

# Being Alive To God

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## Intro

This week in The Story, we are focusing on the Apostle Paul. If the Gospels give us the Good News of salvation, the letters of Paul help us with the nuts and bolts of living the good news. An example of this is in Romans 6 where Paul gives us a fundamental principle that is critical for living out the Good News—that is to be “**alive to God in Christ Jesus**” (v. 11 NRSV).

We all want to be as “alive to God” on earth as we can be. I like this because of its external focus on God and not upon myself. However, as Paul points out, there is something that can hold us back from being fully alive to God—sin. Paul asks in v. 6:2 “**How can we who died to sin go on living in it?**” (NRSV). Paul says that we who have been baptized in Jesus Christ should be dead to sin. However, the reality is that we still experience the pull of sin. If we give in to temptation and sin, then we become separated from God and harder to be alive to God.

Before we go any further, I want to be sure that we are clear on what is sin. Sin, as Pastor Kim has mentioned in the past, is missing the mark. In Hebrew, sin (חַטָּאת) means “*a miss, misstep, slip with the foot.*”<sup>1</sup> When we sin, we miss the mark of where God wants us to be and the result is that we become separated from God. Paul acknowledges this too in Romans 3:23 “**for all have sinned and (all) fall short of the glory of God.**” The overall objective of our lives is to hit the mark, grow closer to God and be alive to God.

We should be dead to sin because of our Baptism in Jesus. Intellectually we know this but that is not what we should feel. Paul writes in Romans 7:15 “**I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.**”<sup>2</sup> I feel temptation. I feel temptation to do what I know that I should not do. I feel the temptation to not be alive to God but to be alive to own selfish desires. How can we live with sin?

## Spiritual Muscles

One way to look at resisting sin is to picture that that we have these spiritual muscles that resist sin. Each of these spiritual muscles helps us resist a particular sin. If these muscles are strong and well developed, then we muscle right through the resistance of sin and we don’t even know that it exists. To be more alive to God, we need to build up our spiritual muscles. They help us to focus on God.

## Some ways can be effective in helping us to be alive to God.

Some things help us to focus on God. The Law, as it is given in the Bible, can help us focus on God. It can help us be more alive to God. In many situations the Law can be clear but in other situations it is not clear or it does not cover all situations. The Law has limits. Sometimes it can just serve to make us aware of our limitations. Paul says in Romans 3:20 “**Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.**” We need to go beyond the law and focus on the fundamental principle that the law is trying to get us to—to be alive to God.

Luckily we resist being distracted from God naturally in some things. I find that there is some sin that I naturally resist. I naturally have some spiritual muscles. You probably know what tempts you and what doesn’t temp you. This is different for each one of us. For example, I find gambling is not much of an attraction for me. In

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1 Gesenius, Wilhelm, and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003, 272.

2 All Bible verses are NIV unless otherwise indicated.

college I was a Math Major and I know the law of large numbers and that in the long term you lose. The fleeting good feeling of winning isn't worth it for me. Everyone is different but everyone can learn from Jesus.

### Jesus' Example

Jesus gives us examples of how to be alive in God. Perhaps one of Jesus' example resonate with you... where you need to develop a spiritual muscle.

- Jesus told us how to behave in the Gospels Matthew 22:37-38: When asked about the greatest commandment "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"
- Jesus was a servant of everyone. In Mark 10:43-45 Jesus says: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve"
- Jesus forgave. In Luke 23:34 when Jesus was hanging on the cross: "Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots."
- Jesus was focused on God. At the garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:36 Jesus says "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (NRSV).

To hit the mark, we must act like Jesus did. He showed us how to live our lives to God.

### Being alive to God

If we are going to be alive to God, we need to see the world as God sees the world as much as we can through these human eyes. More of how God sees the world, and more of we should be alive to, is revealed in the Old Testament. In Genesis 1 we can see that when God created everything, He set it in its place and provided food for each creature so that it could flourish. Time and time again in the Old Testament, God looks out after his people and the less fortunate. God craves justice. We know how God sees the world through His character in the Old Testament and through Jesus in the New Testament. If we are alive to God then we cannot help but act in accordance to God's will as expressed through the OT and through Jesus. If we can see the world through God's eyes, then we can affect the world to be the way that God would want it—that is being alive to God.

This not only affects how we treat the world around us but especially how we treat our fellow human beings. Paul tells us in Romans 12:1: "To offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God." We need to be fully committed to this. We are God's representative to His creation on earth. Part of this is to accept those around us as God accepts them. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in *Life Together* that we should look at those around us as God would look at them. God loves them, God forgives them, and God accepts them as they are today.

The focus should be upon God, not on us. This is what Jesus modeled. Paul does not tell us to feel how much God is alive in us but rather how we are to be alive to God. For me, the external focus is critical. It is not about me, it is about God.

Let me share a small example of how I grew a spiritual muscle and look at the world as God would have wanted. When I heard that a fellow seminary student was looking for a place to do their internships I immediately thought of my church, WVPC. At the same instant, it crossed my mind to be protective of my space at WVPC—I didn't have any space but I wanted to protect it anyway. I was tempted to be selfish, to control what happened at my church. I did not have the spiritual muscle to resist the temptation to be selfish. But I saw the situation as God saw it and I developed a new muscle. I invited my fellow seminary student to consider WVPC. It is not about me, it is about God. We show that by being a servant to others, as Jesus was, that we help the world to run the way that God would want. I don't know how much of a difference I made but I'm glad that I shared.

Then it happened again. Three months later another fellow seminary student needed a place for an internship. This time I didn't even blink. I suggested WVPC as a potential site for them. My spiritual muscle to share had been strengthened the first time and it muscled right through the second potential temptation.

### Seeing God Around You

Not only can we see living our lives to God in ourselves, but we can see it in others around us.

- I see it at the Refuge—a monthly meal to feed the homeless in Sunnyvale—in Sandy making the food that we use to feed the homeless at the Refuge
- I see it in Parker fixing up the church campus
- I see it in Anna, a deacon driving an elderly widow to church each Sunday.
- I feel it when I see my wife respond to the still small voice to help someone.
- I see it Service Worship that our church practices where we cancel the Sunday morning service and instead go out into the community to serve other with no benefit for the church.

There are many other examples around WVPC. This is just a sampling. When we are alive to God, we can see others around us being alive to God. This encourages us.

### Look Forward

When we lift our eyes and fix them upon Jesus and God, then we really hit the mark. It is like in Golf/Baseball/Tennis you must look at the ball to be effective and to hit the mark. We must look forward to our new self in God and not behind at our old self in sin. We must not focus on what we shouldn't do but what on we should do. By focusing on God, we are alive to God.

### Fictional Story

Let me share a fictional story of two brothers that illustrates this.

Once upon a time there were two brothers named Forward and Astern. They lived in a land where you did everything according to your own self-interest. One day the brothers heard a report of a beautiful city that promised a better life than they currently had. The path to this city was at their feet and so both brothers decided to set out on the path.

Soon they could see the city in the distance through a thin haze. Despite the haze, they could see that it was a city shining like gold sitting upon a hill. Both brothers quickened their pace along the path. The path soon came to a cave that went straight through a mountain. When the brothers walked through the entrance of the cave it felt like they had walked through something like a spider's web. There were little pieces of string that gently tugged at them. The cave was not too long and it ended at a waterfall.

The brothers walked through the waterfall. It was warm and refreshing. It felt as if the water had washed away the little pieces of string that had been tugging on them. However, as they continued to walk up the path to the city on the hill they noticed that the strings were still attached to them. The strings had become like fine strands of silk.

Astern turned around. He could see the strands leading back from him through the waterfall. He tried to pull the strands off of him but they just got a little thicker. They were now like pieces of string. He started backing away from the waterfall - pushing against the string, but the more he pushed, the more they resisted and the thicker they got. Astern turned around and tried running away from the pull of the strings but as he looked over his shoulder, he could see that the strings were now ropes and they began to pull him back to where he had come from.

Forward too had noticed the strands of silk tugging at him. However Forward only had eyes for the city on the hill. It was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen. He looked only straight ahead and kept walking. He was

so intent upon the city, that he didn't notice that the pull of the strands was getting weaker and weaker. Occasionally one would tug at him, but Forward kept looking ahead at the city on hill.

### Conclusion

If we want to hit the mark, if we want to avoid sin, then we must keep our eyes on God. We must look forward, to our new bodies, and not backwards to our old ways. We need to build up our spiritual muscles to resist sin by keeping your eyes on God.

Challenge for you today is to build another spiritual muscle this week.

1. Pick something that pulls on you, that you are looking back at.
2. Decide what aspect of being "alive to God" you are going to focus on in order to leave it behind.
  - a. Use Jesus as an example.
  - b. Look at scripture; see what the Spirit tells you.
  - c. Pray
  - d. Ask a trusted friend what they keep in mind.
3. My challenge for you is to pick something and do it. Look forward. My challenge is to be more "alive to God" this week.
4. What will you pick? Take out a Yellow card and write down your choice.
  - a. Will you be a servant in a new way this week? Will you serve others and change things to the way that God wants them to be?
  - b. Will you act as God would want you to act, for the good of all and not for your own self-interest?
  - c. Will you forgive someone and accept them as God accepts them?
  - d. Will you see others around you being live to God?

Take this Yellow Card, write down what you will focus on, and take it home with you. When you see growth, record your experience and turn it back next Sunday so that we can see God alive at WVPC and so that we can thank God for your success.

I began with Paul's question in v. 2 – "How can we who died to sin go on living in it?" The answer is that we live with sin by growing close to God, by leaning on Jesus, keeping our eyes upon God, and being alive to God.