

RUF Large Group Bible Study
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Nov. 17, 2004
James 5:7-12²

⁷ Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸ You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰ As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. ¹² But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

We’re getting close to finishing the book of James, a wonder of the connection between gospel and life, of being and doing, of how the inside gets out to the outside, and how the outside reveals what’s on the inside.

Have you heard of The Hell House? In Texas, the original Hell House still functions each Halloween season and thousands flock to this horror show with an evangelistic purpose. Scare people into Hell. Present the realities of life and then allow them to choose their final destination. Attendees are run through a series of mini-dramas, whereby life and death choices are portrayed with angels and demons on hand to narrate the spiritual dimension. A girl commits suicide – the demon shrieks with delight. The gay man has AIDS – Hell for him. A gal has an abortion and repents – happy angels. You get the picture. Right before the attendees are packed into a room for a minute of an altar call (not much time before the next group comes in so you have to hurry), they are taken to the gates of heaven and the pit of hell. It’s all so stereotypical – gold fabric, white robes, Bach in the background for heaven. Black and red, confusion and contorted bodies for Hell.

I have big problems with this.

Here are two – the first is I am convinced that Hell isn’t going to be like that. I think that C.S. Lewis is onto something with his conception of Hell. Instead of thinking that there is a hole in the ground, a manhole to hell, and there are fingers clamoring to get out but God keeps the lid on, it might be better to think that everyone in hell is happy to be there and doesn’t want to leave. Lewis writes, “I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.”³ Lewis’ novel, *The Great Divorce* paints this sort of picture for us of Hell. It’s constituents don’t wish to leave because they would have to give up themselves to do so, a thought that is intolerable.

The other thing that bothers me about Hell House is that everything that happens is presented in the melodramatic moment. I don’t see the happy 80 year old woman dying peacefully in a nursing home. I don’t see a father going to Interstate Drive to buy a new car to go with his new house and new boat and new GPS system. I don’t see the woman over-scheduling her children.

Are these not the things of life? As scary as the Hell House moments are, I would like to think if I were standing before Heaven and Hell, I would choose Heaven. And yet, that isn’t what happens. I propose in this text we see the little decisions and the big ones, the small stuff and the large stuff.

Sweat the Small Stuff

Do you remember the *Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff: And It’s All Small Stuff!* book? I came out in 1997, by Richard Carlson. Here’s the Amazon.com review:

Got a stress case in your life? Of course you do: “Without question, many of us have mastered the neurotic art of spending much of our lives worrying about a variety of things all at once.” Carlson’s cheerful book aims to make us stop and smell—if not roses—whatever is sitting in front of our noses. *Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff...* offers 100 meditations designed to make you appreciate being alive, keep your emotions (especially anger and dissatisfaction) in proper perspective, and cherish other people as the unique miracles they are. It’s an owner’s manual of the heart, and if you follow the directions, you will be a happier, more harmonious person. Like Stairmasters, oat bran, and other things that are good for you, the meditations take discipline. Even so, some of the strategies are kind of fun: “Imagine the people in your life as tiny infants and as 100-year-old adults.” The trouble is, once you start, it’s hard to stop.

I’ll be the first to agree that being overly neurotic won’t get you anywhere. And I certainly affirm that living according to your purpose in life will guide you, rather than trying to string along all the various activities you go through to try to determine a purpose.

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² Resources used: Peter Davids, *Commentary on James*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982; Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000; John MacArthur, *James*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1998; Dr. Tim Keller’s sermons on James found at www.redeemer.com; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, Doubleday: New York, 1995; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (New Interpreter’s Bible), Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1998; J.A. Motyer, *The Message of James*, Intervarsity Press: Downer’s Grove, Illinois, 1985.

³ *The Problem of Pain*, chap 8, para 11, p. 127

But wouldn't you have to say that James disagrees with Carlson?⁴ Think about what he's saying – patience, grumbling, steadfastness and your words. Those are the things that show who you are. In other words, Heaven and Hell are revealed every day in what you think, say and do. There is an aspect of slinking toward Hell that you should consider, for it is very real. Hell is shown by taking from others – not only physically as in stealing, but also emotionally and positionally. Heaven breaks into even the darkest places at times, bringing life and light to that moment.

Let's think about patience, steadfastness and perseverance.

First, "be patient" translates the Greek verb *makrothymeo*, which James uses three times in 5:7-8. (He uses the companion noun *makrothymia* – patience - in 5:10). Patience is a passive virtue; it waits. We are patient, for example, when we wait for a wound to heal. Sometimes we can do nothing but wait. Patience, in this sense of the word, is the equivalent of forbearance or longsuffering.

Second, James tells his brothers to "stand firm" (5:8, NIV) or (more literally) "strengthen your hearts" (NRSV). This term is a bit more active (the Greek is *sterizo*). It has the sense of steely resolve. Luke 9:51 uses it to describe Jesus who "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (ESV). Soldiers stand firm when they stay ready for battle. We stand firm when someone voices a passionate even angry opinion in our direction and we neither succumb to their bluster nor return anger for anger.

Third, James blesses those who persevere in 5:11. "Persevere" translates the verb *hypomoneo*; the noun perseverance translates the companion noun *hypomone*. They describe the more active side of patience. Perseverance is resolve or determination to continue on the right course, despite difficulty.

Runners must persevere to finish a marathon. Businessmen persevere when they conceive, finance, staff, and execute a plan to open a new business. Pastors persevere when they plan, persuade, fund, inaugurate, and establish a new ministry. Charles Lindbergh persevered when he flew 3,600 miles across the Atlantic Ocean at 109 mph for 33 1/2 hours in a plane that had virtually none of the instruments or amenities we associate with flight today. At night his sole illumination was a flashlight. We persevere when, despite difficult circumstances, we maintain the right course to the end.⁵

How you talk to people matters. Are you patient? In line at the store? With the old lady who's writing a check for two dollars? With your roommate and friends? With God even? I'm way too often not patient, which I think reveals that I think I'm better than other people, more important and that my time is more valuable than others.

Do I consider my vows and back them up with integrity? Or do I say things and make commitments I don't mean? I think that on one level we must take what we say seriously and be truth-tellers in the world. We should show up when we say we will. We should be faithful. We shouldn't make plans with multiple people but stick to our word even if something better comes along. But we should also take our vows seriously. Our vows help us to grow.

I often tell students that we grow in the context of our commitments. By that I mean that it's not until we bind ourselves to something in some sort of covenant do we really change and grow up. If we are averse to commitments and covenants at all, then we will remain immature, something that our society promotes, unfortunately. So I've been thinking about my commitments. Here's what I've come up with, and I've tried to think if there are symbols and/or ceremonies to solidify those commitments:

God - He and I are in covenant with each other. He says He seals this with the Holy Spirit, something I see evidence of.

Julie, my wife - on March 5, 1994 I vowed to be her husband until death do us part. I have a ring and some papers to document this.

Church - I am a part of the covenantal community, symbolized by baptism. This is also a ceremony whereby we stand in front of the church or elders and take vows.

The Presbyterian Church in America - I was ordained on Sept. 16th, 2001, when other elders laid their hands on me and documented that I had received an outward call to the ministry of the gospel. I have vowed to be true to Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the Bible as understood and expressed by the Westminster Confession of Faith.

RUF, Reformed University Fellowship - I have been called by the North Texas Presbytery to preach and teach the gospel and pastor God's people to the best of my ability at the University of Oklahoma. I have papers to document this.

My children - although there hasn't been a ceremony placing each of my children under my care, my four kids are covenanted to me and I to them to our blessing and hurt.

My family - I believe the same to be true for my parents and my sister and then to my wife's family as well. No ceremony that I can think of solidifies this.

My friends - Again, I have obligations and commitments to my friends, but no formal indication of that, unless they are also members of my church. You may be a part of a small group Bible study or other group where you all agree to be there every week to share your life with each other.

Very lesser commitments - I'm taking a class at OU, I have agreed to pay my bills when I use my credit card, to pay my mortgage on my house, to exchange money when I use services, etc.

Understood covenants - there are also relational covenants that tend to go unspoken: pastor/parishioner, professor/student, client/provider, doctor/patient, etc. When these lines get blurred, people get confused and angry. That's why it's inappropriate for

⁴ Yes, I've finally gotten to the text.

⁵ From Dr. Dan Doriani's as yet unpublished commentary on James.

professors to have sex with their students, for example. It breaks the covenant they have with each other.

This helps me, I think. Because my commitments help give me freedom in the context of those relationships and with other venues I encounter. For instance, since I have committed to be married to Julie, it's not okay for me to kiss and hold hands with other women. That's not appropriate for a friend-covenant, only for a wife-covenant. Because I am ordained in the PCA, I can be freed to teach and preach the gospel in that context.

It's when we start operating outside of our commitments is when we have trouble. Some of you haven't thought this through. I think of dating right off. Until you've moved from a friend-covenant to a dating-covenant, you shouldn't be acting like you're dating. (this is the infamous "hand-holding friends" stage). Do friends kiss? Do friends hold hands? Would it be okay if I held hands with you during a meeting? No, because we don't have that sort of relationship, that sort of covenant.

These sorts of covenants are best expressed, when we move from one to another, by some sort of public declaration.⁶ Just as we move from one church to another and should stand and say, "I am now connected to you," we should have something like that even relationally. I tell guys that they should have this conversation. "I would like to ask you to be my girlfriend. Here is what I mean by that." Then you go on to state the terms of the covenant. I'm not going to pursue any other woman and I don't want you to pursue any other man. I will show you an appropriate level of affection that I will not show others. I will not break up with you because I had a bad day. And so on.

If you go into the relationship this way, it makes more sense and if things go awry, it's easier I think to get out of it. How many people are confused because they just sort of ended up dating and then he or she just sort of stopped calling and they drifted out of it? Clarifying commitments help.

Others of you might have other covenants. Joining a fraternity or a sorority comes to mind, something that has a very definite ceremony of commitment (and you should think about what you're saying in that by the way). Embracing commitments and living in light of them is tremendously freeing and liberating. It allows us to truly live. This is often contradictory to our thinking especially in this day and age, but has been true throughout time.

Think through your commitments or your lack of them. Pursue the ones you should have. Reevaluate ones you have gotten into by poor choices. Embrace ones that help you grow as a person. Join a church. Clarify your dating. Then fulfill what each of those commitments mean, even to your own hurt at times. This helps us grow and mature. If you are scared of covenants, then I think you are blocking the path of maturity for you.

You cannot love every man, you have to love your husband. You cannot love the universal church until you join and love your church, particularized in a local body. You cannot love the Bible until you commit to it. You cannot submit to Jesus' authority until you have submitted to the authority of your elders. You cannot serve humanity, until you serve someone, a real live person, the one before you, next to you. Our commitments help to shape and define us for the good. Don't run away from them, but towards the ones that are right, good and true.

James also talks about grumbling. *Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

I'll let CS Lewis handle this one from *The Great Divorce*⁷:

At this moment we were suddenly interrupted by the thin voice of a Ghost talking at an enormous speed. Looking behind us we saw the creature. It was addressing one of the Solid People and was doing so too busily to notice us. Every now and then the Solid Spirit tried to get in a word but without success. The Ghosts' talk was like this:

'Oh, my dear, I've had such a dreadful time, I don't know how I ever got here at all, I was coming with Elinor Stone and we'd arranged the whole thing and we were to meet at the corner of Sink Street; I made it perfectly plain because I knew what she was like and if I told her once I told her a hundred times I would *not* meet her outside that dreadful Marjoribanks woman's house, not after the way she'd treated me.... That was one of the most dreadful things that happened to me; I've been dying to tell you because I felt sure you'd tell me I acted rightly; no wait a moment dear, till I've told you – I tried living with her when I first came and it was all fixed up. She was to do the cooking and I was to look after the house, and I did think I was going to be comfortable after all I'd been through but she turned out to be so changed, absolutely selfish, and not a particle of sympathy for anyone but herself - as I once said to her, "I *do* think I'm entitled to a little consideration because you at least lived out your time, but I oughtn't to have been here for years and years yet" – oh, but of course I'm forgetting you don't know – I was murdered simply murdered, dear, that man should never have operated, I ought to be alive today and they simply *starved* me in that dreadful nursing home and no one ever came near me and...'

The shrill monotonous whine died away as the speaker still accompanied by the bright patience at her side, moved out of hearing. 'What troubles ye, son?'

'I am troubled, Sir' said I, 'because that unhappy creature doesn't seem to me to be the sort of soul that ought to be even in danger of damnation. She isn't wicked: she's only a silly, garrulous old woman who has got into a habit of grumbling, and feels that a little kindness, and rest, and change would do her all right.'

⁶ We call the highest form of this a vow: I have taken vows to: Julie, to the PCA and North Texas Presbytery and to the church when I baptized my children. Most people take a vow when they join a church (rightly so) and some students when they join a fraternity or sorority (I'm not so sure that is okay, to be honest). Then marriage. Then when you baptize your children. And that's about it.

⁷ by C.S. Lewis, pp. 75-78

'That is what she once was. That is maybe what she still is. If so, she certainly will be cured. But the whole question is whether she is now a grumbler.'

'I should have thought there was no doubt about that!'

'Abe, but yet misunderstand me. The question is whether she is a grumbler, or only a grumble. If there is a real woman – even the least trace of one – still there inside the grumbling, it can be brought to life again. If there's one weak spark under all those ashes, we'll blow it till the whole pile is red and clear. But if there's nothing but ashes we'll not go on blowing them in our own eyes forever. They must be swept up.

'But how can there be a grumble without a grumbler?'

'The whole difficulty of understanding Hell is that the thing to be understood is so nearly Nothing. But ye'll have had experiences... it begins with a grumbling mood, and yourself still distinct from it, perhaps criticizing it. And yourself, in a dark hour, may will that mood, embrace it. Ye can repent and come out if it again. But there may come a day when you can do that no longer. Then there will be no *you* left to criticize the mood, nor even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine.

Way too convicting. The small stuff reveals the big stuff in our lives. But the big stuff matters too.

James says Jesus is "at the door"⁸ and that puzzles us, since we assume "at the door" means "ready to enter." We wonder how he can be ready to enter for 2,000 years without actually entering. 2 Peter answers this question. First, God's scale of time is not the same as ours. For him, "a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pet 3:8). We think of little children who cannot grasp the meaning of a long trip. They start asking "Are we there yet" when a fifteen hour trip is just fifteen minutes old. Second, if the Lord delays, from our perspective, he delays to grant sinners more time to repent (2 Pet 3:9).

Third, the Lord will come suddenly, without final signs of warning. He comes like a thief in the night (Matt 24:43-44, 2 Pet 3:10). There is no trigger, no line of preliminary events that must occur before Christ returns. James says that those who oppressed his churches were "in the last days" (5:3). Ever since the death and resurrection of Christ, we live in what the New Testament calls "the last days." (Acts 2:17, Heb 1:2). No one knows how long this period will be. Every day could be the very last day (Matt 24:36).⁸ So when we hear that the Lord's coming is near, it means that as far as we know, it could happen any day.

Therefore, all people should prepare themselves for Jesus' return. Scripture never promotes the question "When will Christ return?" It always promotes the question "Will you be ready when he returns?" The rich, who live in self-indulgent luxury, are fools because they forget the day of reckoning (Luke 12:13-21). The family of God waits patiently for that day.⁹

The Big Stuff Comes from the Small Stuff

James gets at this idea of the bigger life by pointing us to Job. He writes: ¹¹ *Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

Think about the prophets for a minute. First think about how great it is to be chosen by God to be a spokesman for him for all time. What an honor and a privilege. And yet, what a life! As you go through the lives of these prophets, you see that steadfastness was about all they could hold on to.

Isaiah's job was to preach the gospel and God told him before he even started that no one would ever believe him. Get going.

Jeremiah preached at the time when Israel was being attacked and overtaken. His message from God was that Nebechanezzar was to be surrendered to and obeyed. Everything Jeremiah was told by God was considered traitorous by Israel, and yet that is what he did. Even his friends wanted to kill him because he was preaching treason.

Hosea was told by God to do things so he could understand what God's life is like. Marry Gomer, a prostitute who will never love you and be faithful to you. I instruct you to have a life of suffering.

God says to his prophets – I want you to obey me. This is pretty dramatic stuff. Now think about this. If they hadn't obeyed him, we would never have known about them. And yet that certainly isn't why they did it – they didn't obey in order to become famous or used by God or so that their words would be written into the Scriptures. They obeyed because they had to, they were compelled to, they wanted to, they knew that God would be faithful.

So there are the big things. We sweep over Job's life in this verse, but even when we get a longer look in the book of Job there is so much that is left out. The narrative only covers a few chapters; all the rest is commentary and talking about what had happened.

Now think about this. You're going to make a movie that has a huge, dramatic choice in it. The big moment. Why are people going to care about that big moment? What gives it the oomph it needs to be a big moment to begin with? All the little moments that lead up to it. No one cares if a hobbit casts the ring into the pit unless you have seen him struggle with it all along the way and no why *this matters*. It matters because the big moment has built on all the little moments that have preceded it. The small stuff makes the big stuff.

⁸ The phrase "the Lord is near" is roughly like "the kingdom is near." Neither is near temporally, both are near in other ways.

⁹ Doriani - James

How about this way – you watch a movie about someone famous. Let’s say Paul McCartney. So you’re going to see pictures of little Pauly with a guitar in his hand, right? You’re going to see Destiny Child singers up on stage when they’re ten years old. You’re not going to see pictures of these people in cowboy outfits or baseball gloves or making a snow fort. Why not? We’re making sense out of things from the past.¹⁰

Some of you are going to be in charge of huge decisions someday. Financial policy for a company. Policies for your church as a deacon. How you’ll raise your family. Maybe some of you will even affect national policy, or even international relations. Who makes the call whether or not to send troops to Rwanda? Or Serbia to stop Slobodon Milosevic? Or to pay a decent wage to an employee? Or to stand up to a lying and cheating Wall Street culture?

Those are big decisions, and they are made now in all the small ones that lead up to them.

The Answer

So I can’t leave you there with all the weight of big and small decisions crashing down on you. The solution is the same as what James has pointed us to all along.

Jesus has been patient with us. Jesus has stood by us. Jesus doesn’t grumble against us. His love for us means that he prays for us. We so often think that Jesus has no reason to grumble or be mad. That we’re the best of the lot. But we’re messed up, and yet he still stands by us.

Do you know how frustrating you people are? You can really get on my nerves, with all your problems and confusions. Do you know one reason why I don’t get nearly as frustrated as you deserve? Because I was once twenty, and I went through all the same things, and I can remember talking with someone in his thirties who was patient with me. That really helps me. When I was just out of college, I shudder to think how frustrated my boss was with me. I constantly complained, grumbled and took advantage of him. And yet he still loved me. I’ve apologized since.

Do you know how great I think Reformed theology and even the Presbyterian Church in America is? Real great. And yet, I try to be patient with those who disagree with me. That is made much easier because I can remember thinking that Calvinism was of the devil and that the Presbyterians were the worst of the lot of denominations. That helps me try to slow down my zeal and love and pastor people who think just like I did when I was twenty two.

How much more does Jesus love us? How much more does he shake his head when we speak untruths about him and still walk along side us as we learn more? How much does Jesus hear our grumblings and yet not turn the spotlight back on us until we are ready to handle his loving rebukes? How much more does Jesus remain with us even when we do not remain with him?

I want to end with a vision of what we are to be like, one that I think James would approve of.

From *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*, by Cornelius Plantinga:¹¹

As Christians see her, a spiritually whole person longs in certain classic ways. She longs for God and the beauty of God, for Christ and Christlikeness, for the dynamite of the Holy Spirit and spiritual maturity. She longs for spiritual hygiene itself – and not just as a consolation prize when she cannot be rich and envied instead. She longs for other human beings: she wants to love them and to be loved by them. She hungers for social justice. She longs for nature, for its beauties and graces, for the sheer particularity of the way of a squirrel with a nut. As we might expect, her longings dim from season to season. When they do, she longs to long again.

She is a person of character consistency, a person who rings true wherever you tap her. She keeps promises. She weeps with those who weep and, perhaps more impressively, rejoices with those who rejoice. She does all these things in ways that express her own personality and culture but also a general “mind of Christ” that is cross-culturally unmistakable.

Her motives include faith – quite confidence in God and in the mercies of God that radiate from the self-giving work of Jesus Christ. She knows God is good; she also feels assured that God is good to her. Her faith secures her against the ceaseless oscillations of pride and despair familiar to every human being who has taken refuge in the cave of her own being and tried there to bury all her insecurities under a mound of achievements. When her faith slips, she retains faith enough to believe that the Spirit of God, whose presence is her renewable resource, will one day secure her faith again. Since faith fastens on God’s benevolence, it yields gratitude, which in turn sponsors risk-taking in the service of others. Grateful people want to let themselves go; faithful people dare to do it. People tethered to God by faith can let themselves go because they know they will get themselves back.

Grateful people overflow a little, especially with thanksgiving and passed-on kindnesses. But they do not therefore lack discipline. In fact, self-indulgence tends to suppress gratitude; self-discipline tends so generate it. That is why gluttony is a deadly sin: oddly, it is an appetite suppressant. The reason is that a person’s appetites are linked: full stomachs and jaded palates take the edge from our hunger and thirst for justice. And they spoil the appetite for God.

The classic longings motivate a sound life; so do faith and gratitude. Of course, all these things fail from time to time. Spiritually healthy people know very well the drag of sloth and doubt. They know about spiritual depression. They

¹⁰ This means that you’d better be careful when you doodle in your notebooks. I wouldn’t, if I were you, draw something like a lion biting off your head, because you just might be tempting fate and someday someone will find that after a wild lion got loose bit off your head at the zoo.

¹¹ chapter two, pp. 34-38

know what it is like to feel keenly that the world has been emptied of God. That is why a spiritually sound person disciplines her life by such spiritual exercises as prayer, fasting, confession, worship, and reflective walks through cemeteries. She visits boring persons and tries to take an interest in them, ponders the lives of saints and compares them to her own, spends time and money on just and charitable causes. A person of spiritual hygiene covets the virtues and character strengths that Christians since Paul have always prized- compassion, for example, and patience. She seeks these and other excellences – endurance, hope, humility, forthrightness, hospitality. She then tries to work them into a regular practice routine, always aware that in order to grow in these excellences she needs both to strive for them and to fail in her striving. She needs to persist through striving and failure and grow in order to become a free and joyful contributor to shalom.

Just as in sports and music, discipline in spiritual hygiene has a point. Anybody can play, but only a disciplined person can play freely. Discipline is the basis and presupposition of both freedom and power...

The goal of human life, says the opening of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, is “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” This famous claim, filed in language with all the “spareness, strength, and clarity of fine ironwork,”¹² was written as a kind of pre-life orientation for children. By writing documents like this, the church was trying to stake and guy a child’s life so that it would point toward God; only then could it be sturdy, fragrant, and fruitful. A child must learn God’s Word and speak of it tenderly, respect God’s reputation and try to enhance it. She must place her very life in the hands of God and trust that those hands might do to it. She must shun emotional and religious junk food that might spoil her appetite for God and her hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Spiritual hygiene includes ends like these – goals, purposes, primary intended consequences. The point of our lives is not to get smart or to get rich or even to get happy. The point is to discover God’s purposes for us and to make them our own. The point is to learn ways of loving God above all and our neighbor as ourselves and then to use these loves the way a golfer uses certain checkpoints to set up for a drive.

The point is to be lined up right, to seek first the kingdom of God, (Matt. 6:33), to try above all to increase the net amount of shalom in the world.

To glorify God is to do these things and, by doing them, to make God’s intentions in the world more luminous and God’s reputation more lustrous. To enjoy God forever is to cultivate a taste for this project to become more and more the sort of person for whom eternal life with God would be her heaven.

¹² Edward A. Downey, Jr. *A Commentary of the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to “The Book of Confession”* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), p. 246.