

TEACHING SERIES // June 12-July 10, 2022

Guardrails

Some of my earliest recollections as a young boy traveling north on highway 97 are of those yellow signs warning us to watch for falling rocks. “Watch” I did! Craning my neck to scrutinize the rocky cliffs overhanging the highway, I shuddered to think of the damage those massive boulders could do were they to come crashing down on us. While Dad vigilantly kept his eyes on the road, unbeknownst to him I anxiously kept mine on the rocks and was on high alert. Were a rock to break loose and tumble our direction, I was ready to sound the alarm! Between this and the drills we had in grade school (crouching under our desks in the event of a nuclear attack), it’s a wonder I’m not curled in a fetal position, overwhelmed by the dangers in the world in which I find myself!

We are now living in what might be described as a seatbelt/smoke alarm culture. “Protect yourself at all costs” has replaced “Give me liberty or give me death,” and the recent pandemic has certainly served to more vividly illuminate this zeitgeist, this “spirit of the age.” With the diminishment of a Christian worldview and the ascendancy of a pagan and materialist worldview, physical safety has become the be all and end all of our existence. After all, if this is the only life we have, we must indeed protect it with all vigilance. So do we feel more secure now? Are we more at peace or more joyful? Less anxious? Let’s ask the dispensers of anti-anxiety medications, counselors, psychologists, pastors, and all those who work in the burgeoning mental health industries.

Maybe, just maybe we should take the words of Jesus more seriously: “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Please don’t misunderstand. I am not saying physical safety is unimportant. I am not saying in this fallen world there is no reason to take anti-anxiety medications any more than I am saying loving parents shouldn’t warn their children not to play so close to busy streets. What I am saying is that we must not needlessly add to our anxiety by heedlessly ignoring the spiritual warnings of Scripture (Matthew 16:26). God has given us these warnings for a reason.

Warnings given to us in God’s Word are like guardrails. They protect us from veering off the road if we happen to become distracted by an Instagram or text message. They are evidence of our Father’s love for us, not threats intended to make our lives miserable. When God tells us to beware of deceivers, dogs (legalists), libertarian lies, religious hypocrisy, idolatry (God substitutes), those who cause divisions, and sins of the flesh, He is helping us see the dangers that can distract, disable, or destroy us. “Guard your heart” (Proverbs 4:23) is not an idle warning. It’s God’s way of telling us to pay attention to the warning signs and guardrails. These exist because He loves us and wants us to live, and to live more abundantly!

The enemy of our souls would have us believe otherwise. His MO has not changed since his deception in the Garden of Eden. He wants us to believe God is holding out on us, depriving us of something that is rightfully ours, denying us our fundamental right of self-determination. He wants us to believe guardrails are hindrances to our freedom, that they are God’s way of keeping us from genuine self-fulfillment. “Love is love,” the enemy whispers in our ears, as if a cute little aphorism can absolve a person of responsibility for all manner of immorality and sexual perversion. “God wants you wealthy and prosperous,” affirm the self-confident televangelists who do the enemy’s bidding by convincing people greed is actually godly! On and on the masquerade marches, even now reaching to the theater of the absurd . . . gender is malleable, men can have babies, truth is disinformation, nature is under our command and control!

What is one to do in light of this crazy cultural and spiritual disintegration so rapidly taking place before our very eyes? One of the most important things we can do in these days of confusion and deception is take a closer look at the warnings in God's Word. To whom, and for what purpose are these various warnings given? What practical steps can we take to boost our "spiritual immune system" so as not to get caught in the web of last-days lies that are proliferating all around us? For the next several weeks, we are going to take a closer look at warnings from God's Word. Some of them will be general (guard your heart), others will be more specific (watch out for those who cause division in the church). Some of the warnings will deal with sins of the flesh, others will focus on being prepared for the Lord's return. All of them will be for God's glory and our benefit. Imagine what joy there will be in heaven if even one person in our church family is moved from believing God's warnings are intended for harm and deprivation to believing they are intended for our safety and to foster a deep and abiding joy in our Father's protection!

June 12 / *Guard Your Heart!* / Proverbs 4:23 / Scott

Our heart is the seat of our emotions, will, and intellect. It is a word the Bible frequently uses to describe the "inner sanctuary" or control center of all we think, feel, say, and do. Why, however, do we make so many decisions based solely on how we feel? Guarding our heart involves using our mind, or as the great creed of Israel puts it, "loving God with all our mind." In our present culture, the toxic cult of sentimentality has clouded the thinking of far too many believers, leaving them with the impression that above all else they must "feel" love for God. This has taken far too many followers of Jesus over the guardrails and into the deep ditch of depression. How can we guard our hearts by reengaging our minds, thinking right thoughts about God, and enjoying the reinforcement of emotions that follow, rather than lead our thoughts?

June 19 / *Love's Great Quest* / 1 John 3:1-3 / Scott

Special Father's Day sermon

What happens when you truly grasp the meaning and significance of God's love? It transforms you. It changes you. It purifies you. It makes you want to be ready to see Him face to face. No one who really understands and experiences the love of God will ever be the same again!

June 26 / *There's No One Like Our God* / Deuteronomy 4:15-19 / John

An idol is anything we put in the place of God. It is that thing, that object, that desire, that person, that political persuasion which becomes a God substitute. It begins in the mind, with a conception of God that is wholly unworthy of what He has revealed about Himself. It ends up in self-debasement. Why? Because the only authorized revelation on which image-bearers of God can safely fixate is His Word. We take selfies. God doesn't. He cannot be described by, properly understood, or contained in a picture or in anything He has created. Faith comes by hearing, not seeing; and what changes us is hearing and obeying God's Word.

July 3 / *Prosperity's Peril* / Deuteronomy 8:11-14 / Scott or Robert

How's your prayer life? Does it tend to get more focused when the cupboards are bare? When the kids are sick? When you lose your job? When the marriage falls apart? Yes, for many of us, it is the trials which bring a fervency to our prayers and an increased sincerity about our relationship with God. Conversely, it is the comforts, material prosperity, and good health that can (if we are not careful) make us forget God, or worse yet, take the glory or credit for all that we have. What can we do to keep ourselves from drifting away from God in times of great prosperity? In one word: Give. Give of your wealth, give of your time, serve with your

gifts. And in all of this giving, give praise to the One who has supplied you with everything good so you can continue displaying His unmatched generosity.

July 10 / *In All Things Unity* / Romans 16:17-20 / John

The Psalmist put it well: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1). We know, however, from reading several of the New Testament letters, that unity was hard to come by. Not only were the brothers often divided, but the sisters struggled as well (Philippians 4:2-3)! Far too many in the church aid and abet the enemy by failing to follow God’s Word regarding unity. How can we as followers of Jesus find and keep true unity? We must avoid those who cause dissensions, especially those who do not follow the teaching of God’s Word. Then we must humbly submit ourselves in obedience to God’s Word. “Unity” at the expense of obedience to the truth is never true unity.