

Forgetting What Lies Behind, and Straining Forward To What Lies Ahead – Galatians 5

First, thank you for continuing the work of bible study and attentiveness to your ongoing spiritual formation and development. It's important that we do that. It is a never ending task. All things are being made new – in us and around us - all the time.

Michael is on an interesting trajectory, I think. He led us in pursuing the idea of *“Course Correction”* and is heading toward the topic *“Getting It Right”*. He is challenging us to “re-boot” if you will. That's a worthy pursuit. And, it's hard. It's hard because of what it requires of us. It requires an honest self-examination and self-reflection. So let me confess - I don't like contemplation and self-reflection. I think I don't like it because I always discover things in me - in my way of being and doing - that I've let slip or that I'm not very proud of. Things get brought in to the light. And... well... you know... darkness hates the light.

But, the truth is that the Bible is filled with encouragement after encouragement, teaching after teaching, and mandate after mandate to continually examine ourselves and be intentional and deliberate about how we live our life as people of faith.

Luke 14:28 – “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?”

Or, Romans 12:2 – “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Or the oh-so-indicting Matthew 7:4 – “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye’, when there is the log in your own eye.”

2 Corinthians 13:5 says, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”

1 Corinthians 11 tells us to examine ourselves before eating the bread and taking the cup and Lamentations – in the Old Testament – says, “Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord!”

I may not like it... but I can't escape it! To be a person of faith, continual self-reflection and examination is required. It has to be honest. And, it's personal. It's not group work.

The question becomes, “How might we practically and methodically go about it?”

Let me first suggest that we do some reverse engineering. By that I mean, look first to the desired future state – the thing you're driving for – your aspirations as a person of faith - and then work backwards to make it a reality in your life, right now. I'm compelled by the prayer Jesus taught us to pray – the Lord's Prayer. In our version are the words, “... on earth as it is in heaven.” Think about your vision of the nature of heaven. What do you imagine or feel when you hear the word. To me, things like eternal peace, the absence of pain and worry, the removal of all the barriers that separate us from each other, and the eternal proximity to God and all that it might mean come to mind. How can we begin to bring heaven to earth... right now? Or, how do we reverse engineer?

Think about the fruits of the spirit. Our ultimate “goal” as outlined in Galatians 5 is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. How do we begin to make those things manifest in our lives right now? Or, again, how do we reverse engineer?

Recently, I wrote about a methodology for self-reflection and deliberately designing (or redesigning) your life. The eBook is called “Life Is Whacked: Un-Whack It”. It encourages readers to pursue and answer a central question; “What do you want your life to (really) BE and to (really) MEAN?”

In it, I suggested a 6-step process – or method - for doing the self-reflective work in pursuit of the answer to that question. You may find it helpful. You WILL find it hard, regardless of how simple it sounds.

Step #1: TAKE STOCK of your current reality and the life you are living right now.

What do you believe your core values – your fundamental center - to be? What are your intended non-negotiables? How are they holding up?

Core values – or what the book refers to as your “fundamental center” – might be thought of as guiding principles or navigational beacons. They tend to help you draw an internal distinction between good and not so good, right and something less than right. They serve as an intrinsic and internal GPS.

And, they are aspirational. I don't know anyone (author included) who doesn't wander off the path of fundamental center from time to time.

Examples of core values might include integrity, honesty, consistency, dependability, open-mindedness, inclusivity, faithfulness, power, achievement, adaptability, humility, freedom, harmony, trustworthiness, and servanthood.

Begin by naming your aspirational core values and writing them down.

Step #2: Name your MOTIVATORS and beware the hidden ones.

What things – deep within you – are you trying to satisfy with the choices you make and the things you do?

Motivators and Core Values are similar – kissing cousins so to speak – but are fundamentally different, too. Core Values are overarching and aspirational. Motivators are real time. Motivators are the real time drivers – or, the beasts you feel the need to feed – during any given moment of choice or decision. They are what catalyze action (and reaction) in “right now” time. We can put our fingers on many of them. We can (if we're honest) recognize them in ourselves.

Examples might be survival, security, reputation, self-satisfaction, self-gratification, acclaim, peace of mind, power, acceptance, belonging, adventure, validation, or affirmation.

But, beware the hidden motivators as well – namely fear. Not the kind of fear that causes us to cower in the corner shaking and trembling but like, the fear of losing something (oh how we cling!) Or, like the fear of not acquiring, reaching, or

achieving something (I'm a failure!) Or the fear of someone else having something we don't (the birthplace of the demon of comparison!) Or, like the fear of not belonging (the birthplace of compromise.) Or, perhaps like the fear of being judged negatively by others (the mother of all fears!)

Name your motivators. Write them down.

And then, hold your aspirational core values and your real-time motivators next to each other. What do you see? Do they align? Do they serve each other? Or, are they at odds? If they are at odds, you've got some work to do. For me, this is usually one of those places that darkness gets drug into the light. Yuck.

Step #3: Shift your MINDSET and reclaim your power.

I'm not sure just why we grant so much power – so much dominion and influence over OUR lives to OTHERS. But, we do. Cut it out.

There is no universal standard of measure when it comes to designing (or redesigning) your life. Sure, there are factors to consider. Things like your faith (primarily), your responsibilities, and... well... the law – but you really do get to determine the makeup of your life. You and you alone. No one gets to judge and declare the life you choose to live as a success or failure, as acceptable or unacceptable, as fruitful or frivolous, as admirable or foolish. No one but you. It's a mindset.

But of course, that also means that you are now responsible for your life. You and you alone. Let that sink in. It's no small thing.

And by the way, you don't get to assess, judge, and declare things about the lives of others either. Cut that out too!

Step #4: Get serious about answering THE QUESTION.

What do YOU want YOUR life to (really) BE and to (really) MEAN? That's the crux of it.

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A way to approach it or, a framework for answering the question may be to:

1. Think in terms of your “close” others - those with whom you have meaningful relationships. See them in your mind’s eye. Visualize them. What do you want to BE and to MEAN in the lives of those people? What, specifically, do you want to be and to mean TO them? How would you like to be thought of, or characterized by them? What would you like them to say about you?
2. Think about yourself. What gives you joy? What gratifies you? What makes you happy? What gives you peace and contentment?
3. Think about the world in whole – including the people in it. What mark would you like to leave on it? What would you like to DO for it? What gives you a sense of purpose? What are the things – bigger than yourself – in which you would like to play a part?

Roll those thoughts up (and others like them) and begin to draft some statements. Write them down.

Step #5: Commit to achieving BALANCED ALIGNMENT.

Admittedly, it is easier said (and written) than done. The book proposes a 3-bucket filter through which your decisions, choices, things to which you commit, the way you choose to spend your time, the places you invest your energy and attention, and the things on which you spend your money should pass. Do your choices, decisions and actions Support, Inhibit or Suppress, or Have No Impact on the life you (really) want to live? Balanced alignment is achieved when the Supports bucket is fuller than the other two combined. It takes practice.

Step #6: Create a SUSTAINABLE RHYTHM of periodic reassessment, revision, and accountability.

As I said at the beginning, this work is never done. Make it an ongoing practice – or, perhaps, a spiritual discipline.

I encourage you to read the eBook – *Life is Whacked: Un-Whack It* and to use its companion workbook to help you do the work of “being made new” again and

again, to help you live fully and abundantly, and to be fully alive in Christ. You can access the eBook and the Workbook online at <https://dwhite930.wixsite.com/whacked> or through our church website <https://jcbc.org/event/life-is-whacked/>. Or, just look for the book graphic in the Events section at jcbc.org. It's suitable for individuals or groups – and it's completely free. You don't even need an email address for the download. It just opens up. There are some other resources on the site as well.

In closing, let the words written to the Philippians found in chapter 3 be our rallying cry, "... forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Peace.

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