

1. Back to God:  
Turn Back to God  
Psalm 32

I am really proud of the Scout program here in Chapelwood. We have talented and dedicated young men involved in our program and able and committed adult leadership.

Sadly, that has not been the case in every church I have pastored. I recall one church had no Scout program when I got there. So we decided to start one. We had a campout to kick off the new troop. Well, my son was one of the scouts, and I was pushing the program, so I felt an obligation to go on the campout. All I had was a lightweight sleeping bag which was probably not intended for outdoor use. It was cool that night. So, I was lying there on that cold, hard ground. I had lost circulation at all the pressure points. Then, my tooth started hurting. I had been having some pain for some time. I had even been to a dentist. He couldn't find anything. He told me the pain would probably go away. It didn't. It just kept getting worse. That night it hit me with a vengeance. So, there I was lying there on that cold, hard ground with a tooth hurting so bad it was about to knock my head off.

The next morning the scout master took one look at me and said, "I don't know what's wrong with you, but you look bad. We can make it here without you. You go on home." Well, I immediately went to the dentist. He put me in the chair and started touching each tooth with a heated probe. When he got to one tooth, I literally jumped out of the chair. He did a root canal on that tooth. For the first time in months I was pain free. I had heard about how terrible root canals are. Let me tell you: A root canal is not a bad thing. Needing a root canal is terrible. But a root canal is a blessing from God.

What gets me is that I endured that pain for so long. Why? Because I just refused to admit that something was wrong, that I needed to do something.

Why do we do that? Well, probably because in everyday life we do have aches and pains. If we paid too much attention to them, that's all we would be thinking about. However, most of our pains do go away. God has given us the wonderful ability to heal ourselves. Often we don't even have to think about it. In fact, it seems to work better if we don't think about it. Don't worry about it. Get on with your life. And your aches and pains mysteriously disappear.

Most of the time. But not always.

Sometimes a problem doesn't go away. It just keeps getting worse, until you finally do something about it.

That's certainly true of our souls as well.

"While I kept silence, my body wasted away...my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer."

John Wesley organized the Methodists into societies. They met on a weekly basis to examine each other on spiritual matters. The first question they would ask one another is, "How is it with your soul?" By that they meant, "Are you growing in love, joy and peace? Are do you have less love, less joy, less peace than you once had?"

That's the question we should be asking ourselves and one another during the season of Lent. How is with your soul? Are you growing in love, and joy, and peace? Or is your soul in pain?

Not the kind of pain that comes and goes, as we deal with the stresses and strains of living. Life has its ebbs and flows. But in Christ, our lives should be trending upward. We should be growing in love and joy and peace. If we are not growing in love and joy and peace, something is wrong.

Is there something wrong with you spiritually that will not get better until you do something about it?

It's time to get back to the one who can heal our souls.

"When I kept silence, my body wasted away... Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

When we find ourselves wasting away, it is because we have drifted away from the source of life and strength. As the song says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love."

Nobody decides to turn away from God. We just turn to other things—things that may not even be bad things. But they become bad, because, slowly but surely, they take God's place in our lives.

They are things that leave us spiritually malnourished.

I remember reading about an isolated tribe of people in South America who sent a messenger with an urgent request for help. They were sick and dying. A doctor was sent to them. What he discovered was they were starving to death and didn't know it. They had discovered a plant that was like a potato. It was very tasty and satisfying. It grew in great abundance. And the people in the tribe enjoyed it so much that they ate it exclusively. The problem was that it was just starch. It had no vitamins or minerals or proteins. So, slowly but surely, the people were starving to death.

The solution was simple. The doctor told them to go back to the diet they had been eating. Soon they recovered their health.

There is so much in this world that tastes good but does not give us the nourishment we need to maintain healthy souls. We slowly grow weaker and weaker, without even realizing it. If we are aware that we are not as loving, or as joyful, or as peace-filled as we once were, it may be because we are spiritually malnourished. We need to turn back to the One who can feed our souls.

So, the psalmist says to us, "Don't be like a horse or a mule, without understanding." We know how stubborn a mule is. If you tried to force a mule out of a burning barn, it would sit down and refuse to move. If you let it, a horse will keep on eating until it founders. It will eat itself to death.

We need to have understanding. If there is something wrong with your soul, don't be too stubborn to admit it, like a mule. Don't keep doing what you've been doing, until it destroys you, like a horse.

Confess that you have turned away from God. Ask for forgiveness. Then turn back to God.

To be spiritually healthy we have to draw life from God. We need to return to the means of grace. We need to pray. We need to read the Bible. We have to spend time in

fellowship with God's people. We need to go to church. We need to be both hearers and doers of the Word. We need to walk in faith. In short, we need to get back to God.

During this Lenten Season, take a long hard look at yourself. How is it with your soul? Our goal is that by Easter, if someone asks you how you are doing, you can honestly say, "Better and better, it just keeps getting better. Thanks be to God!"

We will all be able to say that if we turn back to God.

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