

# “Pursuing Dust” // 1 Corinthians 10 // *Cutting Through the Noise # 10*

(20th Anniversary and 20 Days of Prayer and Fasting)

*Remain standing...*

Most of you know this, but this January our church celebrates 20 years as TSC, and in a few weeks we’re going to celebrate that. I think about all that God has done here in the last 20 years, and it’s amazing, but there’s one thing that has fueled everything else--it’s not been our mission statements or our offerings or my or anyone else’s leadership--what’s fueled everything else here is prayer. John Wesley used to say he was convinced that God did nothing on earth except in answer to prayer. Jesus said that at its core, his house was a HOP for all nations.

And so we’re kicking off this year—our 21st year—with 20 Days of Prayer AND FASTING beginning Monday, January 24 (slide). 20 Days where we seek God in prayer AND fasting. Fasting, btw, is the key component of this. I know some of you are confused when it comes to fasting--you’re like, “Are you telling us not to eat for 20 days?” No, I’m not saying that--my plan is to set several meals throughout the week that I can skip so I can spend that time praying and hearing from God; there’s also a few things I’m giving up permanently for those 20 days.

Be on the lookout for some communication that will give you ideas about what you can do, or what your family can do for these 20 days. It can really be a great way to start the year, and a great way for us to seek God’s direction for the next 20: What do you want God to do in your life this year? What do we want to see in our church? What does HE want?

Will you join us for these 20 days, starting Jan 24?

Let’s pray now...

YOU MAY BE SEATED.

(Introduction)

Happy New Years and welcome back to the Summit Church! New Years has become a weird moment for our society, it has seemed--

On social media, **NYE 2020** (everyone was like): “This is gonna be our year! Our decade! The ‘roaring 20’s’ are back!”

**NYE 2021:** “It’s fine, we’ll get back to normal soon.”

Social Media **NYE 2022:** \*\*\**Dead silence with uncertainty*\*\*\*

If you have your Bibles, open them to 1 Corinthians 10, as we continue our march through Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians.<sup>1</sup>

In his book *The Rest of God*, Mark Buchanan recounts the story of his Grandmother-in-law--Grandma Alice, he called her--who had this huge boulder-like stone sitting right in the middle of her backyard garden. It had been there forever and was way too big for her to move, but it was kind of pretty--it was round and smooth and it had these glittery mineral chunks in it, so she figured she might as well polish it up and make it an attractive centerpiece in her garden since she couldn't move it. Well, as she sanded, he said, she noticed a thin sifting of gold starting to gather on the stone. She moistened her fingertip and put it into this dust... and it was gold! He said "her heart started racing. She sanded faster, now leaning her whole body into it, and more gold dust appeared. Now she was scrubbing that rock as if it were a bloodstain. Gold dust accumulated rapidly, and in a split second, she'd caught the infamous "gold fever"--that same fever that made grown men in the 1800's squander their homes and families and go out West in search of treasure. She could feel it--she was going to be rich!

She stopped for a moment to wipe her brow, and that's when she noticed that something was wrong with her wedding ring. The topside was normal, but the underside, the part that nestles in the crease of her finger, was wire-thin. And that's when she realized that all the gold dust she'd seen had come from the sandpaper filing down her ring. In just a moment her greatest treasure, a family heirloom, reduced to dust in pursuit of a treasure that had never been there to begin with.

Mark said he laughed the first time his wife told him that story, but only the first time. "After that," he said, "it made me sad: an aging woman, giddy as a schoolgirl, heady with a sense of windfall, dreaming of great riches; and the next moment crestfallen, stinging with shame over her coveting and naiveté. "But it's also sad," he said, because much of my own life I've repeated, again and again, Grandma Alice's mistake. I've squandered treasures in pursuit of dust."

In 1 Cor 10, Paul is going to explain how Grandma Alice's mistake is one every follower of God since the beginning of time has been tempted to make--it's called idolatry, and it is the source of all our sin, and also a source of a lot of the anxiety, strife and bad choices the Corinthian believers are making.

1 Cor 10: Let me give you the context for this discussion: If you remember, Paul has been trying to help the Corinthians navigate a controversy in the early church about whether or not it was ok for a Christian to eat meat that had previously been offered to idols. Many of the new Christians, **particularly the Jewish ones, felt like eating meat that had been blessed by an idol meant that (a)** you were condoning the idol worship and (b) you were eating meat that had a lingering demonic curse on it. **But others were like, "No, God's power is stronger than any idol's curse, and Jesus' death cleansed all things for us anyway."**

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<sup>1</sup> Works Consulted: Dallas Willard, *Life Without Lack*; Tim Keller, *Romans 1-7 for You*; Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God* (quotation edited); Andrew Wilson, *1 Corinthians for You* (The Good Book Company).

In chapter 8, Paul tells them that the meat eaters are actually correct--Jesus' death has indeed cleansed all things for us, and so it's ok to eat meat that has been offered to idols--but then he goes on to say, if you remember, that if exercising that right to eat meat made it hard for someone else to hear the gospel, that's a right he would gladly forego for the sake of reaching people. You got it? We all caught up to where we are in this letter?

OK, chapter 10: After making the point that it was ok to eat meat offered to idols, Paul wants to make it clear he's NOT trying to imply that idol worship is no big deal. "No," he says, "idolatry is a HUGE deal! It's the heart of all sin, from Adam and Eve and the children of Israel down to Grandma Alice." Paul didn't *specifically* mention Grandma Alice, but he was thinking about her...

**Vs. 1** Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all led by the cloud, all passed through the sea... 3 all ate the same spiritual food... (he's talking of course about the Exodus, the deliverance through the Red Sea; the manna). 5 Nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them, since they were struck down in the wilderness. (In fact, all of them but two—Joshua and Caleb.)

Now watch this: 6 These things took place as examples for us, so that we will not desire evil things as they did. 7 Don't become idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to party. 8 Let us not commit sexual immorality as some of them did, and in a single day twenty-three thousand people died. 9 Let us not test Christ as some of them did and were destroyed by snakes. 10 And don't grumble as some of them did, and were killed by the death angel. 11 These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction...

14 So then, my dear friends, flee from idolatry... (notice, Paul summarizes all of Israel's problems under that one heading: **Idolatry: "flee from idolatry;" idolatry is in all of it**)

18 Consider the people of Israel. Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? (IOW, when you worship an idol, you open up a portal for the power of that idol to infect in your life). 19 What am I saying then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but I do say that what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. Idol statues may be inanimate pieces of wood, but demons are actually behind those idols and when you worship an idol you are inviting the power of the demon into your life. So, while eating food that has been previously offered to an idol is not a problem, any kind of worship of an idol opens you up to the demonic.

**We're going to consider 3 questions today from these 20 verses: 1. What is idolatry? 2. How does it corrupt our behavior? 3. Does idolatry really bring us into contact with demons?** Last week Pastor Bryan got to talk about New Year's Resolutions and finishing well and this week I get to talk about *demons*. You're welcome, Bryan; I give you all the easy stuff.

## 1. What is idolatry? (vv 6–7; 14)

- In vs. 6, see the word “*desire*” --They “desired” evil things? The word in Greek is “*epithumia*.” We don’t have a great word in English to translate *epithumia*. “*Thumia*” just means *desire*; “*epi*” is like saying “super.” *Epithumia* is a desire that becomes so large that it controls you. Think of it like a deep-soul-craving. Something you are driven to obtain in life because without it, you’re not sure if life would even be worth living. That’s idolatry.
- Many of us assume idol worship is bowing down to little gold statues, and since you don’t have any of those in your basement, well, you’re not really an idolater then.
- But don’t be so naïve. Biblically, an idol is anything that takes the place of God in your life. **That’s why in vs. 14** Paul summarizes all of Israel’s wilderness sins as “idolatry”--not just the creation of the golden statue, but also the sexual immorality, the complaining and the disobedience--all of it was idolatry.
- Idolatry is when something becomes so central and essential to your life that you couldn’t imagine being happy without it; something so important that, if you lost it, you’d feel like life is hardly worth living.
- **Write this down:** Idolatry is not so much about what you bow your knees to; it’s what you lean your soul on. (PAUSE)
- **Or here is another way to think about it: One of the Hebrew words for worship is the word “*kabod*,”** which literally means “weight.” To worship something is to give it *weight* in your heart. An idol is whatever in your heart is so weighty that you couldn’t imagine life without it being any good.
- Our English word “worship” captures this: “Worship” is a combination of 2 words: Worship = worth - ship. You worship whatever you assign the most worth to.
- Here’s the tricky part: An idol is not usually a bad thing; usually, it’s a good thing that you’ve given God-like weight that turns into a bad thing. An idol is a good thing you’ve turned into a God thing that becomes a bad thing.

For Adam and Eve, it was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God had given them free reign in the entire garden but told them that this one tree they should not touch. But they wanted THAT tree; they needed THAT tree; they *epithumia* (craved) that tree; and they were willing to compromise their relationship with God to get it.

For the children of Israel, their *epithumia* was a desire for safety and the delicacies of Egypt. They didn’t like being exposed in the wilderness with nothing but the promise of God to protect them, and nothing to eat but the manna God provided for them each morning. So, they turned their back on God to pursue those other things.

So, the question is, “What is it for you?” What do you *epithumia*? What carries the most weight in your heart? To what do you assign the most “worth”? What is it that you say, “*This* constitutes a happy and complete life ... and without it, life isn’t worth living.”

And don't think you can avoid this question by not being religious. You can no more turn off your drive for worship by not being religious than you can turn off your appetite for food by skipping a meal. The human heart *always* finds something to worship.

Even secular anthropologists realize this. One cultural commentator summarizes it this way: "There has to be something that captures our imagination and our allegiance, which is the resting place of our deepest hopes and to which we look to calm our deepest fears. Whatever that thing is, we worship it—we pursue it. It's the one the thing we cannot live without, defining and validating everything we do."<sup>2</sup>

What is it for you? Let me run through a little top 10 list (not exactly 10, but it's the spirit of a top 10):

**Marriage:** "Just give me a good marriage and I'll be happy." The key to a happy life is to find that special someone, and when you do that, everything else in your life will fall into place; and until you find them, life will always be missing something and you'll be incomplete. This may be our society's biggest idol, as evidenced by how frequently this theme appears in our music and movies. I don't mean to pick on these too much, but isn't this the theme of every Hallmark movie you've ever seen? "I was a highly paid corporate lawyer and realized on my trip back to my parents' house that my life was empty without love, so I gave up my career to get married to my high school sweetheart and now we run a cattle ranch together. And a coffee shop with a crazy-profitable Etsy business." #trendy I saw a comedian who said (PIC) "Over Christmas I watched a Hallmark movie backwards: A woman in an ugly Christmas sweater dumped her loser, small town boyfriend to pursue a law career in NYC where she lived happily ever after in pencil skirts and amazing shoes." Romance is an idol for many people.

**Independence is for others.** I know some singles who struggle with committing to someone else because they can't imagine being happy in life without complete freedom to do whatever they want to do, and that makes them scared of commitment.

**For others, it's money:** If I have enough in the bank, things will be fine. I read an economic book recently--called *The Psychology of Money*--it was pretty good, I would recommend it, but the guy said he was working off the premise that happiness is having enough money in the bank that you can do what you want to do when you want to do it. And I agree, that's a good thing. But is that the most **weighty thing** in your heart? Is that the one thing you need to be happy—the one thing you require to feel secure, to feel alive, to feel free? If so, that's what will drive your behavior; the path to financial security is the voice you'll obey above all others.

**Maybe you're driven by a sense of accomplishment,** feeling like if you could ever get the respect that comes from being best in your field then life would be good. And that drives you.

- Several years ago, I read an interview of **Madonna** (if you're younger than 30, you probably don't know who that is; think of her as the Lady Gaga of my generation, but weirder. You Gen Z'ers got nothing on us

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<sup>2</sup> Keller, *Romans for You*, 27. Way back in the day, Cicero and Aristotle argued that "telos" was fundamental to life. More recently, Nietzsche put it this way: "He who has a 'why' can endure any 'how.'"

when it comes to producing weird artists. We took that to a whole new level. Madonna was forever doing something weird to set herself apart.) She said in an interview in Vogue magazine, which I read religiously of course: “My drive in life comes from a fear of being mediocre. That is always pushing me. I’ll do something, accomplish something, that makes me feel special, and that lasts for a while but then the feeling goes away and I feel uninteresting unless I do something else. Even though I have become somebody, I still feel like I have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and I guess it never will.”

**Some of us are driven by the opinions of others.** Some of you are still trying to earn the approval of your father, or some unnamed group of people. **I was that way in high school.** I spent my entire high school career trying to impress a bunch of people I didn’t really even like. I wore what they thought I should wear; I talked the way they thought I should talk. Their approval, their opinion, was the weightiest thing in my heart. Weightier even than God’s approval.

You say, **“Well, I’m old enough to know that chasing other people’s opinions or career or money will get you nowhere; life for me is about having a strong family and good friends.”** And listen, I agree that those things are better than money, but those things can become idols, too. I watched a great movie this weekend with my son called *American Underdog*--the true story of Kurt Warner, who literally went from bagging groceries as a football dropout to Super Bowl Champ for the St. Louis Rams and League MVP. It’s a great movie, but at one of the crisis points in the movie, it does what a lot of Christian-themed movies do--after Kurt realizes that building his identity on being good at football has gotten him nowhere, he decides to build his identity instead on being a good husband and dad. Again, that’s better than football, but family can become an idol, too. God, and God alone, was to be our source of identity; God was supposed to be the one relationship we leaned the weight of our souls on.

When “family” becomes an idol, that messes everything up too. Have you ever seen a parent who wraps up their identity, their self-worth, in how well their kids do? They are always comparing their kids to others; feeling jealous of what they see in other families; then they start putting a lot of pressure on their kids to do well because how well their kids do is a reflection on them; they feel personally betrayed when their kids don’t do well and they say really destructive things to their kids like, *“How could you do this to me after all I’ve done for you?”* Yes, it’s better to pour yourself into your family than your career, but family can become an idol, too.

My identity as a Christian is not supposed to be football star, successful pastor, model husband or good dad. It’s supposed to be “servant of God.”

Tim Keller says, **“An idol is whatever you envision enabling you to live a life of power and joy without God.”**<sup>3</sup>

**What is that for you?** What’s the one, central thing for you? The one thing that has the most weight in your heart; the one thing that you attach the most worth to; the one or two things that drive your life?

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller, sermon on the Rich Young Ruler, 2013

## 2. How does idolatry corrupt our behavior? (vv. 6, 8)

In chapter 10 Paul ties idolatry to all kinds of corrupted behavior: Vs. 6, ***because of their idolatry, the children of Israel (vs. 8) gave themselves to sexual immorality***; they started complaining and grumbling against God. Paul tells us to learn from their example and avoid that trap.

**So, let's consider: How is idolatry corrupting your behavior?** Well see, whatever you feel like you have to have for life to be complete, you'll be willing to do whatever it takes to obtain.

Martin Luther said that **God bookended the 10 commandments** with 2 commandments about idolatry. The first command says that we should have no other gods but God (he should be the one and only essential for happiness). The 10th says not to covet (which means to yearn for something--literally, in the Greek version of the OT, it **uses the actual word *epithumia***--deep in your soul because you couldn't be happy without it). Martin Luther said that God wrote the 10 commandments this way because if we kept those two, keeping all the others would be a piece of cake.

Right? Think about it:

- It's because you idolize sex and romance that you break your marriage vows and commit adultery. You can't imagine being happy and fulfilled in life without this kind of relationship and your marriage isn't giving it to you so you step out on your marriage.
- It's because you idolize money that you steal. You're not naturally a dishonest person, but this fudge here, or this cut corner there, gets you that cherished extra money. It's not just that you're a dishonest person: You're driven by *epithumia*. It's because you idolize money that you break God's commandments to be generous and tithe. It's not that you are a stingy person. It's that you can't give away money because you depend on it for happiness and security.
- It's because you idolize the opinions of others that you lie. That's always been my problem. As an adult, when you lie, it's a lot of times to protect your image. Because you still idolize what people think, you bend the truth.

Idolatry drives our sinful choices. It corrupts our hearts, which in turn corrupts our behavior. Ironically, one of the best places I've ever heard this expressed was by **David Foster Wallace**, the acclaimed postmodern novelist, in a famous Commencement Address he gave at Kenyon College. He said, **"In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship... If you worship money and material possessions--if they are where you tap real meaning in life--then you will never have enough. . . . (Watch this) Worship your own body and beauty or sexual allure, and you will always feel ugly, and when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally bury you. . . . Worship power, and you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, and you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out."**

Idolatry turns you into a frantic person like Grandma Alice; always striving, sanding away the best parts of your life in pursuit of that thing. Some of you look around right now at a destroyed part of your life—maybe your family—that was sacrificed to some idol.

Peel back the layers of your sin and you'll find an altar to an idol there. In fact--I've told you this before--St. Augustine said that in many ways, our sinful actions and sinful emotions are like smoke from a fire... **In some ways, the worst thing to do would be to get rid of the smoke: "Honey, there is smoke billowing EVERYWHERE in here; could you open a window?"** No, if you see smoke in your house, you need to figure out where the fire is coming from!

When you see the smoke of bad behaviors or complicated emotions in your heart, don't just wave away the smoke. Figure out what idol they are being driven by! It's like **Paul Tripp** says, *"If you worshipped your way into sin, you'll have to worship your way out."*

I remember one of the first times I was teaching on this I was trying to illustrate for all of you--I was trying to be humble--how my own sins were driven by idolatry.

- So I asked Veronica to help me come up with a list of sins I struggled with most to see if we could determine a pattern of idolatry behind them. **FTR: HUGE mistake.** My wife started rattling off sins: I think she must have had a little list over there she kept by her bedside just ready for this moment. I thought: Next time I'm doing this all alone.
- But it seemed like every fault I had was connected to image management. My worries are driven by a fear of not being successful and other people assuming I'm a failure. I've already told you that any tendencies I have to lie are to protect my image and guard my reputation. A lot of my anger is driven by someone disrespecting and making me look foolish in the eyes of others. Sinful anger comes from this idol of other people's opinions I worship in my heart.
- You're like, *"Man, you've really got problems. Are you sure you should be a pastor?"* No. **But I'm the same as you,** I've just got the courage to stand up here and be honest about mine. **Of course, maybe the reason I do this is so you'll admire me for my transparency and honesty. I don't know. My heart is so messed up.**
- The point is I know my own sin is driven by idolatry. So is yours. I know I shouldn't be brushing away smoke; I should be looking to the heart and finding where the fire is coming from.

### 3. Does idolatry really bring us into contact with demons?

18 "Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?... 20 What they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God."

- Meaning, when you make a sacrifice to an idol, you are communion with a demon.
- You say, "Well, come on--I mean, craving marriage *too* much, being too driven for success, being too into your kids--sure, maybe those things aren't good, but isn't Paul going too far in saying that in idolizing these things we are communing with demons?"
- No, he's not. You see, Satan has power over everything in this world not under submission to God. God calls Satan the ruler of this world, the Prince of the power of the air: think of that imagery; air is



everywhere. We just breathe it in everywhere we go. If the air in here is poisoned, you're going to breathe it in. That's a terrible analogy to make during Covid season, but you get the point.

- Satan's power and influence are everywhere. And every sacrifice made in pursuit of an idol opens you up to his influence. And that's a big thing to say, but it's true. **Idolizing your family; idolizing marriage; idolizing money, or the opinions of others opens yourself up to demonic control of your life.**
- You say, "Wait a minute: Isn't Paul here talking about actual pagan temple rituals?" Yes, but as we've seen, **it's not just in a temple that you make a sacrifice to an idol.** We make sacrifices to idols every day.
  - It's when you **compromise your integrity** because you *need* to be married that you make a sacrifice to an idol.
  - **It's when you stay late** and overwork at the expense of your family that you make a sacrifice to an idol.
  - **It's when you tell a lie (or brag, or boast)** so you can maintain your image before others that you sacrifice to an idol.
  - When you **cut corners to get ahead** you are making a sacrifice to an idol.
- Satan is the spirit at work in all false worship and sacrifices are the portals by which he gains control over your life.
- Remember a few weeks ago I pointed out how when Jesus spoke of the power of money in our lives (Matthew 6) he used a **proper noun, "Mammon"**--you cannot serve God and Mammon--and when Gospel writers wrote down that word, they left it untranslated because they recognized that Jesus was speaking about money not as a thing but as a personal, supernatural force. They left it in as a proper noun, almost as if this was a person! There's a spirit at work behind money, and when you trust in money rather than God, you are allowing that spirit, which is a demonic spirit, to take over your life. You may never know you're communing with demons—you're not going to **grow little horns or speak in parseltongue**—but you are.

Friend, vs. **14: So then, my dear friends, flee from idolatry...** Flee it! Like your life depends on it. Flee it! This is the battle for your soul!

- There's 2 incredible Jewish scholars, Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, who I'll look at sometime. They say: "The central principle of the whole Bible is the rejection of idolatry." (I disagree--it is the coming of Jesus, but that observation is still significant).
- It's the primary battle for your soul: What are you going to worship? Are you going to give yourself to the worship of the living God or dead idols? Paul says in Romans 1 that this is the battleground of the human soul—worship God or worship idols?
- So heed what Paul says to these Corinthians: flee idolatries.

*Let's close with this:*

### **How do we escape idolatry?**

- **10:13, "No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. *But God is faithful*** (highlight that; star it; underline it; take a tube of lipstick and smear it; prick your finger and dab it in

blood) he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.

- God is faithful. **The way to overcome idolatry is to really lean in to the presence and faithfulness of God.** When you believe that God is present, and real, and filled with unconditional and unrelenting love towards you, and ready to help you, your captivity to idols will be broken. ***If you worshiped your way into sin, you gotta worship your way out.***
- Look at how the writer of Hebrews explains it. This is one of my favorite verses: Hebrews 13:5 “Keep your life free from covetousness (remember, covetousness is another word for idolatry--wanting something so bad, epithumia, that it controls your behavior. Keep your life free from covetousness, and...); be content with what you have, *for he has said,* (how can you be content) “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”
- Freedom from the fear and the craving that leads to idolatry is found in confidence in the presence and love of God.
- Over break, I spent a lot of time in Psalm 23. Such an amazing passage. I’m going to come back and do a whole series on it, I think. But the promises are almost too good to be true?
  - The Lord is my shepherd: I have no needs. Can you say that? But then I think: David had needs. Scholars say he probably wrote this on the run...
  - He makes me lie down in green pastures...I’m full.
  - He leads me beside still waters ...
  - My cup runs over
  - You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies... When I’m in the presence of my enemies, I want either to fight or hide. The presence of Jesus causes me to rest and enjoy myself even there
  - Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I won’t be afraid, for... what? For THOU art WITH me.
- When I feel the assurance of his presence, I can be content, even when I’m surrounded by enemies, dangers, toils and snares...
- Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life—I couldn’t get away from them if I tried!
- Do you believe this? Some of you say, “I want to believe it, Pastor, but I just don’t *feel* it. I don’t see it. It doesn’t seem like goodness and mercy are following me. My question is, “If the Lord is my shepherd, why am I on the run from my enemies? Why am I in their presence? Why do I have them?” Yet, even there, in the midst of difficulty and disappointment and unanswered prayer, I can still be assured, *The Lord is my Shepherd.* I may not understand all that he is doing, and the arc of God’s goodness is often longer than ours, but even now, in the midst of the his valley of the shadow of death, in the presence of my enemies, I can cling to him, hold on to him, and trust him--because I see him. I see him in his goodness and his love.
- I see that in the cross. You may not understand how God will turn these things in your life for good, but you can see what he revealed about himself there. Just see that, and rest.
- And then, like the writer of Hebrews says, you’ll find that your cravings and fears go away.

- Dallas Willard says it this way: **“The freedom from the frantic desire to have is grounded in God’s promise to never leave us.”**<sup>4</sup> “The freedom from the frantic desire caused by fear; and the frantic desire caused by coveting is grounded in God’s promise to never leave us” (and always to be our helper).

So, as we start the New Year, why don’t you start with the ultimate New Year’s resolution--to get rid of your idols, to put God first, to surrender to and serve him? Ready to do that now?

He’s ready to receive you, and forgive you, if you’re ready to trust and follow him.

*What competes with God for 1st place in your life?*

**I want to invite you come--today, right now, make that decision. As we get started in the New Year, we’re going to open up this altar for a time of prayer. Some of you need to come, get on your knees, and ask God to help you make him first again. But let me expand that.**

I talked about how idols bring into our lives the power of the demonic. Some of you, if you look in your life, you’ll see that. Your love of money has corrupted your life, and you are seeing its effects in your family. Maybe in how you’ve idolized bodily pleasure you’ve developed addictions. You didn’t start out intending to open yourself up to Satan, but now he’s got a foothold in your life. Your marriage. Now there’s a spirit at work in you; corrupting your heart, destroying your relationships, drawing you away from God. You need more than a resolution to do better; you need what our Pentecostal friends call “deliverance.” I want to invite you to come and pray, with someone or by yourself at this altar, for that deliverance. You need this with your marriage; with your kids; in your own life.

Or maybe you see that in someone else. Your kids. Your spouse. A friend. Someone in your small group; or who used to be in your small group. Why don’t you come and pray for them.

Let’s pray either for ourselves or someone else where we see Satan has a foothold. I want to emphasize; this is not a ritual or a cute little New Year’s resolution moment--some of you, either in your life or the life of someone you love--you are being bound up by Satan and God says he’ll deliver you if you come and ask him.

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<sup>4</sup> Dallas Willard, *Life Without Lack*