

Ash Wednesday ~ Wednesday, February 14, 2018

Returning to God

Joel 2:12; 12-17 and James 4:7-10

The Ash Wednesday liturgy calls us to a place of _____–to see ourselves as we truly are—to reflect on our _____, actions, and _____; and to _____ to God through _____ and prayer.

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of a 40 day journey of intentional _____, as we examine our _____, minds, and lives and ready ourselves to celebrate once again the death and resurrection of Jesus.

“Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:12-13)

Lent is all about _____ to God, who desires to be in _____ with us.

One of the realities of life is that relationships—especially close ones—rarely stay the _____. In any close relationship we’re either growing _____ together or farther apart.

This growing apart happens in our relationships all the time—and it can happen in our relationship with _____ well—especially if we don’t _____ take the time to _____ with Him.

Have you ever felt distanced from God?

We _____ how close to God we want to be—and feeling distanced or disconnected from Him is a result of our own decision to _____ away from Him, to get sidetracked, or to focus on other things.

God always wants to give us _____.

Do I want more or have I settled for less?

Why do I settle for less?

4 REASONS WE CAN WANDER FROM GOD

- _____. Thinking that we’re _____ enough to handle everything on our own; that there’s no way we could ever stumble or _____.

“If you think you are standing strong, be careful, for you, too, may fall into the same sin.” (1 Corinthians 10:12)

“Pride goes before destruction. A haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18)

EGO =

- _____. We get _____ in our faith and slack in our relationship with God—a sort of business as usual, ho-hum approach to faith

Fatigue lowers our _____ and makes us _____ to the lure of temptation. We need to _____ our spiritual muscles just as much as our physical ones.

- **Fear of** _____. Sometimes we can keep God at a distance because we’re worried what other people will _____; or we’re afraid we’ll be _____ r ridiculed because of our faith.

We try to live with one foot in the world and one in the _____—which is no easy task because the _____ of the world can be so strong.

“If anyone is ashamed of me and my words I will be ashamed of them before the holy angels and my father in heaven.” (Mark 8:38)

- _____. We follow Jesus, as long as it doesn’t _____ our style; _____ anything or require _____.

when the lure of the world and the choices we make _____ us from God—God responds with _____.

“There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)

When we fall away from God; when we blow it; when we _____ and fall; when we become _____ in our faith or focus on the things of church instead of the things of God—God doesn’t look on us with condemnation, but with _____.

And like the prodigal son, all we need to do is _____ to our heavenly Father—and He will _____ us home—that’s what _____ is all about—that’s what _____ is all about.

In fact, God _____ to us, embraces us, and restores us as His children. No _____, no guilt, no explanation.

“Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord.” (Zechariah 3:1)

“Restore us, O Lord, and bring us back to you again. Give us back the joys we once

had.” (Lamentations 5:21)

Are you feeling a little distanced from God?

Do you need to draw closer to Him?

Do you need to return to God this Lent?

4 INGREDIENTS NECESSARY IN RETURNING GOD

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” (James 4:7-10)

Ingredient #1. _____.

“Therefore submit to God.” (James 4:7a)

Jesus can be in our lives, but not in _____ of our lives. Just as it took an act of our _____ to accept Jesus as Saviour, it takes an act of our will to _____ our lives to Him. We can’t follow Jesus without doing what He _____.

Are you willing to let God be God?

Are you willing to do whatever He pleases?

Can you submit to His plan for your life?

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7b)

When dealing with Satan we can display too much or too little _____ in the subject.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

Resisting the devil begins with _____ the lie and accepting the fact that we can’t have real _____ apart from God. It begins by _____ close to God.

Ingredient #2. _____.

“Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:8)

The hand symbolizes our sinful _____; and James clearly indicates that a return to close communion with God demands a change in _____.

His reference to purifying our hearts means reversing our _____.

double-minded =

The purpose of this cleansing is to address this double-mindedness and to move us to _____, instead of _____ in sin.

“Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your loving kindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.” (Psalm 51:1-2)

Ingredient #3. _____.

“Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.” (James 4:9)

The intensity of this demand is meant to be intentionally startling—to literally shake us with the _____ of this call to repentance.

Repentance is fundamentally a _____ of heart and mind concerning sin—a literal _____ from anything and everything that separates us from God.

The reality is, we’ll never turn away from sin until we see it for what it really is—an _____ against God—something that breaks His _____ heart.

“For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight.” (Psalm 51:3-4)

All sin in essence is first and foremost against a _____ God.

Ingredient #4. _____.

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” (James 4:10)

Humility isn’t thinking _____ of ourselves—it’s not thinking about ourselves at all. Humility—knowing who we are in relationship to _____—laying down our _____.

“No matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can take it out and make you as clean as freshly fallen snow.” (Isaiah 1:18)

“With great compassion I will take you back.” (Isaiah 54:7)