

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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Series Walk This Way

SERMON: "Walk Attentively"

Introduction

Good morning, great to be with you again this morning.

When I graduated from college I worked in New Holland and lived in the heart of "Amish Country." I was a farm to farm salesman and traveled all of the roads all year long. In the summers, we would try to avoid the main roads and just use the backroads. Because the main roads were crowded with tourists. Cars were literally bumper to bumper. Statistics from 2014 say about 8 million tourists hit Lancaster county each year. That is a lot of people oohing and awing sites they have never seen before.

For the tourists, every Amish buggy was cause to stop paying attention to the road you were driving on, and every horse drawn hay baler was cause to make a sudden stop and almost cause an accident. Maybe some of you were among those tourists causing those traffic hazards. If so, I have already forgiven you.

As someone who lived in that area, and saw those same horses and buggies, day after day, they became very ordinary. To the point that I hardly even noticed them. I would grow frustrated at all the traffic as I rushed from one farm to the next to try and make a sale. I wonder how many interesting and fascinating sites I missed, because I was in a hurry and considered so much of what I saw, just ordinary?

Today we continue our series called **"Walk this Way."** A series in which I hope to encourage us to slow down, take time to be with God, in a relaxed environment. I hope we take the time to consider the choices we make as we strive to know and follow Jesus. I want us to consider how we can take these walks, life journey's if you will, accompanying each other as friends who point each other to Jesus regularly. And as friends who carry each other from

time to time.

Today's message is titled, **“Walk Attentively.”** I want to help us learn to pay attention to what is going on around us and in us. We will consider three areas, where I believe, it is important for us to be attentive. It is important to be **attentive to what God is doing**. It is important to be **attentive to those around you**. And it is important to be **attentive to what is going on in your own life**. So, first let's consider being:

Attentive to God

There is an interesting little phrase about this concept, part of just one verse, of the almost 1300 verses in the prophet Isaiah's whole book. See if you catch it when I read part of Chapter 43 beginning at verse 15. You can turn and follow along with me.

Isaiah 43:15-19

I am the Lord, your Holy One,

Israel's Creator and King.

**16 I am the Lord, who opened a way through the waters,
making a dry path through the sea.**

**17 I called forth the mighty army of Egypt
with all its chariots and horses.**

**I drew them beneath the waves, and they drowned,
their lives snuffed out like a smoldering candlewick.**

**18 “But forget all that—
it is nothing compared to what I am going to do.**

19 For I am about to do something new.

See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

I will make a pathway through the wilderness.

I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

Did you catch it? Verse 19.

For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

What is going on here?

The Israelites have been taken into captivity by the Babylonians because of their disobedience and rebellion against God. They are discouraged. They feel as if God has forgotten them. As if God does not care about them anymore. God sends his prophets to the Israelites for several reasons but in this passage, it seems to be to reassure the Israelites, that he has not forgotten them.

Isaiah reminds the people that God is their Creator and king. He reminds them how God has rescued them before. God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. He did it by opening up a way – making dry land in the middle of the Red Sea – so they could walk to freedom. Then God destroyed the Egyptian army by drowning them in that same Red Sea.

It is like God is saying, “Remember, I rescued you before and I can do it again.”

There is a very interesting phrase in verse 18.

18 “But forget all that—

Wait, what? Forget all of that? Forget that I rescued you? Forget that I have always been there for you? Forget all of that about God?

Well, No. Not exactly. The rest of verse 18:

“it is nothing compared to what I am going to do.”

Isaiah is just pointing out that God, the Creator – always making new stuff, is not limited to only using one method. First time God rescued the Israelites, God did it by making a way through the water.

This time God is going to do something new – and it will be even more amazing!

19 For I am about to do something new.

See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

I will make a pathway through the wilderness.

I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

This time God will make a way through the desert. God will create rivers in the dry wasteland. Isaiah says, God has already started. Doing something new and different. God is not limited to

only one or a few ways of doing things.

The question of significance for the Israelites **this** time is not:

Do you believe God still cares about you? Or:

Do you believe God can rescue you?

The question of importance God has raised is:

Have you noticed what I am doing? Do you see what I am already doing?

That is the first question we are concerned with today. Have you noticed what God is doing? It may be a completely new thing. Something we have not seen before. But make no mistake. God is at work in the world. God is at work among nations. God is at work in our community. God is at work in our church. God is at work in each and every one of our lives.

God has done amazing things in the past. But in one sense we can forget all of that, for a moment because God is not limited to the methods of the past, or even the results of the past.

(By the way next week we will consider the importance of remembering what God has done in our past – but that is next week's message)

For today the question of significance is, "Do you not see what God is doing, now?"

Or to put it another way. As you live your life, as you go through out your day, "**Are you paying attention to God?**"

Pastor Bryan Wilkerson helps us understand attentiveness to God with this statement.

By "attentiveness," I mean making our way through the day with our eyes and ears open to what God might be showing us, with our hearts and hands ready for the opportunities he brings our way.

As I walk out to my car in the morning, I may just see the stones in the driveway. But, if I bend down and take a close look at my driveway, I see a tiny little ant carrying a huge, big leaf

and several other ants all trying to help get these supplies to the nest. God creates ants to do that. Do I notice this is a God thing?

Sometimes I am just going through the plans in my day, getting most of my planned stuff accomplished. Then we get a call for a piece of medical equipment that is needed urgently. I can see that as a frustrating interference in my schedule. Or I can see that God has an opportunity he wants me to take up.

When I see it is God at work, it totally changes my perception of what is happening, and it brings about change in my own heart. But I only notice the ordinary things like that as special God events if I learn to pay attention to God.

What God wants is you. **He wants your attention.**

Attentiveness is actually a **collection of habits.**

It's the habit of 1) **Spending time with God on a daily basis**—to read and pray and be with him, what we often call "daily devotions." That's when we're most likely to hear from God: to gain a sense of direction for the day, or for some challenge we're facing.

That devotion is inspired by love, not just duty. That makes such a difference. You see, when that alarm clock goes off in the morning, and you're having a hard time getting out of bed, you can grit your teeth and try harder. Or you can remind yourself that someone is waiting for you downstairs—someone who is there every morning or evening wanting to spend time with you, wanting to speak into your life, wanting to hear what's on your heart. When you think of your daily quiet time in terms of relationship instead of duty, it's far more satisfying and far more motivating.

Prayer itself **is paying attention to God.**

Prayer is being face to face with God. Not just here and now, but also in the ordinariness and dailiness of our lives.

It is being as mindful, if not more so, of God as we are of flesh and blood people; aware

of his presence and heeding his desires above all others.

Have you ever had the experience where you thought you were by yourself, so you check your phone, or start reading a book, and suddenly realize someone else is there looking at you as if they have something to say to you? What do you do? Just ignore them? Or do you talk to them?

Now consider if that person were God himself. Would you just ignore him, or talk to him? Prayer is paying attention to God.

Attentiveness is the habit of **taking a Sabbath**. God made us to take breaks, to take naps—to set aside a day each week in which we cease from our labor and simply attend to God and others. Ideally, on that day, we spend time in God's presence, centering our lives in him, and we spend time with people—especially friends, family, and the body of Christ.

Sabbath isn't just about one day a week. It's a habit of finding times and places to rest, to be with God and others. It can be a daily thing—a cup of tea or coffee in the middle of the day, a walk after dinner, journaling before bed. It could be a weekend away, or a vacation on purpose.

Every once in a while, try to create a quiet space and pray a simple prayer out loud or in your heart, depending where you are. The prayer may go something like this: “Here I am, Lord. Is there anything you have to say to me?” And then just wait. Maybe take a walk or sit quietly. Perhaps read some Scripture, or sing, or just listen to the wind. Sometimes there's nothing—but sometimes there is.

Jesus regularly spent time alone listening attentively to his Heavenly Father. May we follow Jesus' example of being attentive to God.

We must also learn to be:

Attentive to Others

A few weeks ago Pastor Shaun shared how Jesus made it his business of seeing the people around him and noticing their needs. He gave us numerous examples where it is written: Jesus saw. He noticed because he was attentive to others around him. Let me take us to an old Testament Story. One we may be familiar with because pastor Bill shared several messages with us about Ruth. I want to draw attention to:

Ruth and Naomi -

Ruth 1:3ff

Naomi's husband, died, and she was left alone with her two sons. And after they had lived in the land for about ten years, the sons also died. And so Naomi was left without her two sons and without her husband.

Well, when Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people back in Judah and provided them with food. She and her daughters-in-law prepared to return there.

But on the way Naomi stopped and said to her daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home.

Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

"Look," Naomi said, "your sister has gone back to her people and to her gods. Go back with her." But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go I will go. Where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

And so it was that Naomi returned to Bethlehem from Moab accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite.

In the ancient world, a woman without a man in her life was in desperate straits. She had no protection. She had no provision. She had no voice.

It didn't get much lonelier than that for a woman in the ancient world. In a time when a woman's mission in life was to produce children, Naomi's life's work had just been wiped out. Her only real option was to return home to Bethlehem. Maybe some relatives would watch out for her. But Ruth made it clear that she was going to go with Naomi, no matter what.

There on that road those two women decided that they would make the journey of life together instead of alone. They choose to make space for each other, and because they make space for each other, God can enter that space and meet them there and work his healing.

As the story unfolds, we notice Ruth and Naomi being attentive to each other.

Attentiveness in the context of others means:

‘Focusing on the other person—their needs, their questions, their struggle, their mood—instead of focusing on your own.’

Attentiveness means **listening** to what the other person says without thinking about what you're going to say next. Attentiveness means **watching and listening for what God might be doing** in another person's life and circumstance.

Ruth was attentive to Naomi's need for companionship, and so she said, I'll go back with you. Ruth was attentive to Naomi's need for provision, so she said, “I'll go glean in the fields.”

Naomi was attentive to the fact that God had brought Boaz into their lives, and so she encourages Ruth to pursue the relationship.

Attentiveness to others is watching and listening for what God might be doing.

Attentiveness to others is also getting in the habit of **doing**. If we care about someone or something, we act when we have the opportunity.

When a friend calls you from out of the blue to see how you are doing. They were being attentive. When you listen long enough to someone's story and graciously probe through their

evasive answers to really listen to them, that is being attentive.

Simple acts are enough to communicate to your friend that they are loved and valued by somebody. And if they are loved and valued by somebody, then maybe they are still loved and valued by God. And that may be all they need at that moment.

So, being attentive to others is not just noticing what is going on in their lives but it goes further. It acts on behalf of the other person.

Are you in the habit of paying attention to the people around you – certainly your friends but also others? Paying attention to what they are going through and what God might be doing in them.

Let's consider one more group of people we must pay attention to.

Attentive to Ourselves – I am speaking here of becoming self-aware – not becoming self-absorbed.

It can be difficult to wrap our minds around what is happening around us – school shootings, floods that kill thousands, starving children, unfair treatment and much more. But it can be just as difficult to make sense of what happens inside of us. I am referring here, to understanding who we are and why we behave the way we do.

When we take time to think about it, we often ask questions like: Why do I get so defensive with my spouse? Why do I experience such deep emotions when I talk about my childhood? Why can't I seem to believe that God truly loves me? And so many more. Many times, the answers are complex and difficult to find, but we dare not just give up. It is important that we become more self-aware.

The Importance of Self-Awareness

Though it is a challenge, it is extremely important to pursue self-awareness. When we lack self-awareness, we misunderstand ourselves, and that leads to misunderstanding God as

well. Our pride blinds us with inaccurate ideas about who we are in relationship with God.

A lack of self-awareness can also hinder our awareness of the hearts and lives of others. And that impacts how we relate to those around us.

St. Augustine, an early Christian theologian knew the importance of self-reflection that leads to increased self-awareness. He wrote.

“People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering,”

A knowledge of self, particularly of who we are in relationship to God, is part of God’s good design for us. How we know and experience God, directly impacts our ability to love and care for others. God created us to know Him and to experience His love. Not only are we to experience God’s love, but we are also to live in loving relationship with others.

When we don’t know how to love ourselves, and when we don’t have an accurate assessment of who we are, and how much God loves us, we will have difficulty loving others.

The Purpose of Self-Awareness

So, self-awareness is critical, and a lack of it can be dangerous. But we don’t seek it for its own sake – just so we can know ourselves better. Self-awareness—and the various techniques we may use to cultivate it—ought to show us how our fears, insecurities, anger, envy, apathy, self-righteousness, and other struggles keep us from loving God and others with freedom and fullness.

If you are a parent, you probably became aware, very quickly, that your children were grouchy and fussy, when they were tired or hungry. Or you may have seen them throw a toy when they were frustrated. And no matter how much you told them to just straighten up or else, they kept fussing. It wasn’t until you addressed what was bothering them, that you had any chance of calming them down. Many times, they didn’t know why they felt the way they did.

Well guess what, even as adults we are not much better. When we are tired and hungry, we tend to be grouchy. When we are embarrassed, we become defensive. When we are threatened, we tend to fight back. When we are depressed, we tend to withdraw, even from the people who love us the most.

Until our needs are addressed, we will struggle to relate to God and others in loving ways. But how can we address those needs within us if we are not aware of them?

Self-awareness, then, is not the ultimate goal; it is a means by which we become aware of our desperate need for Jesus.

So:

How Do We Grow in Self-Awareness?

As we strive to understand ourselves, we must be guided by **biblical truth**. When the religious leaders asked Jesus about the most important commandment in the law, Jesus replied with two commands that include self-awareness.

Matt. 22:37-40 Jesus said, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹ A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

How can we know if we are loving God wholeheartedly? It’s tempting to think of love for God primarily as having affection for Him. God delights in having our affections, but Scripture clearly states how we can know if we are loving God. Jesus said, **“If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15).**

We can begin our self-assessment by asking, **“Are there areas in my life where I am being disobedient?”**

When we are not keeping God’s commands, we are not loving God whole heartedly.

God gives us His **Spirit**, His **Word**, and His **People** as the primary means by which we cultivate greater self-awareness.

Holy Spirit pricks our consciences. It is that internal voice that reveals our own hearts to us.

Regular study of God's Word reveals our hearts to ourselves.

Candid conversations with other followers of Jesus, help us become more self-aware.

Sam Storms, pastor, and author writes:

To be 'aware' of oneself is to be conscious and forthright about our tendencies and inclinations. To be self-aware is to possess a keen sense of the way we impact other people. To be self-aware is to have a clear grasp on why we react the way we do when we encounter adversity or threatening circumstances. It is to be in touch with how we think and what we value and why we make the choices we do.

So, here are a few questions to get us started, you can consider, or discuss with some close friends that, I think, will help us become more attentive to ourselves – help us become more self-aware.

Do you know what makes you tick? What motivates you, or inspires you? Maybe you love a challenge. Maybe injustices get you going? What drives you to do what you do?

Do you know what triggers anger in you? Maybe it is a past memory or hurt.

What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it? Maybe it is when they don't seem to care enough to try.

Do you know how you react to pain? Do you hide it? Or do you find someone to blame for it?

Do you know how you learn best? You may want someone to show you. Or you may prefer to figure it out for yourself. If you like to figure it out for yourself, and someone tries to help you, you may snap at them and tell them to get lost.

What are your lifelong dreams? Do you have any? Or maybe you had some, but circumstances in your life have caused you to not allow yourself to dream any more.

This week, as you take your walk with God, notice the familiar things along the way. But also, look around, look up, look down and see if you notice anything new. Something you had not noticed before. The seasons are getting ready to change. So there will be some evidence of that. Remind yourself, God makes the seasons change. Pause and talk to God about his

changing seasons. Maybe what you like about it. Maybe what makes you apprehensive about. But talk to God – he is always doing something new.

Also as you go about your day, notice people more. Look at the expressions on their face. Are their shoulders stooped as if they are carrying some burden. Smile at them. Perhaps you pray for them, without them even knowing it. Maybe they are in a hurry and look frazzled. If it appropriate, ask them if they could use some help. But practice being attentive to other people.

Also practice paying attention to the thoughts and feelings in yourself. Notice when you are becoming grouchy or irritable. Notice when your heart feels light and there is a spring in your step. Take some extra this week to talk to God about what is going on inside you.

Learn to walk attentively – to God, to others, and just as importantly – to yourself.

PRAY

May the God who knows you intimately, reveal Himself to you in ways this week, that you cannot mistake or ignore.