

Prayers to Remain – Part 4

In our study series on grieving and healing through the Gospel, we've learned to express our sorrow openly to the Lord to experience his full love. We learned how to see our sin when we grieve, confess, and receive Christ's beautiful forgiveness. In this, we understand that we are not saved by our own righteousness, but as broken sinners, we are saved by our faith in Jesus, trusting that he will forgive us and help us in our time of need. Yet, Jesus doesn't leave us in our sin. Once we are saved from eternal condemnation, Jesus invites us to throw off our old life with its sins and desires, and commit to a new life in Christ through baptism, completely washing our sins away and making us new! So, what's next? In this new life, Jesus tells us to remain in him. What does that mean? Did he leave us with any instructions? Praise God he did!

Last week, we talked about the importance of confessing our sins to God and to one another so that we can continually experience his love when we sin. He offers us healing and continued forgiveness as we confess our sins to one another and pray for each other. We experience spiritual growth and true fellowship with other believers as we serve one another in this way. Today, we will talk about our lamp. What is our lamp, how do we protect it, and why is our lamp important when it comes to remaining in Jesus?

Lesson 4

(Answers are provided by Ukrainians and other attendees.)

In a section where Jesus is talking about treasures in heaven, he says this:

Matthew 6:22-23

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy (also simple, not crooked, single-focused, or clear), your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy, (bad, blind), your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

От Матфея 6:22-23

²² Светильник для тела есть око. Итак, если око твое будет чисто, то всё тело твое будет светло; ²³ если же око твое будет худо, то всё тело твое будет темно. Итак, если свет, который в тебе, тьма, то какова же тьма?

Mark 4:21-23

²¹ He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? ²² For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."

От Марка 4:21-23

²¹ И сказал им: для того ли приносится свеча, чтобы поставить ее под сосуд или под кровать? не для того ли, чтобы поставить ее на подсвечнике? ²² Нет ничего тайного, что не сделалось бы явным, и ничего не бывает потаенного, что не вышло бы наружу. ²³ Если кто имеет уши слышать, да слышит!

Have you ever wondered what your lamp of your body is? Matthew 6 tells us! What is the lamp of our body?

- Our eyes are our lamp

Why are our eyes so important? What impact do they have on us spiritually?

- What we see affects us, affects our soul, our emotions, and in the end our behavior or actions
- If I watch a movie with sexual sins, it affects me and I might start thinking about it, etc. Where it stops depends on me – depending on my past, like if I had problems in this area – then it could lead me to commit sins.
- Once this information goes into our eyes, it also goes into our brains and affects us in some way

The definition of our lamp can relate to things that are both physical and mental, but let's talk about the physical first – things we see, we watch, we focus on, we want to see, we stare at.

What are examples of these things, and how can these things make us unhealthy spiritually? Give examples.

- Sexual movies or movies with sexual content – can make us dissatisfied with our spouses or current situation, we can feel like this is normal and it's what I should have in my life to complete, it can increase our desires for sexuality, and we act out on that because we begin having strong desires that we don't know what to do with
- Crime scenes on TV or movies – can make us angry, which can then affect others; we can imitate what we saw, and we get bad ideas on how to handle our problems; it can cause depression, fear, or anxiety
- A bad car wreck, looking to see what happened out of curiosity –
- Drug or alcohol use on TV or movies -
- News – people shooting others, watching videos and news of the war – can cause feelings of being overwhelmed, anxious, angry; it can turn into an addiction and cause depression; the news focuses on bad news and the same bad situations over and over
- Violence in movies or video games – it can cause us to fight with others, we glorify it and want to be like this, try to imitate this
- Music that we listen to – sexual content, content about broken marital relationships, divorce, cheating on others, betrayal
- Books we read
- Pictures on our wall – what do they represent, what do they mean
- Social media – we see the perfect bodies or lives; so we think we need to look like that and live like that (we're not normal); we begin to compare
- Modern films in general focus on money and wrong morals vs. healthy movies, maybe movies from the 70's or 80's
- Billboards with sexual content, magazines with bad photos on the front
- People and their modern clothing
- We may have witnessed or experienced abuse – physical or sexual
- People we hang out with – maybe their speech affects us (cursing, negative remarks, gossip, criticism, etc.)

Sometimes we are struggling spiritually and don't even know why. One of the first questions we must ask is, "What are my eyes (and even my ears) doing throughout the day?"

We watch the news, listen to music about love affairs, spend hours on Facebook or internet sites, shop when we don't need to buy something, watch people, watch movies where romance is alive and every problem gets resolved, watch shows where people kill others and the hero is glorified, or play video games where we kill and get glorified! We find ourselves depressed, angry, impatient, dissatisfied with life or our spouses, bored, feeling like we're missing something in life, longing for an escape or vacation, and even addicted to these places where our eyes wander.

Pick one or two of the following areas where we spend time "watching" or "listening": news, music, social media / internet, people, shopping, movies, TV shows, advertisements, video games, billboards, books, etc. Consider how the area may be hurting your lamp. What negative affects is it having on you spiritually and why?

- News of the war – causes anxiety and depression
- Shopping – wanting new things, seeing things I don't have
- Music and the news – hearing things that create bad thoughts in my mind
- People not fully dressed / Pornography – seeing these people can cause me to feel angry or have sexual feelings, pulls me away from my spouse, creates unrealistic expectations, creates overreaction to want people to cover up completely in a way that is not humane or normal
- Movies – depending on my emotional state, they can affect me when I feel weak; maybe I am curious about the plot, but it can cause me to get too involved; maybe the movie contains sexual sins; we think we can handle things, but the information gets into our minds and that can become a problem

When we realize that everywhere our eyes wander – for good or bad – what we see and even hear affect our lives spiritually. This is one of the ways the spirit world works – what we allow our ears to hear and our eyes to see matters deeply in our walk with Jesus. If we want our lamp to stay lit, we must take special care of our physical eyes.

In the parable of the ten virgins, the wise virgins trim their lamps and carry oil with them. Trimming the wick (or the string that burns) inside the lamp, keeps the lamp from becoming dim or smoky. When the lamp is trimmed, the lamp is bright, and everyone can see its light through the glass! Nothing is hidden on the inside. In the same way, the more we limit the unhealthy distractions of our eyes, the brighter our light for Christ will be. Yet, the virgins didn't just trim their lamps, they added oil to the lamps to keep them burning. In other words, trimming away unhealthy things that make us struggle will not keep us spiritually alive. We have to fill our eyes with what is good and spiritually healthy to keep our faith burning for God!

Considering the same areas where our eyes and ears wander, how can we replace activities that cause us to struggle with ones that are good and spiritually healthy?

- Christian music
- Movies with healthy values
- Christians books

- Staying busy with work, family, hobbies – we have less time to do these things (not wasting time)
- Taking a class to help us spiritually, emotionally, or even physically
- Instead of reading things on the internet or phone, get a physical book
- Get active in sports or exercise (walk 2-3 miles outside)
- Do something for the church – serve others
- Surround yourself with Christian friends, positive people
- Find new desires (like serving God, helping others, reading the Bible, researching spiritual topics, mentoring others)
- Sleep balance (7-9 hours), eating well
- Memorize scriptures that relate to our struggle and give us hope, give us healthy thoughts about our life in Christ, hope for eternal life
- Spend time praying
- Confess our problem
- Talk about our struggle and get to the root of it

In the Greek, the word for eye [Gk: *ophthalmos*] can also mean the “mind’s eye.”

What does this term mean?

- The mind’s eye is how we see the world, how we react to the world
- Our perception – how we see situations, people, etc.

The mind’s eye can also mean the area of the brain where we think and focus our attention.

Think about your mind. What areas are mental distractions for you? Where does your mind wander? What consumes your thoughts more that you want to admit? How do these thoughts affect your spiritual well-being?

- What my family thinks about me – their negative comments or criticisms come to my mind daily. It affects me negatively because I can feel discouraged or have a sense of rejection and sorrow at some point during me day. Sometimes, I don’t even realize it’s happening.
- Distracting relationships with others – the quarrels and arguments that can cause my mind to wander. My mind is preoccupied when I think a lot about these arguments, so I can feel angry.
- Things that I don’t want to do or have occupy my time – like moving my office. It takes away from things that are more important to me. Also, the conversation I need to have with my office partner is always with me. Things around the world – injustices that we hear about everyday (lawlessness and deterioration of society) causes me to feel sad and angry. Then I don’t think about the noble / good things that Jesus asks me to think about.
- Before, I had a bad relationship with my dad because of my relationship with Jesus and my devotion to Jesus. It was a little extreme because I was hungry for spiritual things. He criticized my life, and I wasn’t normal in his eyes. My brother was also not a believer, and we didn’t talk. But I tried to be polite, but it was very difficult. Now my dad has cancer, and today he called me about his cystoscopy test, which went well. I was able to help him during this time and to avoid surgery. And now our relationship is better. Praise God.

- I want to share about destructive thoughts. In seminary, I was preparing classes and needed a positive attitude. My neighbor was making a lot of noise, and this affected my mind. I had a negative mood, and I couldn't prepare the materials well. When we want to do Christian work, there are factors and people that can annoy or irritate us. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to give us patience and love so that we can show we are Christian.
- When my father died, I had a strong mental distraction because it was so difficult to lose my parent. In my mind, I was reminded about his life and that he doesn't exist anymore in this world. This was very difficult to overcome this mental distraction. As a believer, I don't have to look to my past but focus on the hope to see him in heaven. When I have this temptation to think about him to the point of depression, I try to think about the future of seeing him. (Grief)

In a figurative way, the mind's eye can also mean how we view situations around us. Have you ever heard of the phrase "glass half empty" or "glass half full"? We see a glass with water up to halfway from the top of the glass. Is the glass "half empty" or "half full"?

If our glass, or our mind's eye, is half empty, then we tend to focus on the negative aspects of a situation. We struggle finding hope. We assume things won't work out. We criticize and find fault with the things and people around us, even ourselves. Perhaps we complain and often express our dissatisfaction with situations. We're mentally focused on what is "wrong," instead of what is right. For some of us, we feel the weight of fear before God because we will never be enough, and we struggle feeling Christ's love and grace. For others, we're proud. Everyone but us is wrong, and we're always right (but we're too humble to admit it 😊). We find our strength and worth in thinking we're better than others, so we are overconfident about our righteous standing with God. Whether we're defeated or prideful, inside we are exhausted, and we exhaust others.

If our glass is half full, we see the good in situations, the hope, and even the opportunity for change or something better. We believe and trust Jesus and others, rather than fret and doubt over our circumstances. We speak encouragement and love into others, rather than blame, shame, disappointment, and criticism. We see what *can* happen, rather than what *can't* happen. We look for the good in people, and express gratitude often. Our words are life and full of love. We enjoy learning from others and see differences as opportunities to grow. We have a healthy view of ourselves before God and trust in his grace because of *his* righteousness, not ours. We are not worried about being "enough" because we know that it is only through Jesus's sacrifice that we will ever be enough. This brings us great joy and peace! In this way, we are fully confident, yet humble children of God.

Not everyone is *all* one way or the other. Many people have a combination of both these views – and our mood can change day by day, hour by hour, situation by situation.

Take a minute to be silent and think of one situation where you see your glass "half full" first and then one situation where you see your glass "half empty." Write down your answers.

Consider how you could see your "half empty" glass differently – find the good, the hope, the opportunity for change, faith, trust, gratitude, or chance to learn and grow. Speak life and love into your situation. Write your thoughts.

Share what you thought about and wrote during this time of silence.

- Everyone shared their personal situations

Consider your spiritual lamp: the physical eye of your body and the mental eye of your mind. Write the areas where you want to limit where your physical eyes wander. Do the same for the distractions of your mind. Consider any situations where you feel negative. How can you see your situation with a healthier eye? Use this time to quietly meditate over the needs of your spiritual lamp.

Going deeper: Confess what you see about your lamp to a Christian friend or community group. Consider a spiritual fast this week from the things that are hurting your physical or mental lamp and replace them for things that make your lamp brighter. Write down any decisions that you make, and post them on your refrigerator!

Time of prayer