

Unbroken Fellowship—Staying Off God's Naughty List

A Seven Day Devotional on Proverbs 6:16-19

By Sharon Stults

There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue and hands that shed innocent blood, ^a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. Proverbs 6:16-19

In this day of grace, it's too easy for believers to become careless about sin.

Too careless to recognize it.

Too careless to repent and renounce it.

Too careless to notice that sin attracts darkness and covers light.

Several Bible authors and Christ himself, list specific sins that anger God. The Apostle Paul inserts lists in three of his letters in I Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21 and Ephesians 5:3-6. In Revelation 22:12-16, the Apostle John gives his warnings about behaviors that are detestable to God. In Matthew 25:41-46, the disciple records a list from Jesus concerning the sinful ways people treat others. In the Old Testament, God inspires King Solomon to make a list of seven behaviors that God hates.

We will focus on Solomon's list, but I encourage you to read and study the other passages on your own. If we are in love with God, don't we want to avoid things that he loathes?

We'll take one day for each item on Solomon's list using the stories of seven different Bible characters. God wants us to understand the importance of his laws and precepts. This is why the Bible tells stories of people who attempted life as spiritual outlaws. There's nothing quite like a good story to caution us and help us remember a key idea.

Intimate friendship with God is a choice. We can choose for him to be an acquaintance if we prefer. Like any peripheral friend, we will know a few things about Him, but not his passions and dreams. Those things are known within the bonds of deep friendship. If we long for unbroken fellowship and intimacy with God, we must learn to recognize and reject the things he hates while embracing the things he loves.

May you know his heart better,

Sharon

Day One—Haughty Eyes

“Before a downfall the heart is haughty,” Proverbs 18:12.

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right, and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble,” Daniel 4:37.

There are several people in scripture who took hard falls due to arrogance, but King Nebuchadnezzar was the biggest swan dive of all. God demonstrated his authority to this proud king, who thought he was God, by preserving the three Hebrew slaves inside a furnace. To make his point clear, God then showed up in the middle of the fire himself. Nebuchadnezzar was impressed but not repentant.

Still waiting on Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge God’s supremacy, time passed before God poked the king’s inflated ego again. Time when the king could have repented but did not. God graciously warns Nebuchadnezzar, through a dream, of the terrible punishment he will suffer if he doesn’t change his ways. In fairness, rulers of that time were typically haughty and proud because they were taught to believe that they were gods, better than normal humans. Certainly better than a god he’d never heard of who ruled a raggedy group of former slaves and allowed them to be conquered by him, King Nebuchadnezzar.

This is why God didn’t strike Nebuchadnezzar down when he tried to force Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship him and then threw them into a furnace when they wouldn’t comply. Instead, God performed a merciful miracle to teach Nebuchadnezzar who was boss, universe-wise. It seems the lesson didn’t take.

After Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the prophet pleaded with his king to renounce his haughty ways. God gave the king a full year, understanding that massive changes needed to occur in Nebuchadnezzar’s heart and mind for him to truly understand that he was not The King, but merely, a king, and definitely not God. The warning was ignored. God caused something weirdly supernatural to take over Nebuchadnezzar’s body that temporarily turned him into an animal.

God decided to teach the entire nation of Babylon and the Israelites what can happen when someone exalts himself higher than God and looks upon others with haughty eyes. In the fourth chapter of Daniel, we hear Nebuchadnezzar telling this whole story, about his dream, the interpretation and his harrowing experience as a beast ending with his ultimate repentance and restoration.

There are lessons to learn here about how God deals with haughtiness.

- If you are fancying yourself smarter, better, faster, holier, than others in a prideful way, you are in danger of being disciplined, publicly. If you are looking down on people who make different choices than yours, like Nebuchadnezzar, you are setting yourself up for a

fall. If you are tooting your own horn about your accomplishments and choices, God may choose to humble you in interesting ways.

- God's mercy and patience are profound. He will send us experiences, teachings, conversations, books, dreams, and anything else that will get our attention concerning arrogance before he disciplines us.
- Don't mistake mercy for God's approval. The fiery furnace episode was a warning for Nebuchadnezzar. Instead of heeding it, in his own words, he continued to wander around his palace talking about his own wonderfulness and all his accomplishments.
- Don't ignore God's warnings. Think prayerfully to see if he has tried to get your attention on a matter through small humbling's and setbacks.
- The greater the arrogance, the greater the discipline. Nebuchadnezzar possessed massive power and authority, but he used it wrongly, arrogantly. Don't put it past God to find creative ways to remind us of his authority and rule if we get too big for our britches in a position of authority.

Prayer

Search, my heart, God. Show me any place where I am looking down on others. Show me places where I might be judging others or looking down on them. I recognize that when I do this, I am trying to put myself above you, the only one who has authority to judge righteously.

Day Two- A Lying Tongue

“The Lord detests lying lips but delights in those who are trustworthy,” Proverbs 12:22.

If there’s any uncertainty about how God hates lying, Solomon sprinkles verses like this through his book. For most believers, I don’t think our problem is that we lack understanding about how much God hates lies. The problem is that humans have redefined what it means to be truthful and untruthful.

I wondered about the origin of the phrase, “white lie.” Even in circles of believers, these kinds of lies are often acceptable because they are used to spare someone’s feelings (do these pants make me look fat?) or to withhold information that could cause someone to be upset. When I looked up the word history, I was horrified at its origins. Here’s an excerpt of what I found:

“It’s based on the ancient Western idea of opposites, represented in popular culture through *white* meaning good and *black* its evil antithesis. We have *white magic*, for example, beneficent magic that’s opposed to the malign black variety.

Along the same lines, a *white lie* is one that lacks evil intent, as opposed to a *black lie*, which is most certainly malevolent, though normally we don’t bother to specify that lies are evil. A white lie is harmless or trivial, frequently one said to avoid hurting someone’s feelings.”

So many red flags here but so little word space, so let me focus on just one. I’m going to restate the last sentence above to make my point. Even though a “white lie” is still a lie, and God hates all lying, these lies are okay because I’m sparing someone’s feelings or accomplishing other noble purposes.

Remember when Abraham lied about Sarah because he decided that was the only way to keep them both alive? (Genesis 20) Certainly, a noble cause. God told Abraham he’d be the father of nations. How was that going to work out if he or Sarah were killed? He had to lie to keep them safe, right? I’ve always had a judgey attitude about Abraham’s lies about Sarah until God convicted me of all the white lies I’ve told for less noble reasons. Abraham authentically feared for his life. Read the story to find out the scary and humiliating sequence of events Abraham’s white lie set into motion, though, for Sarah when he feared men more than God.

God-followers have adopted the ways of the world too much in this area just as Abraham did. I’ve not always told people the truth, for my noble reasons. We humans act like we know better than God, how to care for ourselves and others. Jesus said truth sets people free, but still, we

decide to withhold it for our own reasons. Sometimes it's self-preservation and other times we twist it around to try and make it a kindness or noble act.

This is exactly how Satan works with subtlety. He twists things around, turns them inside out and upside down and then convinces us it's all acceptable. He's good with us losing the conversational art of saying hard things in kind ways. Finding an affirming way to tell my friend that her new hairstyle is not as flattering as the old one, is not an easy task. It forces me to rely more deeply on the Holy Spirit to give me words that tell the truth but still bring life.

What about something more permanent, like a home remodel, career change, even a marriage? How do you remain honest when you believe someone has chosen something long-term and life-altering that sets off your Spidey senses? I've lied in every single one of these examples, when I thought people I cared about made poor choices. That's the coward's way out.

I'm learning to ask God to grant me words that bring life, hope and encouragement to those situations. People usually need to discover for themselves that they chose unwisely. My job is to be truth and grace to them, so that if the wheels come off, they still feel safe coming to me for prayer and comfort. I don't want any "I told you so's," to hang between us.

I also don't want any lies coming back to smack me in the face. Lies that affirmed their poor decision in the first place.

I promise that God will give you right things to say when you are tempted to lie. Read the red sections of the gospels and pay attention to how Jesus spoke to people. He never lied. He always spoke truth with love. That's our standard. Let's be done with white lies.

Prayer

God, I'm done with lying. I confess that I've tried to justify it. I renounce that sin. Please forgive me. Please grow my communication skills so that I may represent you well with my words the next time I'm tempted to lie.

Day Three—Hands That Shed Innocent Blood

2 Kings 21:1-6 “Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Hephzibah. ² And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. ³ For he rebuilt the high places that Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. ⁴ And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, “In Jerusalem will I put my name.” ⁵ And he built altars for all the host of heaven in ^{the}the two courts of the house of the LORD. ⁶ And he burned his son as an offering...”

2 Kings 24:1-4

“In his days, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant for three years. Then he turned and rebelled against him. ² And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldeans and bands of the Syrians and bands of the Moabites and bands of the Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by his servants the prophets. ³ Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the LORD, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, ⁴ and for the innocent blood that he had shed. For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD would not pardon.”

Wicked King Manasseh and his descendants participated, promoted, and led the Israelites of the northern kingdom of Judah into the worst sins imaginable, one of which was child sacrifice. These sins were so detestable to God he allowed Judah to be conquered and taken captive in degrees. (The first round of captivity included Daniel and his friends.) The King of Assyria captured King Manasseh with hooks years later (that sounds very painful) and then bound him up with bronze chains to be hauled back to Babylon as a prisoner. (2 Chronicles 33:11)

During his captivity, Manasseh repented to such a degree of sincerity that God restored him as King of Judah. Upon his return, all altars and shrines to false gods were torn down and destroyed and Manasseh ordered his people to worship the one true God only. Manasseh’s repentance was sincere, and God honored that. Unfortunately, his son’s character was formed during his first, evil reign and they chose to ignore God’s judgements on their father and his repentance and instead returned the nation of Judah back to idolatry. This resulted in the downfall of Judah as a nation within 23 years.

Hands that shed innocent blood today should not think that they will escape God's wrath and anger. Murderers, human traffickers, abortionists, terrorists, dictators, and the like are warned by the existence of, and truth contained in God's Word. Without repentance and renunciation of those sins, the judgement that waits for them is frightening to consider.

What does God expect of me, as his child, when it comes to the sin of shedding innocent blood beyond not participating in it? In America especially, where we live such blessed lives compared to so much of the world, it's easy to keep ourselves busy with our own jobs, churches and families and forget that these crimes and their victims are all around us. Saying and doing nothing doesn't sound like Jesus, does it? Here's a few ideas of how we can work with God to stand against this sin.

- Consistently pray for abortion clinics to lose their funding and close and for their workers to refuse to participate in this practice anymore.
- Support people on the front lines against human trafficking and abortion with prayer and finances.
- Don't isolate yourself from world events and news involving terrorism, genocide, and such. Gain education and understanding about what is happening in at least one area, for example the young, Christian women who are regularly kidnapped, tortured and murdered by Boko Haram in Nigeria or the mass genocide of the Uyghur population in China. Pray for the people God puts on your heart.
- Speak up and stand up when God presents opportunities to you to do so, like peaceful marches and protests or even speaking truth in a lunchroom conversation.

Judgement is clear and certain for those who shed innocent blood. I also think that there will be judgement for those who stood by and said and did nothing, like the German villagers who watched the trains of weeping, screaming Jews roll through their towns on the way to concentration camps. Let's be inspired again by the likes of Corrie Ten Boom and Truus Wijismuller-Meyer (look her up if you don't know her), who stood up to Nazis and sacrificed much to save the lives of the innocent. Or how about Abby Johnson, a former Planned Parenthood director now standing up to the abortion industry and telling the truth about what goes on in those clinics.

We cannot do everything to challenge all who are shedding innocent blood. We can do the one or two things God puts on our hearts for us to do.

Prayer

Lord, I confess that it's easy to push this uncomfortable topic out of my mind because I feel powerless or overwhelmed. God, show me specific situations and people you want me to pray about. Show me any place where you want me to speak up, stand up or become involved. Give me the courage to obey in the small places like a one-on-one conversation, to prepare me for larger assignments you might have for me. In Jesus name, Amen.

Day Four- A Heart That Devises Wicked Plans

Proverbs 24:8 “He who plots evil will be called a schemer.”

The old saying, “you can’t hose a hoser,” comes to mind when I think of the story of Jacob and Laban. Before Jacob married into his conniving father-in-law’s family, he participated in big time scheming with his mother, to steal his father, Isaac’s blessing away from the older son of the family, Esau. (Genesis 27) Understandably that landed him in hot water with Esau, so Jacob fled to his uncle Laban’s house in Haran. I don’t think he had any idea of what a terrible harvest of trickery he would reap in his own life because of this one act of wickedness he engaged in against his brother, Esau.

Laban was a schemer of the highest order. First, he tricked Jacob into working for seven long years to earn the hand of his younger daughter, Rachel, in marriage. On the wedding day, Leah, Rachel’s older sister, is given to Jacob instead. Laban insists Jacob will have to work another seven years for Rachel. Laban also tried to hold Jacob’s family captive years later when he wanted to move back to his hometown because he realized God’s blessing on Jacob was blessing him too. Then, he tried to swindle Jacob out of his rightful share of the flock of sheep they shared. Since Jacob had made things right with God in the wilderness, before he showed up at Laban’s place, God blessed Jacob in ways that made him wealthy far beyond Laban. Laban’s attempted manipulations and deceptions to try and keep the best sheep for himself completely backfired and he wound up with the weakest, most sickly part of the flock.

When we scheme to obtain something or someone instead of waiting on God for him to give us what is best for us, we are telling God that we know better than Him. When we trick people in ways that benefit us and harm them, this is injustice, which God hates. There was a malice of forethought in all of ways the Laban deceived or tried to deceive Jacob, just as Jacob and his mother made elaborate plans to deceive Esau.

For his scheming, Jacob had to flee for his life, away from his family. The wrestling match he had with the Lord caused him to have a permanent limp, a reminder of what he had done and what he allowed himself to become when he cheated Esau. The harvest of Laban’s wicked plans was the loss of two of his daughters and all those grandchildren along with the best part of his flock of sheep. God’s law of reciprocity is unchanging. Not only does he hate wicked scheming, but he has also ordered the universe in such a way that schemers will pay a price for devising their wicked plans.

Have you ever been deceptive with someone to gain something? Even just a little? Have you ever schemed and plotted to try and control an outcome or a situation? Don’t dismiss small instances of this. You may not have conspired to steal someone’s inheritance, but you manipulated situations a bit to win the heart of someone of the other sex. Or you deliberately flattered and cozied up to your boss to get a promotion that someone else deserved more than you.

Did you ever plan and plot to avoid getting together with your extended family? Have you ever exaggerated health symptoms to avoid attending something you didn’t really want to attend?

Scheming is detestable to God, in Solomon's words. I know that twisting the truth to avoid a family function is not the same thing as conspiring to defraud retirees of their pension funds. Does God make those distinctions, though, the way we do?

It's wise to quiet ourselves before God to ask him to bring to my memory any time we've schemed or plotted in the past and never repented of those sins. Remember that God is not bound by time, so what seems like ancient forgotten history to us, is the present for him. In no way do I want to hinder my walk with him and my ability to hear from him because I've got dusty, unconfessed sins lurking around.

Day Five—Feet that Make Haste to Run to Evil

Proverbs 3:7 “Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord and shun evil.”

In the book of Esther, we meet Haman, a wicked official in the Persian kingdom, who couldn't stop himself from running towards evil where the Jewish people were concerned. His dark story is contained in Esther, chapters three through seven. The story begins with a promotion for him from the king, which initially made him quite pleased. His arrogant smile faded when he noticed the one guy in the royal court that wouldn't bow before him. Mordecai the Jew only bowed before God, not before Haman.

It wasn't enough that everyone else bowed and scraped before Haman, he fixated on Mordecai and his silent protest. In one of the biggest overreactions of all time, Mordecai runs to the king with a plan to punish Mordecai for his gross disrespect. Instead of just working out a punishment for Mordecai, Haman convinces the king to allow the killing of all Jewish people living in Persia. The king agrees, a law is made and signed and the Jews are faced with imminent slaughter.

Esther begins to execute her plan to save the Jewish people. She invites Haman and the king to a special banquet as the first step. Foolish Haman never realizes he's helped create a law that will be a death sentence for the queen at whose table he's so delighted to be invited. He gathers his friends and family to share the news of his favor with the queen, Mordecai's disrespect towards him and the coming holocaust for the Jews.

Haman's wife and friends are outraged at Mordecai's disrespect for Haman and come up with a plan to build elaborate gallows where Mordecai can be hung on the day of Jewish carnage. It wasn't enough that Mordecai be punished, he had to be killed. And it wasn't enough for him to be killed, all his people must be murdered also. For Mordecai to simply be cut down by the sword wasn't enough for arrogant Haman either. He eagerly ran out, after the dinner at his house, to hire a crew to build the gallows for Mordecai.

Haman sprinted towards every evil idea and opportunity that presented itself to him. He should have left Mordecai alone and taken the win with everyone else bowing down to him. What were his last thoughts during his arrest?

God hates feet that run to evil because even one person bent that way could open the floodgates of hell unleashing circumstances and events that harm many. Think of all the evil associates that surrounded Hitler, running to execute every evil plan that came to his demonic mind. These are gross examples of running towards evil instead of turning from it but what about the smaller, micro choices we make towards evil instead of turning our backs on it and running towards goodness?

That time we acted like every other impatient customer in the understaffed restaurant, complaining to the server about how slow the service is, instead of thanking her and encouraging her.

That time we harshly over corrected our child's behavior in public because we were embarrassed, instead of speaking to them firmly and kindly.

That time we watched a movie or show that warned us in the beginning about crude content, instead of turning it off.

That time we joined a circle of coworkers gossiping about the boss, instead of walking the other direction.

Once you allow God to tune your frequency to these kinds of sins, you will notice them everywhere around you. Eve didn't murder anyone in Eden. All she did was take a bite of fruit. I think we should consider that seemingly one small act of running to evil when we are tempted to blow off the times we do the same thing. In that moment of disobedience, with the luscious fruit in her mouth, do you think Eve understood the cataclysmic events she set in motion?

Prayer

Father, show me any place in my life where I am running the wrong direction, away from you. Forgive me for minimizing the moments when I run towards evil instead of goodness. Make me aware of any patterns of this behavior in my life so that I may confess, repent, and renounce these sinful attitudes, words, and actions. Teach me to consistently choose goodness, righteousness, and truth in those areas where I've not done so before.

Day Six- A False Witness Who Breathes Out Lies

Proverbs 19:5 “A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape.”

In Acts 6, a Christ-follower and church deacon named Stephen, started to impact the young church with signs, wonders and teaching. The passage tells us that jealous religious leaders who resented the diminishing of their influence, “could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.” The fact that these folks couldn’t stand the anointing God placed on Stephen reveals their hearts. They needed him gone.

The chapter goes on to tell us in verse eleven that they “secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” In plain speech, they convinced men to give fake testimonies to higher up religious leaders about Stephen’s words and actions. They accused him of blasphemy. The result of the testimony of these false witnesses was Stephen’s death by stoning, an agonizing death. What a horrible loss for the young church.

The Bible doesn’t tell us what became of those false witnesses, but I believe Solomon when he reminds us of the consequences of disobeying God’s ninth commandment; false witnesses will be judged and punished. I hope they repented.

I doubt anyone reading this has given a false witness that resulted in someone’s death or imprisonment, but God did bring to my mind occasions when we might engage in that sin without understanding fully what we are doing.

Have you ever exaggerated the actions or words of someone who has behaved badly towards you when you share the story of their treatment of you with others? We’ve learned that dramatic exaggeration gains more sympathy, right? Unfortunately, that overblown caricature of your troublemaker’s behavior is now planted in a third party’s mind. (When it was none of their business in the first place.) If or when, they encounter this person, they already have a distorted perception about them that is not completely truthful.

Have you ever overstated the skills or capabilities of someone dear to you to someone in power who can grant them position, influence, or advancement? Unintentionally, we’ve harmed the one we love. We’ve misrepresented them in such a way that they are awarded a position for which they are not qualified, in a place they can’t succeed. I’ve seen this play out so many times. The unqualified soul often winds up in such a mess of disappointment and failures. We are harming people when we help them advance into places God never intended for them to be.

Perhaps, dear one, you did give false testimony in a formal setting that slanted a court case, dissolved a legal agreement, or created one under false pretenses. I fear this happens too often in divorce and child custody cases, even amongst Christians.

God hates this behavior because it sets chains of events in motion that are not redemptive or helpful. The fruit from a false testimony is always bitter. We can all recount tragic stories of witnesses who mistakenly identify an innocent person for a crime. The innocent spends years

incarcerated and the false witness is devastated too when DNA evidence proves they identified the wrong person.

We must continue with our self-examination, inspired by this list in Proverbs 6. All these sins that Solomon lists are divisive and destructive. That's Satan's modus operandi, steal, kill, destroy. He always wants us to minimize our sins and maximize others. By keeping ours small, in our own eyes, we are robbed of intimacy with God. I confess, when I first read this list I thought, "I don't do any of this stuff." I've discovered Satan's deception to lead us towards sin, can be so subtle.

We may have never given a false testimony in a courtroom but there are so many other ways we can twist the truth concerning the character, reputations, skills, and behavior of others. Learning to recognize and stop thoughts, words, or actions that God identifies as untruthful testimony is the way of the wise.

Prayer

God, search my heart and show me any place where I've participated in the sin of being a false witness about something or someone. I recognize that this is detestable to you, and I want no part of it going forward. You are Truth and you told us that truth sets us free. I ask you to free me from any inner stronghold that concern a misrepresentation of truth. Fill me with righteousness and make me authentic in every way.

Day Seven—One Who Sows Discord Among Brothers

Proverbs 16:28 “A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.”

Two apostles, James, and Paul, address the problem of quarreling, strife, and division in the early church. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, after Paul reminds the Corinthians about their new identity in Christ, he gives them a good come-to-Jesus- talk about divisions. Factions had developed around different personalities involved with the Corinthian church. We don't honestly know whether they divided themselves around Jesus, Paul, Apollos, and Peter. Although Paul uses those names, it's possible he was trying not to call out the names of the people who had gathered little followings around them. He may have used his name and the others to make his point without humiliating anyone.

Either way, this body of believers divided themselves and then behaved, within their individual groups, as if that group and that group only, had the right end of the stick on the gospel message. Does this sound like a familiar pattern that followed the church well after the first century?

In his letter to Jewish converts to the Christian faith, James, Jesus' brother asks, “What's all the fuss and fighting about with you people?” (Stults paraphrase James 4:1) James suggests that their strife and division originate within their old, sinful natures. He shows little concern for the points they are arguing over and is far more concerned about the lack of unity in their ranks.

What a tough way for these people to be remembered for centuries in the scriptures, as divisive and argumentative. How will people look back and remember the body of Christ in 2020 and 2021 through the upheaval of events we've all experienced? Unified or divided?

We've divided ourselves over issues before, allowing the world's stances on government, education, finances, sports, business, and family to drive our arguments. I wish we wouldn't do that. It makes us look foolish and reactive instead of wise and initiative-taking.

Our role, as the salt of the earth, is to be trendsetters, not trend followers. We are the ones who should have the goods about how you disagree with each other and still walk in love and unity. We are truth speakers. We are reconcilers. We are love, kindness and respect personified and lived out in the nitty gritty of life. If we can't get that right with one another, within the body of Christ, where is the hope for the world that such unity does exist and can be a reality?

God is not asking us to sacrifice our doctrine and theology for the sake of unity. That's the way of the world. Hold firmly and fast to absolutely nothing for the sake of peace. Hogwash. He also does not expect us to find unity with those who call themselves Christians but evidence no fruit of a personal relationship with Christ in their lives. This is why I rarely use that word anymore. It's been so compromised and misused, I prefer God-follower or Christ-follower.

Finally, he does not expect us to be in unity with Christians who are living in unrepentant sin. We are kind, loving and gracious, in the hopes of wooing them back to intimacy with God but how can you walk east on a road with someone who insists on going west?

So, what does unity look like in real time?

It's believers with wildly different ideas on the ministry of the Holy Spirit coming together to meet the physical needs of the poor and abandoned in their community.

It's believers who prefer distinctive styles of worship music finding ways to worship together anyway.

It's believers with no agreement whatsoever about the end times coming together to intercede for lost souls.

It's believers from different angles of the political spectrum coming together to pray for their cities and states.

Unity is recognizing that we have differences and preferences but choose to labor side by side anyway, for Christ's sake. When we choose to value our preferences and differences more than one another and our common cause, to spread the gospel, we are divided and in discord with one another. The gospel message is hindered. Disciple making is hindered. Is it any surprise that God hates behavior that creates trouble in the ranks and disrupts unity?

How will we be remembered as individuals? Will we be remembered as people who worked towards common goals with a wide variety of people or as folks who stayed exclusively within our chosen tribe only willing to collaborate with each other?

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for times I've looked down on Christians outside of my church or denomination circles. Show me ways and places where I can join other believers outside my circles to serve you and serve others. Lord, forgive me for starting, contributing to, or going along with divisive behavior. Holy Spirit, convict me and redirect me when I am tempted to get involved with strife and arguing. Teach me how to be in unity with all your followers who are walking in obedience and faith.

