

“Ending Escapism”

When I was just starting out in ministry and my little family was just starting, I used to do a spiritual discipline that I really enjoyed. It was a silent retreat I did every year for 2-3 days. A local Christian conference center had a deal for pastors that they could have a cabin in the mountains with all meals included for only \$25 a night. So, I used to go every year until life got a little too hectic. I was thinking the other day, “could I actually spend 2-3 days in silence and meditation in the Lord?” This little cabin was up in the mountains with no cell phone reception, no wifi, no TV, no noise. It was just me, the Lord, some books, a bible, and a notepad. Today this kind of retreat would be quite the challenge with the addiction to the phone, the worry if everyone is ok back home and the house is not on fire and trying to stop thinking about work.

Jesus modeled for us that getting away in isolation for prayer and intimacy with the Father is a really good thing. But there is a big difference between rest, isolation, and escapism. Escapism is using something comfortable, fun, or entertaining to avoid facing the reality or your problems. Some people binge watch Netflix rather than face the reality that the house is a mess and there are responsibilities to do. Some get lost in a good book, so they don’t have to think about the evil in the world or some of their difficult circumstances. Now again, little breaks and escapes are perfectly fine. Who doesn’t enjoy a good book or a week-long vacation? But if your escape becomes a continual habit and your normal responsibilities and difficulties are being avoided, you can easily fall into addiction and sin. Like a kids blanket, a sin, amusement, or fun thing, become a comfort blanket that we run to avoid facing life.

Today I want to share with you a very practical teaching I’ve titled *Ending Escapism*. Let’s begin by first looking at why we turn to escapism:

Why do we turn to escapism?

#1 – To avoid problems.

I have a friend who used to do a little joke any time someone started arguing with another person. The joke was that he would pull out his phone, put it up to his ear, and just start talking to an imaginary person. Two people would be arguing in the room, and he would very loudly “answer his phone” and say, “Oh hey brother how are you? I could be better. Some people here are a little cranky if you know what I mean?”

There are all kinds of problems we face in life. We deal with relationship problems, money problems, health problems. Facing problems requires energy, time, dealing with frustrating people, paperwork, and on the list goes. Sometimes we get so overwhelmed we just run to our fantasy in order to not have to think about or face the problem. Some turn to overworking, some to sin, some to entertainment.

#2 – To Numb Pain.

Whether it is a physical pain in your body or a mental pain such as depression or anxiety, it is easy to run to escapism to numb the pain of the daily pressures of life.

#3 – To Fight Boredom.

This is the number one issue for me personally. I would rather feel physical pain than to feel boredom. I shared with you all my experience as an extra on the show *The Chosen*. The movie set is just a whole lot of waiting around. I had to sit there with no electronics, no option to get work done, and no entertainment for *hours*. I wanted to slam my head into a wall just to feel anything but boredom. It's funny, the other day I get an email since I am in the system. They were in desperate need for Sanhedrin and religious leader extras. Normally they pay extras \$100 a day but now they were paying \$350 a day and covered lodging and travel. It would be 8 days' worth of work. We are talking \$2800. I was *very* tempted but just thinking about that boredom I said out loud "absolutely not!"

I know I can't be bored. But in my attempt to escape boredom, I became addicted to my phone. I got addicted to working too much. Again, nothing wrong with a little video game, or screen time, or good book...but little good escapes can easily turn into escapism if we are not careful.

#4 – To Hide Insecurity.

If we think about when the first escapism began, we will have to go all the way back to the first sin. Adam and Eve sinned and immediately they felt shame because of their nakedness. In their shame...in their insecurity they heard the Lord and immediately looked for an escape. They *hid* themselves from the presence of God because of their shame. Many times, we feel we are not good enough. Parents, as our kids make mistakes or fall into sin we say, "What did I do wrong?" That insecurity and shame can be unbearable at times. It makes it easier to want to find a form of escapism to avoid facing that feeling.

Good Christians can suffer from escapism as well. What a week we have had in America. As we observed 9/11, we saw an assassination with Charlie Kirk, a Ukrainian refugee murdered on a bus, school shootings, a person was beheaded at a motel in Dallas. With such an evil world, it is so easy to say, "Jesus please hurry and return so we can get out of this wicked world." End times becomes our hope because we don't have to face the evil in the world. We *escape* having to feel the weight and grief of a wicked generation. Yet, now more than ever we need to rise up as believers and preach a message of hope and salvation.

I have a friend who is a graphic designer for a New York best-selling pastor. He told me the number one type of books he writes is end times. He writes them because that's where all the sales are. There are sales there because the demand is there. Could it be that good and godly people are wanting to know more about end times because they can't wait to get out of here?

Even the wisest man in history battled escapism. If you have your bibles go with me to the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 2:

1 I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility. 2 I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind

was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines. 9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. 10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun. – Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 NASB1995

The point of Ecclesiastes is not to say everything is meaningless so why try. The point of Ecclesiastes is to say everything outside of God will come short. Jesus is our ultimate satisfaction in life. We can try to run away or escape our problems by diving into all kinds of sin, but it is all vanity. Only Jesus satisfies. Praise the Lord that He does not leave us as orphans but provides all we need to run to Him instead of the pleasures of life. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 10:13:

13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. – 1 Corinthians 10:13 NASB1995

Escapism is only temporary relief and is only encountered while you are escaping. The moment you stop escaping is the moment you are faced with the reality you were running from. Jesus provides a hope and transformation. As believers we believe in a supernatural reality. We believe that the spiritual is more real than the physical. It means when we desire to escape it should be to the Holy Spirit not the things of this world. Let me encourage you this morning with a few things you can do to end escapism in your life:

Four Ways to End Escapism:

POINT #1 – Find the Root Cause.

If you find yourself in a place where you are trapped by escapism, you need to find the root cause of the need for escape rather than deflect the responsibility. A root cause can be loneliness. It can be a betrayal you faced. A root cause can be a trauma from your past. It could be shame from a hidden sin. Look at what Luke 6:45 says:

“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.” – Luke 6:45 NASB1995

A counselor once told Nikki and I that we have root issues that we needed to deal with. It is like getting shot by an arrow. You can break off the shaft, but the arrowhead is still there. You can walk around all fine until something nudges the arrowhead. Then you are in pain and react. Have you ever been in a small argument with your spouse, and they completely blow up? You might have done something very small, but it hit the arrowhead and because you touched that root cause, there was a big reaction. It is only when you remove the arrowhead that you will find true freedom from a bad reaction and pain.

As many of you know I have had issues in the past slowing down and sitting still. I worked myself into full blown burnout because I was going too fast for too long. After working with my counselor, we discovered that I was so terrified of being bored that I filled up all the time I could with work to *escape* being bored. The escapism turned into an addiction by becoming a workaholic. I had to address the root cause of feeling bored and find creative ways to keep my brain entertained but not get exhausted.

POINT #2 – Recognize the Consequences.

8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. – 1 John 3:8-9 NASb1995

We don't want to be motivated by fear, but we do need to understand the consequences of escapism. If you smoke cigarettes and want to quit it is easy to say to yourself, "I better quit so I don't die." That's fear motivated. There is a difference of an honest evaluation. If you are a smoker and want to quit, you should explore both the negative and positive consequences of quitting. You could say to yourself, "I will feel better, save so much money, be healthier, and not deal with shame anymore. If I keep on smoking, I will continue to damage my health."

You also need to be realistic at what is happening by escaping. When you live in a state of escapism, you are avoiding facing reality and avoiding responsibility. Things get left undone. The house is still a mess, you are still walking in fear, the relationship is still suffering. By failing to face the issue and work on things getting better, you and others will continue to suffer.

We need to give ourselves a lot of grace because problems don't go away overnight. When you commit to ending escapism, you are committing to a process and hard work. It is worth it and true transformation can happen when you walk with the Spirit and lean on Him to overcome root causes.

POINT #3 – Have Vision.

I heard a pastor say one time that "vision gives pain purpose." The age-old question is "how can you change something if you don't know where you are heading or what you want? In order to be successful at navigating change there must be clear, compelling, and Christlike vision.

Habakkuk 2:2 says, "Write the vision, make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it."

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint..."

I respect counselors and therapist but one thing I cannot stand about counselors is that they don't just tell you what to do. They help you figure out what to do. They ask questions until what you need to hear comes out of you. It is honestly hard work to reflect on your life and dream for the future. To think of all the necessary things you need to do in order to run to the Lord instead of a place of escape.

POINT #4 – Set Boundaries.

Real freedom thrives in the limitations given to us by God. A kid in a backyard can play in the grass, swing, run, scream, get sunshine. But if that child was left alone at the local park, it would be a scary thing. You would think, oh there's so much more *freedom* there, but real freedom happens within the limitations God gave us.

Since escapism isn't 100% bad give yourself a time and place to rest and avoid responsibility. I watch 10 hours of football on Sunday. I will often scroll on my phone as well. But the rest of the week I don't watch TV or movies or read a good book. I work, study, do projects, and other things.

It might be beneficial to take a couple days and journal what you did all throughout the day. How much time were you on your phone? How much time did you spend working, improving a situation, or escaping? Here's an example. Let's say you spend two hours a day watching TV. Your house is a mess, but you are too overwhelmed to do anything about it. I would encourage you to start with fifteen minutes. After an hour of Tv take a 15-minute break and clean/organize an area. The other day I was getting frustrated by the number of items on my kitchen counter. I cook non-stop. So, I bought a wire rack shelving unit and put it in the corner of my kitchen. I put all the appliances like the juicer, the food processor, the instant pot, pots, pans, etc. and only left things on my counter that I use every day or at least once a week. I reorganized everything and deep cleaned the counters and stove. It took me less than an hour and now I have tons of counter space and a whole lot less frustration. It has been something I have put off for months because I didn't have the energy. What this little thing did was show me that in a small amount of time I can do something that will have lasting benefits. We all need a few victories like this so that we can remember in difficult times, it doesn't always take hard work to achieve a small goal.

The challenge: what areas in your life are to using as escapism instead of escaping to God? Do you find it easier to run to the things of this world or the presence of God. Let me encourage you to have a conversation with the Holy Spirit this week and find ways to end escapism from your heart.

