

The Well-Oiled Christian

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Good Morning.

Our lesson for today is called, "The Well-Oiled Christian."

In our front hallway, at home, stands a grandfather clock that my Dad built 50 years ago.

One day, I'd say maybe ten years ago, it started to lose time. And every now and again, it would stop.

So, we took it to a clock-maker in Wellington, OH, and he refurbished the works.

Back in our home, after he set it up and made a few adjustments, he reached in and moved the pendulum ... to where it *just* made a "tick" ... or maybe it was a "tock" ... and let it go.

"Now watch," he said. "If everything is working just right, the pendulum will start to swing wider and wider, until it almost touches the inside of the case." "In other words, it gains momentum."

And it did, and he was happy with his work.

Then he said, "before you brought the clock to me, my guess is, that you would get the pendulum swinging pretty good." "But then, a day or so later, its swing was less and less, and then it stopped"

"YUP" ... I said.

"Well sir, THIS is the way it's supposed to work. You now have a well-oiled clock."

Last week I was winding the clock, raising the weights, and I thought about what the clock-maker had said. And it made me think about some of Jeff's recent Bible classes ... talking about how some Christians seem to wind down over time, losing their zeal.

"So ... what about well-oiled Christians," I said to myself. "What would *that* be like?"

"Well-oiled" is an expression that's been around a long time. It's a compliment ... a positive thing.

If something is well-oiled, it just keeps on ticking ... as they say. It doesn't squeak or grind or slow down.

Applied to a Christian, it can mean that he or she has good habits that don't fall off over time. Dependable ... responsible ... trustworthy.

It could mean a Christian that is 'low maintenance,' a self-starter, communicative, no squeaky wheel.

Here are some common descriptions of an organization that is “well-oiled.” We can readily apply these to a local congregation: running smoothly and efficiently, effective, tuned, disciplined, well-organized, orderly, resourceful.

All the parts working well together (all the members of the local congregation working well together).

Quite often, well-oiled organizations ... or people ... are taken for granted. We don't pay attention to them until they stop. Like the farmer said when his cow died ... “First time she ever done that on me.” One of my Dad's favorite sayings.

When brothers and sisters in Christ ... are where they're supposed to be ... doing what they're supposed to be doing ... helping each other ... leading by example ... teaching ... comforting ... praying ... we often don't “See” ... what they're doing.

We don't mean to, but in a sense, we're taking them for granted. Each of us should take the time to reflect on our brothers and sisters. I don't mean in general, but individually.

Count the blessings they each bestow on us ... on our congregation. We mustn't measure folks one against another, we must truly see them. We're not a huge group of people here, but we're a great group of people.

There is a movie, made in 1993, called the “Joy Luck Club.” There is a scene in that movie that will tug at your heart more than you can imagine ... and you'll never forget it.

A daughter was crying, telling her mother that she felt like she had failed her ... and that her mom didn't know her. The conversation goes back and forth for a bit, until the mom takes her daughter's hands in hers ... looks deep into her eyes ... into her soul ... and says “I See You, I See You”

Feeling seen and heard is something we all want to feel. The scene in the movie is well known. It's powerful, because as human beings we all have worth and dignity.

When you really see someone, and give them that respect ... it's a great gift. We can do this verbally and nonverbally. We can show the other person that we care, and are listening to them, and noticing their contributions.

God and Christ SEE us. In 1 Peter 5:7 ... Peter writes, “cast all your care upon God, for He cares for you.”

In 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 ... Paul writes, “there should be no division in the body ... but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers ... all the members suffer with it. If one member is honored ... all the members rejoice with it.

This is our first worship service of the New Year

How about we make a joint resolution ... a simple resolution ... one we can keep. That is ... to not take the peace and love and zeal and faithfulness we enjoy in the Lord here for granted.

How about we make a joint resolution ... to spend more time with one another ..., to be even more forbearing ... to bring out the best in each other ... to stretch ourselves, even just a little bit, out of our comfort zones.

And recognize and appreciate what makes us a well-oiled congregation. And tend to these things ... improving on them where needed.

We're not in business ... so to speak ... to innovate. Rather to bring glory to God in worship and service. It never gets old, giving God what He has asked for with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength,

May we be even more God-fearing and humble. May we display the fruit of the Spirit ... given in Galatians 6 ... love ... joy ... peace ... patience ... kindness ... gentleness ... self-control.

A well-oiled congregation is God-fearing

In Matt 10:28 ... Jesus assures us that God is in control. He calls us to not fear anything ... but Him.

Fear of the Lord ... is not about being scared of God ... but respecting His authority by putting Him first.

How do we put God first?

If anything comes before God and Christ, no matter what it may be ... something needs to change. Jesus ... and serving Him ... should be the #1 priority in a Christian's life. Not lip-service or future good intentions, but in daily practice.

Let us be humble

Jesus mentions pride many times in the Bible. Pride is the opposite of humility. It's the cause of so many problems.

Pride is an over-abundance of self-esteem. It's an unreasonable feeling of superiority. As Christians, we should hate this character trait and distance ourselves from it.

Humble yourselves before the Lord ... and He will exalt you (James 4:10).

We should never esteem ourselves ... too good ... or too important ... to need others, or to receive critical feedback and instruction from other well-meaning Christians.

Fear of the Lord ... and humility go hand in hand. We do not know it all. We cannot do things out of our own strength. Instead, we must humble ourselves and allow God to take over.

God rewards those who diligently seek His strength.

How do we walk humbly with God?

We love. We are to be imitators of our Lord ... and walk in love.

In Ephesians 5:1... Paul writes, "Therefore be imitators of God ... as beloved children. And walk in love ... as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us ... a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"

In Matthew 7:21... Jesus tells us, "whatever you wish that others would do to you ...do also to them ... for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Joy.

Joy is not something that comes only when things are feeling good. Paul says count it all joy when you are in the middle of hard things going on in your life.

Joy is contentment and confidence ... in knowing that we already have everything we need.

Nehemiah 8:10 ... "For the joy of the Lord is your strength"

Peace.

In John 16:33 ... Jesus assures us ... "I have said these things to you, that in Me. you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart ... I have overcome the world."

We are not called to worry about anything.

God promises us peace ... because He has already won the battle.

God's Son defeated death on the cross.

In Matthew 6:25-27 ... Jesus says ... "Therefore I tell you ... do not be anxious about your life. Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. And yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

God takes care of the birds ...and God will take care of His children.

Patience.

It's all about God's timing ... not ours. God is never late, nor is He ever early.

God is very patient with us, and he calls us to be patient with others

In Ephesians 4:2 ... Paul urges us, "With all humility and gentleness ... with patience ... bear with one another in love."

Not simply grit our teeth and bear up, but bear *with* one another IN LOVE.

Loving people comes with patience. It is not a one-time thing ... but a continuous effort to show the love of Christ.

God calls us to bear with people ... over and over again. This is patience in practice... showing the love of Christ ... without expecting something in return ... or over-anxious to see results right away.

We need to be patient ... and know that some things ... many things ... take time. We can ask God for endurance to do good.

We can keep praying and caring for people ... expecting God to be the One working in the hearts of people.

In Galatians 6:9 ... Paul writes, "And let us not grow weary of doing good ... for in due season we will reap ... if we do not give up"

And in Romans 12:12 ... We are to "rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and be constant in prayer."

Kindness.

Love is patient and kind

In Ephesians 4:32 ... when talking about kindness ... Paul includes forgiveness

"Be kind to one another ... tenderhearted ... forgiving one another ... as God in Christ forgave you"

In Colossians 3:12 ... Paul says to "*put on* kindness"

We are not only to love the ones easy to love ... we're also to love the most difficult people.

Just as Jesus did, we are to love our enemies ... do good to them ... and even be kind to them when they might seem ungrateful

Gentleness.

God calls us to "show perfect courtesy" towards all people.

In Titus 3:2 ... Paul writes to this young preacher ... we are "to speak evil of no one ... to avoid quarreling ... to be gentle ... and to show perfect courtesy toward all people"

When answering questions about our faith ... Christians should be ready and willing to have open discussions.

One must always do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

Self-Control.

A Christian should always be seeking a renewal of the mind, since the old man has been put away.

Self-control starts in the mind. Think about it before acting out in sin.

Play it out in the mind beforehand. It all starts in the mind.

If you have control over your mind, you can more easily act under self-control.

In order to have control over our thoughts ... we need to go to Jesus as our example. Did He ever lash out unjustly, even when He was having a *bad day*?

We are to lay our lives down for others like Jesus did for us.

Maybe doing so may involve the sacrifice of one's life. But it may involve a more common thing ... sacrificing our *needs* for another.

This is our lesson for this morning, and I thank you for your kind attention.

Let's not take our well-oiled congregation for granted.