

A Hope-Centered Community

Isolation—part 8

June 12, 2022

DAY 1: I need the big picture of life and reality

1. The bible tells us that this is a fallen world. Evil happens. Sin happens. Suffering happens. Oftentimes, it appears that the forces and people of darkness are winning. Too often, evil goes unpunished. That's not just how it seems now. It's also how it seemed in Malachi's day.

Malachi 3:13 You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?' ¹⁴ "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?' ¹⁵ But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly, evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.'"

2. This question haunts us: Is it really worth it to follow God?

3. We need to not just *know* God's truth, be reminded of God's truth, but also to have God's truth **reinforced** to us, regularly. This is the value of community.

4. Here are some of the big picture reminders I need. Under each section, what's the big picture?

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Rom. 8:22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Romans 5:3-5 More than that we rejoice in our suffering, knowing suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured out through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Heb. 12:28 ... since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our "God is a consuming fire."

5. What big picture item strikes you the most?

DAY 2: What is spiritual maturity? How long does it take?

1. When I was a younger Christian, I assumed several naïve beliefs about spiritual growth. (1) I assumed that the greatest impediment to my spiritual growth was a lack of biblical knowledge. (2) I assumed that all I needed was bible knowledge, properly applied. (3) I assumed that once I knew a biblical truth, properly applied, that I was “past” whatever sin was in front of me. (4) I assumed way too much progress could be made in way too short a period of time. (5) I assumed that I “should” be past certain sins.

2. This begs the question. Just what is spiritual maturity?

3. Let’s start with what spiritual maturity doesn’t mean. It does NOT mean: (1) I won’t face the same old temptations I’ve always faced. (2) I’ll feel close to God as much as I’d like. (3) Feeling the spiritual high I felt at college camp up in the mountains. (4) I will necessarily be aware of significant progress as a Christian. (5) biblical knowledge, no matter how much, is not the truest a metric for spiritual maturity.

4. What is spiritual maturity?

(a) Someone who is learning to love people when loving people is tough. To love people who are bulls in china shops, who are rough around the edges, who have few filters on their mouths, who rarely take an interest in you, your opinions or ideas. To learn to forgive anything from the toughest of betrayals to unintended slights or insensitivities. Matt. 5:43-48

(b) Someone who is grateful for evidence of spiritual formation while at the same time, broken over the still strong power of their own human nature, and ever-present capacity to spiritually fail. Rom. 7:25-8:2; 1 Tim. 1:15

(c) Instead of despair over a greater awareness of my fallen nature, spiritual maturity generates a sense of **wonder!** How is it that God still wants me? Loves me? Hasn’t given up on me? Is still working in my life? The person who is growing in spiritual maturity senses a deepening gratitude and a deepening brokenness with an atmosphere of hope. Rom. 6; Rom. 8:31-39

(d) Spiritual maturity is seen better in a *longing* for God than an *experience* of God. God is creating a hunger and thirst for Him. The natural benefit to hunger is hope. We realize that one day our hunger will be fully sated and our thirst fully quenched. It is hope that enables me to fight on. Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalm 27:1-6; 42:1-2; 63:1-5

(e) Spiritual maturity is seen in people who are open, realistic, and humble about themselves, without living in the mudhole of discouragement—for very long. Romans. 12:3

(f) People who keep on enduring in following Jesus on the narrow road, no matter how difficult.

Col. 1:9 We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience...

5. What strikes you from this list of spiritual maturity? How does it change or reinforce your understanding of spiritual maturity? How do you see God working spiritual maturity in you?

DAY 3: The final and eternal defeat of evil and Satan

1. When we read the book of Revelation we must remember that we are reading an allegory. An allegory is the use of symbolic figures, language, word pictures, images, and actions of truths about God, life, human beings, the future, etc.
2. The details of an allegory are not the central point. The message or impact of an allegory is what's important. An allegory dramatically tells a story of truth in a vivid and pictorial form.
3. This section describes what theologians refer to as "end times."

Revelation 20:7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison⁸ and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.⁹ They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.¹⁰ And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

4. There are several big picture truths that should bolster us
 - a. The allegory portrayed in this section of scripture paints a picture of ultimate judgment.
 - b. No matter how powerful Satan and or the forces of evil in human beings may seem, the ultimate doom of evil in both Satan and evil people is spelled out in graphic form.
 - c. A rebellious world will finally come to an end.

Revelation 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

5. More big picture truths:
 - a. A righteous reckoning will take place. People will get what they deserved.
 - b. Justice will prevail. Evil will be ultimately and fully defeated
 - c. God will be just.
6. These truths are given to us to bolster our faith, especially in the darkest of times, when it appears that the forces of darkness are winning.
7. As we say, "in the end, justice will prevail." This enables us to trust our redeemer God.
8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

Day 4: A new heaven and a new earth

1. Revelation continues, not just with the final judgment of all evil, but the remarkable future that His people will enjoy forever. Again, as we read these verses in Revelation, remember that John is writing in allegorical form. He is using figurative language, word pictures to tell vivid truths, not just for us to know, but for us *to greatly anticipate!*

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ ⁴ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ *He who was seated on the throne said, “**I am making everything new!**” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

⁶ *He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.*

Revelation 21:9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. ¹¹ It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. ¹³ There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. ¹⁴ The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

¹⁵ *The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶ The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. ¹⁷ The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. ¹⁸ The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone..... The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.*

²² *I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*

²³ *The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.*

2. Life is sometimes terribly tragic, but the life to come, for God’s people will be filled with wonder, glory, beauty, and life “as it is supposed to be.”

3. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

Day 5: Sustained through hope

1. Our secular culture continues to infest our institutions with its secular worldview and values. Higher education (and even lower education), the news media, the Hollywood media, and big government, all ply the secular trade, with devastating effects on people. It takes a gruesome toll. The breakdown of the nuclear two-parent family is increasing, mental health issues are up, depression is up, suicides are up, addictions and opioids are up, and overdose deaths are up.
2. Our culture has been rotting for over six decades. One of the insidious effects is the loss of meaning, particularly among young people.
3. To live as a Christian in a corrupt world like this one requires being anchored to God's Larger Story that the bible describes.
4. John paints the city of God, a place where heaven's values will remake the world we've made a mess. Heaven will be a place of wonder that will outdo the Garden of Eden. It will be a place of glory, beauty, and wonder.
5. I want to be drawn and driven by the hope of what's coming, not discouraged by what I see. I want to be in a community that values
6. I am bolstered by a community of people who understand this life is not all there is, but that the real life to come will be real life. Because that is true, we can anticipate with great joy what is to come for God's people.

*Romans 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide **we might have hope.***

*Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that **you may overflow with hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

1 Corinthians 13:13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

6. ISOLATION series summary

- a. I want to be part of a community committed to hearing God's truth for everyday living to everyday people.
 - b. I want to be part of a community that values the pursuit of becoming like Jesus in spite of ourselves.
 - c. I want to be part of a grace-based community.
 - d. I want to be part of a transformational missional community.
 - e. I want to be part of a community that aspires to live as the Trinitarian community.
 - f. I want to be part of a community that defines love by Christ's character and relating.
 - g. I want to be part of a community that puts Christ on display in how we live.
 - h. I want to be part of a community that is fueled by hope.
7. What strikes you from today's devotional?