



Thawing
#5 Isolation
Courage Church, Detroit, MI
February 5, 2017

Today is part five of our Thawing series.

Next week we are ending the series, with a message about “indifference” -

Thawing from “Indifference” - because here is the reality... our world, it is a bizarre place... a lot of strange things

happen, a lot of unjust things happen...

and Christians do not have the luxury of NOT CARING.

So we are going to dive into that next week, but today we are going to talk about Isolation, and hopefully we are able to shine a little bit of light into an extremely dark area of many people’s lives this morning.

The concept of this whole series has been: what do you do when the pipes freeze?

We live in Michigan, and winter’s are very cold, and very dark. There are a lot of things about living here this time of year that, truthfully, at least for many, just are not pleasant. and it is so incredibly easy during these times to let yourself get a little numb.

It is easy to not want to ever be around people, but always stay home. and in the age we are living in... staying home a whole bunch leaves you a lot of time to yourself, and what most of us do during these times to ourselves, is we feed ourself whatever the world is currently dishing out.

We spend so much time online, reading blogs, articles and posts of other peoples smooth words and carefully formulated opinions, and if we aren’t extremely careful, our minds and even our hearts can start to be shaped by

people on the other side of a computer screen in their parents basement somewhere...

and if you don't have anyone in your life who you can bounce the things that you are letting into your mind against, who will tell you honestly "hey, that may be a little off" - then a little off quickly becomes A LOT OFF. Something small can turn into something BIG. Very quickly.

and the bible has a LOT to say about stuff like that. Way more than we could possibly get to in one morning... but we will look at a couple of verses and examples this morning.

STARTING with an absolutely brutal passage in Proverbs, and we could start a few verses earlier in the chapter before this... and we could keep reading beyond the small passage we are going to look at, but again, then it would be its own series! but we get so much in these four verses that I think it will be enough for today!

Proverbs 18:1-4:

**Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;
he breaks out against all sound judgment.**

- 2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing his opinion.
- 3 **When wickedness comes, contempt comes also,**
and with dishonor comes disgrace.
- 4 The words of a man's mouth are deep waters;
the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.

Lets Pray.

There are a variety of ways that people isolate themselves, especially in today's world.

The obvious one is that we isolate ourselves by keeping *to ourselves*... we hide behind computer screens and Facebook posts... whatever it may be for you... and don't actually engage in any real community.

Another form of isolation I have noticed more and more of lately, and that is more of where I want to go today, is we isolate ourselves and our friendship circles and our connections in such a way that we only are around people who are JUST LIKE US.

The church has been guilty of this for years... We have isolated ourselves in rooms like this one and never experienced anything beyond those walls... which is why for so long people would say things about Christians like "they are sheltered."

They are sheltered from the real world. They have no idea what the real issues are... things like that. and Courage Church does not get this perfect but we do try really hard to be in the community... in the trenches and involved and constantly assessing and trying to figure out what the needs are here... going to community meetings and ACTUALLY ASKING what the needs are... because the last thing we want to do is spend a bunch of time or money providing something to the community THAT WE THINK IT NEEDS, when really it needs something totally different...

and if you isolate yourself from the community, that is what you get.

You find yourself creating solutions to problems that don't really exist, and ignoring problems that you could easily solve if you took the time to get involved.

So the church, as a whole, needs to thaw of its isolation from the rest of the world.

But even IN the church, not just our church... but the church in general... we isolate FROM EACH OTHER.

We are drawn to the people who are just like us, and we form these little clique like branches of community where some people are in, and others are out, because of the things that they enjoy or the things that they are good at or the way that they voted or even the way that they think church should be done.

but look again at the first thing we read:

Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;

Do you see how much easier it is to seek your own desire when you live your life in isolated ways?

You can ignore other people you are called to love, and not even have to see it. You can clear your own conscience from even being aware of the basic needs of other people... you can live your life not even realizing the way that you maybe hurt someone else,

Proverbs was written by Solomon who was the wisest man who ever lived. And last week we looked a little bit at Solomon and the way that, even though he denied himself of nothing, he still found himself empty.

but He says this in Proverbs 2:6 - "the Lord *gives* wisdom"

He speaks a lot about wisdom in Proverbs because he has a lot of it. We just read "the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook." - but its fascinating how you get wisdom.. you get it, when the LORD gives it to YOU!

So after striving and living and trying to make his own way... even having power and ruling over many people... he came to terms with the fact that wisdom doesn't come merely by experiencing the world and then making yourself judge over whether it is the way it should be or not... it comes from the Lord.

I read this quote, by Ray Ortlund, who said - "Wisdom is when we outgrow our misconceptions about how life should work, and we learn how God actually built life to work."

and I think that often we mis-identify biblical wisdom with earthy perception.

One English definition of the word "wisdom" is: the *soundness* of an action or decision with regard to the application of experience, knowledge, and good judgment.

You look around, and you assess *before* you take action, and when you finally do take action, your experience and the things that you have been taught stand out in your decision.

But biblical wisdom adds to it an understanding that asks:

okay, but where is God in this? What is the bigger picture? How do we use this situation to continue to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven in our broken world?

Look at what James says about wisdom: (James 3:13-18)

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him **show his works** in the *meekness* of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, *demonic*. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be **disorder** and **every vile practice**. But the wisdom from above is first **pure**, then **peaceable**, **gentle**, **open to reason**, full of **mercy** and **good fruits**, **impartial** and **sincere**. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who *make peace*.”

Notice this, the person who has wisdom SHOWS his works in meekness.

Meekness means to “lay down or to restrain your strength.” It doesn’t mean that you are weak, it means that you are choosing to not use your power.

It means you have what it takes to win. You have the trump card. But you don’t use it.

But then James begins to talk about people who have earthly wisdom but not the wisdom that comes from above... and he says that things like jealousy and selfish ambition in our hearts leads to disorder and every vile practice. And he says that if those things get into your hearts, that is not the time to boast... which is a Greek word (*katakauchaomai*) that implies comparison. It literally means you are finding glory in someone else being hurt.

because what will happen is, if you boast in that, IT WILL BE YOU who is being false to the truth, and it will lead to all sorts of things that James literally calls demonic.

Notice that though... James doesn't say that you will never have these feelings... but he says that if you do have them, don't boast!

No... if you find yourself here, remember: "There is wisdom in the multitude of counselors" (Proverbs 15:22)

Not the multitude of affirmers... or of people who will feed your every emotion. There is wisdom in the balancing of the scales by not isolating yourself to only yourself, or to only other people who think the exact same way that you do.

One of the biggest problems with the digital revolution that has overtaken our world is that it is possible to create a whole movement without building a single relationship with anybody.

You can hide behind a screen and be only the things that you want to be, and you can buy into only the things that you want to buy into... and you can draw whatever conclusions that you want to draw.. and you can do so without any checks and balances from anyone who actually knows you.

You can make assessments about other people who you are in community with because of single sentences that are written out as a social media "status" or because of a blog post that a person shares that perhaps gives a different view of a situation than the view that you have already determined to be the right one.

and you can read something that someone *else* hiding behind a screen says and you can go... "I can't believe that person thinks THAT."

and so goes the comparison game. So goes the BOASTING! So goes this idea that you are here... and they are here...

and before long you are building up WALLS behind computer screens to protect yourself from people that, if you would just sit down and have a

conversation with, you probably would see that they have a very similar heart that you have... they want many of the same things that you want... they love people in many of the same ways that you do... and they are just trying to sort through all of this mess that is our world today JUST LIKE YOU ARE.

but because we have built up these opinions of people based on the smallest fraction of their lives that they have let us into, when we actually see them in a public setting, LIKE AT CHURCH, we avoid eye contact with that person, avoiding conversations with them, and suddenly what we have is a *divided body*.

Where you gravitate toward people who are exactly like you and you villainize people who you think that you don't agree with.

Because we think that we have *them* figured out.

and when that happens we aren't working for peace as James puts it, and we certainly aren't open to reason.

BUT God is bigger than the things in life that make us different. And he made us different for a reason. And those differences are what make us a BODY, but if we isolate ourselves based on our differences then we are putting the nail in our *own* coffin of future growth because growth does not come by stubbornness or seclusion, it comes by teachability.

I have been spending a lot of time in Paul's letters to Timothy the last few days, and man, they are totally blowing my mind... its like, I read all of these things, and I have read them my entire life, and then I read them this week and suddenly I read it a little differently. One is 2 Timothy 4:1-4 -

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

I have always read this from the generalization that Paul is warning Timothy of teachers who only tell people what they want to hear.

and I know that that is a problem, because as a teacher, I understand that people want to please other people... they want a crowd... they want to have fans... I teach this verse to all of our discipleship school students and try and put a large emphasis on it because I want people to take seriously everything that they teach to others...

and I take very seriously the verse in 1 John (2:19) that says “they came out FROM US, but they were not OF US.” - So even the APOSTLE JOHN had people who he raised up and they then strayed... so I want people to know how easy it would be to merely tell people what they want to hear, but the dire consequences of doing so.

but today I want to look at it from a slightly different light for a couple of minutes today.

Paul tells Timothy that in the last days, people will only surround themselves with teachers who tell them ONLY the very things that they want to hear... they will surround themselves only with people who feed the things that they are already feeling so that they can build themselves up more and more IN THOSE feelings, and Paul says that what happens when people do this, is they wander off into something that English bibles translate as myths.

MYTHS

I began to look into that word, myths... Now,

This word myths is the Greek word *mythos* (pronounced: mü'-thos).

it means “a narrative” - in some cases it is *true* narrative, and in some cases it is a *fictional* narrative... and it shows up 5 times in the New Testament.

And so we read that and automatically think “people turn away from listening to the truth and they wander off into narratives, and we usually assume they are fictional. Like, “they get delusional... they get stupid... they start making up weird things...” because it is a whole lot easier to

associate the convicting passages in the bible to *other* people when we can convince ourselves that it is NOT talking about US. Right?

So we think... these people fell off the deep end chasing something crazy.

But this verse in 2 Timothy is one of only two times in the bible where the Greek word *mythos* by itself does *not* make up the word we translate here as myth. There are actually two Greek words here that combined make up the word.

it is: “*ó ho mythos*” The only other time you see these words together is in 1 Tim 4:7 when Paul says “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;”

“*ó ho*” is used a decent amount of times in the bible, and translations vary depending on its usage... most of the time it is simply translated as *these, those, this* or simply “*the*.”

This is why this subtle difference matters:

the word “*ó ho*” is what is known as “The definite article.” The definite article is something that someone would say, assuming that the hearer ALREADY knows what he is talking about.

For example, if I were to refer to “the president...” I wouldn’t have to necessarily say the president’s name, because it is a safe assumption that all of you know who the president is. “The” is the definite article. You don’t wonder “which president?” It is THE president.

“*ó ho*” is used in the bible the same way, usually to describe *circumstances, conditions, and experiences*.

Here is a biblical example, it is used in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1 when it says David was the Father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.

The author assumes we know what happened there... David committed adultery with Bathsheba... who was married to Uriah. We don't read Bathsheba's name in the genealogy, but we don't have to. She is there.

But it seems strange that Paul would put the definite article here, to describe these so called "myths"

and what I believe that means for this passage is that Paul is implying that the myths he is referring to are things that his hearers would hear and automatically know what he was referring to.

it was not stuff they were just making up as they strayed farther and farther from the truth, it was things that were prevalent in their world.

we could put it this way, Paul is saying here: that people are turning away from listening to the truth because they have wandered off into narratives that are being formed by *circumstances*...

In fact "ὁ ἡ" in 3 places is literally translated as circumstances.

Things that are obvious to them. Things that everyone is experiencing. Things that everyone knows to be going on.

So they still are *mythos*... they still are narratives... but they are being formed by real circumstances, not necessarily by fictional stories but by things that the hearer would have already considered to be truth.

Which makes this passage hit way closer to home for most of us who have subliminally chosen to ride or die based on the current tones of our broken world.

But circumstances are constantly changing. And this is so dangerous and truthfully is incredibly irrational behavior from people claiming to be a Christians because the gospel is the only hope for the world and it never changes.

You have heard me say it time and time again... Jesus Christ is the SAME... yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)

But the bible very clearly tells us that a time is coming when people will wander away from the gospel chasing the circumstantial... sometimes its money... its wealth, its power.

Sometimes it is other things... as simple as itching ears that are straying from the truth in pursuit of a narrative that the world is feeding them, and the lie that says "this narrative is a more attractive cause than the cause of Christ."

People who have itching ears, as Paul describes, feed themselves from their need to be affirmed all the time when sometimes what they *really need* is to be rebuked. and to be told the truth in love.

The truth is that (Isaiah 40:8) "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Do you know what that means? It means that nothing will outlast the word of God. and if your happiness is based on the flower never dying you will live your life disappointed every time the season changes and the flowers fade.

The truth is that (1 John 2:17) "the world is **passing away** along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

The truth is that: (Psalm 73:26) "My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

what drives the world is NOT what drives the gospel!

and what drives the gospel is love. True agape love that says I will meet you in your brokenness even when I don't understand it, and even when it is uncomfortable for me, and even when I disagree with you on fundamental issues because our common cause is the greatest cause and that is the reconciliation of all people back to Jesus.

I won't isolate myself from the ones who think differently than me because maybe I have exactly what they need! Or maybe they have exactly what I need.

Think about the first half of that Proverb:

**Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;
he breaks out against all sound judgment.**

² A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing his opinion.

If you don't let yourself be around people who are different than you are, you will certainly achieve your own desires... but you will drift further and further from sound judgment.

If you let your life be dictated by your opinions, even things that should be obvious to you will get more and more blurry...

I hate even reading these types of passages because the wording is so harsh... a fool. The literal is "a stupid fellow." Stupid fellows only care about expressing THEMSELVES, not in understanding what someone else feels and why.

We mentioned briefly last week what Peter says about the church... how we are a spiritual house... we are all bricks being built together into a spiritual house... and piece by piece it is built upon... all of these different pieces coming together to form what Peter calls "A Holy Priesthood."

and what is so significant about that, is a PRIEST in the Old Testament was God's representation on earth...

and God says that when all of you uniquely individual bricks all come together, what you, together form, is just that... you form the image of God to our broken world.

but think about a brick.

What good is a brick by itself? We have been collecting bricks for over a year now on Craig's list, trying to get as many as possible because ultimately we want to build a brick pathway in our backyard, and maybe if we get enough bricks, even an outdoor fireplace one day.

and when someone posts and says "100 bricks free just come pick them up!" we will go and pick them up, and piece by piece they build on to what we want to create...

but one of them or even a few of them by themselves doesn't make much of a dent...

in fact, when we only had a couple bricks out there, often the kids would trip over them because they weren't actually a part of something bigger yet, and they in one way kind of were doing more harm than they were doing good.

And even now, because we still don't have enough to build our pathway, we just sort of have them set up like a brick path, but they aren't sealed in place... and again, the kids sometimes will run on them and because they aren't secure, someone will trip.

At any moment, I could pick up the brick and put it somewhere else.

But when you build a house out of brick, you take those pieces, and you commit them to the project. You don't just loosely lay them together and then build the inside of the house... you seal them together with mortar.

It takes a whole lot to take that brick back out of the house after it is mortared into place.

and so when Peter says that we are all bricks in a spiritual house, you have to understand, it means that we are committing to each other!

We aren't all the same because we aren't supposed to be. But we ARE SUPPOSED TO BE TOGETHER.

There is a story in the Old Testament book of Judges about a city called Laish, and this wandering tribe of Dan who was looking for a city that they could conquer and make their own.

This is all taking place during a time when there is NO KING in Israel... (Judges 18:1) and no land in Israel belonged to the tribe of Dan (Judges 18:1)

So they sent out 5 men to explore and spy out a particular place called "Laish" to see if the Danite army would be able to overtake the people there, and take over the land.

They wanted to invade, and so this was the scouting trip. and I want you to look closely with me the way that the bible describes this place that these 5 spies are scouting out (Judges 18:7):

"Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people who were there, how they lived in security, after the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and unsuspecting, lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth, and how they were far from the Sidonians and had **no dealings with anyone.**"

So there is this town called Laish. And by the way, the word Laish means "Lion" - so naturally we can assume that this was a place with a destiny, but they had gotten very comfortable. They lived in security, lacking nothing.

Or so they thought.

They had this perfect little world all to themselves but there was ONE major problem:

"they were far from the Sidonians and had **no dealings with anyone.**"

The NLT puts it like this:

"And they lived a great distance from Sidon and **had no allies nearby.**"

So collectively... they were all the same. They had a world, but it was a sheltered world. And it seemed like they did very good for themselves in this sheltered world but the moment that someone outside of their world came in wanting to do them harm, that was the first weakness that they identified.

“There is no-one who will run to their rescue *if* we attack them... they live in Isolation... This is going to be easy.”

I wish that I could stand up here and say “THANK GOD WE AREN’T LIKE LAISH!”

but in a world where you can be anybody without knowing anybody, I fear that we are going more and more in that direction.

but when people isolate themselves and they keep only to themselves... or they keep only to a very isolated group of people who will feed them all of the same things that they are already feeling... what it does is it affirms us in all our ways... which some times WE DO NEED, but it doesn’t help us to grow... it actually causes us to isolate further and further because it starts to become us AND them. When really it is just supposed to be US.

All of us.

Bearing one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2)

I remember one day last summer, talking to a friend of mine whose wife had, a few weeks ago had a miscarriage.

And I hadn’t seen them for a little while, but hadn’t heard about any of that, so when he told me, and he let me know when it happened... my initial thought was “why didn’t you tell anyone?”

We would have loved to of been there for you through that time.

but it was maybe a month later, and Dawn and I went through the same exact thing. and it was one of the first moments in my entire life when I honestly did not have any idea what to do. No clue how to process it... no

clue to help Dawn through something that was actually happening inside of her body... I didn't really even know how to be there for her.

and suddenly I realized why our friends didn't reach out to anyone while it was actually happening... because we didn't really want to reach out to anyone either. But it was to our own detriment.

Because there is a whole world of people in our lives who would have dropped everything to help us. Even if it was as small as taking the kids for a few hours... whatever it may be.

and now here we are, a month away from when the baby that we lost would be due... and Dawn is pregnant again with a baby due in July.

and we are super excited, but for her, she has felt pregnant the whole time, and now, nine months later, she is still 5 months from having a baby. And some of you who have been there before know, it is hard. We have been facing things that we have never had to face in the past. Questions that don't have answers that we can tangibly come up with.

And there is no shame in thinking "maybe we need an ally right now."

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When we lived in Rockaway beach, and Superstorm Sandy hit us head on... the moment it was over we had allies coming to help... friends we hadn't seen in years sending us money... showing up and helping clean up... one woman gave us a whole apartment for our family to live while ours got repaired. I told you guys the story of all of the people in Japan who put their money together to send us a check, because they wanted to bless us because the American church helped them so much when they faced their Tsunami. Those are allies! Friends.

Those are people who rushed to our rescue when our world fell apart.

But if instead of bridges you build walls, then on the day when you need someone, they won't have a way in.

Because the only access to our hearts in those dark moments in our lives, are the bridges we built that allow others to cross.

and to me, when I look around at our world right now... I don't see many people building bridges.

I see people building walls.

I see people disconnecting like islands with people just like them.

Because most people prefer their OWN DESIRES over SOUND JUDGMENT, as the Proverb says. and so they isolate.

and though we gravitate toward people who think like us, act like us and maybe even look like us, the church of Jesus Christ is meant to be a body of people who look differently. Who even in a lot of ways, THINK DIFFERENTLY. And do you know what Jesus says? He says that THE WORLD will know that we BELONG TO JESUS... by the way that WE LOVE EACH OTHER. (John 13:35)

That is to Christians. That is to people of the way... the church. That verse is not about how we love people outside the church it is how we love the ones who ARE A PART OF IT.

BECAUSE if we can't get it right IN HERE... we will NEVER get it right, OUT THERE!

Jesus says "A house divided against itself cannot stand" (Mark 3:25)

and when we divide ourselves up by what makes us different rather than unify around the thing that we all have in common, we take away accountability. We take away reason. We take away mercy, and sincerity impartiality, and all of the other things that James says comes with Godly wisdom.

Isolation *does* exist *in* community, and it happens every single day.

and we need to Thaw of isolation, and be the church that Jesus called us to be, BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

Look at what happened when the Danites finally do invade Laish.

Judges 18:27-28

“they came to Laish, to a people quiet and unsuspecting, and struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. And there was **no deliverer** because it was far from Sidon, and they had no dealings with anyone.”

Their isolation made them an easy target.

Are you an easy target?

Is the church an easy target?

It shouldn't be!

A cord of three strands is not easily broken (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

There is power in numbers, but there is ALSO POWER IN DIVERSITY.

and the church of Jesus Christ is, by design, a place where community happens. Where partiality is NOT shown... where everyone comes in with whatever the week brought them... and they have an encounter both with the living God, and with his living body, the church... people who want to do life with you, not on a basis of your race or your socio economic or political status but on the basis that we are all children of the risen King with an earthly mandate to reconcile our world back to Jesus.

and we do it together because nobody should do life alone.

One of the things that we are going to begin are life groups.

Pray about if God is putting it on your heart to start a group... we aren't looking for leaders who feel like they need to know everything, we aren't

asking you to preach long sermons or anything... what we want to do is get people together, in community with others.

Next week Dawn and I are going to start a group where on Sunday nights people come over to our house or someone else's house, just for an hour and a half and all we are going to do is have coffee together. I teach enough... I won't be doing that at this group...

but if you have questions, we will always try to answer them... if you are struggling, we will struggle with you.

Not everything in life has to have this big agenda. Sometimes people just need to be human... TOGETHER.

Brian and Laura are going to do a group going through a study of 1 John all about love... we are working on a couple of other groups, and we are trying to organize it all so that it is easy for you to connect to one, and we will give you more about that next week... but this week, consider if you are supposed to help in this area of our church.

We are currently not meeting on Thursday's so that people have more time for things like this... we have some amazing plans for the Spring that we will share with you soon... but for now, we want you to connect with others.

And it is okay to connect with people who are like you... just don't shut out the ones who AREN'T.

Life is meant to be done in community.