

Broomfield 

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Leanness of Soul

Psalm 106:13-15

Let's go now to our Lord Jesus Christ, and feed upon Him. As He has proclaimed in His word, as He is proclaimed at The Table; let us feast and commune with our Savior.

I ask you to turn with me to Psalm 106. In your bulletin is an outline; it is somewhat ambitious, I had planned to preach this whole passage this morning but in preparation for this morning I decided I won't. We're going to make this a two parter.

Psalm 106 is believed to be a psalm of David though it's not identified that way; according to 1Chronicles 16:34-36 the first and last verse of this Psalm match that perfectly, and hence it's believed that David wrote this Psalm.

Psalm 106 is a psalm is about God's loving-kindness. It's about that in it's showing God's loving-kindness by showing man's sinfulness in verses 6 thru 43, in fact notice verse 6, it's the recurrent theme of "man's failure" in 6 thru 43, summarized with verse 6:

Psalm 106:6, "We have sinned like our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly."

And if you look at how bad man is, and then you see at how good God is you see how incredibly loving kind God is, and hence verse 1, which demonstrates the glorious theme of this psalm

Psalm 106:1, "Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting."

God is love, and His lovingkindness is everlasting, so this psalm is a psalm extolling the lovingkindness, the mercy, and the grace of God as demonstrated by man's sin.

Our passage is found in the section in which the psalmist is detailing the sin of God's redeemed people, that is the key, we're not talking about pagan's, we're not talking about non-believer's – David is re-living the history of a redeemed people, and how they related to God. Specifically we will be looking at verses 13 to 15 and this little pericope as it describes an account of God's people in Numbers 11. Follow with me as I read this portion of God's word Psalm 106:13-15:

Psalm 106:13-15, “They quickly forget his works; they waited not for his counsel: But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. So he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.”

Never before in the history of the church has the Christian in the United States experienced so much wealth, and yet lived with so much misery as Christian's in the U.S. do today. In the United States we have houses, cars — some of us two or three cars — we have toys. We have savings accounts, retirement accounts, slush fund accounts. We have vacations. We have memories of incredible vacations in the past. We have plans for tomorrow — next week — and perhaps this coming year.

And thus we look at ourselves in America like the song goes “God has blessed America” “He shed His grace on thee.” And we look at *The Voice of the Martyrs* a periodical detailing persecuted Christians around the world. Or we read *Foxes Book of Martyrs* and we say “praise God that we have been blessed like we are today.”

And yet amazingly during these times of supposed blessings we rarely look at our souls and there gauge whether or not we truly are the recipients of God's blessings. In fact, I believe if there is any Achilles heel of the church today, or the church throughout redemptive history — we see this in Romans chapters 2, 4 and 5— it's this: God's people believe that because they are the recipients of physical blessing, of physical well-being, or something opportune that they attribute that to the blessing of God, never minding the state of their souls.

Spurgeon wrote this:

“That God gives a man his desire is no proof that he is the object of divine favour. . .”¹

But we missed that boat. We think that because I got what I prayed for, asked for and pleaded for from God and God gave it to me that I can say God blessed me. In fact we say that God blessed us so much that because we got what we wanted. When the reality is that is a false correlation!

Just because we have physical well-being, just because we have this or that —we've got two cars, we got that house — that doesn't mean that God is blessing us! The true measure and standard of biblical blessing is not the stuff that you and I have but it is the character and relative health of our soul.

Can we honestly believe that the church in the United States is blessed when the divorce rate is at an all-time high in the church and is equal with the world? Can we truly be the recipients of Divine blessing when evangelicals are committing abortions in this land by droves? Are we truly the ‘people of blessing’ that we say we are?

¹ The Treasury of David, page 367

Are we truly blessed when churches have replaced the worship of Almighty God with services of celebration? Are we truly blessed when the standard for pastoral care in the body of Jesus Christ today is derived not from God's word, but from the business world?

Can we honestly say that God has blessed us when the average evangelical pastor spends less than three minutes a day praying? Are we really blessed when the average congregant spends less than five minutes per week reading the word of God?

Can we honestly say that we are a blessed people?

I say that we live in a land of 'spiritual emaciation.' The church at large in the United States is suffering from a disease that if we could see it we would be disgusted. You and I might be able to see it, but we know it, don't we?

The symptoms and the signs of 'spiritual emaciation' are all around us: depression, anxiety, worry, bitterness, sorry, envy, anger, and sadness.

Do you know how many millions of dollars are spent each year on therapists, psychoanalysts, and medication? It's mind-boggling. But we are a people who says "God blessed us so" "I've got the pay raise." "I took the vacation." "I got the job."

Spurgeon wrote this:

"If we must know scantiness, may God grant it may not be scantiness of soul."²

In essence he's saying "take my vacation, take my money, take my job, take ANYTHING, but DON'T take the health of my soul God!"

Yet sadly it's flip-flopped today, hasn't it? We live in a land that is so plentiful today it's amazing. Yet spiritually speaking our lives are thin, and our time is lean.

So what is the solution to scantiness of soul? Is it to go read another book? Is it simply to go to another conference? Perhaps one should go to another retreat?

Family of God, gloriously speaking, the answer is found in the text this morning: Psalm 106. Psalm 106 is so special, specifically verses 13 to 15 for our purposes this morning because it's describing a people who got what they want.

From all outward appearances you'd say those people are blessed. This is the generation that watched God powerfully deliver them from the hand of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh. This is the generation that walked through the Red Sea on dry ground. This is the generation that watched God bring water from a rock. This is the generation that beheld the power of God as like none of us has ever seen before, and until we die ever will see. This is the generation that prayed for meat and they got it. They got the answer to their prayer, and yet this is a generation according to verses 13-15 suffered as we'll see, emaciated souls, spiritual leanness.

² The Treasury of David, page 367

And what makes this passage so special for us is that it just not only says they had a lean soul, or spiritual emaciation, but verse 13 thru 14 gives us the reason they had a lean soul. Hence what we have is not only a description of a people who were spiritually lean, it also gives us the reason — the cause — and thus, the cure for ‘spiritual emaciation.’ Or as I’ve titled it here *leanness of soul*.

Let us look at this passage this morning.

Notice this text answers the questions “what is leanness of soul?” and “how do I cope?”

What is Leanness of Soul

First of all let’s begin with its content – what is “leanness of soul”? Look with me at verse 15.

Psalm 106:15, “So he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.”

God sent leanness into their soul as the KJV reads. Or as the NAS says “sent a wasting disease among them.”

This idea of leanness, or a wasting disease speaks of emaciation. It refers to the process of making thin by starvation or illness.

Now to understand this, we must recall the situation to which David is referring in this Psalm. Turn with me to Numbers 11 to recap that history.

Numbers 11:4-5, “And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick.”

Now after carrying on like this, the people hear from God – He answers’ their request in beginning in verse 18.

Numbers 11:18-20, “And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?”

In essence God is saying “you want meat? You got it! And you’re going to be eating meat everyday. God said you will be eating meat until you’re throwing up. That’s what it is saying – “till it comes out of your nostrils – you’re so sick of meat that you’re throwing it up!”

Numbers 11:33, “And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.”

Go back to Psalm 106. They quickly forgot God's works. They craved intensely in the wilderness, and God gave them their request, but sent a wasting disease, or leanness of soul among them.

Clearly by this passage we have concluded that God's people got physically sick, they were throwing up the meat that they were eating.

I used to know what the title is, but some scholar's believe that they had some form of physical ailment caused by too much meat, or a certain kind of meat, that they were throwing it up. But this text goes beyond a physical ailment verse 15 says that "He sent a wasting disease among them." Some texts say "in them." The implication is that believers at the time of the Exodus suffered far more than a mere physical ailment. They suffered something spiritually.

And thus for example Joseph Alexander wrote these words:

"The last phrase ["among them"] is... designed to shew that the emaciation or decay which was sent upon them was not bodily but spiritual."³

The term *among them*, and *in them* tells us that this is something far beyond a physical result of eating too much meat. It is that they are suffering spiritual decay, spiritual emaciation. C. H. Spurgeon wrote, speaking of this "wasting disease" these words:

"To gain silver and lose gold is a poor increase; but to win for the body and lose for the soul is far worse. How earnestly might Israel have unprayed her prayers had she known what would come with their answer!"⁴

He is exactly right.

What's going is more than just a physiological response to too much meat. It is that the people of God got their physical request answered but it cost them the spiritual health of their soul. They got Leanness of Soul.

What is that then?

Let me define it as the Puritan's defined it. This is what the Puritan's termed *the dark night of the soul*. What they are talking about is a time when your soul is bereft of its only true delight and love: God. This is leanness of soul.

It's a time when your soul is left to itself and therefore left to reap its own workings. It's a soul is in want of the only cure for its cancer — the cherished presence of the Savior! It's a soul which once having experienced the comfort, joy, and fulfillment of fellowship with God is abandoned to experience a greater pain than if God were never there!

It's not a soul which once having been saved is lost. This is impossible. Rather it's a soul that has lost the glorious experience of communion with God. It is a soul that has lost the sense of His presence.

³ Joseph Alexander, Commentary on the Psalms, page 446

⁴ The Treasury of David, Volume 2, page 367

Leanness of soul is not a dead soul. Leanness of soul is a soul bereft of the only thing, the only One, that can nourish and feed it, and that's God!

So God gave the Jews their prayer request. They wanted meat, He gave it to them. But in His providence He sovereignly withheld the sense of His presence from their souls. So they languished.

That family of God is a leanness of soul.

Practically, God has not left them. We are talking about redeemed people here. We are talking about a people who God took with His mighty hand (the other Psalms say "and brought them to The Promised Land"). We are talking about a people redeemed of God. Not aliens but redeemed! And it is these redeemed people who say "I am sick of God what I want is my fleshly lusts."

God has said "you want it bad enough I'll answer that prayer, but I'm also going to lift the sense of My presence, such that you are going to feel an emptiness, a gulf, a hunger that you've never know before." That is leanness of soul.

How can one deal with leanness of soul?

As I look across America, and I look at my own soul and I see the churches and think "man, is this a description of today?" How many Christian's have you heard it said, "God has blessed me so much, today I got a pay raise?" That is not a blessing it could be the greatest curse in the world!

Or perhaps you have heard: "God blessed me so much, I got the job" "God blessed me so much I got this." That may not be a blessing family of God! We have so lost the standard upon which we measure blessing. To use the standard is what happens physically on this earth, that's platonic, its pagan.

The Bible says the standard is the state, and stature of your soul. That is the standard by which we measure blessing.

When I tell someone "God has blessed me so much I got a pay raise" but then I tell you I have been struggling the past year before God. We have to say that standing before God that pay raise is NOT a blessing! To say "God has blessed me" is to say God has given me a greater contempt of myself, a greater love for the cross, a greater hunger, a greater passion for the Savior. That is divine blessing!

God's blessing is to stand before people and say "I don't care what you think about me anymore, because God loves me! And He cares about me! And that is more important to me than all the tea in China!" That's divine blessing!

But sadly we live a day when church youth groups are bursting at the seams with children who are learning to eat goldfish, and "pin the tail on the preacher." They are not learning, not knowing that the spiritual health of their soul is. They are not learning of the depth of the knowledge of their sinfulness, and thus the depth of the knowledge of their Savior. They are not learning that His grace is greater than all their sin.

We're spiritually emaciated.

Thankfully this text tells us how to deal with leanness of soul. This text gives the cause.

Verses 13 thru 14 are a progression. The first leads to the second. And the second leads to the third.

Don't miss this it is an important point. The first cause of spiritual leanness is what leads to the second cause. The second cause leads to the third.

Now we are going to look at the first two causes this morning. Next week we will wrap it up with the last two. By looking at the cause, by God's grace we will know the cure.

Psalm 106:13, "**They soon forgot his works**; they waited not for his counsel."

This is an amazing statement. The word for *forget*⁵ is an active word in the Hebrew. It is NOT simply as the dictionary defines it a psychological act of having a thought pass from the conscience. It is not a temporary or permanent loss of memory.

That is not what this word means. This word is not passive, it's active. It's not where you accidentally let something slip from your mind. This word is an active, purposed, chasing from your mind.

It is to forget by intentionally doing something. For example it is used in Deuteronomy 8 where God's people ignored God's commandments.⁶ Here God's people are said to have forgotten them. This is further explained to us in Deuteronomy 8:19.

Deuteronomy 8:19, "And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish."

Here where God's "followed other gods" they are said to have forgotten God. It is not where you're going along, and realize "Oh! It slipped my mind – He is alive!" No, forgetting God in this context is actively worshipping a false god. It's actively ignoring God's commandments.

Isaiah 51:13, "And forgettest the LORD thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; **and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?**"

Here forgetting God is to "stand in fear of harm and danger or to live fretfully and timidly" (NAS) This is the idea behind forget. It is actively ignoring and neglecting God and His works, and running to something else! It was this that the people were guilty of in the days of Moses.

This forgetting God has an important qualification: soon. This term *soon* or *quickly*⁷ means to hasten, to do something with speed. It carries the idea of swiftness and suddenness.

The Israelites just didn't forget God, they did it quickly. This implies intention or purpose.

It wasn't long after they were across the Red Sea that they actively, purposefully said "we're sick of you God." This is forgetting God. They quickly did it. They did it with post-haste. You may say "that's rather

⁵ שכח shakach

⁶ Compare Deuteronomy 8:11

⁷ מהר mahar

shocking for believers.” I mean we read this verse and say “they have to be pagans – there’s no way these guys can be Christian’s, because a Christian wouldn’t do that.”

Adam and Eve were in the garden, what is the first thing they did? Did they run to God and say “God, I’m so sorry I sinned against you?” What did they do? They hid themselves. And then they did what? They covered themselves. They covered their shame in their own clothing!⁸

Sin has spread to us all! And by our nature, indeed the greatest passion of our sinful nature is to run from God. Do you believe that?

Romans 1:21-23 pictures the non-believer

I remember early in my walk with Jesus Christ, and even as a non-Christian thinking that the non-believer’s that worship idols, and false gods in foreign lands, that they’re just trying to get to God the best way they can.

Right, you’ve heard that? That person bowing down to an image, they’re trying to get to God. They are just not informed. Romans 1:21-23 says no guys they are running from God just as fast as they can. Running to an idol is not their way to get to God. It is their very means to run away from, to get away from God.

A non-believing heart hates God.⁹ They don’t want God. They are fleeing from God. And though we are saved in Jesus Christ, and have been given a brand new nature, and hence we love God, nevertheless our old nature is still there.¹⁰ That old nature, don’t miss this – it’s passion, it’s hunger, it’s thirst — is to get out from the presence of God as fast, as quickly as is possible. It is in your blood. The very blood that pulsates through you has that rebellious passion. On the one hand we say “Lord thank You for saving me”, but on the other hand we say “God get out of my presence I don’t want You – You scare me.”

What did they quickly forget? This is important and that’s why we are spending so much time here. They quickly forgot His works. What works?

According to Psalm 106:6-12 they forgot His works of redemption. They quickly forgot the sovereign power of God which didn’t even speak a word, and the water was split.¹¹ They forgot who released His people from slavery; who enabled His people to walk across the Red Sea on dry ground—you can read it verses 6 – 12; they forgot this. Again, they did not forget this the way the English dictionary says it. They actively said “I don’t want to know this, I don’t want to think about it, I don’t want to meditate on it, and I want to run from that! They quickly forgot that fact about God. They forgot His act of deliverance, His act of sovereignty therein.

Thus family of God, note this – the first cause of spiritual leanness is the actively forgetting of God’s works, power, and deliverance in our lives. If we forget God’s works and powers; if we forget God’s character as evidenced in the cross, then you and I are on a death spiral towards leanness of soul.

⁸ Compare Genesis 3:8

⁹ Compare Ephesians 2, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 2:14

¹⁰ Compare Galatians 5:17 and Romans 7:14

¹¹ Compare Exodus 15:22-24

The Rich Abiding Walk with God

In fact, then the opposite would also be true – labor for a high view of God, labor for a vivid memory of the character, and the workings of Christ on our behalf, and you’ll be on your way to a deep, rich abiding walk with God.

Let me show you that – please turn in your Bibles to Exodus 19 for three examples to the contrast of Psalm 106:13. Psalm 106 tells us these people had leanness because they quickly forgot the works of God. Let me show you the opposite that if you and I keep vivid in our minds-eye the workings of God, we will have everything else but a lean soul.

Exodus 19:18-25, “And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them. And Moses said unto the LORD, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. And the LORD said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them. So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.”

Notice that this text is before Mount Sinai or the giving of the Law.

Now skip to Exodus 20:18.

Exodus 20:18 - 19, “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

This passage is the very reason that I am preaching to you today instead of a God speaking from a mountain. God at this point instituted the office of preaching (prophet) in place of the mountain. In place of the loud thunderings there was the still, small voice of the prophet.

Notice the answer that God gave Moses in verse 20:

Exodus 20:20, “And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and **that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.**”

God gives us a glimpse of His character to temper us so that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin. When you and I come to a fuller and richer comprehension of the awesome character, and almighty power of God, the ramification is for redeemed people — not un-redeemed people because their response is climb under these mountains and say “kill me God” — is awe and reverence, and a passion to be holy, and not sin, and to flee from sinful lusts.

It is just the opposite of spiritual leanness. It's a soul that is set back by the vision of a mighty, awesome God. It is a soul who says "how awesome is this God we must whisper, we are on holy ground, and I don't dare sin."

We whisper on Monday morning, and on Tuesday when I'm tempted by those websites. I don't dare violate God's presence because as a redeemed person I realize I am always standing in the presence of a mighty awesome God.

See guys, if you forget the works of the Lord your soul will grow lean. If you come to a fuller comprehension of the awesome glory of a mighty God, you live in reverence, fear, and you don't sin.

Job 42 is another fantastic passage. You know the story of Job. He is a righteous man. He is a Christian. But God allowed Satan to destroy Job's life. In this test of Job's character, the Job's salvation was tested. Satan was allowed to take everything short of taking his life.

Job didn't sin.

Job 1:20-22, "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly"

Through this entire trial Job doesn't sin, or blame God. He is a man that loves the Lord.

Should I blame God for taking back that what is already His?" That would be an ill debtor, to grumble when the master comes and requires that which is his. I can't blame God for taking my children – they're His. I cannot blame God for taking my wife – she's His.

But then along comes Job's friends, these wonderfully well-intentioned minister's of the gospel (and this is probably stretching a little bit). They came and sat down for seven days — wonderfully ministering presence. They just sat there with Job. Then started talking, and they said, "Job, you know why this happened don't you?" "Why it is because you sinned."

Well so much for being ministers of the gospel, now they're being pagans. They're teaching him how to worship Zeus. "Because you sinned, and everyone knows if you sin God's gonna get ya' ".

Job, as a sinner like you and me said, "No way! If that's true then God's wrong! That can't be true!" Job fights this idea from Job 1 through 42 it is that fight in which he is saying "no guys you're wrong – I haven't sinned – not like that! Yes I'm guilty of sin, but not in the way that you're talking!"

So finally Job sins. And he says "I just want God to stand right here, right now and answer my questions. One simple question God that's all I want. You better answer it!"

Well God appears — chapter 38, 39, 40, 41 — and then Job responds. God never answers Job's question. God just manifests His glorious, awesome splendor. That is all God does. He gives Job a glimpse, a greater glimpse if you will — the curtain is spread it is made just a little bit thinner. And this is what Job says:

Job 42:5-6, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Job says "guys until this point in my walk with Jesus Christ, everything I have known about God, at best was like a rumor. All that great systematic theology, all that great understanding of who God is, and His character at best could be described as a rumor compared to all I understand and behold to be true of God right now." And what's the response? "Therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes."

Job came to a fuller understanding and comprehension of the greatness of his God. He fell on his face like a dead man and said, "God I am sorry, I retract my accusation, and I repent!"

He is a picture to us of Matthew 5:3-4, mourning over his sinfulness, mourning over his impoverished state. If you desire a rich full soul, meditate upon God. Come to know God more richly, more fully; come to know the God of the Bible!

The final passage is found in Matthew 14. Christ has been speaking all day when he sends His disciples out on the Sea of Galilee on a boat. The wind comes down, tosses that boat to and fro. The disciples are on that boat for nine hours.

Christ has just fed the 5000. He is up in the mountains praying. Then Christ comes to the distressed disciples by walking on the waves.

The disciples see Him and think He's a ghost. He answers them by saying it is I. Peter says, "Let me come out to you on the water." Peter starts to walk on the water but becomes afraid and starts to sink because he took his eyes off of Christ and place them onto the wind and the waves. Christ lifts him up, and they get into the boat, and the wind stops, and then we read these words:

Matthew 14:32-33, "And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, of a truth thou art the Son of God."

The key to this passage is actually found in the parallel passage of Mark 6.

Mark 6:51-52, "And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened."

Matthew records that the disciples worshipped. I know you're thinking that's obvious they should be worshipping Him. After all Christ fed 5,000 people with just five loaves. Why this is so amazing that the disciples worshipped Him is that they didn't gain any insight from the loaves. They looked at the loaves as the means by which they could get a good meal.

The disciple's world was minute. They didn't look at the loaves and see the glory of God. They didn't look at the loaves and see the grace and mercy of God. They looked at the loaves and saw a good, well balanced meal.

So when they got into the boat and worshipped it is amazing that they did. Mark says they weren't listening, but they did worship. Under a fuller comprehension of Jesus Christ one worships! Life becomes worship. Life becomes an offering of praise. Life is a time when you live in repentance, dust and ashes. Life becomes a time where you live in fear and reverence.

As God's people we must fight against leanness of soul. It behooves us as redeemed people to make it a point to labor to come to a fuller comprehension of the greatness of God. In fact family of God I will say this as a word of exhortation, watch over your heart. Leanness of soul occurs when you and I stop the vigilance

Proverbs 4:23 'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.'

Watch over your heart brothers and sisters. Because in that heart are all the makings of apostasy. All the makings of fleeing from God are in that heart. Watch over that – stop that passion before it starts.

A low view of God rots religion. A. W. Tozer wrote these words:

“A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.

“It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity.

“Perverted notions about God soon rot the religion in which they appear. The long career of Israel demonstrates this clearly enough, and the history of the Church confirms it. So necessary to the Church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the Church with her worship and her moral standards declines along with it. The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God.”¹²

He's right.

Psalm 115:4, 8, “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.”

Let me ask this: look across the church today, what do you see? Do you see God's character reflected in the body of Jesus Christ at large? When you look at the Reformed church — let's talk about the Reformed church —. Is it characterized more by coldness, by a “God is sovereign” (emphatic intonation) attitude rather than a worshipping spirit. You know what, if that is true, that the church that proclaims the sovereignty of God, and yet it is cold, heartless, and uncaring — then I can guarantee this — they are not worshipping the God of the Bible, because you will become like the god you worship. A church that you say is a biblical church worshipping God does not reflect the character of that God, then family of God they are not worshipping that god – they are not worshipping the God of the Bible – they are worshipping a god of their own fancy, and their own imagination.

Leanness of soul is the result of worshipping a false god. Leanness of soul is having thoughts about God that are not worthy of Him. Thus if you and I will guard our hearts, watch over them diligently so that our

¹² A. W. Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, Pages 10, 12

concept of God is not derived from me, or from a neighbor, or from a book I just read — a bestseller – but from the Bible, then we will enjoy a rich, and deep soul.

But as you watch over your hearts I want to warn you of one error, because the key to the battle in guarding our hearts from ignoble thoughts about God — there is a battle family of God, and if you don't know it you will be a victim.

2 Corinthians 10:5, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

Family of God, Christ and the knowledge of God are inseparable. You will find that the battle when it comes to our understanding of God revolves around our understanding of redemption, and the cross. Now I know all of you are going to say “hey man, I understand that Jesus died for me.” Guys guard that – your spiritually emaciated soul will begin decaying if you don't guard that understanding.

But you say “what understanding? Jesus loves me, this I know”. This is the most profound theological statement ever! Let me ask you something, if you understand that Jesus loves you then why are you so defensive? Why in your marriage do you argue so much with your spouse? If you know Jesus Christ loves you, and therefore the only basis you stand upon before your wife, your children, this world is the love and acceptance that God has for you, then why do you care what your neighbor thinks? Why do you care what your family thinks? You care because you've forgotten the gospel!

The basis upon which you stand before God is based upon other people's opinions of you. You care more about your children's statements about you than God's assessment of you.

When your husband comes home from a hard days work and tells you “oh man I'm so sick of this meal – it stinks” (and he does this sinfully so) as the wife you base your righteousness upon your husbands appreciation of your meal. You react by saying “oh yeah?! Oh yeah? If you want to cook food – well you cook it then!” Rather than taking it to the Cross of Christ.

Or perhaps as a husband when your wife asks a simple question you take it defensively – why? Because the gospel means nothing to that man at that moment. His righteousness is based upon the statements that his wife does/ or does not make. . His righteousness is based upon his children sitting here in this congregation. “Did they sit well?” “Did they answer the right questions?”

Guys guard your heart! Guard the basis upon which you stand before God. Guard your appreciation, your understanding and comprehension of the cross-work of Jesus Christ. Don't let any man, any power dissuade you from undistracted devotion and worship of the living God, Jesus Christ. Family of God, to neglect the things of God is the first step toward spiritual

All spiritual warfare is directed at Christ! And thus, destroy a high view of the cross and you will begin to reap a lean soul!

When you actually convince yourself that your sin is too great — Christ could never forgive me! Or you just down-play your sin and the Savior such that you view the Gospel as

“God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”¹³

When standing in the presence of God you feel faint on account of His greatness.¹⁴

Do not shrink back. Stay there and gaze at the cross for therein you will be strengthened.¹⁵

Leanness of Soul begins with a willing neglect of God! Leanness of soul begins with the neglect of God’s graces and the His character. Neglect these redemptive truths. Neglect God. And you will suffer with an emaciated soul!

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on January 12, 2003. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.

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¹³ H. Richard Niebuhr, Quoted in *The Kingdom of God in America*)

¹⁴ Compare Isaiah 6:5

¹⁵ Compare Isaiah 6:6-7