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Pastor Jonathan Falwell

ReNew: Refocus Your Heart

Scripture: Galatians 5:16-26

Summary: Sharing from Galatians 5:16-26, Pastor Jonathan encourages believers to refocus their hearts, desires and attention on the mission and vision God has given them.

There is one important truth that I think all of us can take away from this morning is that I definitely married above myself. Great, great song. Great song to go along with what we're going to talk about today, about what we're going to spend some time studying and looking at as we talk about what it is that God wants us to do, how He wants us to accomplish things for Him.

We have just come out of a study of the book of Ephesians, of great truths that we've found in that book that have driven us to understand what it is that God has done for us and what it is that God wants us to do for Him. And today we're going to go back a book but go forward in our understanding of who God is and what God wants to do and look in the book of Galatians, chapter 5, as we take this opportunity, as we often do this time of year, to renew and refocus on what it is that God wants us to do, of where God wants us to be and how He wants us to serve and how He wants us to accomplish things for Him.

It's the time of year when a lot of us are evaluating some new things and some new moments in life as we talk about this whole back-to-school thing. This week at Liberty and LCA we're back to school. Any students here that are going to be going back to school this week? Lots of hands going up. Yeah, boo. I agree. I hated school, but don't tell anybody. As we go back to school, it's a time when we take a look and regroup, refocus. If you've driven around Wards Road, there's a lot of regrouping and refocusing going on.

If you go into Wal-Mart, there is a lot of re-everything going on. I made that mistake yesterday as we went and did some back-to-school shopping. I've got four kids, and we had a list of all the things we had to buy for school, and it's amazing what you have to have to go to school these days. When I went to school, all I remember we had to have was a comb in our pocket and a lock for our locker. That's all that I remember having to get.

But now we get this list of all the things we've got to buy. We have to buy a certain kind of compass and a certain kind of protractor and a certain kind of ruler and a certain kind of graph paper and a certain kind of composition notebook, and 1 ½-inch binders. We have to have note cards and boxes for the note cards. We've got to have tissues and anti-bacterial soap for some reason. And we have to have a certain type of calculator. All the things we've got to buy in order to go back to school.

So yesterday I took the kids to Wal-Mart to go back-to-school shopping. Now for the record, that is one step above going to the dentist the week before school starts. So we're buying all these things, and of course the kids know that not only do they have to have the things on the list, but also, as they are walking through the store—and boy the stores know this—they come up with all of the other things that are not on the list that they've got to have, so they're getting locker crates and locker shelves and magnetic boards so they can put up pictures of all the boys and girls on the locker. They've got to have markers so they can write little notes to their friends in the lockers and all of these things.

I started thinking in that respect it's kind of what we need to do today in our walk with and our conversation with and service to God. There are times of the year when we need to spend some time and look back at a sheet of paper, if you will, to regroup and refocus on some of the things that we must have if we are actually going to pull it off this year, if we're going to be successful this year when it comes to our walk with God.

So for today and the next couple of weeks we're going to be talking about the idea of renewal, renewing our walk, renewing our ideas of who God is and what God wants to do, renewing our service to Him, renewing our place in His presence. So for the next couple of weeks we're going to talk about what we need to do, and the first thing I believe we must do in order to get a picture of that is look at what our mission is, our purpose.

Here at Thomas Road our mission statement is to change our world by developing Christ-followers who love God and love people. That comes right out of Matthew 28, Mark 16, Acts 1. It's a statement that Jesus gave to us right before He ascended to heaven. He wants us to go out and preach the Gospel to the world. He wants us to go out and make disciples of all the nations. He wants us to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the outermost parts of the earth, with the only thing that can change lives, and that is the Gospel.

And I firmly believe that what the Bible says is true: The only way to see a changed life is not by attending church; it's not by attending a Christian school; it's not by being involved in serving. It is by the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we are changed and transformed. I believe that with all of my heart.

So we've got to take a look at what our mission is, what our purpose is, and that purpose that Jesus gave to us in Matthew 28 and Mark 16 and Acts 1 and a lot of other places in Scripture was not just for the Church, it's not just for the pastors, it is for all of us, it is for every single one of us, and so I want to talk about how we can renew in our purpose and our plan and our mission, and today what I want to talk about specifically from Galatians chapter 5 is that if we're going to do that, we have to start with the whole idea of refocusing, making sure that we are in focus and we've got it perfectly set.

I love taking pictures, and I know a lot of you do as well. There is nothing better than taking a great shot of a landscape or a great shot of your kids or a great shot of some animal out in nature where you get this incredible photo that you want to hang on a wall, something you want to keep as a memento, as a keepsake of something special that happened in your life.

That happened a couple of years ago with me. I actually had the opportunity—and it was an incredible opportunity, I was so excited about it—to go and preach at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. And for many of you who don't know what Bellevue is, it is where Dr. Adrian Rogers was the pastor for many years. If you don't know who Adrian Rogers is, I'm telling you, go back and pull him up on YouTube or something. They guy was an amazing preacher of the Gospel and mentor, and somebody that even today when he's in heaven still teaches us.

I had the opportunity of preaching there, and I was so excited. Think about that. Here I am, little old me, and I got to stand behind the pulpit where Adrian Rogers preached. So I took my wife with me because I wanted to share that experience with her. We got there and I had a camera and I was on the front row, trying to be cool, and I told my wife, "Shari, when I get up there, make sure you take a whole bunch of pictures of me at the pulpit." And by the way, you guys know I like to walk when I preach. I said, "When I get up there, I'm going to stay behind that pulpit for a couple of minutes purposely so you can get good pictures."

I had it all planned out. I said, "I'm going to go up there and stand behind that pulpit and I'm going to put my hand on there and make some hand gestures like I'm really giving it to them. Make sure you get some great pictures of me standing behind that pulpit. I want those pictures."

So I went up there and she is taking pictures from the front row, and after a couple of minutes she put the camera down and I'm going to start preaching. That night, I got back to the hotel and I'm so excited, "Give me the camera!" I got it and put it in my computer because I want to look at the pictures my wife took of me speaking at Bellevue Baptist. I opened them up and I looked at the 20 pictures she took. It was great.

Every picture she got the entire podium, the entire pulpit on the stage at Bellevue Baptist and got me preaching behind there and she got my hand gestures. The only problem is that when she framed the picture, because she was trying to be cool about it, she cut my head off in every picture. I can prove that my suit was there. I can prove that my belt was there. I can prove that my Bible was there. I can even prove that my hand was there. I cannot prove that my face was there.

So a lot of times I think when we talk about serving God that we get out of focus sometimes, we get out of the frame sometimes of what it is that God wants to do. So today I want to take some time to refocus. And we're going to take a little bit of time to look through this passage, Galatians 5:16-26, and get a picture of what it truly means to refocus, to regroup, to renew our service to and passion for and walk with Christ.

Let's read this passage together, beginning with verse 16,

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against [fights against] the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit [controlled by the Spirit], you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like.

Paul gives us a long list of things that will help us fight against the Spirit in our lives. Now you remember last week Ben Gutierrez preached out of Ephesians 6 and talked about the armor of God. He talked about how God gives us this armor to protect us from the wiles of the devil. Satan is out there to destroy us. John 10:10, he comes to steal and to kill and destroy. He wants to take us down.

So Ephesians 6 tells us about the armor God gives us to protect us. We can hunker down behind the armor and power of God to protect ourselves against what Satan wants to do. This list—and I don't want you to miss this—reminds us of how while we are being protected by the armor of God, if our heart is not in the right place and we continue to give in to the flesh rather than standing in the Spirit and walking in the Spirit of God, from the inside we can actually battle against the very protection that God gives to us. This list is the list of things that if you're living here, you're going to destroy yourself. You're going to take yourself down.

He goes on to say, "...and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.'

Now I want to take a moment to remind you—Ephesians chapter 5 talks about this—that word *practice*, it says those who practice this will not inherit the kingdom of God. That's the Greek word *prassō*, which is the idea of exercising. In other words, it's not saying those who fall occasionally, it's not saying those who make a mistake, it's not saying that those who sin as believers will not inherit the kingdom of God. What it says is those who continue to practice, who exercise, who live in their sins with no repentance, no remorse, no turning away from the flesh, that's a problem that we've got to examine our hearts and lives to see if we've ever accepted Christ in the first place.

It says those who practice this will not inherit the kingdom of God. It goes on in verse 22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."

I want to share with you three things from this passage that we can take away to ensure that we are renewing, regrouping, refocusing our lives towards God. The first one is this: We must refocus our hearts. Look what it says in verse 16. It starts with that phrase, "To walk in the Spirit." To walk in the Spirit of God. When we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to us, He walks alongside us, He lives and dwells within us to help us make the right choices, the right decisions, to go in the right path, the right way.

So he's saying if you're going to truly experience this, then walk in the Spirit. That word *walk* is the Greek word *peripateō*, which is the idea of regulating one's life. Not just simply going for a walk, not just going out to exercise or a casual stroll. No, it's literally to regulate one's life.

Now I know, I've got friends and family members that are diabetic, and you know there are many different types of diabetes, many different ways of dealing with that, and I know some people have a pump that they wear every day to regulate their insulin, to regulate the blood sugar. I know others who have to take a shot every time they eat or every time they get out of balance to regulate so that they can have the quality of life that they want. Others may just take a pill; some don't have to do much at all. The point is that all of those are things that they've worked out with their doctors, they've done the studies and tests to find out what they personally need in order to regulate that so that they can live the quality of life that they want to live. That is what Paul is saying here with that word *walk*.

He's saying to regulate your life, figure out what that means for you so that you can walk in the Spirit and what it means to walk in the power of God so that you can have all that God intends for you. The things that we do for God and our outward activities will never allow us to fulfill our mission unless the inward, the heart, is fixed on Him.

There are a lot of people who get passionate about doing things for God. They show up at church, they get involved in volunteering and serving and want to do things and find activities they can get involved in because they want to carry out a mission, they want to do stuff, and sometimes those people's hearts are never actually in it for the right reasons. Sometimes they are in it because they want to elevate themselves because they want others to look at how good they are. Sometimes they do it because they want to feel included, to feel involved.

Let me tell you, when you serve God and are doing things for God, I hope and pray that you are doing it not because you want to be somebody, because you want to be recognized, because you want to fit in, because you want to be included, but you are doing it because you want in your heart to draw closer, to be closer to God, that you are in close proximity to the power of God in your life and it's a natural outflow of that that you want to do things for Him.

You see God is not so much interested in your service as He is interested in your heart. We've got to refocus the heart. We've got to make sure that our heart is in the right place when it comes to serving God.

The second thing we've got to talk about is not only refocusing the heart, but we also have to make sure that we are refocusing our desires. This passage, and we've already read and talked about it a little, but look back in verse 19 it says, "Now the works of the flesh are evident." That word *flesh* there is not talking about skin; it's not talking about what covers up our bones and our blood and organs. It's talking about our animal nature, our raw animal nature. That's what it's talking about here.

All of us have had the experience of having pets in our past. Some of you have dogs or cats or fish and snakes. We've got a dog, Twixie. She's a great dog. She's 7 years old now, and when we first got her I hated her with all my heart. This was a dog that I was trying to figure out if there was any way to accidentally run over her without getting into trouble. I just did not like this dog at all. Now I love her to death. She's awesome. She's my buddy. She sleeps next to me every night. I love Twixie. She's awesome. But she's just a dog, a dumb dog.

We play games with her all the time. One game that we have is we have this little rubber duck that squeaks, and what we do is take the rubber duck and throw it in the house and as it takes off, she takes off to go find it and she chases it all over the house. And the person who throws the duck, what we do is we real quickly as Twixie's chasing after the duck, that one will get on the couch and put our legs up on the couch and cover ourselves up with a shirt or blanket and Twixie comes back with the duck, and when she gets back to where we are, she stops and drops the duck because she has to find the person who threw the duck. Not only does she have to find the duck, but she has to find the person who threw the duck.

We're sitting right there in front of her, in the same place we were a minute ago when we threw the duck, but because we cover our heads with a shirt or blanket, she doesn't know where we are, so she will begin running around the house for minutes and minutes at a time, looking for the person who threw the duck—even though we're in the exact same spot.

Why does she do that? Because of her animal nature. Regardless of how many times we do it—and we do it all the time, almost daily. We're very simple people. That's our entertainment—and even though we do it over and over again, that dog never picks up on the fact that the person that threw the duck is still in the exact same spot that they've been every 365 days before.

Now that is also a picture that Paul uses here to talk about us. When we are not controlled by, led by, walking in the Spirit, when we are literally giving in to the flesh, the animal desire, the raw lust and desire of our hearts and who we are as mankind and the human nature that we have, that no matter how many times we say we want to do the right thing, we go right back to the wrong thing. We've got to get away from that, because what happens is the end is always the same, just like it is with my dog. The end always leads to destruction. It always leads to fighting against the Spirit, who is alive and well in us and leading us and guiding us. We're fighting against ourselves.

So Paul says, "You will understand that the works of the flesh are..." and what it says in verse 19 of the New Living Translation, when you follow the desires of your sinful nature the results are very clear. In other words, I don't care how dumb you are, it happens over and over again the same thing. We've got to refocus our desires so that our desires are not in the things of the world but our desire is for the things of God. We want to live for Him, walk with Him, experience all that God has for us, so we must refocus our hearts. We have to take time to refocus our desires. And lastly we have to refocus our attention, what we pay attention to, what we're looking at, what we're seeing, what we're aiming at. We've got to refocus our attentions there as well.

Look what this passage says in verses 22 through 26, "But the fruit of the Spirit." In other words, the results of following after God, the results of walking with God, the results of allowing the Spirit of God that dwells within you to lead you, to guide you, and to control you, this is what it looks like.

We've got to understand that when our hearts and desires are in line with God's we can't help but refocus our attention on the mission that God has for us. And I just want to say today that that mission that we have, that God has for us, that mission is not carried out by our activity, but rather it is carried out by our proximity to God.

So he gives us a list here, a simple list. It says, “Love, joy, peace [harmony between individuals], longsuffering [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Paul gives us a list here. This is what you need to look like and what you can look like if you allow the Holy Spirit to lead you.

All of us, if we truly took time to be honest with those around us, if we said, “What do you want other people to think of you?” this list would sum it up, wouldn’t it? We want to be known as people who love others. We want to be kind. We want to be known as gentle. We want to be known as faithful. We want to be known as patient. We want to be known as those kinds of things. That’s who we want to be known as.

With my four kids, I hope that years from now when I am dead and gone, when someone asks them, “Tell me what your dad was like,” that they could say, “He was a great example of what love is. He was a great example of what kindness is. He was a great example of what gentleness is and faithfulness.” That’s what I want my kids to think about me and remember about me. And that is what Paul is saying here. This is what the Holy Spirit wants to do in your life if you’ll let Him.

Now the Church today—every church, not just this one—the Church today so often stops because Christians aren’t trying to live that out. The Church today, in so many settings, it has stopped fulfilling its mission and accomplishing what God wants it to accomplish because we have long since walked away from what the Spirit wants for us, and we are more focused on what we want for us. So rather than focusing on love and kindness and gentleness and faithfulness and patience and all of those things, rather than focusing on those things, we start focusing on our selfish desires, and what happens is they begin to eat away, it begins to destroy, and we, in our own setting, our own situation, end up destroying ourselves. I know that’s true, because if you look back in Galatians 5:14 and 15 it says, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”

The New Living Translation says it this way, “For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.”

We can’t begin to talk about the mission that God has for us until we look inside. We can’t begin talking about what God wants us to do until we take a deep examination of who we are inside, because if you are not controlled by the Spirit and living out what it is that God has for you, this idea of living in love, the fruit of the Spirit—gentleness, kindness, all the things that we’ve read in this list today—if you’re not doing that, then the opposite of that, which is true in every setting, is that you are living a life that eventually will end up biting, devouring, destroying, confusing, stopping your effectiveness for God, and in turn, stopping the effectiveness of the Church.

So when we talk about renewing and refocusing, it’s got to start from within. It’s got to start from your heart. Where are you? Think about your own relationships. Are you living out that

list? Love and kindness and gentleness. Are you living that out? Or are you living out the other list where it's full of self, full of sin and full of destruction?

Today the one thought that I want you to walk out of here with is this: Being led by the Spirit means denying self. Your life should not be consumed by what you want; it should be consumed by what God wants. And if you will live there, I promise you'll get more than you ever, ever wanted before. Your life will be full. Abundant life. That is what Christ came to give. Would you bow your heads and close your eyes with me?

[Praying] Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for how it teaches us. We thank you for how it instructs us. We thank you for how it convicts us. God, today as we gather in this few moments of renewal and commitment, I pray that you would help each and every one of us to look inside, to evaluate, "Where am I? How am I living? How am I reacting? How am I responding? Am I doing what God wants me to do? Am I walking in the Spirit or am I being controlled by the flesh?" And God, if we're walking in the flesh, right now convict us and change us. I know you can do that.

(Singing: "I Surrender All")

Father, we love you. We thank you for the truth and beauty of your Word. As we leave here this morning, we want to glorify you in all things, to live for you in every moment and be led by our Spirit in all things. We love you, Lord Jesus. We give you praise, we give this week and our lives to you. In your name we pray, amen.

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