

## NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

Here's a video update for the Life Groups that I made: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhEAH22O4Xw>

**Mission Night.** Our Pastor Cynthia stepped down last year to prep for doing missions in the Philippines. Come learn about what Danny and Cynthia will be doing and how you can support them on **May 22**. Link for registration and info: <https://willingdon.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/2941756>.

**Men's Fellowship.** Men are meeting on **May 24** and will have a guest speaker, Dr. Steve Brown. He'll be speaking on Maintain Your Vigilance, so guys will learn about three deadly enemies we face every day and three defenses God provides. Link for registration and info: <https://willingdon.org/events/mens-fellowship-maintain-your-vigilance/>.

**Ignite.** Good news: we have a lot of girls joining us to learn more about God and grow together! That means we need more ladies to come and serve. Watch Sam's segment in my Life Group Video.

### 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

<sup>1</sup> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

<sup>3</sup> For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. <sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

<sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup> Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

<sup>8</sup> Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

<sup>9</sup> I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—<sup>10</sup> not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

<sup>11</sup> But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

## Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

### 1. What's something considered normal when you were younger, but now regarded as unsafe or dangerous?

I remember when only the people in the front seats wore seatbelts while those in the back could roam free. It was fun to look out one window and then scootch to look at the other one. Seatbelts for all passengers only became mandatory in BC in 1991. Now that I have a kid, I would *never* let him ride without a car seat/booster/seatbelt in the back, even if it were legal.

Many of us also grew up in an era where smoking was normal. People smoked in restaurants (<https://youtu.be/BvySTtPzogk>) and airplanes (<https://youtu.be/dqbFu7gwr-Q>). It was everywhere! Remember always being asked, "Smoking or non-smoking?" But nowadays, smoking is considered dangerous<sup>1</sup> and only a minority smoke.<sup>2</sup>

On a lighter note, when I was single, I pushed the limits of how long my leftovers could last in the fridge. Despite graduating with a degree in microbiology and immunology, I could let things sit in my fridge for over a week. I'd examined my food using visual and olfactory cues to ensure they were safe. I don't think I ever got sick.

In this week's passage, the Corinthian church is living dangerously without realizing it.

### 2. What's something painful or difficult you experienced that was beneficial?

Many of us spend years at a university to study for a degree, at a trade school to learn skills, or in an apprenticeship to get experience towards a Red Seal. It was hard, but for the best. You couldn't be where you are today without that sacrifice. Many of us have been through interventions, therapy/counseling, or addiction treatments. It was hard to face our problem, but through the process, we found healing and a new life. Many of us have been fired or let go from a job, leading us to find an even better position or career path.

In this week's passage, Paul tells the Corinthians to take painful actions for the benefit of the church.

### 3. What was the silliest thing you used to be proud of?

How many of us were super proud of our appearance when we were younger? We thought that a hat, shirt, dress, haircut, or jacket made us the coolest person in school. I've shared in other notes about my trench coat. (I don't think my parents have any photos of that era, so don't ask for them. I also don't want my cool trench coat and sunglasses look to lead people to elevate me above other pastoral staff!) Now, when we look back, we cringe and wonder what we were thinking.

My son is almost three, so he's recently been proud of using the potty like a big boy. Of course, it's a big milestone for his age, but hopefully, he'll be proud of different things as he grows older.

In this week's passage, the Corinthians are proud of something that they shouldn't be proud of.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/smoking-tobacco/health-effects-smoking-second-hand-smoke/risks-smoking.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/smoking-tobacco/surveys-statistics-research/smoking-what-we-know.html>

## Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

### 4. Why is it dangerous to celebrate or allow sinful behaviors to continue unchecked?

Here are a few suggestions.

**Continued Damage.** Sin is sin because it's harmful. God doesn't call helpful or beneficial things sinful. Sin is anything that isn't loving towards God or other people. So, sin separates us from God or other people. If people continue in their sinfulness, they will be engaging in behaviors that draw them away from God. They will also damage themselves or other people.

Sexual sins (like in this passage) draw people away from God because it's doing what God didn't intend. Usually, people who are committing adultery aren't excited to spend more time with God. It also harms others because we're using them to gratify our desires instead of treating them with the dignity of being God's creation.

**Spread.** Others may see that sin and be tempted. "They seem to be enjoying it, maybe I will, too." By not addressing it, it sends the message that the behavior is permitted. "Everybody knows it, but nobody's stopping them. It must be OK." It can also inspire other sins. "Hey, that guy's with his dad's wife. Does that mean all these other family women are OK to have relationships with?"

**Bad Witness.** If word gets out, non-Christians will have the wrong idea about Christianity. "Why would I want to be Christian? They're totally OK with some messed up stuff!" That presents a wrong idea of who Jesus is.

### 5. How can grace be misused in the church?

On one hand, Jesus loves sinners so much that He came to die on the cross and bring us into a relationship with Him (Romans 5:8-11). That's grace, because we don't deserve it. But His grace doesn't leave us to stay in sin. He enables us to live a new life (2 Corinthians 5:17). His grace allows us to change from being sinful and self-destructive to being holier and kingdom-constructive.

**Wrong Goal.** Sometimes we focus on the first half, that Jesus shows grace to sinners, while forgetting the second half, that Jesus wants sinners to be holy (1 Peter 1:14-16). We can end up sending the idea that Jesus just wants people to be happy wherever they are. They can live out their lives because their sins are forgiven and they're good with God.

**Too Much Time.** Of course, we don't expect everyone to instantly become perfect and Christ-like when they believe. It takes time to be shaped and molded by God. We don't want to list out all the things they're doing wrong and tell them they need to change by next week. We call out and address sins over time and allow God to work over time.

But if we let sinful behaviors continue for too long, there will be consequences (see Question 4).

## Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

### 6. Why might churches want to be loose with moral standards? Why can that be dangerous?

**Jesus Set Us Free.** The frequent response to "too many man-made rules" is "no rules, just right" (like how they eat in Australia: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lfr\\_H3iBI70&t=23s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lfr_H3iBI70&t=23s)). Often, people think that Jesus' death has dealt with

the consequences of sin, therefore, everything is permissible. Or perhaps that since Jesus loved all sorts of people, no people are wrong or sinful. But this forgets that sin has the consequences of God's wrath. And it forgets the purpose of the cross: to deal with God's wrath.

**But They've Done So Much Good.** Some churches allow bad and abusive behavior to continue because those doing the abusing have done so much. A few months ago, I heard a podcast where the guest, Tim, had replaced an internationally recognized pastor who had some scandals come to light (<https://careynieuwhof.com/episode637/>). Tim helped the church to restructure and pick up the pieces. He told about how he took over the former pastor's office. It was huge and isolating, requiring three locked doors and a badge to get in! Even some of the staff were afraid to enter the doorway into the senior pastor's office.

There was such an obviously unhealthy and sinful power dynamic there, but everyone justified it because that pastor was so famous, the church was so big, his conferences helped so many other churches, and so on. But allowing all of this to go unchecked led to a catastrophic failure and rupture within that church. Tons of churches that had followed their model suddenly questioned what they were doing. The news was so big that non-Christians could see and mark this down as more evidence that Christianity doesn't exist.

**It Would Cause Too Much of a Stir.** Sometimes, sin is permitted because doing something about it would make too much of a disturbance. "We might upset people and they'll stop coming." If the truth spoken in love offends, then they are likely lacking in truth. It's God's grace to let them know the truth and let God convict their hearts. "If this comes to light and people find out what's been happening, it'll make us look bad." But things always come to light. One of the biggest shames is when churches knew what they were doing was wrong, but they tried to hide it. "We're doing well, if we deal with this, it will affect our momentum." If allowing significant sin to grow is part of that momentum, that momentum is carrying us in the wrong direction.

## 7. How does having healthy boundaries help people who fall outside of those boundaries?

**Know the Boundaries.** By setting up healthy boundaries, people know what is right and wrong. People will know what to pursue and how to grow. They will also know when they're getting near the danger zone and can take corrective measures to turn around. If they do fall outside of those boundaries, they know where they need to get back to.

If people don't know the boundaries, they have no idea what's right or wrong, so things can quickly go wrong. I forgot who it was, but I heard a sermon illustration on this. Sometimes we want to play "How close can I get to sin without sinning?" That's like playing "How close can I get to fire without getting burned?" That's a dumb game to play. The fire's heat should be plenty of warning that we're about to get burned, so we know to take a step back. Boundaries can serve that function, too. They can warn us if we're getting too close to sin.

**Support.** We can help each other. Sometimes it's easier to see when other people are getting too close to sin. Say your friend is in a relationship. They're love-drunk and don't realize they're putting themselves in potential situations for sexual sin. You, on the other hand, can clearly see all the red flags of spending the night together or getting too handsy.

**8. Pastor Brody said, “Unrepentant sin kills gospel witness. If life is not different because of forgiveness and freedom in Jesus, why would anyone want to come to Jesus?”**

**How can the way we address sin, forgiveness, and freedom draw people to Jesus?**

On one hand, if we don't exhibit repentance and seek forgiveness, people won't see a need for Jesus. And if we use freedom in Jesus as an excuse to do anything, including destructive behaviors, people will be turned off, thinking that Jesus endorses it.

But if we healthily address these things, people will be drawn to Jesus. They'll see that there is hope and a way to be free from those sins. They'll see that Jesus knows they're a sinner but still loves them.

**9. Pastor Brody said, “Where is the decay of our old self worming into our relationships? We must be vigilant and kill sin in us.”**

A Christian from the 1700s named John Owen famously stated, “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.” If we aren't aware of our sins to deal with them, our sins will be killing us. Sexual sin, anger, unforgiveness, pride, materialism, etc. harm us and others.

If, with God's help, you've killed old sins, share so others can celebrate Jesus' work in you. If you are currently working on killing sins or recognizing some sins you need to kill, share with the group so they can support and pray for you. Some of us may not be aware of what sins we need to deal with. If you're in that boat, ask others to pray for you so you God can show you. Don't feel like you must share with the group. However, if you do find something, begin by confessing it to God so you can begin dealing with it (1 John 1:9).

**10. Why should we examine what we're proud of?**

The Corinthians not only allowed some pretty messed up behavior, Paul notes they were proud of it! They were “arrogant” and were “boasting”. It's not uncommon for churches to be proud of the wrong thing.

Some churches are proud of standing up for the truth and not compromising. They're quick to call out people who aren't in line. It's important to point out false teachers and people who are doing it wrong. But these churches can end up speaking truth without love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Instead of building on common ground with other Christians to expand God's kingdom, they're always on a fault-finding mission. And, often, they end up confusing what is biblical truth with their interpretations or opinions. Anyone who doesn't do it their way is branded a false Christian. I know, because I was like that. I was always trying to draw lines between us versus them, while ignoring my own sins and problems. I could be quite unloving.

A few years ago, I heard a speaker who's very well-known in Asian circles. He's famous for calling out people and “telling it like it is.” His talk was supposed to kick off a weekend conference and be an opportunity to invite your non-Christian friends to hear about Jesus. But during the whole first message, he just bragged about denouncing people and how he was such a good speaker because he's preached in front of hundreds of thousands of people and doesn't ask for donations. I don't remember him ever really talking about the Gospel. Maybe he did, but I was so distracted by his bragging. My wife and I decided to skip the rest of the sessions.

He had also spoken in Dallas years earlier while I was still there. I didn't hear the messages because I was helping watch the kids. His talks ran waaaaay over time, easily 45+ minutes. I was told that, as some people got up to use the

washroom, he pointed them out from the pulpit and scolded them in front of everyone! I don't know about you, but I don't think Jesus would yell at elderly people getting up to pee after two and a half hours.

I heard he wasn't always like this, but it seems like his pride grew and grew to the point of messing up his ministry. And the vibe I got was that he was so big, nobody dared to confront him about it for his and his ministry's sake.

There are many things we should celebrate at Willingdon Church, but if we're not careful, that pride could also lead to sin. For example, our church began with a modest 116 members (<https://willingdon.org/about/history/>) and through God's grace, it has become one of the largest churches in Canada. Churches of our size are extremely rare.<sup>3</sup> We could easily attribute our growth to the pastors on staff or how much better we are than other churches at doing preaching, praise, or programming. We could easily look down on other churches that are stagnant or declining. All too often, Christians confuse big numbers with success. Some of the largest so-called churches in the world may look successful to the world, but don't teach the Gospel.

- 11. Pastor Brody said, "We need the church to care for us. I'm talking about you and me, brothers and sisters, not specifically professionals. We may be blind to sin in our lives. We may have a little leaven tucked in a corner, ready to puff us up and cause division in our relationships or decay in our walk with Jesus."  
Do you have examples when others cared (or didn't care) for you by pointing out your sin?**

Almost 20 years ago, I was in seminary and volunteering with a church youth ministry. I was very impetuous and driven to make things happen. The youth pastor appreciated it, I think, because he was all about having lots of big youth events. We had a church-based Halloween alternative gathering. I had spent hours setting things up with other volunteers. As the night went on, things got chaotic. Unsurprisingly, teens weren't always cooperating and had damaged some of the things we set up. I got so frustrated that I punched a big hole in a hallway wall. This was in front of probably a few dozen youth.

We eventually survived the night. The kids had a good time. And the youth group went back to its regular programming until the special Christmas gatherings. I was worried that someone in leadership would be angry with me, but I felt relieved after nobody brought it up.

Looking back, I'm surprised and saddened that nobody in the church leadership addressed this huge problem. On one hand, it's great that I was so passionate about serving the church. It's great that I felt strongly about making things go well for everyone. But the fact that I responded with physical violence was proof of a spiritual issue. I should have prayed or relied on God, exhibited fruit of the Spirit like patience, or literally anything else. My actions were just pent-up rage and didn't help at all. I also did this in front of a bunch of impressionable teenagers. What message did that send to them? At best, it's ... totally fine to ... uh ... be upset when God's plans don't go well and it's better to hit a wall than hit a kid? I honestly can't think of any positive spin. And the fact that the church never talked to me, made me apologize, or told the kids what I did was wrong, sent the wrong message.

Sometime later, I left to intern at their church plant. The youth pastor there was also mostly focused on events. I got frustrated and angry when things didn't go right, but never to the point of destroying church property. I have to admit that it was still incredibly unhealthy.

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<sup>3</sup> Even for the States, Willingdon would be in the top 0.5% of the largest churches.

<https://worshipleader.com/leadership/worship-in-the-average-church-in-america/>

I wish those youth pastors had told me I made success an idol. I wish they had sat me down and told me that ministry success was built on the depth of my relationship with Jesus, not on my abilities. Ministry wasn't about programs, but about people. Times when youth didn't go along with our plans should have been opportunities to minister to them. It would take many years and even more regretful sinful failures for God to teach my stubborn heart.

I think a huge part of my legacy wasn't passion for Jesus, but passion for programs. Love for big events and lots of hustle and bustle. Doing things to do things.

## 12. How can we make ourselves receptive to correction from others?

Pastor Brody made a few suggestions, and I've added some of my own.

**Pray.** There are plenty of things to pray for. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any sin you don't see. Ask the Holy Spirit to help the person speaking to you to speak clearly and lovingly. Pray for patience so everyone keeps their cool. Thank God that He's sending someone to help you grow closer to Jesus.

**Ask Questions.** Sometimes it's easy to jump to conclusions. "How dare you say that!" But those conclusions can often be just a misinterpretation. Maybe we're being defensive and assume they're attacking us. Or we're projecting our negative feelings onto them. Because we're blind to those sins, our sinful nature and Satan will try to keep us in the dark, so we need to seek clarity to see better. "What do you mean by that?" "Do you have examples?" "Have others expressed the same observation?"

**Talk to Others.** If you have a sinful behavior, chances are that more than one person has seen it. There is also a chance that someone has made wrong observations. Serving as a pastor is a visible role, so I've had lots of people make comments about me over the years. Some of them were accurate, but some were way off base. Having another trusted person to talk to helped to distinguish between the two.

"Hey, Caring Cathy thinks I can be kind of harsh when I correct people during our discussions. Do you feel that way?"

"Observant Oliver said my jokes make the girls in the group uncomfortable. Do you think they're inappropriate?"

"Encouraging Euphemia told me I sacrifice too much time with Jesus/the church for my hobbies. Do I really?"

**Be Proactive.** Instead of waiting for people to tell you, you can invite others to be your extra set of eyes and ears. "I know you care about me, and I know you're spiritually mature. Can you let me know if I'm doing something wrong?" "Let's have each other's backs. If either of us sees the other walking out of line, we'll keep each other accountable."

## 13. How can we lovingly confront the sins in others?

Pastor Brody made a few suggestions, and I've added some of my own.

**Look Out for the Best.** Make sure your intention is for their benefit! Sometimes it feels good to righteously knock people off their pedestals. We may be acting out of jealousy or revenge. There are tons of wrong reasons to speak out. We should do this because we care for them and want them to be more like Jesus.

**Pray.** You can pray for discernment on your part. Make sure you're seeing what God's seeing and you're saying what God wants to say. Ask God to soften their heart so they'll be receptive. Thank God that you're able to help them.

**Give Space to Explain.** Don't rush! "Hey, I don't have time to elaborate, but you've been super sinful lately, so I need to call you out. Anyways, gotta go!" Let them ask questions. Try to explain everything as clearly (and gently) as possible so it doesn't feel rushed.

**Talk to Others.** Of course, talk to the right people because you don't want to end up airing others' dirty laundry. Talk to people who know the person and have the right mindset. Maybe you're wrong about the situation or have an incomplete idea. Ask to get a fuller picture. You can also ask more experienced people for help, guidance, and prayer.