to resign from being a pilot and go to another line of work. This other line of work gave him no financial security but it was what God wanted him to do. This pilot risked it all and followed Jesus.

As a family, list the things that would be easy for you to give up for the cause of Christ and then list the things that would very difficult to give up.

As a family, pray that we would be willing to risk it all for Jesus in order to follow His lead.

Litmus test:

- a. When total dependency on Jesus becomes the norm for you, you are a part of the Jesus movement.
- b. If you are stuck in complacency and comfort, you might not be a part of the Jesus movement.

The Challenge: Lead others in the Jesus movement by staying in love with Him, by serving others for Him, and by risking it all because of Him!

Week of August 31
Devotional 1

(sermon podcast: EmergeCommunity.com and ElevateCommunity.com)

Title- Finish Line... The Parent's Responsibility
The Bottom Line- Elevating the parent to child/teenager relationship.

It is common for the parent to misunderstand the child/teenager and for the child/teenager to misunderstand the parent. There are many reasons why this happens.

As a family, go around the table and ask each other the following questions and then spend some time answering them.

What is your favorite style of Music?
Who is your favorite musical artist?
What style of clothes do you like to wear?
What is your favorite TV show?

Most likely, as your family has answered through these questions, it is clear that there are generational differences on our preferences in the areas that were just discussed.

If the parent and child/teenager can get into each other's shoes, we may have a better chance to understanding each other and the lens that we are looking through.

Today, lets focus on increasing our understanding of the goal of a biblical parent.

Lets play a matching game as we look at 3 passages as it relates to the Parent's role in raising the next generation.

Match the passage with the correct description of that passage:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|----|---|
| _____ Deuteronomy 6:4-9 | A. | A parent's commitment to pass the baton of Truth to their kids and to their grandkids. |
| _____ Psalm 78:1-7 | B. | A charge for parents to biblically equip their kids. |
| _____ Ephesians 6:4 | C. | A parent's real love for God overflows into the lives of their kids as they journey through life. |

The Challenge: Parents, pray that you would be able to fulfill the biblical responsibility to raising your kids.

Children/Teenager, pray that you would be able to understand that your parents are doing their best to fulfill their biblical mandate to lovingly raise you under the instruction of the Lord.

Week of August 31
Devotional 2

Title- Finish Line...Appreciating the Parent's Influence
The Bottom Line- Parents' decisions impact the next generations!

There used to be a talk show entitled the Jerry Springer Show. Do you remember watching some of the episodes? Crazy!! In a one hour show, the TV viewer would witness major conflict between the main characters, the audience, and the host. In just one hour, so many differences in opinions, actions, thoughts, etc. that would lead to major conflict.

Just like the talk show, there are so many opportunities for conflict within the home. Thousands of decisions are made everyday by parents and kids/teens. When you combine the fast paced life that we all live with the thousands of decisions that we are required to make on a daily basis, the outcome can lead to arguments and misunderstandings.

Today, in our quest to better understand each other as Parents and kids/teens, we are going to look at the influence that parents have on their kids. We are going to find that good or bad, parents have major influence on their kids.

Read Exodus 17:3.

In this verse, we find the Israelites grumbling, complaining, and down right mad at Moses! They were inconvenienced because of their thirst and they were ready to let Moses "have it" for leading them out of Egypt and placing them in this position of great thirst. Somehow the Israelites forgot that God can perform miracles like the parting of the Red Sea!!

The point that I am trying to make here is that the adult Israelites who decided to focus on their inconvenience, who decided to forget about the miraculous God who provides, who decided to focus on themselves and express their discontent to God's leader...they also lost sight that their kids were watching and listening to their every move and every word!

Check out what happens 40 years later when the kids of these complaining Israelites grew up. Notice the behavior trend as you read Numbers 20:2-5.

Did you see it? The children went through times of inconvenience decades following their parents times of inconvenience. The children grew up under the influence of complaining, grumbling, and faithless parents and guess what?? When times of inconvenience occurred, the next generation copied the behavior of the previous generation.

Parents have major influence on their kids! So the question to parents is how are you using your influence?

The Challenge: Parents, as your kids copy your behavior, attitude, actions, walk with God, priorities, etc., are they pleasing God or not?

We as parents have a gigantic task as the next generation listens to and observes us. What are we going to do with this responsibility of influence?

Use your influence to point your kids to Jesus!

Week of August 31
Devotional 3

Title: Finish Line...Honoring God by honoring your parents
The Bottom Line: As kids, we have an opportunity to bring God glory by honoring our parents.

In 2004, John Elway was inducted into the National Football League Hall of Fame following a phenomenal career. His daughter had the honor of introducing him so that he could deliver his Hall of Fame speech. You would think that she would talk about how awesome it was to watch her dad scramble in the back field, make miraculous throws, score touchdowns, etc...but this is not what she focused on. In her speech, she went on to express that all she cared about at the games was for her dad to turn around and wave to her in the stands. Wow!! This story gets me every time. Fans worship John Elway's performance on the field and all she wanted daddy to do was to turn around and wave. This story reminds me that my kids number one concern is not my performance at the work place but it is the attention that I give them.

John Elway's daughter symbolizes what we all feel towards our parents. We want their attention. We want their influence. Please read Proverbs 17:6 as the writer validates this desire.

From a secular point of view, MTV has stated that teens want to be inspired and impacted by their parents. I don't know if teens will ever admit this though! For example, I always told my dad not to come to my baseball practices and games in High School but I really deep down wanted him there!

Ephesians 6:2 tells us to honor our parents. One way that we can honor our parents is to tell them that you appreciate them.

The challenge: Communicate to your parents how much you love them and how much you desire their attention, their inspiration, their impact, and their influence.

Spend some good time thinking about the many times your parents have provided all of these things for you and then call them and thank them.

Do this and you will be honoring God as you honor your parents.

Week of September 7

Devotional 1

(sermon podcast: EmergeCommunity.com and ElevateCommunity.com)

Title: Finish Line...Self Image

The Bottom Line: Who we are in Christ!

Ephesians 1 and 2 reveal a beautiful description of who we are in Christ. As a Christian discussing the topic of self image, we need to begin with our image in Christ. We need to understand 3 major truths about our image.

First, we are chosen! Read Ephesians 1:11-14. God pursues us with purposeful intent. Nothing about us is an accident. Nothing about us is by chance. We are special and on the forefront of God's mind. We are chosen! Our inheritance is guaranteed and secured. We are forgiven. God has His hands wrapped around our lives. He has a mission for us. He has designed us to build up His body and advance His Kingdom. As a family, repeat after me: "In Christ, we are chosen!" Good!

Second, we are alive! Read Ephesians 2:4-5. Many times, we gloss over the truth that God has made us alive with Christ. In other words, we were born dead in our sin. The only way that we can breath spiritual life is to be made alive. God has the only power to do this. We are not dead zombies, but we are God's children and full of spiritual life. As a family, repeat after me: "I am alive!" Good!

Third, we are unified! Read Ephesians 2:11-22. We are unified with God in the sense that we have access to Him because of what Christ did on the Cross. We are unified with each other in the sense that we are God's body and building with Christ as the head and the cornerstone. If you have ever played a sport and have been on a team, you know that there is a special bond that is created when you spend an entire season playing together. The longer the team plays together, the stronger the bond. The thing that is amazing about God's kingdom, is that we share a bond that the world can't even begin to match. I'm sure you have had the privilege of meeting a Christian at some point on the mission field or in a conversation locally and you felt like you and this person knew each other before you met each other. There is no bond like the God bond!

The next couple of devotionals will be very practical and relevant when it comes to addressing the topic of self image. For now though, appreciate who you are in Christ!

The Challenge: Share with someone this week about the foundation of your self image in Christ!

Week of September 7
Devotional 2

Title: Finish Line...Outer Beauty
The Bottom Line: God made you beautiful!

The world is misdirected on their standard and definition of beauty. Many are going to extreme measures to reach a standard of beauty that is not real nor achievable. So many are struggling with this area in life. In the book, "Preparing Your Daughter For Every Woman's Battle," 25 middle school girls were asked to describe the perfect girl. Their answers were as follows: thin, blonde, popular, beautiful, athletic, curves, has a boyfriend, confident, straight white teeth, no zits.

In 2003, Americans spent 9.4 billion dollars on cosmetic surgery so that their appearance would be "improved." Check out how the trend on money spent in the attempt to improve the outer appearance. In 1990, 33 billion dollars was spent on weight loss programs. In the late 90s, 50 billion dollars was spent. In less than a decade, the dollar amount almost doubled!

Research suggests that about one percent (1%) of female adolescents have anorexia. That means that about one out of every one hundred young women between ten and twenty are starving themselves, sometimes to death.

More than half of teenaged girls are, or think they should be, on diets. They want to lose all or some of the forty pounds that females naturally gain between 8 and 14. About three percent of these teens go too far, becoming anorexic or bulimic.

You might recognize the following names and their struggles with appearance. In 2004, Mary-Kate Olsen has entered treatment for an eating disorder, according to her publicist.

Katharine McPhee doesn't want to hide anymore. The "American Idol" runner-up comes out as a recovering bulimic in the new issues of *People* and *Teen People*, which hit newsstands on June 30th a couple of years ago.

What does God say about outside beauty?

Genesis 1:27 says that God created mankind in His image.

When we don't celebrate how God created us, we are saying He made a mistake.

Proverbs 31:30 says that a woman who fears God is to be praised, not charm because it is deceptive and not beauty because it is fleeting.

Our outside appearance continues to change, so if your trying to make your outsides look a certain way, it will be a lifetime obsession that will never reach satisfaction.

The Psalmist says in chapter 139:13-14 that we were knit together by God and that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Like the Psalmist, we should give God praise for this, not question Him.

We will get into this in the next Devotional, but for short, God spends a lot of time focusing on inward beauty, not outside “beauty.”

So, God has made all of us beautiful! We don’t need to pay any attention to the man made worldly standard that satan often uses to get us down. So it doesn’t matter if your short or if your tall, if you have big nose or big feet...God made you the way that He wanted to...and it’s beautiful!

The Challenge: Everyone in the family repeat after me: say: I am beautiful.

 Good! Say it again....and believe it!

Week of September 7
Devotional 3

Title: Finish Line...Inner Beauty
The Bottom Line: It's all about the inside!

When it comes to beauty, God spends a lot of time focusing on the inside more than the outside. Our focus, time, and energy should be spent perfecting our inside with character qualities such as integrity, humility, authenticity, faithfulness, etc. so that we can get closer and closer to the image of Christ.

To illustrate, find two drinking glasses. Find a sparkling clean one from your dish washer and then find one that is clean but looks dirty (stained) on the outside (maybe that one that you haven't touched for a year that is located in the back of your kitchen cabinet on the top shelf!)

Now, pour dirty water into the clean glass and pour clean water into the "stained glass" that looks dirty. At first glance, your kids may go for the clean glass and end up drinking dirty water! Remember the "stained" glass is clean, it just doesn't look clean on the outside. In this case, the good water is located in the "dirty" looking glass. Once again, we have established that you can't judge a book by its cover!

Go ahead and open your Bibles to Matthew 23:25-26. Straight from the mouth of Jesus we have the foundation of the above illustration.

If we were to all be honest, who are we really trying to impress? This will dictate who and what we are living for. This will determine what our standard of beauty is. The world would tell us to make sure that we have a clean glass, wash it 10 times a day, make sure it sparkles and glistens. The world doesn't care too much about the liquid on the inside.

In this case, God created the "stained" glass and He thinks it is beautiful (see previous lesson)! Again, He spends a lot of time focusing on how to have clean water on the inside of the glass which leads to life while the dirty water leads to death.

There used to be a show on TV entitled: The Swan. It was a show that transformed the outer appearance through cosmetic surgeries. People on the show testified that they were changed from the outside in. The show didn't last long because the outside can never change the inside. The show got it backwards! Change comes from the inside out and Jesus is the only one that can do this beginning with a changed heart and mind (Romans 12:1-2).

Please read 1 Samuel 16:7. God is communicating to us that He looks to the heart while the world stops at the outer appearance.

So again, I will ask: Who are we really trying to impress? Paul speaks to this issue.

Please read Galatians 1:10 and answer the following question:

Who is Paul saying that we should try to impress?

He is very clear that followers of Christ only try to win God's approval and not the world's.

The challenge: Print out the verses, Galatians 1:10 and 1 Samuel 16:7 and tape it to your bathroom mirror.

Every time you look at your outer appearance, remember that God is your only audience and He is more concerned about your inner beauty!

Week of September 14
Devotional 1

(sermon podcast: EmergeCommunity.com and ElevateCommunity.com)

Title: Finish Line...Purity

Bottom Line: As Jesus is Pure, so should we be pure.

There is a question in Psalm 15 that asks who is eligible to live on God's Holy Hill. We should all be interested in how God answers this question through the Psalmist since eternity is on the line! As you read the answer found in the next four verses, you may be thinking to yourself: "Wow! There is no way that I can live up to the standard that is listed here. Someone would have to be perfect in order to live up to these words and then be able to meet God in heaven!" You are right to be thinking this way. When we read this passage through a New Testament lens, we see that it points the reader to the cross of Christ and His perfect blood that covers His followers. Colossians 1:21-22 brings all of this together and communicates that followers of Christ will be able to join God on His perfect hill because God sees them through the perfect blood that covers our imperfections. This is great news for Christ followers!

Let's validate that God is pure and holy. First, the word, holy, is used to describe God 532 times in the Bible. It is the only word that describes God repeated three times in a row (Isaiah 6:3, Revelation 4:8)!

As a family, try and come up with synonyms for the word, holy. Were any of these on your list? Sanctified, unadulterated, uncontaminated, unpolluted, clean, spotless, dirt free, spick and span, squeaky clean, clear, sterilized, germ free, immaculate, shiny, glossy, perfect, sound, unblemished, just what the doctor ordered, untarnished, flawless, blameless, faultless, consecrated, sacred, spiritually perfect, spiritually pure, untainted by evil, untainted by sin, saintly.

Second, there are biblical examples of God's holiness and the truth that He is SET APART from anything or anyone else.

Example #1: God is so SET APART that if we were to see His face, we would experience immediate death (Exodus 33:18-23, 34:5, 34:29).

Example #2: God is so SET APART that, back in the Old Testament, priests would have to go through a process of cleansing before entering into God's presence. If they didn't, they would experience death.

Example #3: God is so SET APART that there were people back in Biblical times who would not say or write down the name of God, Yahweh, unless they washed up and changed clothes first!

God is clearly Holy and Pure!

Remember that in order to be connected with God, who is holy, you must be covered by the blood of Jesus.

The Challenge: Make sure that you are a follower of Jesus.
Join with the angels today and Praise God for His holiness!

Week of September 14
Devotional 2

Title: Finish Line...God's Standards
Bottom Line: God's standards are perfect!

So many times, we seem to lower God's standards. I think there are many reasons why we tend to do this. One of the primary reasons is that we don't want to feel bad about ourselves when we are not living like we should be living. And then, when we lower His standards, we don't want to admit that we are (again, so we can feel good about ourselves, even though in reality we are displeasing our Master).

Are you ready for a litmus test to see if you are lowering God's standard? In other words, lets see if we are bringing God down to our level (instead of adjusting our lives to His level). So, here is the test: If you can read through the teachings of Jesus and still feel good about your self and your spiritual condition, than most likely you are lowering God's standards to your own standards. On the other hand, if you feel convicted and challenged, than most likely you are keeping God's standards where they need to be.

So what are God's standards? Lets take a look at them.

First, God calls us to be pure with our actions. You will find an example of this when you read Matthew 5:48 and the passage found in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.

Second, God calls our thoughts to be pure. So, we can have the right action, but if the thought going along with the action is off, than we are still impure. Read 2 Corinthians 10:5 and Philippians 4:8 to back this point up.

Third, God calls our motives to be pure. So, we can have the right action and thought, but if our motives are wrong, than we are still impure. Read Psalm 19:14 and Matthew 5:28 and you will be reminded that even our motives need to be pure.

As we have learned, God's standards are perfect. We get into trouble when we lower these standards to what we want them to be. Of course, we will never get our actions, thoughts, and motives right every time, but this is when the need for a Savior comes in. Jesus saves us from our imperfections!!

The Challenge: Wash yourself with God's Word in relation to His standards daily.
Fight against the urge to lower God's standards to please our sin nature.

Week of September 14
Devotional 3

Title: Finish Line...The Sin Process leading to Disaster
Bottom Line: Sin is down right ugly, stay away from it!

You've probably heard it said before that it is very wise to begin with the end in mind. In other words, if you don't know how you are going to finish something, then you're not going to know how to start it. For example, when you last purchased some legos for your kid, the top of the box has the final product on it. It would be silly to put one piece of the lego project on the front box. By seeing the end product, you are knowledgeable on how to begin building.

I want to take this same approach with sin. We are going to walk through the five stage process of sin, but begin at the end. We are going to find that the end product of sin is ugly and not good at all. If we can keep the result of sin in the forefront of our minds, then we have a better chance of staying away from the temptation that leads to the sin.

So, lets begin at the end, which is Stage 5.

Read Romans 1:26B-32. This passage of scripture is a description of the result of sin. At this stage, you are experiencing disaster and are far away from God. You are wondering to yourself: "How in the world did I end up here!" Well, we are going to look at how a person ends up here by observing Stage 4 in the sin process.

Read Romans 1:24-26. This section expresses God giving the people who have chosen to sin over to the result of their sin. This is a very scary stage to find yourself in. It is a stage away from the result of sin and also you are removed from the umbrella of protection that God provides. The psalmist says in Psalm 121:5-8 that God watches over His followers. At this stage, He lifts His protective watch and leaves you vulnerable to direct contact from the evil one. In order to find out how a person arrives at Stage 4, we must look at Stage 3.

Read Romans 1:22-23. The person in Stage 3 of the Sin Process finds themselves having replaced God by worshipping idols. They have moved from giving their attention to God to giving it to gods. They have formed God into what they want Him to be. How can you reach a point in your life where you are giving up on the creator of the Universe and turning to a god who is empty and fake? To answer this question, we must observe Stage 2.

Read Romans 1:21. This Stage is filled with followers of Jesus who no longer care about giving Him praise. Rather than pleasing Jesus, they would rather please themselves. They give themselves credit when things are good and blame God when things are bad. This is a very dangerous stage because on the outside, this person probably looks the same and is still going through the usual Christian routines. But, on the inside, this

person is moving away from God, becoming stale, laughs at the things that hurt God, and are moving briskly down the slippery slope of sin. Stage 2 is very common, so lets see how people get here by looking at Stage 1.

Read Romans 1:18-20. Those in this stage know the truth, but reject it, suppress it, ignore it, and bury it. They find themselves at a point of temptation and choose the to sin over God. In other words, the flesh beats the Spirit on this occasion. The desire that comes from the sin nature is stronger that the desire to please the Spirit.

So, the end result of sin is not good and leads to death. This is what we MUST keep in the forefront of our minds at the point of temptation! Lets get real practical. The next time you find yourself at the point of temptation and you are deciding between self or God, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is it worth losing my Job/Ministry?
2. Is it worth losing my Spouse?
3. Is it worth losing my Kids?
4. Is it worth losing my Friends?
5. Is it worth losing my Testimony?

If you can be disciplined enough to work through these questions, the temptation that once seemed so big, is reduced to the reality if what it is...a carrot from satan that leads to death and destruction both in your life and those around you.

The Challenge: Post the 5 Stages of Sin and the 5 questions to ask yourself when at the point of temptation somewhere you will see often and encourage someone else to do the same.

Choose the full life that only comes from God and not the empty carrot that comes from satan!