

Battle for Your Soul #4: Ai: The Battle Against Hidden Sin

Battle of the Soul

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Richard, did you get the recording started? Great, thank you.

Let me ask you to take your Bibles. Turn to Joshua chapter seven this morning. We are going to have... how many of you find it useful once in a while to be reminded of things you have been told before? Ok. Well, good, because I am going to repeat a Sunday school lesson. Actually it was a sermon. We are going to repeat it as Sunday school lesson for a variety of reasons. One, last week my son mentioned in the Sunday school lesson how in studying the life of Ahab and Jezebel he brought up an example about a prophecy in the Old Testament that was fulfilled by Achan and a man by the name of Hiel. The prophecy was that if you ever rebuild Jericho that you would lay the foundation of it in your own family. And basically Hiel's two sons died in the process of rebuilding Jericho. And also the other part of that prophecy relating, you know, was that you won't take anything from the city. It was an accursed city. You can't take anything from it. And, of course, we know what Achan did.

And the principle that came out from that lesson last week that I thought was so outstanding is that hidden sin always precedes open rebellion. And that is just such a key thing for each of us to remember. So as I thought about that, I thought, let's repeat a lesson on the subject of hidden sins. You may remember that I preached a series on the battles of the Promised Land and there are five battles in the Promised Land and each one represents a significant battle for your soul.

Interestingly enough, I went out this week to look at those lessons on our audio sermon website—and the address for that is on the front of your bulletin—and discovered that the only lesson that never got recorded was the battle of Ai. And I thought, let's teach Sunday school lesson, get a new recording, finish that out. We will get the whole series there like it needs to be. So we are killing more than one bird this morning. And I am sorry if you are a bird lover.

Ok, so we are going to look at Joshua chapter seven, the battle of Ai. And just so that you can kind of remember there is a reason these battles represent the battles for our soul. Egypt, of course, was run by a king called pharaoh. And he had a crown, had a serpent on

his head and Israel was in slavery to them so Egypt represents bondage to sin. And when they ate the Passover Lamb, in other words, a perfect lamb, a perfect male lamb had to be examined. It had to die. They had to take that lamb inside them and only then were they able to leave the Promised Land. Now that is a picture of salvation.

Then the battles for the Promised Land, the battles of getting into the Promised Land represent the soul. There were five key battles. Each one of them has to do with a battle in our soul. And so the battle of Jericho represents the battle of bitterness, because Jericho had huge thick walls and the Bible says that a brother offended is harder to be won than a walled city. And so the analogy there is if you learn how they conquered Jericho, you can learn how to overcome bitterness in your life.

The second battle in the book of Joshua is this battle of Ai and we will talk about how that represents the battle against hidden sin. And if you are a parent, I just want to encourage you that one of the most serious battles you will ever fight as a mom or as a dad is to fight the battle against hidden sin and I ... grace and I have a story we could share with you about that.

And then, you know, the final stage in salvation, there is three steps to salvation. There is justification which is me being justified before God because Christ died for my sins. There is sanctification which is me becoming more holy. And that is what happens in this Promised Land state. And then one day God is going to glorify this body. Now I know it is pretty glorious as it is. We will all admit that, ok? But he is going to glorify it in a far better way, ok?

So what we are talking about in the battles of the Promised Land is how to overcome Satan's strongholds. Now a stronghold is a lie that he tells us. Now every one of the five battles in the Promised Land has a particular stronghold or a particular false hold or a false idea or a lie. So, for example, if you have hidden sin one of the lies that the devil wants to tell you is: Don't worry. Nobody will ever find out about it. You can get away with it. Nobody has to know about it. You can, you know, stuff that magazine under your bed or watch that show after everybody else has gone to sleep or don't tell anybody that you had that phone call, you know, with that person that you shouldn't have. You can hide your sins. And that is the false idea. I can hide my sins. Nobody will ever know.

So let's look at Joshua chapter seven. We will begin with verses one through five. It says:

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel. And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Bethel, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few. So there went up

thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.

And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?¹

And so here is the story of the battle of Ai. So let's look at several principles about hidden sin. One is: Hidden sin brings us to true danger. Now you notice that they had a problem. They had a problem with pride and pride caused them to under estimate the enemy. The spies went and said there is not many of them. We can take them. It is not a big deal.

In Joshua chapter eight and verse 25 we find out that at this time Joshua had at least 12,000 men and women. So there has to be at least 6000 men here and they say, "Well, we are only going to send a little portion of it." So when we hide our sin what we are doing is we are saying, "You know, it is ok for me to hide this sin. There is not really any consequences. I can get away with it. Satan is not that dangerous. It is not that big of a deal." And we lose our spiritual alertness. We lose how dangerous it is.

Now some of you are aware of different eye diseases.

Richard, if you would let me know when I get behind again, I would appreciate it, because I was behind a slide just then.

There is an eye disease called glaucoma. Now maybe you have heard of this and what happens is that the fluid inside the eye which is called aqueous humor it flows out through the pupil and it can be absorbed into the blood stream through the eye's drainage system and that is, you know, proper drainage is a good thing. As long as you don't have the wrong amount of pressure in the eye everything works great. You have to keep the right amount of pressure in the eye for a healthy eye. But in glaucoma the eye quits draining properly and you get a build up of pressure and it damages the retinal nerve and then you become blind from it. So it is a pretty serious condition.

Of course, you all know the test for it, right? So you go to the eye doctor and they have you says, "Well, look in here and open your eyes." And you are looking at some

¹ Joshua 7:1-9.

beautiful picture. At my eye doctor it is this beautiful, colorful picture of a hot air balloon. And you are going, “Oh, how pretty.” About that time they go, poof. And they shoot a big, you know, puff of air at your eye. And they want to see if your eye bends properly, you know, in reaction to the air and if it does, you know, eye pressure is fine, you know. But they ought to warn you that they are about to put out your eye with a puff of air and they don’t.

Then there is another disease called cataracts. And, of course, cataracts is something that happens to our lens where the lens gets cloudy and at some point you usually have to go have cataract surgery and they take the lens out of your eye and they replace it with a different lens and a lot of times you don’t even have to wear glasses after that or you have to get a different prescription. And it just becomes difficult when you have cloudy lenses to make out shapes well and at night and, you know, you see cars coming the other way and you get this, you know, yellow cloudy look around things.

Well, in the same way that pressure builds up from this stuff in glaucoma and as we... our vision is blocked by cataracts, sin damages our spiritual sight in the very same way. And so we ... when someone is rejecting the prompting of the Holy Spirit to confess and forsake sins, they feel more pressure. It builds up in their life. They can’t handle it any more. We have got to... You know, I feel more pressure. I feel more pressure, because you are not responding to the conviction of the Holy Spirit in getting your life right. And then cataracts, David said in Psalm 51, he says:

“My sin is ever before me.”²

It was kind of like no matter where he looked he couldn’t enjoy life because his vision for life was blocked by his sin.

Now another thing about sin is that it is hidden sin is marked by a self-reliant pride. So, for example, you see that they have a misplaced confidence. Israel overcame the might and power of Jericho with no problem. Fact is all they had to do is go out, obey God, walk around the city one time for six days, on the seventh day walk around the seven times and then they blew the ram’s horns. They were totally quiet all this time. They blew the ram’s horns and then the walls came tumbling down.

And so, you know, it was kind of like it wasn’t a big deal for that. The problem is when they get to Ai, here is a little town. It doesn’t even have big walls and they say, “Oh, man, compared to Jericho this is a walk in the park.” And they forget who it was that gave them the victory at Jericho and have a false confidence in their own ability.

So in Joshua seven verse three they are basically saying, “We can handle it. They are nothing next to us. We can leave most of the army at home. We will just take a handful of men.”

There were approximately 428,000 fighting men in Israel. And earlier I was saying Ai

² Psalm 51:3.

appeared to be a city of around 6000. They 428,000 and they said, “Oh, man, this is an easy city, a little old Podunk town like that, we can take them.” So they say, “We are only going to send 3000. That is 0.7 percent of our fighting force of 428,000. We are going to send 0.7 percent, because this isn’t really worth our time.”

And so they had a misplaced confidence. See, hidden sin is a mark of pride. It is saying “I can do what I want. I can get away with it. I will be the judge of what is right and wrong for me. I know that maybe God says that is wrong, but I think it is ok. Somebody else, maybe my parents say it is wrong, but I think it is ok.” And then, you know, what God commands doesn’t matter.

The problem is the Bible says in James chapter four that God gives grace to the humble. If you are not humble, then God is not going to give you his grace. There is another problem with hidden sin and that is that it hinders our prayer life. And the fact is, you can just say that hidden sin equals hindered prayer. It is that close of a correlation.

Now at Jericho they had six days of obedience. They had meditation. They had prayer. They had sought God’s plan. God gave them a plan. They... every day they go out and they walk around the city, come back, they pray. And every day they go out, walk around the city, come back and pray. Seventh day they all had prayer. They were quiet the entire time. You know what they were doing while they were walking? They didn’t talk. God told them not to talk. They were just praying. They were meditating. They are trusting God. They are thinking about the greatness of God. They are thinking, I wonder what it is going to look like when God really does this thing, because this is a weird plan. But they were focused on God.

Now, there is no record, however, in Scripture that before they went to battle at Ai that they did any kind of prayer. There is no record that they did anything to seek God. They simply said, “You know what? This is just a little Podunk town. We are going to send just a handful of men and we can take this place.

So there is no self examination. There is no prayer. There is no spiritual preparation. There is no seeking the will of God in the battle.

So let me put it to you this way. In Jericho they were depending on the power of God and they got what God could do. At Ai they were depending on the power of man and they got what the power of man could do.

Now so think about that the next time you are having a big battle in your life. Whose power are you depending on? That is crucial.

Proverbs 28:13, by the way, says this.

“He that covereth his sins...”³

³ Proverbs 28:13.

That is, if you have got a sin and you are trying to hide it, you are trying to keep a sin secret from your parents, you are trying to keep a sin secret from your wife for from your husband. He says:

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.”⁴

How many of you want to prosper? I know I do. And he says:

“...but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”⁵

How many of you think you need mercy? I do. So I want that.

Now let’s talk about how hidden sin damages our prayer. First of all, you don’t see God, Romans three verses 10 and 11, you know, says there is none that seeketh after God, there is none that understands. He says, you know, when you are over confident, you don’t feel that you need God. So you get pride and then you start thinking, I can get away with this. And you don’t really feel like you need God. So one of the first symptoms, parents and if you want to know if your children are hiding sins is they will no longer have a devotional life. Their devotional life will begin to die off.

So if they have been accustomed and you have trained them to read their Bibles, spend time with the Lord every morning, they will quit doing that when they have hidden sin because, quite frankly, they don’t see their need of doing it. It is just a drudgery to them. There is not a delight there anymore.

God will not hear our petitions when we have hidden sin in our lives. The Bible says:

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”⁶

Psalm 66:18.

I call it the scariest verse in the Old Testament, because for me it is the scariest verse.

“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”⁷

So it is just crucial that we understand that.

Now there are some blessings that come to us from seeking God. We should want those blessings. So 2 Chronicles 26 is a beautiful passage on this subject. It says:

Then all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the room of his father Amaziah. He built Eloth, and

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Psalm 66:18.

⁷ Ibid.

restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers. Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him to prosper.⁸

{?} our pastor preached it from about King Uzziah last week, I think it was or recently from Isaiah chapter six. And so, you know, it is an amazing thing. As long as he sought the Lord.

Now, there is an interesting phrase, because Uzziah, I think toward the final days of his life kind of messed up, but as long as he sought the Lord God, it made him to prosper. How many of you want to prosper? You know, I think that is a good plan. Let's try that. Well, how do we do that? We have to seek the Lord first. And that is the truth.

Now, by the way, hidden in this little passage about King Uzziah is the remarkable set of truths because in the Old Testament Bible names mean something. So Amaziah means Jehovah is mighty. His mother's name—that was his father. Uzziah's mother's name was named Jecholiah which means Jehovah is able. And then Uzziah means my strength is Jehovah.

So, you know, this is a family that was keenly aware of the fact that the Lord was their only source of strength and if you will keep remembering that, he is your only source of strength, then you will seek him. You will try to seek him out. Otherwise your pride will blind you to your need.

And something else hidden sin does to us is it guarantees our discouragement. Did you see what happened when the children of Israel went against Ai? For one thing they lost 36 lives. That was a loss of... now look at this. Now if you have ever talked to military people and tomorrow morning is a big day in our family because tomorrow morning my nephew Brian Yates is being promoted from lieutenant colonel to full bird colonel in the US air force. He gets his eagles pinned on him out in an air force base in Arizona. And that is a huge accomplishment to make it all the way to full bird colonel.

And, you know, the thing about military people is they go to war college. And Brian had to go to war college several times to reach the level he is at. And one of the things they tell you about planning war, planning battles, there is something called, you know, an acceptable loss. You know, there is a certain amount of loss you know when you go into battle. You don't like the fact that anybody gets killed, but it is just a fact of war. People are going to die.

Now if somebody, you know, if you think if you lose, you know, one or two percent,

⁸ 2 Chronicles 26:1-5.

maybe even five percent of your fighting force that might be at what you would determine an acceptable loss.

Look at this. They lost—now, remember. They had 428,000 fighting men. They lost 36. That this 0.0012 percent of the whole army, this, from military terms, this is not a big deal. In fact, just imagine that you are a part of three million people, 428,000 of those people are just your fighting force of men who are 20 years old and upward. You probably don't even know the 36 who died. Chances that you knew the 36, probably not that great. You might... now your friend might know him. Everybody has got that six degrees of separation thing happening, right? And so a friend of a friend might now know them.

So... and even of the 3000 men who went into Ai, they only lost 1.2 percent. This doesn't sound like a big deal. But did you notice in verse five it says the entire congregation of Israel, all three million people, they melted in their hearts. This is ... this is a discouragement.

Now statistically ... wow, that was beautiful. We get some interference at times from the airport and I think that is what causes that. Statistically speaking, though, this is not a big deal. But the entire nation is upset about that.

So hidden sin guarantees our discouragement. See, the end of all sin is some kind of death. You may feel that you ... when you have hidden sin that a part of you is just kind of dull and dry and dead and your daily Bible reading and prayer become just like that and your testimony goes down, too. Now here is something else that hidden sin will do to you. It will damage your family and your church.

Let's talk about Jonah. You remember Jonah? He didn't want to go to Nineveh. He didn't think the people of Nineveh deserved an opportunity to repent. So he gets on a boat and he sails towards Tarshish. He is trying to go the other way. He has a disobedience, but he is hiding the fact from everyone else on the boat that he is disobeying God.

Meanwhile a storm comes up and the ship is about to capsize. And these unsaved heathen people say, "Somebody on this ship is not right with their god." Isn't that amazing? I think it is amazing that lost people when they get desperate about something, they don't know who God is. They don't really understand Jesus Christ. But even a lost person in a desperate situation will breathe a prayer of God help us, don't they? Yeah, they will claim God's name when they are... yeah, they will forget about him when things are going well, but so here are all these people. They are like somebody on this ship is not right with their god and they need to do something about it. So he nearly cost the lives of every body on the ship.

Now Achan he had... what happened was he went in to Jericho and while they are defeating Jericho after God took down Jericho's defenses and walls, he happened to spy a garment that he wanted. He happened to spy a little chunk of gold that he wanted and he

though, ooh, I want that. And he looked around and said, “Nobody will ever know.” And he takes it back and he hides it and then when they pitch camp that night he digs a hole in the bottom of his tent, puts the stuff in the hole, covers it over, because they might be there a few days. If anybody happened to visit Achan’s tent, nobody would know, because he covered over the hole.

The problem was Achan wasn’t the only one that knew about the hole in the tent, because the kids were there and they saw daddy digging the hole.

By the way, dads, if you think you have a sin that you can hide from your family, let me promise you something and this ought to shiver you down right to your timbers. Your hidden sin will affect your family. Let me say that again. Your hidden sin will affect your family. There is no two ways around it. You hold the spiritual umbrella over your family. If you have got hidden sin, they will be affected by it. It is like having a hole in your umbrella and it is going to rain on your family. So don’t think that you can get away with it.

So what happens in this case? Well, you know, there were the 36 men that lost their lives. Israel lost an easy victory. And Achan and his family had to die.

In Deuteronomy two, by the way, verse 24, excuse me, verse 16 it says this:

“The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers.”⁹

See, the problem was the children were put to death in this case, why? Because they were complicit in their father’s sin. His sin contaminated his family and they came under God’s judgment as well.

Here is another thing that hidden sin does. It causes us to despise scriptural repentance. Now, a fascinating thing that happened here. Joshua goes and the Bible says he poured out his complaint before the Lord. Have you ever prayed a prayer like that where you just complained to God? I have done that. I have got to tell you I am grateful that my heavenly Father loves me so much that he will listen to me gripe and complain.

Now that this not how we should pray. Don’t make that your goal. Oh, good, I can complain. Let’s go home and do that tonight. No, don’t make that you goal. But Joshua basically goes and complains. “God, why did you bring us out here to die.”

And then God says, “Dude, it is your fault. Somebody in Israel has got sin. I can’t bless that. By the way, you guys didn’t pray before you went into Ai. You didn’t seek me. I could have told you there was a problem, but you didn’t ask.”

And now he says, “You know, do you want to know where the problem is?” And Joshua says, “Yeah, I would love to know where the problem is.”

⁹ Deuteronomy 24:16.

And he says, “Ok, what I want you to do is get the whole nation of Israel and arrange them by tribes and within the tribes arrange them by clans and within the clans arrange them by families. So everybody {?}. And I want you to march the whole group and we will have the priest stand out there with his Urim and Thummim and he will use the Urim and Thummim and every time a tribe passes in front of him he will cast the Urim and Thummim.” He says, “I am going to let you know when one of these tribes is the tribe that has the problem.”

So they start doing this and all of the sudden the tribe of Israel of which Achan was a member got selected. And then so Joshua dismisses everybody else. He says, “March them through again.” And here comes clan by clan and all of the sudden the Urim and Thummim designate one particular clan.

He says, “Ok, march him through again. Now it is family by family. It comes down to Achan and his family.”

Now why didn't God just say, “Joshua, go find a fellow by the name of Achan of the tribe of so and so, the clan of so and so of the tribe of so and so. He is your problem”? Why did God go through this elaborate thing? I believe God was trying to give Achan an opportunity to confess and repent. It was kind of like all of the sudden his tribe gets selected and it should have dawned on Achan. Uh, oh. And then it is his clan that gets selected. Now he should have said, “Whoa, God is coming after me.” And he should have gotten... right then he should have gone to Joshua and said, “Listen. I confess. It was me. Here is the thing. Let's destroy it right now. Let's burn it right now. I confess. Not only do I confess, but I repent of my sins.”

I believe God was trying to get him an opportunity to repent of what he had done. It makes me wonder what would have happened had he done so. Would God have pardoned Achan if he had repented?

Now is God a forgiving God? Well, he ... when David committed his sin with Bathsheba, God forgave him. He wrote an entire psalm about his forgiveness, Psalm 32. He said:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.¹⁰

Now David had experienced the agony of unconfessed sin. He says:

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.¹¹

¹⁰ Psalm 32:1-2.

¹¹ Psalm 32:3-4.

But forgiveness was available to David. He says:

“I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”¹²

So if God forgave David, do you think he could have forgiven Achan? Absolutely, forgiving God.

Here is another thing hidden sin does. It leads us to public judgment. It leads us to public rebuke. See, God says what you do in secret I will reward openly. Well, guess what? That is true of things you do, righteous things you do in secret. What kind of righteous things are we supposed to do in secret? Anybody know what we are supposed to do not so men can see us, but only so that God can see it? Arthur?

Ok, so we should give secretly. We should give in a way that gives glory to the Lord and not glory to ourselves. What is something else we are told to do? Pray, fasting. Those are teachings. He says when we do those things we do them in secret, he says, and God will reward you openly. Well God applies the same principles to our sin. He says, “What you do in secret, I will shout from the housetops.” How many of you want your hidden sin shouted from house tops? Dude, I hope you are not in the neighborhood when that happens. That is a bad thing.

God does that. It is also true of our sins.

Proverbs 9:17 he says:

“Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.”¹³

But then in Psalm 98 he says:

“Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.”¹⁴

So you can keep sin secret for a little while from people around you, but you can never keep them a secret from God.

Jeremiah 23.

“Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.”¹⁵

The Bible in Psalms says that darkness and light are alike unto God.

¹² Psalm 32:5.

¹³ Proverbs 9:17.

¹⁴ Psalm 90:8.

¹⁵ Jeremiah 23:24.

God brings judgment on hidden sin. Ecclesiastes 12:14:

“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”¹⁶

He says, “It doesn’t matter. I am going to bring it to judgment.”

Galatians six:

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”¹⁷

You know, that is just a... it is not God being a big cop waiting to pounce on you. It is God saying, “This is my law. This is the way life works. Your secret sins are going to come out.”

Now God’s judgment, by the way, benefits others. One of the fascinating things in Scriptures is God says that when a nation fails to serve the Lord, the first thing God does is he gives them bad judges. Now how many of you based on the news you have heard the last several years and outcome of court cases and what not think that maybe we have a problem with judges in the U S of A?

Now he has given us some bad judges and we have judges now that are creating legislation from the bench and that was never the intention of the founding Fathers. We are messed up because we have bad judges. We have judges because we messed up. We quit following God in our nation. And so this has been a huge problem for us.

So the fact of the matter is God wants judges to punish evil doers. When ever doers are punished it is better for all society. And not only that, a lot of people will argue and say, “Well putting people in prison or capital punishment doesn’t decrease crime.” Do you know why capital punishment doesn’t really decrease crime that much? Because the Bible says it is to be done swiftly and now we drag things out in the court of 20 and 30 years and by that time everybody has forgotten what the crime does before we put somebody to death. Ok? What we need to do is, you know, they have got two or three witnesses that things are credible, you know, we give them a one or two chances for appeal and then that is it. And they shouldn’t be hanging around even off the state bread and butter after that. If we had swift punishment then it would be a deterrent to crime.

But God identifies the guilty party. And how does he do that? Proverbs 16:33:

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Ecclesiastes 12:14.

¹⁷ Galatians 6:7.

¹⁸ Proverbs 16:33.

I believe they used the Urim and Thummim. Now does it say that in Joshua? I was doing something called isogesis, reading my own meaning into the text. So I will be honest with you about that. But that is how in the Old Testament they made crucial decisions to reveal the will of God. The high priest had a pocket behind his breastplate and in that pocket were two stones, the Urim and Thummim and they would use them to determine the will of God about something.

God judged the guilty party and eliminating the sin allowed Jesus to be in a place where God could bless them.

Now here is something that I really want to get across and this was not in our presentation last time and some of you know I spoke to a conference of about 600 dads in Indianapolis. Some of you have seen the film of that and in that was called secrets of the olive tree. And I am just going to pull one little tiny portion about that, because I think parents need to know how to recognize when your children have hidden sins. So you dads, you moms, write this down, because this is going to be valuable to you. How do you protect them from?

The first thing you need to know about hidden sin is it is not something that just pops up. It is part of a process. Ok? It is part of a process. So if you know what comes before the hidden sin, you can step in to prevent it. First of all, the person becomes less and less spiritually alert and they become kind of asleep to spiritual dangers. So they lose this spiritual ordinance. They lose their discernment. They don't, for example, understand the difference, let's say, they lose their spiritual discernment to how dangerous certain forms of dress are or they lose their spiritual discernment as to the difference between music that God approves of and music that is worldly or they lose their discernment between worldly philosophy and God's truth. They lose the discernment between man's devices and God's counsel.

All those things are crucial for us to do.

Then, after that, wrong habits start to develop. When you have these wrong habits they are usually caught from somebody who is significant to them. So in other words, if your kids develop a bad habit of getting up every morning and getting dressed and starting their day without reading God's Word, you need to find out if they used to do that and they are not doing it anymore, you need to find out why are they are not reading God's Word anymore and one of the first places dad needs to look is: Is dad reading God's Word? If dad quits reading God's Word or dad quits having devotional time, then maybe that is why the kids aren't doing it anymore. So you need to find out if they have been negatively influenced by someone in authority. They could also be negatively influenced by wrong influence of someone that they have become close to.

You know, I believe we have just got new neighbors. I already kind of have the feeling they don't know the Lord so I am hoping we build a relationship with them, but, you know, they are from Germany and German teenagers are very often ... haven't had a lot of godly training and they tend to be kind of very independent, very rebellious. This guy

has all the looks of it. He is probably 15, 16 years old. He has to step outside every day and, you know, smoke his cigarette several times, because ... and that is something, you know, that in our society, at least, we are starting to tell people, "Hey, that is not cool. It stinks. It is not healthy." You know, we are trying to do that.

But the thing is most young people who start smoking, start smoking because one of their buddies said, "Oh, you will look cool if you do this," ok? That is why they do it. Is it a dumb thing to do? Well, if you look at how much it costs and how bad you are going to stink, yeah, it is a dumb thing to do, how unhealthy it is. Yeah, it is a bad thing to do. But the point is we usually get started on bad habits in life because somebody encouraged us or we were influenced by that.

If you work around people that curse all the time it is easier for those words to slip back into your vocabulary because you are exposed to it all the time. So we have got to just really... we have got to really be careful about those things. And then the person becomes as energy taker instead of an energy giver. In other words, they suddenly are needy and they are always ... and they are not ministering to anyone. They are not helping anyone. They are not helping anyone. They are not encouraging anyone. Basically, when you are around these people they just drain the life out of you. And then they become secretive and withdrawn, because by now they are into their hidden sin and they don't like to be around people whose life reminds them that they have hidden sin and so they just kind of withdrawn from you and secretive. The kids don't look you in the eye anymore. They become non communicative and, you know, the only exchange of information you have with them is about, you know, schedules and facts and what not and you don't hear them talk heart to heart with you anymore. And when that happens you know you have a problem with hidden sin.

So what we need to do... there is a verse in Psalm 128. I think it is verse three. Psalm 128 says that for the righteous man he says:

"Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table."¹⁹

Now like I said, I have a three hour presentation on video of why children are like olive plants. But let me talk to you a little bit about olive plants. There is three main enemies of the olive tree and if you can beat these three main enemies you will have a successful olive crop. Every one of those enemies represents, in an analogy form, one of the enemies that is against our children. And so there are things called black scale. It is actually an insect. A black scale sounds like a fungus, but it is an insect. They get on the olives and what they do is they first of all have these adult egg laying females come, but before that there are what they call second and third in star nymphs. So, in other words, if you are an alert olive grove person, a person with an olive grove, a husbandman, I think, is what the Bible term for that would be, you are alert that when you see these nymphs you are going to have a problem. So if you are going to spray, you are going to do it {?} before the adults come along and lay the eggs. So there are some signs, in other words.

¹⁹ Psalm 128:3.

And, by the way, there is a major olive grove in Texas that someone may have and normally can only grow it in really warm climates that never have a winter, but the fellow in Austin even though we have a little tiny bit of winter in Texas has managed to figure out how to do that successfully.

Harmful habits are preceded by a sleeping or hibernating spiritual alertness where they just kind of ... they quit being alert to what is going on around them.

In the book of Revelation in the letters to the seven churches, one of the churches was the church at Sardis, and God warns them about how they were asleep. Sardis was eventually conquered because they were asleep to the danger. And what happened is that basically while they were asleep some people scaled the cliffs behind them that Sardis had said would never be scaled and they came in and attacked the city at night and destroyed the city. It wasn't awake and alert to danger.

So one of the things you need to do as parents is make sure your children don't have any hibernating lies or wrong thoughts. Have some accountability. Make sure they are yielding their rights to God. Be sensitive to know where they are at spiritually. Take kind of a regular spiritual inventory. The scale... it gets on the tree and, as you can see there in the picture they feed on the tree by piercing the tissue of the tree or the branches and they suck the sap out of it.

See, wrong habits come into our lives through what I call the piercings, the openings. And what are the openings in our lives? Well, one is our eyes. Most sin enters through our eyes. It is through what you see. That is why you need to... the Bible warns to keep a frontlet between your eyes. Don't look to the left, don't look to the right. Look straight on. You need to be careful. David says:

"I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes."²⁰

If he hadn't had his eyes where he did on the day he saw Bathsheba, the entire Old Testament would be different, or half the Old Testament would be different had he not done so. And so they come in through eyes. Another thing is through the ears. So what you allow your children to look at and what you allow your children to listen to will help determine their character or help deter their character from being what it ought to be. What kind of magazines do they read? What kind of TV shows do they watch? What kind of music do they listen to?

If any of these things are worldly and they don't lift their mind up to make them want to focus on God, if they don't have the majesty of God as part of their character, then it could damage them.

So... and, moms and dads, don't just... don't impose standards on your kids. First of all, let me tell you. Rules and regulations never work with kids. And if you think they do,

²⁰ Psalm 101:3.

you have missed the boat. What you need to do is explain to children how life works and why life works. They need to understand the principles. If they know the principles, they will follow the principles when they are gone from home. They will follow the principles while they are at somebody else's house and their kids will still be a delight when they are at somebody else's house instead of a pain, you know? So we need to understand that.

Now this scale leaves its young, I guess, on the underside of twigs and leaves. And it is an amazing thing. So if you go and look at an olive tree and you just walk up to it and you are just looking at it and you said, "Well, that looks healthy," and you move on to the next olive tree, that old tree may be infested. What you have to do is you have to turn over the leaf and look at the bottom side of the branch. Look at the bottom side of the leaves and that is where you are going to see this scale. You have got to do some turning over a little bit. Don't just look at what the outward appearance to someone is. You need to do some regular kind of investigation. And what you need to do is look for the small and harmful habits, little tiny bad habits pose a big problem if they are not under the intention of someone who is in authority. They may be trying to hide a habit.

Let me tell you something. The strength of sin is in the secrecy. Now I don't care how many movies you watch about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. They all have at least one thing that is wrong. I can tell you what that is. And I hate to be blunt, but I am just going to tell you. Jesus had no clothes when he hung on the cross, because his ... he took all of our sins upon him and God could not leave any place for the sin to hide. There is no place.

Now he looked more like a chunk of meat than a man. The Bible tells us that:

"...his visage was so marred more than any man."²¹

That is in Isaiah. So you might not have even been sure what you were looking at, so severe was the punishment against Christ. So the movies don't have that right either. Now you would have brought something from the butcher block and hung it up there by the time they were done with Jesus.

But the thing is the strength of sin is in its ability to hide. When sin is hidden it has a control over someone. That is why I believe that men can never get free from the sin of pornography unless they will admit to their wife, they will admit to their family and they will admit to their church that they have this sin. When they expose the sin it no longer has power over them.

It is interesting. When I was doing this presentation on the olive tree I had done one presentation and then there was a break and I was doing the second half of the presentation. And right before I got up in a crowd of 600 men, I think about 42 men got up and confessed the sin of pornography. And God gave them freedom, because they didn't try to hide the sin anymore. The strength of sin is in its secrecy.

²¹ Isaiah 52:14.

Now another thing we need to do and here is what you parents need to do. You need to protect your family from these wrong habits. So how do you do that? Well, first of all, guys, your wife gave you a radar. It is called, you know, God gave you a radar. It is called your wife. She will keep you from flying into mountains. She will keep you from doing stupid. And very often a wife is aware of changes in the emotional state or in the heart of a child that you are not aware of, ok? And very often I will have one of these discussions. I will see something that is... ok, what is wrong with that kid? And my wife will say, "Well, you need to know this and this and this." And she is aware of the states of their heart and she is my radar that helps me to know those things.

So you need to evaluate what influences you are allowing in your kid's life that could be damaging. Everyone of you needs to protect your kids from the internet. You need to protect your husband, ladies, from the internet. So what are some ways to do that? Well, you could get be safe on line. You can have some monitoring service that will even send you emails about what sights that are prohibited were accessed so that you know it. I think that is a great thing to do. Have the email go to the momma in the family, the momma and the daddy so that the momma can check that as well. That will be extra accountability for husbands. Don't let computers be in private places. Never let a kid put a computer in their bedroom, because they could be finding stuff on the internet that they find nowhere else. There is a service called open DNS. You go to open DNS. I think it is dot com. And it becomes... you put it on all your kids computers. All requests go through open DNS and it filters out stuff. We have open DNS on the church network, because we don't want anybody that happens to be hooked to the church network inadvertently coming across something.

Phones, beware of messaging devices. A lot of young ladies are having their hearts stolen because they are getting text messages from young men and the father is not aware of this unmonitored communication that is going on. Do they really need messaging?

By the way. It is amazing. I was in a restaurant yesterday and I saw six girls sitting around a table and you would think...now when girls get... girls used to get together.... they all do this. They are talking all the time. I know, because I have six girls living at my house and what tar they doing all the time? And women know how to communicate. Guys, we have to go to school to learn how to communicate, but women, they know how to communicate. I want to communicate with the trigger finger. They actually want to talk. And what is fascinating about this is these six girls are all sitting around a table. Do you know what every one of them is doing? They are texting. They weren't saying a word. Something has gone wrong when women sit this far apart and they don't talk anymore. They text. Ok? You need to question whether or not that is really a wise choice for you. Also, do you look at the {?} to see who they are talking to? And I get, you know, I get a little freaked out when one of my kids is talking on the phone after 9 PM. One of my kids came down the other day and they were talking after 9 PM on the phone. Daddy wanted to know who they were talking to. It turned out they were discipling someone. That was awesome. But they had better be discipling somebody, you know, or they would have had trouble.

Beware of the night. Sin loves darkness. Strongest temptations often come at night. A great thing to do is you have got an intercom system at your house or a stereo system at your house, play some godly music at night once in a while and it will help dispel those wrong thoughts. And then have some time of prayer. That is crucial.

And then what happens to the olive tree when it gets this scale on it absorbs the nutritional material and then the olive tree begins to die or portions of it begin to die because it lacks it. And so what you have to do is you have to spray the tree with horticultural oil. This clogs up the pores of the scale insects and they die. And then the olive tree can then get the nutrition.

Well, in the same way a major symptom of wrong habits is you ... if your kids lack scripture meditation or personal Bible reading, if they haven't gotten any new insights from God's Word, no {?} then you know something is wrong with them. What you need to do is anoint them by blessing them. Pray for the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Encourage them to memorize some Scripture and then every once in a while just ask your child. What is God teaching you lately?

Now sometimes I don't have to ask some of my children. I have at least one child that every time she gets a truth from Scripture she is excited. She comes and shares it. And I have got another one who will come in and ask me every time she comes across something in God's Word she doesn't understand. She says, "Dad, what does this mean?"

That is great. That is signs that something is working. If kids aren't doing that, then I need to be going to them and asking them questions, you know, what have you learned lately?

Well, finally, how do you conquer hidden sin? The first thing you need to do is you need to view sin from God's perspective.

If you look at verse 11 back here in Joshua seven he goes through a progression and here is basically what he says. He says:

"Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing."²²

Let me put this in the second person plural or singular, take your choice. But let me put it in more modern day idiom. God is saying, "You have sinned, you violated the covenant, you have appropriated the things, the devoted things, the things that were supposed to be for me. And, by the way, you do that every time you take the time you should be giving to God and to your family and leading them in worship and you give it to something else. Then that is appropriating those other things. You have stolen, you have lied, you have concealed stolen goods." The fact of the matter is God can't stand sin. He can't stand it.

²² Joshua 7:11.

Then you need to recognize the awful consequences of sin. So it says after the victory of Jericho it says that God was with Joshua and his fame spread. If you look at verse 12:

“Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.”²³

So after they defeated Ai he says, “Ok, you wanted to fight your battles without consulting me and you want to hide sin? You want to do it so I can’t bless you? Go for it. You know, you can do it all on your own.”

Sin causes you to lose not only the blessing of God, but they presence of God in your life. And that is terrible.

The last thing and that is so we recognize the awful consequences of sin and that is losing the blessing of God. You know, I travel a lot and I am in hotel rooms, you know, around the country and I, you know, unless God changes the plans which I am praying he will, because I really need to stay here next week, but if God doesn't change the plans I will be back in Washington, DC next week. It is kind of my home away from home, probably the city I spend more time in than any other outside of Mansville, Texas. And... but when I am there I know that there is nobody that can see me doing what I am doing, but I know God sees everything I do. And that is what keeps me. And I think when Satan tempts me to sin, the first thought that comes to my mind is: I don’t want to lose the blessing of God on my life. And I don’t want to lose his presence.

The last thing here is you need to confess specific sins with a repentant heart. Now there is a problem here. Achan does confess. Now he confessed after God gave him three chances to repent before he singled him out. You know, he had all Israel pass by and then each tribe passed by. And then each clan passed by and then each family passed by. He had a chance to say, “Whoa, it is me. I confess. I repent. I am so sorry, God. Please forgive me.” He didn't. He was hoping he would get away with it.

Have you ever done anything like that? Have you ever done anything stupid and hoped you would get away with it? I remember when I was a little kid one time. I was a very scientific mind. You know, inquiring minds want to know and one day I remember sitting at home about 3:30 in the afternoon. Mom wasn’t home yet. I had a BB gun. I loved my BB gun, you know? And I got to where I could just raise it up. I didn’t have to put my eyes to it. I could raise it up at hip level and I could hit whatever I was shooting at. I loved that BB gun. But I had a scientific curiosity, because if you shot something hard BBs bounce. And one day I am sitting home and I am thinking? Do you think a BB will bounce off of a television screen? And I was overcome with my scientific curiosity. And I was pretty sure it would, so I pulled the trigger. It didn’t. The glass totally shattered on the front of the TV screen.

²³ Joshua 7:12.

Fortunately back in the days of cathode ray tubes, before we had all these flat TVs and LCDs there was another layer of glass inside. So you know what I tried to do? I... by the way, this is the natural thing you do when you have sin in your life. You try to hide it. That is our first thought. I have got to try to hide it.

So do you know what I do? I picked up all the broken glass. I swept it up. I vacuumed it up. I picked up all the extra little broken glass out of the frame around the TV screen. I turned on the TV and could still see a picture. I thought, I am good.

About three days later my mother is laying on the couch watching TV and she says, "You know, there is something different about that picture. It just looks brighter than it used to." And she went over here and she didn't say these exact words, but she said something to the equivalent of, "Lucy, you have got some explaining to do." You know? That was, you know, the problem that she... you know, we never get away with it.

Well, what does Achan do? He confesses his sins, but he fails to repent of them. He says, "Yeah, I took it." And he even is very specific about what he did. He says, "I saw it," because sin begins with our eyes. Right? I saw it, I wanted it. I took it. That pretty well describes it, doesn't it? I saw it, I wanted it. I took it. But does he ever say, "May God forgive me"? Does he ever say, "I realize now that I am wrong and I am sorry. I am responsible for the death of those 36 men. May God do to me what he did to them"? Does he ever repent? No. He just says, "I did it. You caught me red handed." I saw it. I wanted it. I took it. But he never says I am sorry about it." So he didn't repent.

1 John 1:9 says if you confess and what? You have to not only confess your sins. It does tell you there if you confess your sins God is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. But back in Proverbs 28:13 what does it say? If you confess and what? Forsake your sin. Confess means you are hiding it. You take it out and you can see it. Forsake means you drop it, you put it away and you walk away from it. That is what we need to do with our sins.

I hope this will especially be helpful to parents, because one of the greatest dangers that will attack your family is when a father or a mother or a child is hiding sin in their lives.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, thank you for this day. God, forgive us of the things that we think we can get away with that we think we can hide and, in reality, we can't.

The question is: To whom should you confess your sins? Well, we should confess our sins to God. We don't need a priest. We don't need an advocate. We don't need a psychologist. We don't need a counselor. All sin is against God. That is where we need to be confessing our sins. We need to start there. But then we may also need to go to a proper scriptural authority and the reason we do this is so that we can be accountable to them. We go to them and say, "You know, pastor, I have prayed about this, but I need someone to keep from.... help me keep from falling into this sin again. And I would like

you to question me from time to time about how I am doing in this area of my life.” Or, you know, we have at our church an online men’s discipleship group. We meet on Saturday mornings and we can kind of hold each other’s feet to the fire. We can hold one another accountable. And obviously you need to confess your sin to the one that you have wronged. If you have wronged someone, you need to go restore that relationship and so you need to go to that person and you need to confess the sin to that one that you have wronged.

We also need to claim the blood of Christ. You know, Achan’s sin required his own blood and that of his family. And, again, it is because both Achan and his family were complicit in the crime together. God would not have put Achan’s children to death for the sin of their father or nor would he have put Achan to death for the sin of his kids, but they were in the thing together. So his own... his sin required his own blood.

But the basis of 1 John 1:9 where it says that:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”²⁴

...is the shed blood of Christ. We can’t pay for our own sins. You know, when Achan and his family died for their sins they met whatever eternal judgment there was already waiting for them.

The fact of the matter is, though, I can be restored to fellowship with God because Jesus took my punishment upon himself. When God looks at me he looks at me through blood colored glasses. He sees me in Christ and he sees Christ still hanging on the cross dying and paying for my sins. He knows that the penalty for my sin has been paid and that his justice has already been satisfied. He is not sitting up there waiting to zap me because, you know, I am going to lose my salvation and go to hell because I have sinned. If I could have lost my salvation I would have lost it long ago. And, by the way, those people that believe you can lose your salvation need to understand that in Hebrews seven it says if you could lose your salvation you could never get it again. So in other words, you would be saved, you would lose your salvation and you would be lost for the rest of your life, because Christ only died for sin once the writer of Hebrews says. That is why we can’t be saved a second time. And so some of our charismatic friends and some of our church of Christ friends who believe you can lose your salvation, they have just got it wrong. And it is a sad theology that they have.

Another thing we need to do is we need to tell proper scriptural authorities. Never conceal a matter from God {?} authorities. I tell my kids. If anybody ever tells you something and then says, “Don’t tell your parents,” you immediately come tell me, because that is where a secret sin becomes a part of their life. That is where somebody says, “You can’t tell your parents.” Or somebody says, “Here, I want you to listen to this music, but I know your parents don’t approve so don’t tell your parents.” Or, here, you know, let’s go do this. It won’t hurt. Just don’t tell your husband about it or you know,

²⁴ 1 John 1:9.

you ... or somebody confides you and they say, "Well, honey, don't worry about it. We won't tell your husband." Or somebody does something and says, "Well, you know, let's just don't let the pastor hear, because we don't want him to know we do such and such."

Any time you are concealing a matter from a God ordained authority you are asking for problems. God ordained your authority as a protection. So you need not humble yourself. And you need to go to that authority and you need to say, "I need your help to stay under protection."

Then you need to make whatever restitution is necessary. Pay what you owe. The law in the Old Testament said that if you took something that didn't belong to you, you needed to return it at least four times the amount stolen. And so if you took one sheep you needed to return four sheep and part of the reason for that is that helped to remove obstacles to others coming to the Lord. When people sensed that you fear God enough that if you took one thing and had to return four and there was a, you know, this was kind of a severe penalty. It is not just taking and bringing back what you stole, but it is bringing back four times the amount you stole, then that really helped to remove obstacles to others. It caused the fear of the Lord and just to see that kind of restitution necessary.

The best thing about restitution, though, is it helps you feel the pain of your sin. You know, just this morning I had a father bring a little girl to me and she went home with three pencils that she took from the church last week. And, you know, I would have never noticed about those pencils, nor would I have ever really cared about it, but this father recognized how important it was and he brought that little girl to me and had her ask for my forgiveness and, you know, give the pencils back. And I said, "Well, honey, just put them pack in the pew. I definitely forgive you." But the point is this father was very wisely trying to help his daughter feel the pain and the embarrassment of sin.

I remember when I was a little boy. My mom and I walked from our house up to a convenience store that was about three, four blocks from where we lived and I was in that store and I took a piece of bubble gum and I just wanted that piece of bubble gum. I didn't get bubble gum very often. It wasn't one of those things my parents ever bought me. And so somewhere on the way home I just kind of unwrapped it and stuck it in my mouth, didn't think much about it.

Well, my mother wanted to know where that bubble gum came from and I had to confess to her what I had done. I was probably in the second grade at the time. Well, she made me walk all the way back the three blocks to that store and she went in with me and she had me apologize to the store owner of taking a piece of bubble gum that at that day and time cost two cents. Now this was a long time ago, but that is what it cost. But what that did is I still remember that 40, you know, almost 40 years later. I still remember that, because of the pain and the embarrassment that I felt. Making restitution is a great idea.

Now what we need to do for our families and for our children in particular is we need to learn how to put a fence around the cliff. The was an old poem and I love this poem and

the poem says it better than I can. The poem is called a fence or an ambulance. And here is the point. It says:

'Twas a dangerous cliff,
As they freely confessed,
Though to walk near its' edge, was so pleasant.
But over its terrible edge there had slipped,
A duke in full many a peasant.
So the people said something would have to be done,
But their projects did not at all tally.
Some said, "Put a fence around the edge of the cliff,"
Some, an ambulance down in the valley.
But the cry for the ambulance carried the day,
For it spread throughout the neighboring city.
A fence may be useful or not it is true,
But each heart became grim, full of pity.
For those who slipped over the dangerous cliff,
And the dwellers in highway and alley,
Gave pounds or gave pence, not to put up a fence,
But an ambulance down in the valley.
"For the cliff is all right if you are careful," they said,
And if folks even slip and are dropping.
It isn't the slipping that hurts them so much,
As the shock down below when they are stopping.
So day after day as these mishaps occur,
Quick forth with these rescuers sally,
To pick up the victims who fell off the cliff,
With an ambulance down in the valley.
Then an old sage remarked, "It is a marvel to me,
That people give far more attention,
To repairing results than to stopping the cause,
When they much better aim at prevention.
Let us stop at its source all this mischief," cried he.
"Come neighbors and friends, let us rally.
If the cliff we will fence, we might almost dispense,
With the ambulance down in the valley.
"Oh, he is a fanatic," the others, rejoined.
"Dispense with the ambulance? Never.
He'd dispense with all charities, too, if he could,
No, no, we will support them forever.
Aren't we picking up folks as fast as they fall?
And shall this man dictate to us shall he?
Why should people of sense stop to put up a fence,
With an ambulance works in the valley."
But a sensible few who were practical, too,
Will not bear such nonsense much longer,

They believe that prevention is better than cure,
And their party will soon be the stronger.
Encourage them, then, with your purse, voice and pen,
And while other philanthropists dally,
They will soon scorn all pretense and put up a stout fence,
On the cliff that hangs over the valley.
Better guide well the young then reclaim them when old,
For the voice of true wisdom is calling,
To rescue the fallen is good, but this best,
To prevent other people from falling.
Better close up the source of temptation and crime,
Than deliver from dungeon or galley,
Better put up a strong fence round the top of the cliff,
Than an ambulance down in the valley.

That poet, a man by the name of Joseph Malins said it perfectly correctly. And even in our society and our government right now, we should be putting up fences. We should be finding ways to prevent youth from going into an ungodly life rather than trying to rehabilitate them later. We should be finding ways to help people be financially stable on their own by freeing them and giving them incentives to work and reducing their tax load so they can make a go of business rather than take everything from everyone else and then some day saying, “Ok, don’t worry. We will provide you social security. We will take care of you.” But it is also true for your children and that is don’t wait until your kids need picking up in the valley with an ambulance and maybe it is too late to get them. Watch, be diligent. Look to the danger signs that are in their life. Make sure that they are not having hidden sin. Put a fence around the cliff. Protect them from things like the internet and wrong influences and wrong music and wrong friends. It is so crucial that you do that.

There is a process to sin that every Christian needs to know and in James chapter one describes this so perfectly. He says:

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.²⁵

James says there are basically four steps to sin. There is a desire, his own lust. And if God gave every one of us natural desires. When I get tired at night I have a desire to sleep. But when we pervert the desire to sleep it becomes being a sluggard. God gave a married man a physical desire for his wife, but when that desire gets perverted it becomes lust or it becomes fornication or it becomes concupiscence or it becomes adultery. We all have a desire to eat, but when you take that to the extreme it turns into a perverted desire called gluttony. So the devil always helps us when he sees we have a desire. His job is to pervert that desire.

²⁵ James 1:14-15.

Then we have deception. James says when he is drawn away of his own lust. That is a Greek word for a fishing lure. It means to be lured away. And I love to go bass fishing and I haven't done it in a long, long time, but I used to have a beautiful, yellow and orange lure that floated on top of the water. You could give it a little twitch to your fishing Rod and it would make a little popping sound. And if you did it at the right time in the early spring it was like the fish saw something on the top of the water and he thinks it is dinner. He thinks it is something to eat. He doesn't really pay attention to the hook. So that doesn't mean anything to him. So he runs up there, opens his wide mouth and jumps on it and then the hooks catch him.

We often are fooled by the devil. We are deceived by the devil, because he shows us something that looks good, shows us something that meets one of our perverted desires. And we don't see the fact that there is a hook. We don't see the fact that there is a penalty. We don't think about the fact there is a consequence. He wants us to think that there are no consequences. And the word entice means to bait an animal trap. And you know you have all seen the old cartoons where there is a carrot and under a box and there is a stick holding up one end of the box and then there is a string tied to the stick and you are waiting for the rabbit to get in there and eat the carrot and you pull the stick out and you have trapped the rabbit or, you know, in actual trapping terms you put something that will cause an animal to walk into a trap and then the jaws clamp around his foot.

But, see, the whole point is you are trying to make the animal think that there is something there that they can take, something they can eat and that there is not a consequence to go with it. And that is what the devil tells us. He says, "Go ahead. You can get away with it. Nobody will ever know. You are here in a hotel room. Nobody will ever know what you are going to do." But the fact is that it is important.

And then disobedience is the next step. When lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin. Every person in the world has two physical parents. Well, sin has two parents as well. It is lust and the will that, you know, when they get together they form sin. So for example if you have a perverted desire for physical relationship and you lust after a woman and Jesus says if you have lusted after a woman you have already committed adultery in your heart. Why? Because the will gets together and says, "Yeah, I would like to do that to that woman or I would like to think about that longer. I would like to ponder her. I would like to have her." And when the will combines with the lust it is sin at that point in time.

Man doesn't actually have to go out and commit the adultery. Same thing with hating someone. It is saying that they are not worth living and basically when you think that thought, you don't have to actually murder, but you are just as guilty as someone who had murdered. And then he says that sin when it is finished bringeth forth death. The reality is that the end of all sins is death. It is a death to your testimony. It could be a death to your marriage. It could be a death to... of your relationship with someone. It could be a death of your walk with the Lord. It could even mean physical death. There and Paul told the Corinthians that because they had taken of the Lord's supper unworthily some are weak and sick and some now even slept against them.

We also need to learn how to respond correctly to temptation and James tells us how to do that, too. So, first of all, you need to remember the consequences of sin. He says, “Sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.”

Think about King David walking along the roof of his palace one day and he should have been out to war, but he wasn't. Some people persuaded him to stay home and home and he looks and he sees Bathsheba. Most sins enter through the eye and he sins with her.

Now let me ask you a question. If David had known when he sinned with Bathsheba that she was going to get pregnant, he was going to have to have one of his mightiest warriors killed and then you are going to have one of his sons rape one of his daughters and then another son is going to kill that son and then the son that killed the other son is now going to try to steal the kingdom from David and David and his counselors are going to have to run for their lives until they can restore the throne and then the second son, Absalom is going to die and he is going to be killed by a general, Joab, against the orders of King David and you would think if David had known all of that heart ache would have come that he would still said, “Yeah, I still want the woman”?

No, he wouldn't have. If we would think about the consequences of sin we wouldn't give in to it. And then we need to remember God's goodness to you. The Bible says every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. Actually in Greek it says every good gift and every perfect gift is continually coming down from above. Listen. We need to recognize the fact that God has been good to us. And don't want to blow that. I have too many blessings from the Lord. I don't want to blow his blessings.

And then we need to remember the divine nature within you.

“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”²⁶

I am a child of the king. So why should I serve the enemy. I belong to the King of kings and the Lord of lords and I can walk in his throne room? Why would I want to stoop to serve not only an enemy, but a defeated enemy at that? Because Satan was defeated on the cross.

We need to become spiritually accountable. One of the best things you can do to avoid the dangers of hidden sin is to have accountability partners, people that can ask you about your faults, ask you where you are going. Confess your faults, that is, your tendencies to sin, your weaknesses. Confess your faults one to another. Pray for one another that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Find some righteous people and say, “I am struggling in this area. Would you pray for me?”

Now what a fault, the word here means to fall beside, it means to have a lapse or

²⁶ James 1:18.

deviation from truth or uprightness. So it is talking about a spiritual weakness. And you need to become accountable to some...

I just want to emphasize that it is a blessing that God gives us a very precise story in the battle of Ai on how we can overcome hidden sin and what the dangers of those sin are. And I want to especially tell parents, because I have been through this with one of my children and I wish we had time to ... for Grace and I to share with you what she did and what sin she hid and how I found it and what questions I asked to uncover it. But you need to develop wisdom as parents to talk to your children, to keep their heart, to know when their heart isn't right anymore, to know when there is a block in that fellowship with them. May God help each one of us to overcome the dangers of hidden sin.

May God bless you.