

SECURITY

Joe Slater

Just over a year ago a gunman entered a church in Sutherland Springs, TX, and murdered 26 people. This awakened us to the need to prevent such a horrible event from happening here.

Justin Police Chief Alex Coss came here at our request Wednesday evening, December 5, to observe our facilities. He made several recommendations for improving our security. Surveillance cameras at appropriate locations and improved lighting in the parking lot may be in the works soon.

Chief Coss pointed out that absolute security is virtually impossible for us because we are “open to the public.” And we don’t want that to change! The last thing we want to do is to “hunker in the bunker.” We want to continue being the welcoming, friendly congregation that the Lord would have us to be. May it never be the case that we would look with suspicion on everyone we don’t already know! Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). His mission is our mission. And Jesus routinely reached out to the outcasts of society. “*The least of these*” were vitally important to Him (Matthew 25:40, 45), and should be to us as well.

Jesus told His disciples to “*be wise as serpents and harmless as doves*” (Matthew 10:16). Prudent security measures are appropriate. Being afraid is not! “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:7). Keep in mind that Paul wrote those words from a dungeon in Rome as he awaited execution. We might think Timothy had legitimate reason to be fearful; but Paul says otherwise!

Realistically, the odds of a shooter attacking us are slim to none. Nevertheless, we will take precautions. But we will not cower in fear!

Live and Learn? Or Learn and Live?

We’ve all heard the saying, “Live and learn.” We know what it means, too. Through the course of our lives, we gain knowledge and understanding, and, hopefully, a little wisdom along the way. It’s called experience.

From the vantage point of a follower of Jesus Christ, though, it’s backwards. It’s not “live and learn;” it’s “learn and live.” You may be able to learn valuable life lessons from the experiences of daily living, but you cannot learn in that way about real life — eternal life — the life Jesus came to give.

The very purpose of the message of the Bible is life. As is explained in John’s gospel: “*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name*” (John 20:30, 31).

This is not the life that every person has by virtue of being among the living. It is the life Jesus gives. He said, “*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*” (John 10:10).

How does one go about finding this life? As strange as it may sound, the Bible says we learn it. We learn and live. Really!

Paul told the Ephesian Christians that there is a difference between the way people following Jesus live, and the way others live. Notice this explanation: “*They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; and they have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity*” (Ephesians 4:18, 19).

Did you catch that? Their understanding is “darkened.” They are “alienated from the life of God.” Ignorance characterizes them. Consequently, theirs is a life filled with wickedness.

Now, here is the punch line: “But that is not the way you learned Christ” (Ephesians 4:20).

We learn Jesus and enjoy the life He came to give.

Some of Jesus’ most beautiful words are an appeal to hurting and weary people to come to Him for help. “*Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*” (Matt. 11:28, 29).

Jesus wants us to learn from Him. Jesus wants us to have life . . . and not just any life, but “abundant” life.

So, we learn and live in Him.

--David Deffenbaugh (Oklahoma City, OK) via *Old Paths*

Watch Over Your Heart

"The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart" (Lk. 6:45).

Our heart is a treasure house where we store those things that control our intellect, emotions, actions, attitudes and will. What we think, believe, how we act and react is determined by that which we have stored in our hearts. We need desperately to hear and heed the words of Solomon, “*Watch over your hearts with all diligence, For from it flows the springs of life*” (Prov. 4:23).

Keeping watch over our heart will require that we do as Paul instructs in Philippians 4:8, to think on those things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good report, excellent and worthy of praise. It will require that we be willing to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God and not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17).

I love Gal. 2:20. “*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*”

If we are going to successfully guard our hearts then we must surrender ourselves completely to God and his will. Hear James as he tells us, “*Submit yourselves to God, Resist the devil and he will flee from you*” (James 4:7). What do you think submitting to God means? I don't know how you would answer that question but as for myself, I believe it means that I let him mold my thoughts through his word; I let his word fill my heart and let his word guide my life every step of the way. It is saying "God I surrender all to you, take me, take me now!"

--Charles Hicks