

Slow Fade

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QASREBVDsLk>

I had Kathy share this song for a reason. I know the video focuses on marriage and the subtlety of infidelity and how what we do will affect those around us, and I want us to listen to that message, but I want to take it deeper than that.

When I read my Bible I will often highlight something that resonates in me or I will write in the margins thoughts that come to me when I'm reading and sometimes I like to just read over some of the things that spoke to me. The other morning I was doing that though I & II Kings and in II Kings Chapter 17:9 I read: **"<sup>9</sup> The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right."** Yet the Lord sees and He warned them to turn from their evil ways but we read this: **"But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their ancestors, who did not trust in the LORD their God. <sup>15</sup> They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors and the statutes he had warned them to keep. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless."**

I have to tell you that stopped me in my tracks. Scripture tells us that what has been written is for our example...for us to follow ...or not follow. Yes, I know we don't set up physical idols, but anything...Anything!...that takes priority in our lives above God becomes an idol. I don't have to give you an example...you know. In Matthew's gospel we are told that in the last days—the

love of most will grow cold.—We get so entangled with the world and the things of life that our love begins to fade.....it's a slow fade.

So this morning, I want to take you to Ephesians the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter (just a footnote, they have changed the NIV a little so what you are reading is just a little different than how it reads in my Bible)

**<sup>1</sup> Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children** Xander come here....Xander loves his Grandma. Almost every day I get a call from him: "Gramma whatcha doing? I come to your house...come get me." And we bake bread and make cookies and do almost everything together. One day I caught him " Ok Ok, and he would put his hands on his hips. And I wondered why he did that until I saw and heard myself. "OK" He was imitating me. I wonder what my life would look like if I really loved God....if I wanted to be in God's presence as much as Xander wants to be with me? And if I would imitate Christ—if I used His mannerisms... listen, the next verses tell us how we are to imitate Him.... **<sup>2</sup> and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

**<sup>3</sup> But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. <sup>4</sup> Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of**

God.<sup>[a]</sup> **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. **7** Therefore do not be partners with them.

I want to jump back over to chapter 4. Paul is saying there are things that don't belong to someone who has been made new by redemption. You and I—all humanity—is born in sin—that's who we are. There are some things that only Christ can do for us. I can't make myself sinless. I can't plead away my guilt and avoid the punishment that I deserve because of my sin. I don't have valid arguments for that. II Cor 5:21 says: **For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.**

I couldn't do that. Only Christ can do that for me. And when we bow to that –when we lay down who we are—our sinful lives—and take on what He did for us, the Bible tells us that we are new creations—hence the phrase "Born Again." That's something that only

Christ can do. But Paul goes on to tell us: **22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**

Ok, we are new people...don't live the old life any more. One place in scripture Paul tells us to put to death the misdeeds of the body. Here he tells us to put it off. You've been made new...get your thinking new. You are new if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior—

You're new—Created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

**25** Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. **26** "In your anger do not sin"<sup>[d]</sup>: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, **27** and do not give the devil a foothold. **28** Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

**29** Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths,... You know, we are quick to point out lying and stealing as sin but beware of the more subtle aspects of sin... Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

You know when you get that new car? You don't eat in there or drink in there...you kick the dirt off your feet before you step in...you don't let trash sit in there...you clean it out every time you get out.

You're a new person...Don't let this fill up with trash.

There are things in this list that convict me. I'm so tempted to be bitter...something happens in our life and it's not fair..... Maybe you didn't get the breaks that someone else did...Or someone else's actions have cost you....we all have an area where we can become bitter.

Let me get personal....

We are **not** a small church—we are part of a worldwide, large church. Don't get caught up in saying we are a small church...We are a vital part of a very large church. We just happen to be a small group that meets together regularly. Sometimes as small groups, it's personal....If you're in a large group that meets together, no one really knows you and you really don't know anyone....The dynamics are different in a small group... Because that group is small, when one of us is missing, we feel it. I hope you missed me last week. If you are not here, we miss you. More so when one of us pulls away or chooses to leave...That hurts.

Just recently, Marcia asked to have her name removed from our membership...That Hurts. She is an excellent teacher and she plays the piano, she cleaned the church...planted flowers. And it especially hurts when it feels so wrong. Nothing in my spirit feels right about this. And sometimes when something hurts, we want to hurt back.... It would be easier to point out her flaws so that it wouldn't feel so bad. It's would be easy to slander...to find fault... both directions...hers toward us and us toward her. We can always find fault. Don't get caught up in that.

Two things come to mind.

The first is when Jesus had been teaching and some of His teaching was so hard that is reads, Many of His disciples... Yes, disciples...turned back and no longer followed. Jesus didn't run after them. I had a conversation with Marcia and she is adamant about leaving and I have to let her go.

The other thing that comes to mind is that more than anything else, I want you to make heaven. If this body of believers is not where you are encouraged to do that, then I want you to find another church that does that for you.

Can I just say, I love doing church with you...You encourage me... you make me a better person.

Let's not hurt each other. Let's pray for each other. I want every person who steps through these doors—even if it is only one time—to go away encouraged because this body of believers really cares--loves them and this is home.

So how are we supposed to live? Listen to this:

**32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Then jump over to 5. Let me again read verse 2: **2** and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us then down to verse 8: **8** For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light **9** (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) **10** and find out what pleases the Lord. **11** Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. **12** It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. **13** But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. **14** This is why it is said:

“Wake up, sleeper,  
rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.” Wake up--- sometimes it's too easy to sleep in—rouse yourself spiritually. Rise

from the dead—Are you dead? No, Seriously. ..are you dead? Are you just going through the motions? Rise up from the dead! Live!

**15** Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,**16** making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.**17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.**18** Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, **19** speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,**20** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to address verse 18. I know there are some in this room who have never been drunk. Being drunk is not a good thing. The Bible addresses this issue seriously. But what it is talking about here is that when you drink too much you begin to lose control. You are under the influence of alcohol. Hence DUI-- Driving under the influence...You can get arrested for that. You do things under the influence that you would never do sober. This is saying instead be under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Give yourself over to His leadership. You’re not going to kill someone... you’re not going to say stupid stuff...you’re not going to do things that will ruin your life. Don’t give yourself over to the influence of a drug or alcohol that will cause you to sin....give the Holy Spirit that kind of control in your life.

Be light in the world. Be a light in YOUR world. Find out what pleases the Lord. God may lead you into some dark places, but you be the light in that world.

I want to illustrate with a couple of things:

Dollar Bill ( took a dollar bill out and ripped it stomped on it and said no matter what it looked like or what was done to it, it still had value)

I read this week:

*This was written By Anna McCarthy*

A while back I was asked by a group of pastors' wives to go with them to strip clubs.

That sentence alone sounds strange. But hang with me.

At first I was a little hesitant. And not for reasons you might think.

I love people. Especially ones who are broken; it's part of my calling. But, given what I've walked through, I know how fragile broken people can be.

And I know how insensitive the church can be.

And I was uneasy.

But, these weren't just any pastors' wives.

They had a vision.

One that longed to love on women that society had thrown aside.

It reminded me a lot of Jesus.

So, I jumped on it.

Their plan was to visit these clubs once a month to deliver a meal and gift baskets. I joined them the first night and I'll be honest, I had NO IDEA what to expect.

Now, I had my fair share of time (back in the day) in bars and such, but I'd never been to a strip club. I was totally unaware of what I was walking into.

We arrived and the bouncer ushered us back into the dressing room where we introduced ourselves and began distributing the gifts and food.

**I was shocked by what I saw.**

And I'll tell you why:

I was raised to believe that no good comes from places like that. Which is probably true on many levels.....

But, I was filled (as were many Christian kids) with fear about "places like that." That "those people" were heathens and doing all kinds of *sinful, shameful things*.

Which, again, is true of strip clubs.

And bars.

And many other places.

Even churches.

But, these girls—these lovely girls—were so ... *normal*.

As I talked with one in particular, she reminded me of any young mom I'd talk to in the school pick-up line.

Minus the fact that she didn't have much clothing on—I tried not to focus on that.

.....

They showed pictures of their children, talked of pregnancy (I was pregnant at the time), chatted about trying to get back in shape after having a baby, etc. It was SO NORMAL.

But, as we talked, and I looked into their eyes, I saw women—young, broken women. Who had stories, probably much like mine or yours.

We didn't stay long. They had a shift to work, and we didn't want to overstay our welcome.

But, as we left, they thanked us.

More than once.

**As I drove home, I totally fell apart in my car.**

Not because I felt sorry for them. Not because I thought I was so much better than they were. Not because I pitied their circumstance.

I cried because my heart was broken.

One thing the Lord continues to do in my heart is humble it. Like over and over. Countless times, I think I'm going in to minister to some lowly soul and then I walk out, completely undone because the condition of my own heart was exposed.

I wept before God asking for His forgiveness in the way I had viewed women in that profession.

Because, people—that could have been me.

It could have been any of us.

Had my journey taken a few different turns, I very well could have been on the receiving end of that encounter.

Man. HE WRECKED ME.

I had my baby shortly after that visit and didn't get to go back for the monthly visits to see the women.

But, I stayed in contact with one of the women organizing it and, every so often, I ask her how it's going.

They have been visiting them for a year now and received permission to leave a prayer box where the women could leave prayer requests.

The first few times they collected the box it had silly things written in it.

But they continued to leave it there.

**Over the following weeks and months (as they continued to love on these women), the prayer requests got real.**

Real situations

Real hurt

Real needs

Last time my friend and I got together, I asked about the strip clubs and this is what she said:

Her eyes always, always fill with tears when we talk about it because God is SO in love with these precious women.

She said, "The women are starting to reach out more. I've been texting with one and getting to connect with her a bit deeper."

**We talked a bit more and she turned to me and said something that I am still rattled by.**

"You know what one of them said to me last time?"

“What?”

“She said that she was so glad we come to visit them because we’re not like the other churches.”

I said, “What did she mean by that?”

She said, “Apparently other churches send them hate mail. ALL THE TIME.”

I’m sure my face turned three shades of white.

Complete shock and disbelief gripped me.

We both looked at each other and about fell into a pool of tears right there.

**People—church—WHAT ARE WE DOING?!**

Did we forget (or do we just sing it in songs) that Jesus was a friend of sinners?

Did we forget that it’s his kindness that leads us to repentance?

Did we forget that it is ONLY the blood of Jesus that makes us holy?

That ALL OF OUR GOOD BIBLE LOVING STUFF is like filthy rags without Him?

Jesus was UNAFRAID of walking in love to the least of the least.

Like the scum of the scum.

He walked right in, sat down and ate with sinners.

Gross, ugly sinners.

And the religious HATED HIM FOR IT.

A few years ago, I met with another pastor’s wife across the country who shared with me a similar ministry, although after months of developing relationships with the dancers, they asked the owners a crazy question.

They asked to hold a Bible study.

IN THE STRIP CLUB.

Just for the dancers.

Surprisingly, they were given a yes.

(Something about it building morale in the employees, but whatever. It was a yes!)

So, they started leading a Bible study in the club.

But, something was missing.

And those ministering knew it.

The women they were ministering to needed to be led by a man—not because these women were incapable, but because of the damaged, skewed image they had of men. They needed to see a man who was safe—they needed a man who knew Jesus.

This woman's husband (who was a pastor) stepped up and took on the challenge. And, for months the dancers wouldn't even look him in the eye.

But he kept showing up...

Soon, one by one, the women met Jesus through this pastor's humble, gentle leadership.

There were prayer sessions.

Women were set free.

And many went on to lead healthy, restored lives.

**All because this group of women and this pastor were unafraid to go where God was leading them.**

I'm not suggesting that we all have this calling.

I am not the Holy Spirit.

What I AM saying to you is that if Jesus were here, walking among us, wouldn't it be just like him to walk into the most un-Christlike place (strip club or whatever) and completely freak the religious folk out?

Just a thought.

He loved then.

He loves now.

But, he can only reach as far as you and I are willing to go.

Please hear this.....There is a big difference in embracing the lifestyle and embracing a life.

Not in any way can I say that their lifestyle was right...what I can say is that God loves them really loves them and how will they know unless we are a light in the world.

The only way that we will be a light is if we put off what we used to look like....sexual immorality....drunkenness...slander...coarse joking .....bitterness....

When we allow those things to have any kind of place in our lives, we will slowly fall out of love with God.

Some of us don't even realize -we're not in love anymore.

“Wake up, ...  
rise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”

Be Brilliant!!!!