



grow. pray. study.
Jubilee Shores UMC - Weekly Guide

WEEK 2 CLEANING OUT THE MUCK

MONDAY 08/05/24

A searching, fearless moral inventory

Psalm 32:1-7, 51:10-12

Step 4 in the AA 12-step program is “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.” That idea has strong Biblical roots. Israel’s King David found himself in a tangled moral situation that just kept getting worse (cf. 2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:13). When his friend and ally, the prophet Nathan, called out what he had done, David did not shrink from a searching, fearless inventory. Psalms 32 and 51 seem to clearly reflect the thought process by which he restored his life to God’s purposes.

- Verses 3-5 of Psalm 32 reflect the reality we sometimes express with the phrase “the coverup is worse than the original offense.” Most of us have experienced in some way (though maybe not for anything quite as huge as David’s failure) of “when I kept quiet, my bones wore out.” Have you also ever experienced the relief and lightening of your load verse 5 described? Is there anything in your life right now that you need to come to grips with honestly?
- For centuries, God’s people have used the prayer from Psalm 51 as a model of honest, serious prayer for renewed life. “God has the ability to create and re-create, activities associated elsewhere with God’s spirit (see Genesis 1:2). The threefold repetition of spirit suggests that new life is possible for the forgiven sinner.” * What makes it important that a “searching, fearless moral inventory” lead to hope for new life, not hopelessness?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, by your Spirit lead me to be honest with myself and with you. And then by your Spirit lead me to the hope of a renewed, purified way of life. Amen.

* J. Clinton McCann, Jr., study note on Psalm 51:10 in *The CEB Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), p. 897 OT.

TUESDAY 08/06/24 Changing a former way of life
Ephesians 4:20-24

We often see our culture as given to short-term thinking, seeking instant gratification. When we choose that approach, it can feel as though giving up “a former way of life” means getting rid of all of life’s fun. The apostles saw it very differently. They were convinced that the new mind-set God offers us is not at all meant to squelch true joy in life. It rescues us from “deceitful desires” and makes genuine joy truly and lastingly possible.

- Ephesians 4:19 said being people “who lack all sense of right and wrong, and who have turned themselves over to doing whatever feels good” is what we don’t learn from Christ. In what ways do you see that approach to life echoed in many parts of today’s popular entertainment and media cultures? Have you ever sensed that those constantly transmitted messages have shaped your thinking more than you intended or realized?
- “Paul sees growth as increasing in discernment and discretion, which helps believers avoid being taken in by false shortcuts to growth....Personal growth and community growth work together here so that mature believers contribute to a mature church.” * JSUMC offers community resources to nurture our members’ spiritual growth through ministries and small groups. Don’t try to change a former way of life all by yourself!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you that your Spirit works within me, and through my brothers and sisters on the journey of faith. Keep guiding me toward your way of life. Amen.

* Timothy Gombis, study note on Ephesians 4:14, 16 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 369 NT.

WEDNESDAY 08/07/24 Repent = “Change your hearts and lives”

Matthew 3:1-8, 4:17, Acts 2:38

Matthew recapped both John the Baptist’s and Jesus’ preaching with the words, “Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!” Translators often render the Greek (*metanoia*) behind “Change your hearts and lives” as “repent,” but we sometimes miss that word’s full meaning. “This is a call not merely for us to feel sorry for our sins or even just to accept forgiveness for them, but to choose a different and wiser course of living.” * Peter and the apostles preached that same message.

- Matthew 4:23 characterized Jesus’ message in verse 17 as “the good news of the kingdom.” Praying (as we do in the Lord’s Prayer) “thy kingdom come” is not just a wispy, wistful dream of an idealized future. It is a claim of our true citizenship here and now, and a way of bowing to God as our true king. Can you identify one or two ways that belonging to God’s kingdom has reordered your life? Are there parts of life in which the call to reorder brings you hope, not uneasiness?
- We see that John the Baptist bluntly challenged those who thought their ethnic or religious identity alone could keep them close to God. Have you ever known (or been) someone who hoped that family tradition or church affiliation could take the place of a life-changing personal connection with God? Do religious as well as non-religious and nominally religious people need to hear and heed John’s call to “change your hearts and lives”?
- **Prayer:** Lord Jesus, you, your forerunner John and your follower Peter all called people in their time to become citizens of “the kingdom of heaven.” Begin or enhance the life of my heart in your kingdom today. Amen.

* Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, study note on Matthew 4:17 in *The Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible*. HarperSanFrancisco, 2005, p. 799.

THURSDAY 08/08/24 Changing a former way of life
Romans 12:1-2

People of all backgrounds in the first century Mediterranean world would have seen “sacrifice” as solely “religious” activity. Like them, we might think being “transformed” mostly meant having better religious ideas. We need to catch what *The Message* version saw in Romans 12:1: “Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.” * That’s the difference between a “living sacrifice” and a dead one.

- In the ancient world, most people had made a sacrifice to some god. That usually meant killing an animal in the god’s temple or shrine. If that were your background, how would you need to shift your thinking and acting to respond to Paul’s call to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice”? In what ways are you willing to put yourself, your life, “on the altar” to live daily for God?
- We sometimes live a sort of “news channel” life: we treat “Religion” as a completely separate topic from “Business,” “Entertainment,” “Politics” and the like. How would the transforming of your mind Paul called for affect your business dealings? Political behavior? Activities like sports or movie going? Shopping? What forces try to lead you to resist transformation, to conform to the patterns of this world? How has God helped you to move beyond those pressures?

Prayer: Lord of my life, continue touching and transforming me to make my every-day, ordinary life an offering to you, an ongoing act of worship. Amen.

*Peterson, Eugene H., *The Message Numbered Ed.* Hardback. Navpress. Kindle Edition.

FRIDAY 08/09/24 Signs of a transformed life Colossians 3:9-13

“Cleaning out the pond” means removing attitudes or habits that hinder spiritual growth. Colossians 3 aimed to define what that kind of transformation looks like. It called for removing the prejudices that divide people, and for living in harmonious community. “Christians aren’t merely saved individuals but are a saved people....God calls people to live as communities that reflect the reconciliation, love, & forgiveness that reflect the work of Christ (Col 3:12-17).” *

- Colossians 3 invited God’s people to “put on” qualities closely related to those

listed in Galatians 5:22-23 after “taking off” hurtful traits. That was more than just calling out natural abilities. “This life reflects [the Colossians] identity as the loved, forgiven, reconciled people of God in Christ.” ** Which of the qualities listed in Colossians 3:12-13 do you see flourishing in your life? Are there any you want to ask God to help you nurture and grow in?

- “As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other.” Not easy, said British Christian C. S. Lewis. “When I think I am asking God to forgive me....I am asking Him not to forgive me but to excuse me....Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances....we can always have [real forgiveness] from God if we ask for it.” *** How have you learned that truly forgiving and accepting forgiveness is central to living in God’s way?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to love all my neighbors, everywhere. Help me start close to home and guide me as I expand my vision to be more and more like your vast, world-changing vision. Amen.

* J. R. Daniel Kirk, sidebar “Christ as New Adam” in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 386 NT.

** J. R. Daniel Kirk, study note on Colossians 3:12-17 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 386 NT.

*** C. S. Lewis, “On Forgiveness” in *The Weight of Glory and other addresses*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1976, pp. 178, 181. (Lewis’s entire essay on forgiveness is well worth reading.)

SATURDAY 08/10/24 Room left for growth Revelation 2:2-5

Late in the 1st century, Rome exiled a prophet with a pastor's heart to the island of Patmos. Revelation bore messages from God to warn and support a "circuit" of seven churches in Asia Minor. The 1st message went to the church in Ephesus. "Ephesus was the Gateway of Asia. One of its distinctions, laid down by statute, was that when the Roman proconsul came to take up office as governor of Asia, he must disembark at Ephesus and enter his province there....Its position made Ephesus the wealthiest and the greatest city in all Asia." * The message praised real strengths in that strategically located church. Yet even those good people needed to "change their hearts and lives" (i.e., repent)—they had let go of the love they'd had at first. In this life, the work of "cleaning out the pond" and letting God transform us is never done.

Some commentaries struggle to figure out if "the love you had at first" refers to their love for God or their fellow believers. The two are so interlocked that it seems needless to choose: "it might mean for both." ** God commended the church for having "tested those who say they are apostles but are not, and you have found them to be liars." Christians have always met false teachers, and the Ephesians had taken a firm stand against some of them. But scholar William Barclay noted, "There had been a honeymoon period, but the first flush of enthusiasm is past....It may well be that heresy-hunting had killed love, and orthodoxy had been achieved at the price of fellowship. When that happens, orthodoxy has cost too much. All the orthodoxy in the world will never take the place of love." *** How can you hold to truth without letting "heresy-hunting" damage your personal love, or the love of the Christian community you belong to?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, always keep my heart warm with the love I receive from you and feel for you in return. Let my love never turn into lifeless pious words, but always remain the living center of all that I believe and value. Amen.

* William Barclay, *The Revelation of John—Volume 1 Chapters 1–5* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 58.

** NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Location 287639). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

*** William Barclay, *The Revelation of John—Volume 1 Chapters 1–5*
(Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 64.