

Look Around: Look Down

1 John 1:5 through 1 John 1:10 (NKJV)

⁵This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Series Introduction

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV)

⁹But as it is written:

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”*

1 Corinthians 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

In the purest sense, we do not know what tomorrow holds for us. But God knows. Eyes have not seen and ears have not heard, but God has prepared some things to happen in our lives. He has prepared blessings and opportunities. He has prepared challenges and rewards.

God holds every day of this New Year in his hand. He already knows the ministry we will perform next month. He has already ordained and commissioned the blessings you will receive six months from now. He knows the lives he plans for us to touch in the fall. He knows who he plans to bring into our lives and he knows the people who will walk out of our lives this year.

Since our God has already prepared a course for our lives, I believe we must work to position ourselves to receive his blessings. It would be a shame for us to miss the blessings of God by being out of position to receive them. Why? It is because God has already ordained that he will reveal his plans for us by his Spirit.

To help us position ourselves to receive the fullness of God's blessings in this year, we are taking a look around. We began with Look Back. Last week we took a Look Around. Today, we will continue with Look Down. We need to look down in our lives to discover the obstacles that are in our path.

There are three principles for looking down that we will discuss today. The first principle is ...

Acknowledge the stones.

John wastes no time and tells us directly that we all have sin. He says ...

⁸*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

Here are some scriptures to back this up.

Psalms 51:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.

Isaiah 64:6 (NKJV)

⁶ But we are all like an unclean *thing*,
And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags;
We all fade as a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind,
Have taken us away.

Romans 3:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰As it is written:

"There is none righteous, no, not one;

Romans 3:23 (NKJV)

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Face it, we all have sins. In our lives we all have done and said some things that do not please the Lord. If it wasn't for the blood of Jesus, we would all be condemned to spend eternity in a burning lake of fire. If these sins go unchecked, they could stop us from reaching the goals God has for us.

Turn to Hebrews 12:1.

Example Cross Country Running Story:

A few years ago I was standing on a golf course having a discussion with someone about renting the course for a tournament. The man I spoke with told me some golf courses could be rented for high school and college cross country running events. In our discussion he explained some of the dangers of cross country running when it came to rival schools. He said sometimes back in the woods when they would run, rival team members would elbow each other. They would ram their spikes into the legs of runners ahead of them. They would deliberately trip other runners or hinder their forward progress.

Hebrews 12:1 (NKJV)

¹Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

The imagery used in this passage is that of a runner in a race. The writer says to run the race we need to lose the excess weight and the sin that so easily ensnares or besets us. The word used for ensnares or besets describes a competitor who sets out to thwart your plans. This is a competitor who is out to get you. This is a competitor who is doing all that he can to beat you and hinder you. This is the type of competitor who is going to slow down your forward progress.

We all have them. We have sins in our lives that will make it almost impossible to get ahead in life. We have habits that are unproductive. We have certain character flaws that will cause people to not want to work with us. We have attitudes that will destroy our relationships. We have unresolved issues from ten years ago that we are still paying the price for today.

These are the things that will easily beset us in 2010. Satan doesn't have to go get any new demons to attack us if we are already tripping ourselves. The plans we make for our lives are already in jeopardy if we are going to spike our own legs. The hopes and dreams we have for our future are already shattered if we are loaded with character flaws. We cannot trick ourselves into believing that just because the calendar changed from 2009 to 2010 that all of the issues and problems will magically fade away.

We need to look down and acknowledge the stumbling blocks we brought with us into the New Year. Once we see them, we have to own up to them. That brings us to the second principle of looking down which is ...

Take ownership.

James 1:12 through James 1:15 (NKJV)

¹²Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. ¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Where does the temptation come from? In us. Think about it; Satan can't tempt you with something you don't want or like.

Example: Peanut Butter Cookies

We have some great cooks in this church. Some of you can bake pies and cakes that make a brother's tongue go back into his mouth and slap his brain. My wife is that kind of cook. Her strawberry short cake, sweet potato cheese cakes, and scrumptious are out of this world. I enjoy them all, but they don't give me issues. They don't tempt me. Out of all the sweets in this world, there is only one that gives me fits. It's peanut butter cookies. Apple pie ala mode is great. Brownies are nice. Sweet potato pie is fine. But peanut butter cookies seem to twist my arm and make me eat just one more.

That's my issue. It's not the same as your issue. You have your own. That's my issue and I own it. You see, there are stones in my path that are different from the stones in your path. James says we are drawn away by our own lusts and enticed. Some of us need to be honest, look down, and own up to what entices us. Once we own it, we can be set free.

If peanut butter cookies are your issue, just admit it. Peanut butter cookies are great! Because I know they are that great, I just don't buy them. If alcohol is your issue, just admit it. You like the taste and the buzz. Because you know that, stay out of the liquor store.

Understand, if there are stones in your path, you know where to find them on your path. I know how to get peanut butter cookies. I know that McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's don't sell them, but Subway does. I know which grocery stores have the best peanut butter cookies. I also know that I can get a quick fix by stopping at the gas station and buying a two pack of Grandma's peanut butter cookies. I can tell you where to find them on the isle in some of the gas stations because I've stopped there before.

I know where to find peanut butter cookies. Drunks know where to find liquor. Fornicators know where to find partners. Gossipers know where to find listeners.

So what entices you?

If you like tall dark and handsome, admit it. Say to yourself, “he looks really good and that’s why I’m going the other way.” Own it, then stop staring at the man. Stop driving around town hoping you will see him again.

If you have issues with material things, admit it. Then stop going to the mall. Stop reading the magazines to just see what other people have. Stop looking for labels on everybody’s clothes.

If you know that you are hateful, admit it. Then stop mistreating the people around you. If you are not a good leader, admit it. Then start learning how to be a better leader. If you are not good at handling money, admit it. Turn your check book over. Then get a financial planner to help you make the best choices.

Why is this such an issue? It’s because some of us are slaves to our issues. We can’t function without a drink. We can’t talk without arguing. We can’t go to work without stealing. We can’t converse without flirting. We can’t look without lusting. We can’t shop without coveting. We can’t work with people without running them off.

Some of us are too mean to get a promotion.

Some of us are too lazy to get ahead.

Some of us have attitudes so bad, we will run off a spouse if God gave us one.

Some of us are too greedy to sow and reap.

Some of us are disobedient and can’t keep the commandments of God.

Some of us are ungrateful and can’t praise God.

Some of us are too prideful to humble ourselves and worship God.

Jesus died to set us free from the bondage of sin. He can also help us overcome our habits, attitudes and distractions. John put it this way; if we walk in the light as he is in the light we could have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus would cleanse us from all sin.

That leads to the third principle we must learn which is ...

Enter into Fellowship.

In 1 John 1:9 we get a clear picture of the blessing of fellowship.

⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our fellowship with God is vital if we are going to remove the stones from our lives.

If we confess our sins; “enter into covenant”.

Here in this passage the word for confess means “one idea” or “one topic”. It means to covenant with another. It means we are in agreement with God. It means to confess or make a promise. We must **voluntarily** enter into covenant with God. We must be willing to be transparent with God. We are already naked and exposed before him, but we must make a conscious decision to give God full disclosure of our lives.

John describes God’s role in this exchange. He says God will be faithful and just. “trustworthy and equitable”.

In order for us to have life-changing fellowship, we have to be willing to trust in the Lord. God is trustworthy. He is faithful. He is just and right. We have to know that God will be fair and equitable in his character and his attitude toward us. We have to trust that God doesn’t have some other hidden agenda or motives.

“I can confess to God because I know he loves me.

“I know I can confess to God because he wants what’s best for me”

“I’m free to confess to God because I can trust him.”

“I can share my faults with God because he is not out to get me.”

This healthy fellowship with God blesses us because he forgives us and cleanses us from the unrighteousness that is not a part of our covenant relationship. We need to talk with God about the stones in our path. We need to walk in the light as he is in the light. Look at verse 7 from our passage today. John says ...

⁷But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Walking in the light gives us fellowship with one another just as we have fellowship with God. The end result of this fellowship with one another is the same as the fellowship with God. We can be cleansed from our sins.

God uses the relationships we share with each other to cleanse us also. He uses interaction with our faithful friends to help us remove stones from our paths.

Turn to ...

James 5:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

James 5:19 through James 5:20 (NKJV)

¹⁹Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, ²⁰let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Here James says we are to confess our trespasses to one another. The benefit of this accountability is we can be pray for one another and be healed. We just need to exercise our accountability with others the same way we do with God.

Example: Brother Will

I have an issue. It is that I'm a "work-a-holic". Over the years I have developed some bad work habits that have resulted in a lack of quality rest in my life. Sometimes I will work until I'm not good to anyone. It is a stone in my path that affects my family relationships, my friends, my health, and the ministry God called me to.

One day I shared this issue with a friend. I shared my voluntary desire to do better in this area. I have a desire to remove this stone from my life. I know I need help. I have come up with a plan to help myself get the rest I need.

My friend agreed to help me remove this stone in my life. My friend knows my plan. He knows which day I have decided is my off day. I'm transparent with him. All my friend does is ask me where I stand on the issue and then either challenges me if I'm slacking or encourages me to keep up the good work when I'm doing well.

Every Wednesday evening or Sunday Morning, Brother Will asks me one question. He asks "Pastor, did you get any rest this week?"

We have a covenant agreement. Every time he sees me, he is to ask how I'm doing. Every time he asks I am to be honest and give him full disclosure on this issue. Sometimes I hate to see him coming because I know he is going to point his finger and lean in on me when I'm shirking my responsibilities.

I know that Will is going to ask every time. I trust that he doesn't have any outside motives or a hidden agenda. He is genuinely concerned that I get rest so I can be the best Husband, Father, and Pastor that I can be.

I know that I can confess to Will about this issue because even if I fail, he will forgive me. Then he will be faithful to show some tough love and challenge me to do better.

Proverbs 27:5 through Proverbs 27:6 (NKJV)

⁵ Open rebuke *is* better
Than love carefully concealed.

⁶ Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend,
But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.

Because of this accountability I have not only designated a day off, but now I'm adding a second day. I'm not only taking two breaks a year, I'm taking three. My wife can tell you that I look at this stone in my path every day. It just doesn't trip me up as much as it use to.

Let's be honest; some of us would be farther along if we were accountable to a friend in the faith. We would be better if we had some iron to sharpen iron as it says in Proverbs 27:17.

Some of us need a friend to tell us when we are gossiping. Some of us need to meet with a friend to talk about our addictions. Some of us need somebody to check us concerning our extra marital affairs. Some of us need to have a friend call us once a week to ask if we have had a drink.

We need somebody to challenge us to forgive and loose our grudges. We need somebody to get in our faces and ask us why we are always late. We need friends who will tell us when we are lying.

Every believer needs somebody who will be trustworthy to hear their faults and pray for their healing. The effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much.

Conclusion:

There are peanut butter cookies in my path. There is "work-a-holicism" in my path. When I look down, there are many stones that need to be addressed because they could hinder me from reaching the goals God has for me in 2010. You are no different from me. We all have stumbling blocks in our lives. We all have issues that need to be addressed. They may be issues of character, issues of sin, issues of habits, addictions, lusts, whatever.

We need to be honest with ourselves and God by acknowledging our issues. We can't pretend that they don't exist. We need to take ownership of our issues and don't compare our issues to anyone else's. The only things we can compare our issues to are the word, ways, and will of God. Lastly, we need to have fellowship with God and other faithful and trustworthy believers. They will create the friction that makes us sharper to cut a clear path to our goals.