Doing and Saying – a Christian Pilgrimage

At the door – Week 22

Knock, and the door shall be opened…

Day 147: Wrestling some more

So, if I decide to take God seriously, and I decide that Christ is true, then I must acknowledge that all humans are susceptible to evil, that in Christ I (and we) find forgiveness, and if I live in love, I have found Christ?

In a nutshell, yes.

And this is, in effect, preparation for eternity?

Yes. Your life on earth establishes your trajectory forward into eternity and prepares you for living that life – with or without God.

Yet I must acknowledge that Christians fail as much as anyone else, and that the church has hypocrites, evil within, will argue, bicker and fight, people will be there with all their warts, their baggage, their hurts, grievances, fears, and anguishes…

Yes… we are not at the end-stage of God's creation yet. We are still fallen and broken creatures.

And I have to love them?

That is what is asked of us. Though we hurt each other in our own woundedness and human short-sightedness, Jesus instructs us to forgive each other, and yes, love each other. Also to ask forgiveness of ourselves when we fail.

Even if they hate me, even if they hurt me, I must love them?

The Christian life is not easy. It doesn't depend on the sufficiency of our love for each other for we are great failures in that department. It rests on the total and unswerving love of God through Christ, and Him alone. Only through Christ can we find the love to give, even in facing persecution and denial. The love you have received is through Christ. The love that you give is from Christ.

And my salvation depends on this?

In a word, yes.

In your own words, what saves you from all that is evil?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 148: An important question

If I don't choose Christ, you would say I'm damned for all time?

Again, we frankly don't know. There are real consequences of your choices and actions, and we have grave concern for your eternal welfare if you choose to deny the source of all life, God. However, we believe that after Jesus was killed, and before He was resurrected by the Father, He spent time in what we call hell – the place where those who are separated from God are.

Why would He do that? According to your belief, isn't that God going where God isn't welcome?

Precisely*. Yet we are told:

Because Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring you to God, by being put to death in the flesh but by being made alive in the spirit. In it he went and preached to the spirits in prison, after they were disobedient long ago when God patiently waited… (1st Peter, 3:18-20a)

We also state in our Daily Prayers:

"He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead (the older version states "He descended into hell").
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father." (The Apostle's Creed)

Why would Christ descend to hell and preach to those imprisoned there, except for them to turn their lives around and accept the love of God? This gives rise to the idea that God is always reaching out, always encouraging, always loving, always inviting – even after we die here on earth. So, the "for all time" bit is a little suspect. Remember as well, that time is a creation of God – God exists outside of time as well as being present with us in it.

* *As an aside, God is everywhere – whether He is wanted there or not.*

Given everything we have covered in this course, describe the character of God.

Now describe your own character.

Why are there differences?

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 149: The Wrestling Continues

Great! I can live as I want to right now, and then sometime after I'm dead God will come and forgive me and all will be well.

God will forgive you if you earnestly ask Him.

That's what I just said.

Really? It sounded more like "God is a patsy who will let me in if I ask Him to, if I decide that it's no longer any fun getting my own way."

Ummm… that MAY be what I really meant.

That's not truly seeking God. That's not truly being sorry. That is "the punishment hurts so please make it stop." The problem here is two-fold:

1.) The punishment is self-inflicted. You declare, by your words, your actions, your being, whether you are following God or walking your own way. God doesn't push you away, you push God away.
2.) Pretending to accept God won't stop you from pushing God away. Unless you truly desire to change, you will keep on speaking and doing actions which are contrary to God's desires, which are parts of the many paths of death rather than life. God accepts you when you allow God to accept you – and you don't allow God to do so unless it is real.

The more you continue to walk in your own way rather than God's way, the more damage you will do to yourself and to others – damage that has real consequences. We grieve not just for you, but for all those you negatively impact when you are walking apart from Love. The reality is that at some point, you will either come to the extremely hard and painful decision to give yourself to Christ and live a life of love, or you will continue a death of painful despair in being separated from the source of life. When that point happens, *if* it happens, is entirely up to you.

Are you pushing God away? If so, why? What would it take for you to stop?

Share your answers with others whom you trust

Day 150: Consequences

So your theory is if I'm to be healthy, I have to choose the "path of life", and live in love, which means living with Christ and giving myself over to His direction, or there will be consequences that I won't like.

There will be natural consequences, yes. This is not a vengeful God giving consequences – we give the consequences to ourselves.

Can you give me an example?

Here's a real-world example which occurs repeatedly throughout history:
The dictator of a country decides he or she wants to rule the neighbouring country as well. They make lots of pronouncements regarding how the neighbouring country's people are bad and would be much better off being part of the dictator's country. The dictator's people listen and follow along. Eventually, they invade. Thousands (in some cases, millions) are killed with many more wounded, and the trauma takes generations to heal. If it ever does. People find themselves trapped in a cycle of vengeance and counter-vengeance, living lives of despair and hopelessness – separation from God.

I'm not the dictator of a country. How about a less extreme example?

You get jealous of another person. Unable to express this jealousy positively, you feel wounded and become angry, taking it out on your spouse and children as well as affecting you performance at home and at work.

That will lead to my eternal damnation?

It's a state of current damnation, which extends into the future for as long as you allow it to.

How would it be different following the Path of Christ?

You become jealous of someone. You feel hurt and angry. You talk to Christ about it and realize that whatever the other person has received doesn't lessen your worth in any way. You forgive yourself of your jealousy, recognizing it as a perverted desire to have the best for you, in effect a perverted desire for shalom, and re-commit to pursuing true shalom with God. You ask Christ to forgive you. You re-connect with yourself and with God.

That sounds like a pipedream.

Paradise often does. As you walk with Christ, you gain increasing self-awareness (not self-focus) and control, which enables you to choose your actions (and even your thoughts) with greater capability. How you live and interact with others becomes ever more a matter of your own choice. There are exceptions (such as environmental, mental, and physical illnesses and conditions) which require outside help, but with or without help, for most of us our lives can ultimately be lived according to our choices.

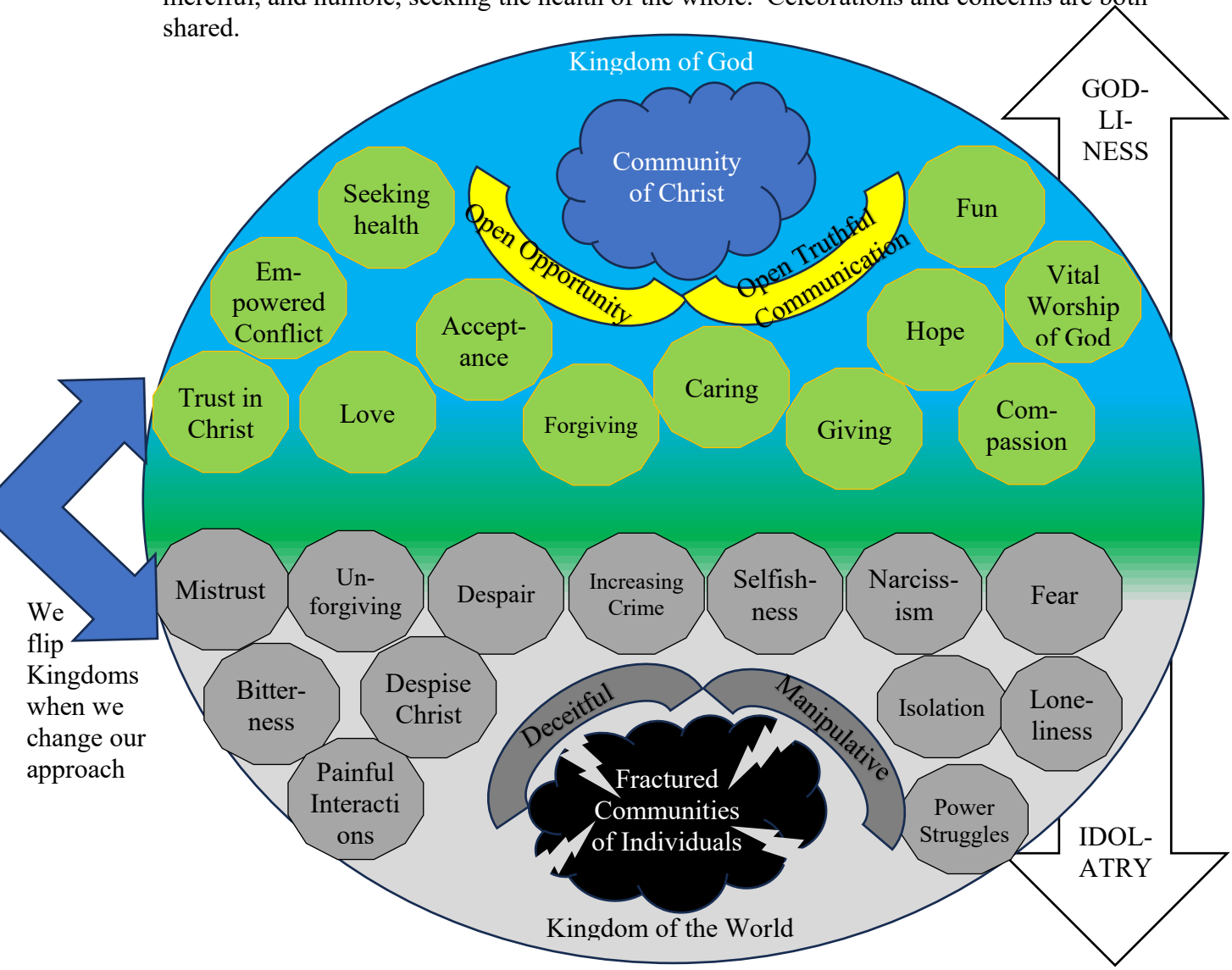
Give examples from your own life of consequences from not following the healthiest path, the path of life.

Share your answers with others whom you trust.

Day 151: Living the life

I know you've talked about "the path of life" lots, and I can read up what Christ said, but what's a simple example?

How about this. The Kingdom of God is not only where God resides, but where His will is done – He is the ruler in both theory and practice. This is God's Country. In God's Country live people who are exploring how to live according to the Way of Christ – these people, the Community of Christ, are known as "the church." To be successful according to the Way of Christ, people have Open Opportunity to enter Shalom: all are given opportunity for wellness, wholeness, completeness, influence, empowerment. People also have Open Truthful Communication: no one is prohibited from communicating, communication is honest, graceful, merciful, and humble, seeking the health of the whole. Celebrations and concerns are both shared.



When you are trusting Christ, forgiving, caring, loving, worshiping God, you are following the Path of Christ. Note that these are actions! When you are mistrusting God, bitter, unforgiving,

harming, selfish, you are following your own path. If you pursue being selfish, you become manipulative and deceitful, community becomes fractured, and you have embraced one of the many Paths of Death – you are part of the Kingdom of the World. You have become idolatrous, where you worship something other than God. However, if you follow the Path of Christ, you encourage open, honest interactions and open opportunities. You promote cohesion and unity of purpose. Your focus becomes living your life as an embodied worship of God.

What if I switch, even momentarily, from trust to mistrust, for example?

At the largest scale, you've switched kingdoms.

So then I'm damned?

No! So then you recognize what you've done, forgive yourself, ask for forgiveness, and strive to trust again. You switch back.

And if I refuse to switch?

Then you're separating yourself from God – you're damning yourself.

For all time.

Perhaps – at least, for as long as you stubbornly turn away from God and reject Him. The choice is always yours – despair or hope, death or life.

Please give examples where you've switched from the Kingdom of the World to the Kingdom of God through what you've done. What were the consequences of you switching? What struggles do you have with the concept that you are always living in one of two Kingdoms?

Share your examples with others whom you trust.

Day 152: Opening the door

If I decide you are right, and I want this healthy life, not only for me but for all of humanity's sake, what do I do to start?

Jesus said:

"I tell you: Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

I ask?

You ask.

How do I ask?

How about something like:

"Jesus, I'm sorry that I haven't listened to you. I understand that God wants the best for me and for all humanity. Please forgive my attempts to direct my life according to my own desires. I give myself to you, and everything I have is yours. Please guide me in Your presence from now on. Please help me to hear You, and to choose life, choose what is healthiest, always."

What if I still want to live my life according to my own desires?

We all do. Some of us have realized that pursuing our own desires leads to death, not life.

My asking will guarantee that I can live this life of health?

No. It will open the door. God will take you up on it. The rest of your life will then be exploring the life of health as you are best able to. There will be many times when you will falter, when you (even inadvertently) switch kingdoms, which is why we encourage a daily prayer of forgiveness (of yourself and of others) and then re-committing to Christ. You will be part of God's Temple – the people in which He dwells.

If you are able, I invite you to say the above prayer either to open the door to Christ, or to re-commit yourself to Christ.

No sharing needed – God knows what you have done, and what you are doing.

Day 153: Rest

We come again to the seventh day, so today we rest. Reflect on the past week and care for your needs (body and spirit). In the evening get together with a group you trust and share what you would like to from the previous week – good points, hard points, what you've learned, what you've struggled with, etc. Decide again if you wish to continue journeying together or want to stop.

Know that God loves you.