

(slide 46 – blank) I've told this story before...so bear with me as I share it again... I'm very thankful for the heritage of faith I received in a little Baptist church in Galesburg. I remember attending as early as 4 years old. I remember flannel graph story boards during Sunday school. Our family was very involved in volunteering, and we had a small youth group...And we would do a "Youth Sunday" once a year during a Sunday evening service.

Usually, a couple of the girls would sing a duet...in which...It always seemed that they ended up giggling uncontrollably...making it impossible for them to finish. Usually there was a student on the piano or organ playing the prelude and playing the music for the hymns. Never a guitar or drums...that wasn't allowed. Most of the guys were ushers...they would receive the offering and hand out bulletins...usually the oldest guy in the group would give a little devotional, another person would do announcements and the youth pastor would bring the message...

I was 15 when I had the job of announcements. And that happened to be the year that I grew 8 inches! I had horizontal stretch marks on my lower back. My knees hurt all the time...doctors had me wearing these special shoe inserts...they just said... "Those are growing pains and you're growing really fast." (slide 47- Picture)

Yes that is me at 15. Do you know the difference between a good haircut and a bad haircut?

About 2 weeks. I don't think a month of Sundays could fix that.

I grew so fast...that my "church clothes"...weren't able to keep up....I remember I was about this age when my friend from church said..."Why do you wear the same clothes every Sunday?" Because these are my church clothes... I didn't understand...that question led to a whole different kind of insecurity... Up until then...I got a new outfit for Easter and Christmas, maybe my birthday...and I made a combination of those work throughout the year.

So needless to say my clothes didn't keep up with my growth spurt this particular year and my pants were...tight. Too tight...and I was getting ready to stand up in front of the congregation.

During rehearsal...about an hour before people started coming...while we were practicing our parts...I start walking up the stairs to the stage...and my pants decide they had fought the battle long enough. And I heard fabric rip just behind me...and felt a new freedom and comfort in my pants that I hadn't felt in long time.

Somehow standing behind that big Baptist pulpit...I managed to get through my part at rehearsal and as soon as I was done went to the bathroom to try to assess the damage in the mirror. But I couldn't get turned around far enough to see it. I could feel the hole in my pants but I couldn't tell if it was something that could be seen.

So when service starts...I'm absolutely distracted, and worried...stand behind the pulpit, worried about what the congregation may have seen as I walk up to the stage...and I choke. I

just absolutely forget what I'm supposed to say...and looking at all of those people I must have mumbled my way through something...Do you know what it's like to look at 200 people that feel sorry for you? Eventually I went and sat down. It was the most embarrassing moment of my life up until that point.

I remember sitting in that pew alone as the rest of the service continued...I can still picture it in my mind...exactly where I was sitting at Colonial Baptist Church....and I made a vow...I'll never speak in public again...I'll never speak in a church again...

While my pants lost a battle that night...the enemy won a very different battle that I didn't even know was raging. It was a battle for my heart. That battle rages to this day...35 years later.

Did you know...the enemy wants your heart? He wants to crush it, steal it, destroy it, paralyze it, distract it...anything he can do to keep you from knowing God, trusting him fully and realizing your purpose here on earth...he doesn't play fair. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Today we're in the final message of a 3 part series based off the book "And then..." (slide 48) where we are discovering how 2 tiny words can make a big difference... if you don't have this in your family library yet...I brought a few copies...you can help yourself at the information table.

The premise of the book is that... if you live long enough...we have these critical moments in our life...where we have a decision to make...fragile moments...usually after a mistake...or when we're afraid...or when we make a vow....I'll never \_\_\_\_\_ ... I'll always \_\_\_\_\_ ...Because we forget who and whose we are...where we're tempted to give up and write "The End."

Week 1 we looked at 3 keys to processing an "And then..." when we fail. We followed David's example in Psalm 51 and we said you could really boil his restoration down to... anyone remember the first one?  
Confess it. Own it. Flip it.

Last week we looked at the life of a spy named Caleb...he was one of the spies that was sent into the promised land...we looked at the consequences of grumbling...and we discovered 2 questions God answered when he poured out his favor on Caleb and his family... 2 questions we can ask when we need process an "And then..." when gripped by fear... They were, 1. How's your Spirit? 2. Are you walking with God...fully? Who remembers why the Israelites wandered for 40 years in the desert? What did they do. They grumbled. That's right...go look it up and read about it...

If you missed either of those messages, I want to encourage you to go back and get caught up online through Facebook or YouTube.

Today... "And then..." when you forget the promises of God. When you forget who and who's you are. We're going to look at a few moments in the life of a great king. And spoiler alert. This

guy doesn't make it. He doesn't end well. Instead of processing an "and then..." he embraces a "The end." He doesn't listen to his own advice. But because of that...we're able to learn from his story...

Remember in week one we talked about one of the consequences of David's sin with Bathsheba was the death of their baby. But after David confesses his sin...owns the consequences and flips the script and flips the page on his story...they have another child...his name is? Does anyone know? Solomon...

It was quite a controversy...when Solomon became King...See he had some older brothers... and one of them as David was fading...claimed the throne.... Bathsheba comes to David just before he dies...and asks... "Didn't you say that our son Solomon would be king?" and they do this secret oath of office behind closed doors...with Nathan the prophet...and Solomon becomes King.

So Solomon...when he was probably still a teenager...You might remember this. God gave him a wish in a dream. "Ask whatever you will...and I'll give it to you...says the Lord...". And Solomon doesn't ask for gold, or land or a bigger army... He asks for wisdom. Amazing. A teenager...probably...says, Give me a discerning heart and the ability to make good decisions...

He grows up with a reputation across the known world at that time as the wisest person to ever to live...

Let's look what he says in Proverbs 4:23...(slide 49)

"Above all Else...Stop...I want to make sure we understand the seriousness of that statement? Solomon... the wisest man to ever live...So says scripture...is telling his son... "If you get time..." no. "If you happen to think about it when you get older"...no. "If you get around to it someday when you're not so busy..." no. (slide 50)

"Above all Else"...in other words...Make it the top priority..."guard your heart. For from it flows the well spring of life."

Ok, Solomon...you've got my attention. But why? Why is it so important to Guard our heart...

There are really only 2 reasons you guard anything...Because it's valuable and because it's under attack. Both are true when it comes to your heart.

When Solomon says to guard your heart, he implies that you are living in a combat zone...one in which there are casualties.

The other day we were in the fishing supplies isle at a local store. Racks full of lures and hooks...And Leah says, "Look daddy, catfish snacks!" I said, no, those aren't snacks for catfish...that's bait. There's a hook in there somewhere...meant to lead a catfish to its demise.

Many of us are blind to the reality of this battle. We can become so oblivious to this...

we might even think it's snack time. This won't hurt anyone... The world even recognizes the battle!

I was reading the book Atomic Habits (slide 51) by James Clear this week...this isn't a Christian book...but it's great read, I would highly recommend...he says this... "The super stimuli of our modern world...exaggerates features that are naturally attractive to us and our instincts go wild as a natural result driving us into excessive shopping habits, social media habits, porn habits, eating habits and many others. If history serves as a guide, the opportunities of the future will be more attractive than those of today. The trend is for rewards to become more concentrated and stimuli to become more enticing. Junk food is a more concentrated form of calories than natural food. Hard liquor is a more concentrated form of alcohol than beer. Video games are a more concentrated form of play than board games. Compared to nature these pleasure packed experiences are hard to resist. We have the brains of our ancestors, but temptations they never had to face."

Catfish snacks.

As believers we need to understand that we have an enemy that is bent on our destruction. He not only opposes God, he opposes you. And he wants your heart whether you've decided to follow Jesus or not...doesn't matter. You have an enemy...He's either trying to keep you from knowing the truth about God and His love for you...or he's trying to keep you from fully experiencing all God has for you... So, consequently, the battle.

And I really believe the majority of the battle is being lost when we forget who and who's we are in Christ.

So, if "Guard your heart" is the assignment...how do we do that? Wouldn't that be nice to know?

It's also found in Proverbs...(slide 52) It's Solomon again speaking wisdom to his son...it's in chapter 3...and it says, "**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.**"

There it is...it's so simple. (slide 53)

**"Trust in the Lord with all of your heart...**All of it. Keyword ALL. (slide 54) Not just a little bit... Not just the Sunday morning portion... not just with a certain group of friends... Trust in the Lord With "ALL" your heart...and **Lean not on your own understanding...** ...**In all your ways ...acknowledge him...**give him full access and ownership rights to your heart...

**...and he will make your paths straight....** Who wouldn't want that, right? For God, who we know is the perfect Father, who wants the best for us, who loves us... to make this path straight...In fact the Hebrew there actually means more than just guidance...It can mean making level and removing obstacles. Imagine God going before us, removing obstacles and making level. I want some of that! That's a battle strategy I can be comfortable with...God going before me.

Let's boil this passage down...this is going to be our take away today... If you're taking notes... here's what you'll want to write down... (slide 55)

*With ALL my heart...In ALL I do... (slide56) God first.* You begin to apply this...and let's see how it impacts our lives. Write this down... *With ALL my heart...In ALL I do... God first.*

Quick survey...

Do you guys have creekin shoes? Let me just see a show of hands if you know what creekin shoes are...I asked this to our VBS kids this past week...and I was impressed. Good Walnut Grove kids know what creekin shoes are.

I grew up on the banks of Court Creek...canoeing down the spoon river...You had to have creekin shoes. You couldn't drag a canoe out of the spoon river in flip flops...and you wouldn't dare go bare foot because of the glass and metal that could cut your feet. And creekin shoes...smell terrible. I mean...you keep creekin shoes in the basement or the garage. They don't come inside.

Creekin shoes are the next to last destination for shoes in our house right before the trash. Creekin Shoes are not worthless...they're just worth less. And all Creekin shoes got their start as brand new shoes...and you used them just for the good stuff. School...church...maybe the gym...you take good care of them but eventually... you're not afraid to wear them in the rain...or mowing the grass...see they aren't worthless...they're just worth...less. You might paint the garage with them...spill some paint on them. Each stage in the life cycle of shoes at our house becoming worth...less...until they're creekin shoes.

Now listen, Some of us are tempted to think that because of the things we've done in the past that somehow we're "Worth... less". Do you know what I mean? You know you're not worthless...your Sunday School teacher told you that. But deep down inside...for some reason...usually it's when you forget who and who's you are...you feel worth...less.

Some of us have settled for "Creekin shoe Christianity." You just don't think you're worth much most days...let alone that God could still use you to impact the world.

In your mind...you're at the bottom of the shoe life cycle and ...all there is to do now is wait for Jesus to come back...

If that's the case, you've let your guard down...and you're losing the battle for your heart.

You have an enemy...And he recognizes your eternal potential...your Kingdom potential. Maybe even more than you do.

We actually see an example of this in scripture...

There is a moment with Jesus recorded in Luke 22 (slide 57) ...where Jesus says, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you." This passage is fascinating...because...at this point...Peter hasn't done anything! He hasn't written any books...he hasn't taught in front of the big crowds...yet even Satan recognizes Peter's potential and asks for permission to take him out.

What if, and we understand that there really is a battle for our hearts...what if the enemy attacks us at the very place that God has gifted us...the very place God wants to partner with us to make the biggest impact in this world!? If that is true...that makes this battle a big deal! And it confirms that you have a role to play in advancing the Kingdom.

Is it just a coincidence that while doing announcements at a youth service 35 years ago I embraced a sense of shame because of something outside of my control...and that's kind of what I do now? Maybe...but maybe not.

I believe it was a strategic battle meant to attack the very place that God intended to use my life. I was ready to say "the end" to something God has created me to do...at the age of 15! For some of you it was even younger. And what happened at 15...is tied to something that happened when you were 10...and the enemy doesn't fight fair. It's gorilla warfare.

Why do I believe that? Because the battle still rages...in me...everyday...and you know this.

Let's go back to Solomon... ..look how it ends for him... (slide 58)

1 Kings 11...

"For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father...So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.

...And the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord...

...And the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon, Hadad the Edomite....

Notice anything? The advice he gave his son...40 years prior... "Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart...In ALL your ways... and acknowledge him..." Solomon didn't head his own advice.

I have written in the margin of my Bible...and I don't remember who said this...but I've written. 95% devotion to God is 5% too little. With All...In All...God first.

Solomon forgot who and who's he was...and he didn't guard his heart.

Let me ask you question... (slide 59)

Where's the battle in your life? (pause) The battle for your heart...what is it?

Where have you agreed with shame in your life?...where did you embrace a "the end"?  
It may be the battle for your heart...and it may be keeping you from the very thing God created you to do.

No matter what you've done...no matter what you're struggling with...Don't forget who and who's you are. You can experience the "And then..." of freedom that Jesus offers us in this life and the victory we have through the cross when this life is over.

I know that there are people here... perhaps watching online and you're thinking, "But you don't know what I've done. I didn't guard my heart...I keep giving in to the same addiction or sinful habit...I can't forgive myself...How can God?"

That's the Battle? Do you see it? You're losing the battle for your heart. You've bought the enemy's lie.

You're owning a future for your heart that contradicts God's heart for your future. You've bought the lie that somehow you are "worth less".

Truth is... "No matter what you've done, or what you're struggling with...Bring it to God...let him heal you...and give him all of your heart. God says you are "Worth More".

You may have screwed up so bad...the world can say you are "worth less" ...the church may be able to say it. ... Listen...God says, "You're worth more" ...and you don't have to believe me...you can simply look at the value God placed on you by the price he paid for you. He gave his son. It's an amazing reality...that He not only made you...but he bought you back...he rescues you so you can be free...and if you'll put Him first in all your ways with all of your heart...God will make your paths straight. That's the truth... That's the "And then..." we need to remember when we've forgotten who and who's we are.

It starts when we can say...with ALL of my heart...In ALL I do...I put God First.

I promise you...young people, if you were to ask most adults what their greatest regrets were in their life so far...and if they were to be honest and tell you...and you were to follow up with this question... "Did you put God first?" They would say, "nope."

And if those same adults gained any wisdom from those experiences...and could pass on that wisdom to you now it would be so simple...they would say. "With ALL, In ALL ...God first."

Message over...nice, neat little takeaway...In all we do...with all our heart...God first. We could end it here and get on with our Sunday...

But As we close... allow me to land this plane on a different runway... go back to week one...we looked at the story of David and Bathsheba...Adultery...murder...it should have been... "the end" ...instead we see him process an "And then...". But his repentance and obedience put in process...something else...bigger than he could have imagined...

Check this out in Matt 1...just listen as I read...

"And then..."

David and Bathsheba have another son...His name was Solomon.

And Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

And Rehoboam was the father of Abija.

And Abija was the father of Asa.

And on and on, generation after generation all the way to...

Matthan who was the father of Jacob who was the father of Joseph who was the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus...the messiah.

And so the messiah comes through the line of David...and prophecy is fulfilled.

How's that for an "And then..."?

What if your "And then..." isn't for you? But it's through...you... through the generations that come after you...that hear the story ...of your "And then..."

Maybe you did something that you're still ashamed of, maybe there is person you need to forgive...maybe it is yourself.

Whatever it is...let's go to the Lord in Prayer. Let's bow our heads and close our eyes...I'm not going to do anything weird...I'm just going to pray...you borrow my words...and let's listen to what the Holy Spirit wants to say...

1. God please reveal any area I am walking in...where I've forgotten who I am in you.? Lord, have I believed that I am a mistake or something is wrong with me...Have I embraced a "The end" because of shame? What is the lie I've believed?
2. Lord, I am sorry I agreed with this shame; I've forgotten who I am in you. I break my agreement with this lie and ask you to reveal Your truth so I can agree with it in my heart." Lord, what is the truth?



3. Lord I agree with your truth! Who do I need to forgive in this process? Myself? Others who have hurt me? I choose to forgive Lord.
  
4. I release my shame to You, Lord, in Your mighty name. I ask Your blood to cleanse me and fill every crack and crevice where this shame has been present. I ask that in place of this shame every portion of me will be filled with Your promises. That I will receive the revelation that Your goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life and that it will be truth in my heart. I trust you Lord, to restore me. Thank You, Lord! I now seal this work in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Close in Praye...(slide 71 )