

Happy Friday, New South Family. Welcome to the 64th edition of the Weekly Word – this for the week ending October 9, 2020.

-----**The Critical**-----

Announcements

- 1) Please Keep the Superintendent Search Team** in your prayers. The team, made up of myself, Bishop Cowart, Kasey Puckett, Scott Clark and Reed Wilbanks.
- 2) Leadership in Tumultuous Times:** [Click here for the first of a series of five videos](#) that speak to leading through difficult days, put together by Bishop Cowart and the Conference Superintendents in his area (including me.)

Church of the Week: Let’s keep the Pastor Ryan Bigham and the Smyrna First Free Methodist Church in our prayers this week.

Eagle Ridge Retreat Center Update: FUN! FUN! FUN! It’s the permanent 9-Square Game Center at Eagle Ridge! Thanks to Board member Joe Wilson for taking the lead on having this great game added to the campground play area! Nine-Square is a combination of volleyball and 4-square. The center “serves” the ball to any other square, and players must keep the ball in volley to any other square.



Although most of our camp customers had to cancel due to COVID, this awesome 9-Square will be ready and waiting for all of our groups in 2021! Thanks again to Joe Wilson for helping with this addition!

Conference / Superintendent’s Calendar

(all times eastern; in-person schedule subject to COVID restrictions)

October 16:	DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
October 16:	BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
October 17:	MEG / MAC Meeting – Wilmore, 8:00a
November 12:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
December 10:	DL Zoom, 9:30a
March 19:	DL Meeting – Wilmore, 2:00p
March 19:	BOA Meeting – Wilmore, 6:00p
March 20:	MEG/MAC – Wilmore, 8:00a
June 17-20:	NSC Family Camp – Eagle Ridge (tentative dates)

And now...

-----The Important-----

Resources

- 1) **The Latest (Digital) Edition of Light and Life**, our denominational magazine, [can be found here](#).
- 2) **Attached Are A Couple Helpful Articles** (at least I found them helpful;) one on the dangers of curiosity, and another on how football trains the will.

- 3) **A Great Reminder** by Rabbi Daniel Lapin, entitled, *A Time for Everything*

Whether because of COVID-19 or due to governmental reaction to the virus, these past months have provided a stark message to the world that many things are outside our control. Businesses have failed no matter how hard their owners labored; people have fallen ill no matter how many health foods they consumed, and political currents have destroyed cities no matter how decent the people who live there.

Imagine a baby newly aware of his ability to deliberately move his arms, hands and feet. Lying on a blanket near a window, he sees that each time he waves his arms, the leaves outside the window dance. Delighted with this power, he repeats his gestures. Suddenly, the leaves stay rigidly still and our baby bursts into tears. Unbeknownst to him, the leaves were responding to an autumn wind, not to his machinations.

There are things in this world that we can influence and other things that we cannot. One of the secrets to sanity and happiness is recognizing the difference.

The world-record for the biggest-selling popular song with the oldest lyrics belongs to The Byrds' rendition of Turn, Turn, Turn from 1965, containing words from the third chapter of King Solomon's book of Ecclesiastes. This book, Kohelet in Hebrew, is read during the holyday of Sukot each year, a joyous week that we are currently celebrating. It contains a credible explanation for our mystery.

A time to be born And a time to die A time to plant And a time to pluck... (Kohelet 3:2)

The seven verses of Ecclesiastes we are examining (3:2—3:8) contain twenty-eight events for which "there is a time." Some events are under our individual control. Other times, we can only respond to events in our world. By scrutinizing each verse from the perspective of strong individual control, we find that verses (3:2—3:4) deal with events in our lives where we need to follow external triggers. Verses (3:5—3:7) deal with events under our control.

In Kohelet 7:8, Solomon provided the clue to the pattern he followed:

Better is the end of a thing than its beginning...

This verse tells us to look at the end of the section we are studying for a clue.

A time to love And a time to hate A time for war And a time for peace (Kohelet 3:8)

This verse contains both types of events. Loving and hating are decisions made by each of us. Whether our nation is at war or peace lies outside our personal choice. King Solomon teaches that our lives contain both kinds of events and we need to learn to distinguish between them.

Fatalistic people deem everything in life to 'just happen' so they attempt little and achieve less. Foolish people imagine they can control every aspect of their lives and fritter away their time and energy fighting reality. Those of us who follow King Solomon's guidance recognize that while everything is ultimately in God's control, we must spend our time and efforts on those things our endeavors are likely to impact while adapting to and accepting those things the wind blows our way.

Job Openings

At this point, we have two churches who need pastors: Greeneville (TN) and Harriman (TN)
Please keep this process in your prayers – that the Lord would provide shepherds for His flock.
Remember too that [if you click here](#), you will find job opening listings at FMC Human Resources.

October Birthdays (*that we know of)

12 – Timothy Thomas 13 – Lynne Fuller
15 – Andrea Tinsley 16 – Craig Saunders
24 – Diane Munoz

*I would love to know the birthdays of all those related to the NSC who receive this communique – pastors, elders, delegates, special friends, etc. Please send month and day to Timothy at newsouthconference@gmail.com

This Week's Passage, Quote and Joke

Passage: We here at Wilmore continue on with our series, "Jesus, Provocateur," taking a look at the hard-heartedness of the religious leaders' response in Mark 2.

Quote: "The darkest hour is just before the dawn. It may be that this moment of discouragement which you are going through is preliminary to a sunburst of new and beautiful living, if you will follow on to know the Lord." — A.W. Tozer, *How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit*

Joke:

Quarantine Update 2.0: we moved onto Scrabble today but he keeps playing the same word! Isn't that cheating somehow?!



Blessings on your worship this weekend!

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FIRST THINGS

THE VICE OF CURIOSITY

by
Hans Boersma

9 . 29 . 20

This year's lectionary readings for the matriculation service at the seminary where I teach were rather curious. They were from Psalm 90 ("You return man to dust and say, 'Return, O children of man!'", Ecclesiastes 1 ("Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity"), and Luke 9 ("Herod said, 'John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?' And he sought to see him"). For encouragement at the outset of the seminarians' studies, one would think almost any other passage might have done better than these.

There's no denying the sobering character of these Scripture readings. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes, in particular, seems determined to undermine even the most committed novice: All of our work is *hevel*, vanity; it's a puff of wind, fragile, empty, insubstantial. The academic curriculum is crammed with books—words upon words. And the Preacher reminds us, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (12:12).

Why does the Preacher claim it is a wearisome thing to devote ourselves to our studies? Because no matter how much knowledge we cram into our brains, they never fill up: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" (1:8). Our eyes turn page after page, our ears take in lecture upon lecture; yet satisfaction escapes us. In the end, it is all more of the same—been there, done that. "Is there a thing of which it is said, 'See, this is new?'" (1:10). The Preacher seems to undermine his students' insatiable appetite for knowledge.

Ecclesiastes questions one of our most dearly held cultural assumptions: that curiosity is a good thing. Curiosity is a vice, not a virtue. 1 John 2:16 speaks of three kinds of worldly love: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Saint Augustine, in his *Confessions*, identifies the second of these, the lust of the eyes, as curiosity. Why? Because seeing and knowing are one and the same. The African bishop laments our “lust for experimenting and knowing.” “To satisfy this diseased craving,” he comments,

outrageous sights are staged in public shows. The same motive is at work when people study the operations of nature which lie beyond our grasp, when there is no advantage in knowing and the investigators simply desire knowledge for its own sake. . . . Even in religion itself the motive is seen when God is “tempted” by demands for “signs and wonders” (John 4:48) desired not for any salvific end but only for the thrill (*Conf.* 10.35.55).

“Even in religion,” says Augustine. Even theological studies are not immune to the vice of curiosity.

King Herod, in Luke 9, raises an excellent question: “Who is he?” This is the first and foremost question for every theology student. It is not the question itself that’s the problem, it is the curiosity with which Herod raises it. This should hardly surprise us. Herod, after all, was not a particularly virtuous person: He lived with Herodias, his brother’s wife, and when John the Baptist dared raise a question about it, the king served his head on a platter. Herod was driven more by vice than by virtue.

Still, he engages in theological inquiry. People are speculating about who Jesus is. Herod, we read, is “perplexed” by the question (Luke 9:7). Could John have risen from the dead? Could this be Elijah? Or could one of the prophets of old have arisen? No matter how wicked a person, Herod remains a theology student. He wants to know who Jesus is, and so he seeks to see him (9:9).

Herod gives curiosity free rein. His perplexity endures to the end, when Pilate sends Jesus off to Herod. We read in chapter 23, “When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him” (23:8).

Herod’s desire is to see Jesus. Sadly, he is merely curious. He has fallen into the empirical trap of the “lust of the eyes.” His hope of seeing a sign done by Jesus cannot but remind us of Augustine’s claim that even in religion itself curiosity shows up when we seek knowledge for its own sake as we look for “signs and

wonders” only for the thrill. Herod sees Jesus, and yet he still treats him with contempt, mocks him, and arrays him in gorgeous apparel (Luke 23:11). Herod’s question, “Who is this?” stems from curiosity. He is not a genuine student.

Jesus takes up the Herodian question. “Who do the crowds say that I am?” (9:18), he asks his disciples. They respond with the various options mentioned earlier—John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets of old. “But who do you say that I am?” Always eager, with his hand up first, Peter responds: “The Christ of God” (9:20). Both Herod and Peter may have matriculated. But only Peter knows how to tackle the question.

Let’s return to the Preacher’s question: “Is there a thing of which it is said, ‘See, this is new’? The question may seem rhetorical. No, would be the obvious answer. There is nothing new under the sun. A resigned weariness in studying and working would seem inevitable.

And yet the Book of Lamentations holds out the gospel, in the midst of Jerusalem’s ruins: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:23). The Prophet Isaiah holds out the gospel, promising an end to all exile: “Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isa. 43:19). John the Seer holds out the gospel when he sees “a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Rev. 21:1).

There is a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new.” The new thing is the gospel. The new thing is Jesus, the Christ of God. The new thing is the Spirit of Pentecost. The new thing is the church. The new thing is the kingdom of God. Indeed, the entire curriculum of the new covenant is packed with new things.

Immediately before discussing the vice of curiosity in the *Summa Theologiae*, Saint Thomas Aquinas deals with the topic of studiousness (ST II-II, q. 166). He treats curiosity as a vice but regards studiousness as a virtue. In other words, it is not knowledge per se, but the immoderate or otherwise wrongful pursuit of knowledge that is the problem. Borrowing the language of Ecclesiastes: Recognition of the gospel as new distinguishes studiousness from curiosity.

Vigilance is required for those wishing to be students of new things, for Herod’s approach is easier than Peter’s and curiosity easier than studiousness. Curiosity is the lustful pursuit of the pleasures of the eyes;

studiousness the sacrificial pursuit of things that are unseen (cf. 2 Cor. 4:18). Both Herod's and Peter's approaches to knowledge are open to students of Jesus. We are called daily to engage in the fight against curiosity as we explore ever more deeply the one question that truly matters: "Who do you say that I am?"

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FIRST THINGS

TRAINING THE WILL ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD

by
Stephen Schmalhofer

10 . 6 . 20

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen once remarked that the football field is the only place on a school campus that trains the will. Teachers impart knowledge, but this “can create clever devils without disciplining the will.” Fr. James Schall, S.J., wrote that “many a young man will acknowledge that his best teacher in high school was a coach.”

Sheen and Schall would have admired the priest who once grabbed my father by the facemask and dragged him out of a fight at the 50-yard line during a high school football game. The message was clear to every young man in the stadium: Play to win, but seek an honorable victory. Your strength is a gift, but get your hits in before the whistle blows. Do not let your selfish pride ruin the hard work of others. These lessons passed from that Father, to my father, to me.

These lessons are also taught boy to boy, young man to young man, as iron sharpens iron. Today, activists posing as educators are inclined to frown upon such lessons as examples of “toxic masculinity.” But what they denounce as dangerous conformity is the natural way that boys and young men seek role models, mentors, and coaches to show them how they ought to live as men. Willa Cather’s editor Viola Roseboro once scolded an activist dismissive of muscular masculinity: “You have read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the original, and you ask why men are proud of their strength?”

They cannot offer anything to beat the glory of high school football, so now they carry on the ignoble tradition of the sore loser and bad sport. At least 33 states will play high school football this fall. Beginning

with Utah on August 13, twenty-five states already kicked off. New York's COVID curve was flattened. The state of Connecticut has fewer than 25 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents. But in New York and Connecticut, football has been singled out for special mistreatment by our public health and education officials. Football is the only sport these states have cancelled this fall.

Connecticut high school football players and their families peacefully protested this decision at the Connecticut state capitol with a simple request: "Let us play!" Students are returning to indoor classrooms, but football games played on large outdoor fields are cancelled—even though the average game draws only a modest crowd. Connecticut isn't Texas. For some public officials, making that distinction clear seems to be the real policy goal.

In New Haven, Connecticut, football fans once had the joy of watching legendary coach Carm Cozza lead the Yale football team to ten conference championships. Cozza coached from 1965 to 1996 and he kept his young men focused on their goals as a team through decades of campus and cultural controversies. He held no tenured professorship, but for two generations of young men he was the greatest and best educator on campus. Whatever else they learn in the classroom, Coach Cozza's wise advice is the most valuable lesson many young men will receive this fall. From the preseason handbook issued to his players:

If you are poor, WORK. If you are rich, WORK. If you are burdened with seemingly unfair responsibilities, WORK.

If you are happy, continue to work. Idleness gives room for doubts and fears. If sorrow overwhelms you and loved ones seem not true, WORK. If disappointments come, WORK.

If faith falters and reason fails, just WORK. When dreams are shattered and hopes seem dead—WORK. WORK as if your life were in peril; it really is.

No matter what ails you, WORK. WORK faithfully, and WORK with faith. WORK IS THE GREATEST MATERIAL REMEDY AVAILABLE. WORK will cure both mental and physical afflictions.

If young men are not taught in the classroom about causes worth fighting for, reasons to keep faith, models of bravery and ability, and channels for rivalry and ambition, another institution provides them: high school football. On the football field, a young man learns how to will himself through the fears of being embarrassed in front of a crowd, of being injured by an intimidating opponent, and of disappointing his teammates. He trains in the hot summer sun so he can persevere through exhaustion and even injury. If his will falters, his coaches and teammates help him, so that the previous week's failure does not ruin the next game. Games played under Friday night lights are the preseason for the greater joys of marriage, fatherhood, and vocation. As a father, he will know exhaustion, injury, and embarrassment. He will be ready.

But first, let him play!

Stephen Schmalhofer is the author of Delightful People. He played football at Yale.