

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Giant Steps at Pathway, 2024.
- B. Who's ready for this?
- C. Today, my topic is the topic everybody struggles with, nobody realizes it, and nobody admits it when you talk about it.
- D. In case you missed last week, we're in a very special series this week. It's called Giant Steps.
- E. Giant steps going where?
- F. Giant steps going straight into the promise of John 10:10. John 10:10 is the place in the Bible where Jesus promised you something pretty amazing.
- G. He promised you an ABUNDANT LIFE.
- H. That's bold. That's a God-blessed life. That's a prosperity inside and out. It's the thing that nobody could put a price tag on.
- I. Last week I said that I was going to preach three kinds of sermons. Step out. Step into. Step up.
- J. I won't go into them, but these are the step out sermons:

1. STEP OUT of...

- a) Self-Deception
- b) Self-Harm (Cutting, Body Dysphoria, Cutting)
- c) Substance Abuse, Gambling
- d) Porn
- e) Cohabitation
- f) An Affair, Pre-marital Sex
- g) Fearfulness
- h) Anxiety
- i) Condemnation, Guilt, Shame
- j) Anger Issues
- k) Substance Abuse
- l) A Traumatic Past
- m) Gender Dysphoria, SSA, Sexual Brokenness

2. STEP INTO...

- a) Attachment & Bonding
- b) Healing
- c) Therapy, Community, Groups
- d) Shedding Negative Labels
- e) Claiming Life-Giving Labels
- f) Meaningful Singleness and Dating
- g) A Healthy Marriage
- h) Working Out, Losing Weight
- i) Daily Devotions
- j) Rededication To Christ
- k) Repentance, Consecration
- l) Taking Dominion

3. STEP UP...

- a) Having a Testimony to Give
- b) Baptism
- c) Generous Giving
- d) Church Partnership
- e) Entrepreneurship
- f) Prosperity, Financial Freedom
- g) Workplace Influence
- h) Leading
- i) Being A Bible Teacher
- j) Serving Christ and the Gospel
- k) Writing That Book, Launching That [__]
- l) Full-time Christian Ministry
- m) Becoming a Missionary

II. The Therapist

- A. When I was working on this list of sermons, I had a meeting with a respected counselor/therapist in our community. I showed him my list of sermons. I wanted some wisdom. One of the questions I asked him was if I missing anything.
- B. He looked over the list and the first thing he said is actually my topic for today. He said, Bill, there's one thing I see all the time in my practice, and it's one of the hardest things to deal with."
- C. Okay, here's my topic for today:
 - 1. Step Out of SELF-DECEPTION
- D. This is coming from a professional who has counseled thousands of people over decades.
 - 1. Because people are living in denial of the essential forces that are hurting their lives.
- E. I want to take you through a number of Scriptures today. You can highlight them in your Bible, or mark up your Bible.

- F. Because I want to say something very important, I hope you never forget it. It's going to carry us through all these sermons.
- G. There is one self-deception that is the mother of every other self-deception. If you fix this one, you will break the power of them all.
- H. Would you like to know what it is?

III. The Galatians

- A. *"You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? [2] This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? [3] Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"* (Galatians 3:1-3)
- B. This is from the Book of Galatians in the Bible. Galatia was an ancient city. It would be in present-day Turkey. It was a center of culture. And there was a great church there. The founder of that church was Paul.
 - 1. He came. He preached the Gospel. He established a church.
 - a) The Galatians were joyfully saved by grace through faith.
- C. Then, Paul moved on to another city to plant a church there, and right away, false teachers moved into Galatia. These false teachers began undercutting the teachings of Paul.
- D. Specifically, they were undercutting grace through faith.
 - 1. Paul taught salvation by grace through faith. The false teachers taught salvation by obedience through works.
 - a) Tragically Galatians believed the false teachers.
- E. Paul literally says they were *bewitched*. This means they were hypnotized by lies, and those lies were demonic. This is shocking to him. Paul says,
 - 1. *"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel."* (Galatians 1:6)
- F. So Paul writes this letter, this Book of Galatians, to bring them back to their senses, which means to bring them back to grace. He is going to knock the self-deception out of them.
- G. I hoping today that you will etch this truth into your consciousness:
 - 1. **The essence of all self-deception is living in denial of your Father's all-sufficient grace.**
- H. Let's look at how this works:

IV. The Triangle of the Soul

- A. Let's look at the blueprint of the human soul. This is the spiritual machinery going on inside your soul, your heart, your brain.
- B. This **triangle** is your soul.
- C. We'll draw a **line** across it.
- D. Below the line, this is your dark side.
 - 1. This is the part of you that pulls against God and against God's truth. The Bible calls this part of you **The Flesh**. Not your body or your skin or even your appetites or sexuality, though it influences all that.
 - 2. This is the part of you that stores all the broken stuff, the selfish stuff, the angry stuff, and the "I give up" stuff of your life.
- E. Above the line, this is your **noble self**.
 - 1. It is the part of you that wants God and wants God's truth. The Bible calls this part of you the spirit, or the **Human Spirit**. This is the part of you that interfaces with God, through the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. So, in this same book of Galatians, Paul explains this. He says,
 - a) *"For the flesh has strong desires against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you really want."* (Galatians 5:17 [BG paraphrase])
- F. This is the tug of war you feel inside your soul, pretty much all the time.
- G. Back down to the Flesh. We'll divide the flesh into **two halves**.
 - 1. On the left, is when you are whiny, weak, and wimpy. We'll label that **Passive**.
 - 2. On the right, that is when your flesh is aggressive, grasping, demanding, and mean. We'll label that **Aggressive**.
- H. So, if you want to understand the inner workings of your heart, please understand that you have a dark side that is polarized into passive and aggressive attitudes.
 - 1. Over this Giant Steps series, this set-up will apply in a whole lot of ways. We'll come back to this.

V. Gideon

- A. Let's go next to a man named Gideon. The time is about 1,200 years BC. Israel is under constant threat from their neighboring enemies. A young adult named Gideon is doing his best to process his harvest while also hiding out.
 - 1. He's processing wheat where he would normally process grapes. This is in a winepress, which is a hole in the ground. He's in a hole in the ground so he can hide.
- B. Then God comes and talks to him... which goes like this:
 - 1. *"And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!'"* (Judges 6:12)
- C. I gotta believe that Gideon looked around, thinking "Who's he talking to?" But he's the only one there.
- D. Right away Gideon starts his denials.
 - 1. I am not a mighty man of valor. The Lord is not with me. In fact, the Lord has forgotten all about my people and that includes me.
 - a) Remember, the essence of all self deception is living in denial of your Father's all-sufficient grace.
- E. Today Gideon would sound like,
 - 1. I'll never get a good job. The economy is bad and I don't have the right connections.
 - 2. No one would ever want to marry me. I not rich, and I look like road kill. I am an addict and I always will be. I am depressed and I always will be. I am a loser and I always will be.
 - a) This is Gideon's self-narrative... coming straight from the sewer of his flesh.

- F. So in comes God with a different narrative: Greetings, mighty man of valor!
 - 1. By grace, you are powerful. By grace, you are provisioned. By grace, you are capable. By grace, you are worthy. By grace, you are included, beautiful, free, healthy, desirable, competent, saved, secured, and elevated above anything the world, the flesh, or the devil can throw at you.
- G. Now, let's go back to our triangle.
 - 1. When God called Gideon a "mighty man of valor," which part of Gideon's soul was he describing: His Noble self, the human spirit.
 - 2. When Gideon called himself a loser and a nobody, did that voice come from his spirit or from his flesh? From his flesh.
- H. Going deeper now, when Gideon called himself a loser and a nobody, which pole of his flesh did that come from, passive or aggressive?
 - 1. Passive. This is an important lesson about the self-deception of living in denial of your Father's grace.
 - 2. When you deny grace, and go passive, you say that **Grace is UNAVAILABLE**.
 - a) I'm not worthy. I'm a failure. I've done the unpardonable sin. I'm a loser. I'm stuck like this. I'm a victim. And on and on.
- I. This is me inviting you to quit living in denial of your Father's all-sufficient grace.
- J. There's another way this denial plays out.
- VI. Solomon
 - A. Let's turn to the richest, wisest man who ever lived... this would be King Solomon at his peak. Richer than Elon Musk. Solomon went on a binge to find the good life. When he did this, he kept a diary. This diary is called the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible. This book chronicles Solomon's experiments in living his best life now.
 - 1. *"I said to myself, 'Come on, let's try pleasure. Let's look for the 'good things' in life.' But I found that this, too, was meaningless. [2] So I said, 'Laughter is silly. What good does it do to seek pleasure?'"* (Ecclesiastes 2:1-2)
 - a) Experiment 1, hedonism, didn't work.
 - 2. *"After much thought, I decided to cheer myself with wine. And while still seeking wisdom, I clutched at foolishness. In this way, I tried to experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world."* (Ecclesiastes 2:3)
 - a) Experiment 2, getting drunk, staying drunk, didn't work.
 - 3. *"I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. [5] I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. [6] I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves. [7] I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household. I also owned large herds and flocks, more than any of the kings who had lived in Jerusalem before me. [8] I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire! [9] So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. [10] Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors."* (Ecclesiastes 2:4-10)
 - a) So, he's Alex Hermozi, Bill Gates, Andrew Tate, and Elon Musk all rolled into one. How did that work?
 - 4. *"But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere."* (Ecclesiastes 2:11)
 - a) Experiments 3, 4, and 5. Nothing works.
 - B. Solomon is climbing a ladder. He climbs higher than anyone ever in history.
 - C. He gets to the very top only to realize his ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.
 - D. He uses the word "chasing." Maybe that's you. You're on the chase. You're chasing things, chasing women, or chasing men, or chasing the next high or the next score or the next pleasure or the next dollar or city or job or wife.
 - E. Let's go back to the Triangle of the Soul.
 - 1. Is Solomon operating in the spirit or in the flesh? He's in the flesh because he has zero reference to God or God's truth.
 - 2. Which side of the flesh? Is he passive or aggressive?
 - 3. He's aggressive. He's going after stuff. He's making his own life, but without humility before God.
 - 4. Is he tapping into the grace of God? No.
 - 5. He doesn't need it. He can do it without help. Without grace. And Without God.
 - a) Gideon, who was in the flesh and passive, said Grace is Impossible.
 - b) Solomon, who was in the flesh and aggressive, said **Grace is Undesirable**.
 - (1) I don't need Grace. Grace is for weak people. I don't need God. God is a crutch. His theme song is Frank Sinatra's, "My Way."
 - (2) I don't need anybody. I'm Superman. I'm the tiger lady. I've got this. I can do all things through Me who gives Me strength.
 - (a) Workaholism. Type A personalities. Partiers. Self-righteous, religious legalists. The Church Lady (SNL). Corporate Overlords. Power-brokers. Sexaholics. Abusers. Takers. Exploiters. Con Artists.
 - i) "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—" (Revelation 3:17)
 - c) Both Gideon and Solomon living in denial of the Father's all-sufficient grace, one is passive, one is aggressive.
 - 6. If you operate in the flesh long term, you will always come to the same place:
 - a) *"So I came to hate life because everything done here under the sun is so troubling. Everything is meaningless—like chasing the wind. So I gave up in despair..."* (Ecclesiastes 2:17, 20)
 - F. That place is **DESPAIR**.
 - G. Having everything the world can offer simply doesn't satisfy. Because only Jesus can satisfy your soul.

1. The world can't. The devil can't. Money can't. Power, fame, influence can't. Alcohol can't. Sex can't. Drugs can't. Porn can't. Money can't. Ask the wisest man who ever lived, because I guarantee you, you don't know better.

VII. Abraham

- A. I had a kind of revelation this week, thinking about one of the toughest stories in the Bible. It's the story where God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his son.
- B. The story starts when God makes a promise to Abraham. You and Sarah will have a son, and I will make your descendants a mighty nation.
- C. The problem is Abraham is 100 years old. Sarah is 90.
- D. The whole thing feels like a joke to Abraham. Between him and Sarah, there's no way to have a kid.
 1. Denial of the grace of God.
- E. So Abraham and Sarah decide to help God out.
 1. Footnote here. When you help God out, that's called works. That's called legalism. (See Galatians 4:24,25)
 2. When God takes care of business, that's called grace.
- F. So Sarah suggests legalism and works. She tells her husband to make a baby with another woman, Sarah's handmaid, Hagar. Abraham buys into the legalism. I guess he's motivated.
- G. Bottom line: because of their denial of grace, they go into the flesh, and activate the aggressive side of the flesh, they sing, "I did it my way," and that lineage has been a mess ever since.
- H. But God keeps His promises. So finally, Abraham and Sarah actually have a son together, and his name is Isaac. He is a true miracle.
- I. When Isaac is age 14, God tells Abraham to take his son and go offer him as a sacrifice. The whole thing is horrible. (Genesis 22:2).
- J. If you know the story, at the last second, God stops this sacrifice. Abraham takes his son, sets him on an altar as a sacrifice, raises the knife, and at the last second, God provides a substitute sacrifice, and Isaac is spared.
 1. *"Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. [14] And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, 'In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.'"* (Genesis 22:13-14)
- K. What's this about?
- L. It's about the test if Abraham has shed his self-deception, and specifically the self-deception of living in denial of this Father's all-sufficient grace.
- M. Because the last time, when he was faced the the problem of not having a son, he moved into the flesh and denied the sufficiency of Grace.
- N. Now, this time, when he is faced with the prospect of once again not having a son, which way will he go?
- O. Flesh or spirit? Flesh or spirit? Flesh or spirit?
 1. Is God true or not? Is grace real or not? Is your Father there for you or not?
 - a) **This isn't a story about you being willing to give God everything. It's a story about you believing God will give YOU everything from the abundant riches of his grace.**
- P. Two thousand years later, Jesus said:
 1. *"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."* (John 8:56)
- Q. What did Abraham see? He saw a substitutionary sacrifice. I have a feeling when he saw that ram, God flashed across his mind a vision of Jesus, sacrificed on the Cross for the salvation of the world.
- R. Finally, Abraham saw the all-sufficient grace of the Father who really will provide.
- S. And this time, instead of going into the flesh, he stood in his noble self. He took his stand in the truth of God's grace.
- T. He broke out of denial.
 1. He didn't say, Grace is unavailable. He didn't say, Grace is undesirable. He simply said, **Grace is Real for me.**
 - a) One way or another, my son, this son, will be the father of many nations, and one day, from him will come the Savior of the World.
 - b) No matter what happened, he knew that his Heavenly Father would give him everything he longed for and everything his heart desired.
- U. If you operate in the flesh long enough, you will always come to the same place, which we saw is DESPAIR.
- V. But if you operate in the spirit, in the truth, and in light of grace, you will always come to the place you want to be, which is the **ABUNDANT LIFE.**
- W. That includes love, peace, and joy. When Abraham went this way, Jesus said, Abraham REJOICED.

VIII. One last verse

- A. One last verse and we're done. Remember, the topic is Step Out of Self-Deception.
 1. *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption [despair], but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life [the abundant life here and now]."* (Galatians 6:7-8)
- B. The essence of self-deception is living in denial of your Father's all-sufficient grace.

IX. Prayer

- A. Father, I step out of the self-deception that grace is impossible for me. I step out of the self-deception that grace is undesirable for me. And I declare that your grace—your all-sufficient grace—is real for me. It is real when I feel it. It is real when I don't feel it. In every need, every trial, every problem, every relationship, and every opportunity, your all-sufficient grace, your blood-bought grace, is real for me. Therefore, I can live. I can survive. I can change. I can thrive. I can be free. Through Jesus my Savior. Amen.