

VI

A WHITE ELEPHANT

Purity and Purpose

Is purity a word that sits comfortably with you or one that seems a little ill-fitting?

Do you consider it something of a white elephant?

Something that doesn't really have a practical place? Is purity something you'd think was a little obsolete? Out-dated, antiquated, no longer a word in our everyday vocabulary so therefore not really applicable?

Purity is like a mirror. In this mirror we see reflected all that we are and all that we are not. The mirror of this word reflects an attribute of God that He just IS and we are not. Blessedly this word is a verb – a doing word - something that we can be active in bringing about.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.
PS 119:9...

This may seem a little obvious, but purity is pure. Absolutely pure. Nothing, nada, zero, zip - to make it the slightest unclean. Look up any dictionary and you'll see for yourself.

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, **with absolute purity.** 1TI 5:1-2

If the word 'pure' finds us squirming a little internally, perhaps it's because we feel it's an unattainable standard. And perhaps it is (an perhaps it is not!). In the Old Testament, a standard is like a flag or a banner. It was lifted high as a rallying point for armies and families to gather. What good is a standard that is not high?

CS Lewis wrote in "Mere Christianity":
Very often what God helps us towards is not the virtue itself but this power of always trying again...this process trains us in habits of the soul...It cures our illusions about ourselves and teaches us to depend on God. We learn on the one hand that we cannot trust ourselves even in our best moments, and, on the other hand that we need not despair even in our worst for we are forgiven. The only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection.

Purity lost can be purity restored in Christ... could Jesus have been anything but pure?

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. COL 3:5-10

Purity is also a journey where the trail we travel is as long as life. We'll see new sights and scenes along the way- and be met with different terrain, weather patterns and fellow travellers who'll have joined the journey at different points of the track.

Just like the mirror that shows us things we may not want to see in ourselves, purity is part of God's refining process. Like gold in a smelter, dross rising to the surface until it is pure.

I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. Isaiah 1:25

Purity is freedom. Freedom for whole relating and relationships. Freedom in body, soul and spirit. Purity and sexuality are not divorced from each other. But sexuality fits within purity in God's order of things. God's green light is marriage, and His red lights have positive purpose too.

Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure... HEB 13:4a
Purity enables God's people to be navigational lights to others in the world around us. Without the light to guide and warn, many more lives will crash upon the rocks of sexual brokenness.

... so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe... PHP 2:15

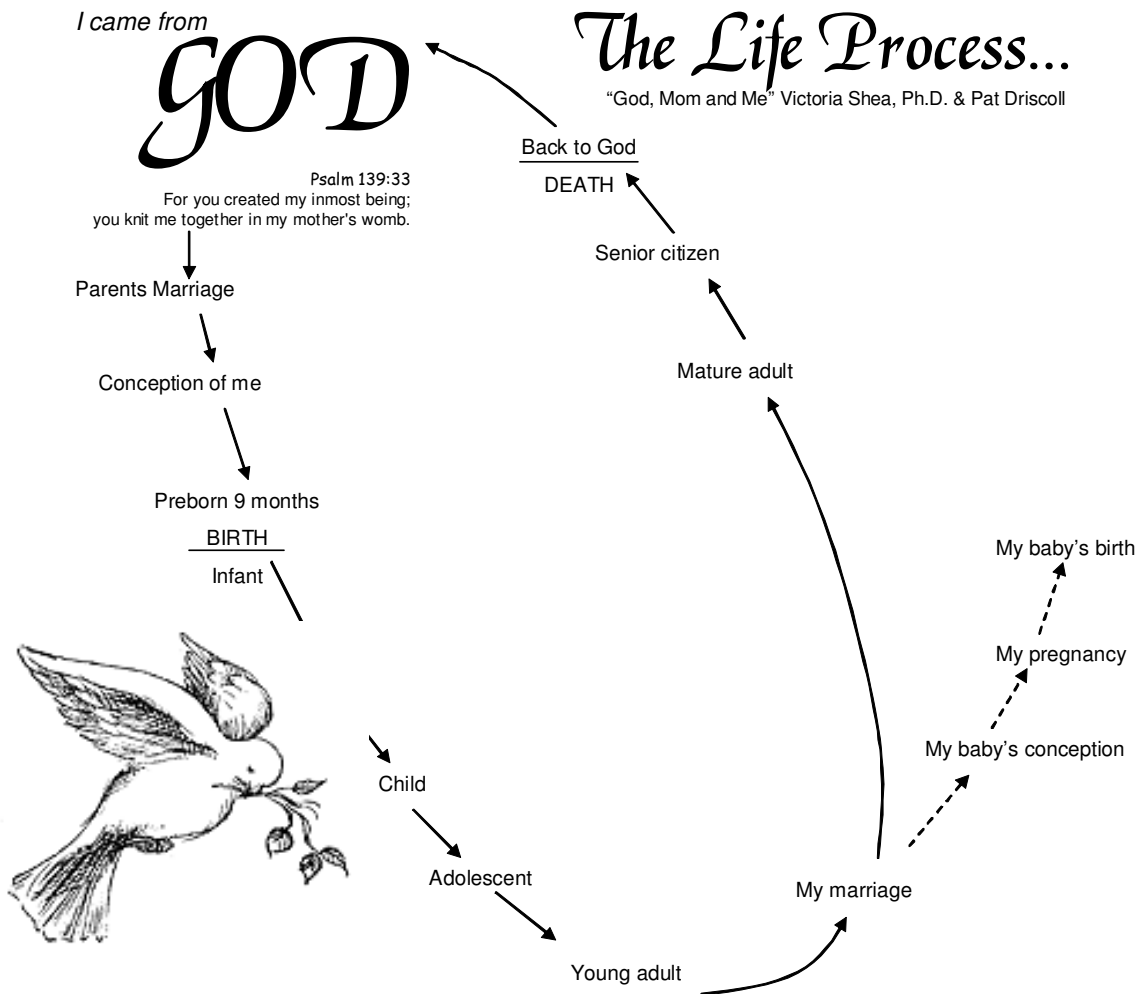
The sexuality battle did not begin with Alfred Kinsey.

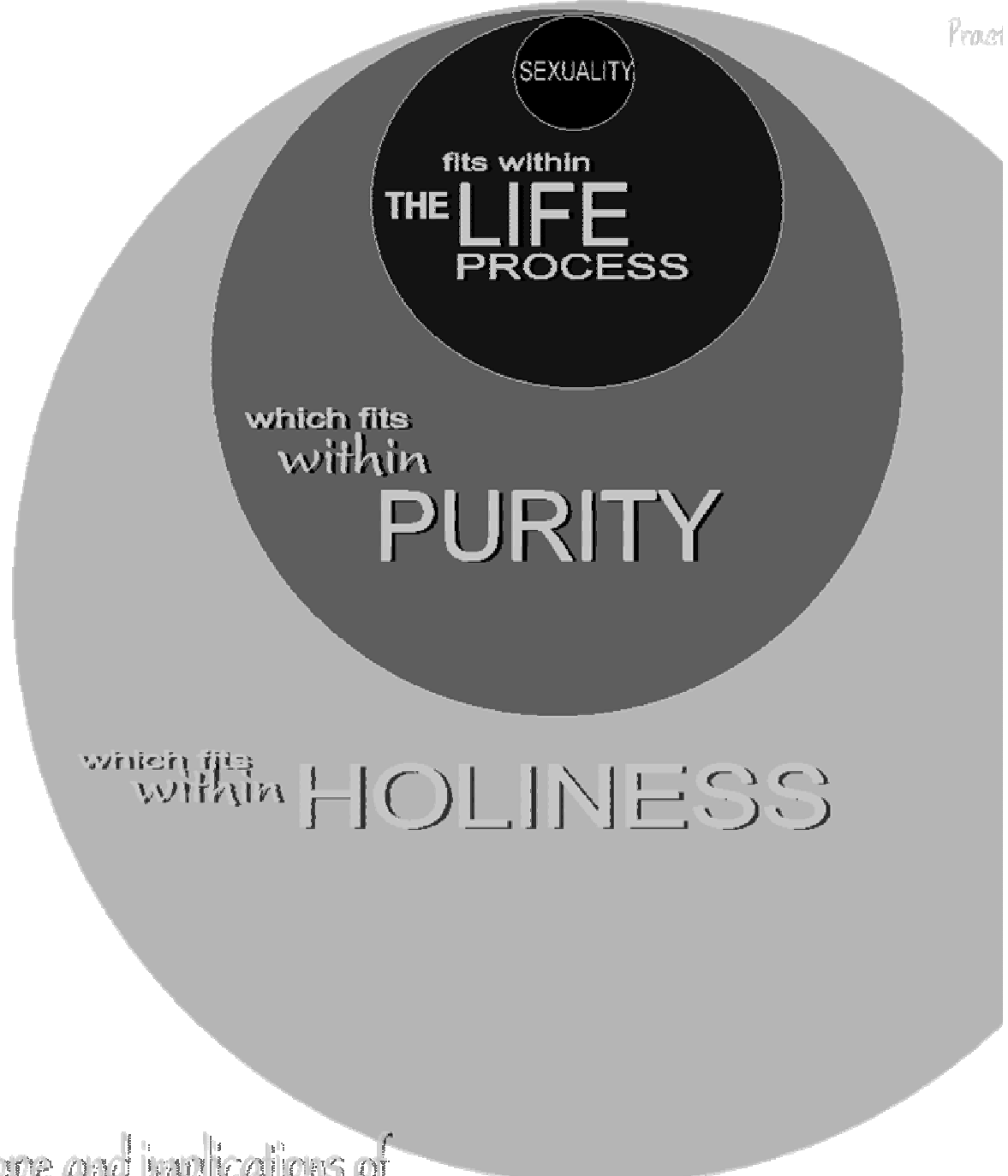
Be awake, be watchful and be wary for your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1PE 5:8

You are entering times like no other in history.

The depravity around us in terms of behavior may be matched by other cultures and times (Sodom, Gomorrah, Rome etc). The difference is that today we live in the age of Information with every kind of moral invasion, innuendo and perversion just a billboard, a commercial or a mouse click away. In past generations, access to pornography had to be actively sought out. Society held at least a framework of respectability where the seeking of such material held a measure of shame which had to be overcome. **Today, active steps have to be taken in order to avoid explicit media.**

Think about these two illustrations. They are intended to illustrate the place and role of sexuality in our lives from the two different perspectives. Our culture is sexually driven and would have us believe that to be normal and healthy. In fact, there is much more going on in the life of a well balanced person.





within the scope and implications of
ETERNITY

So WHY do each of these areas fit “within the scope and implications of eternity”?

Because of the potential that exists to create another human life – *another eternal being*.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:13-16).

Because of the option that so many take up – to destroy that eternal beings earthly life while still in the womb.

Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:3-4).

Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, "But we knew nothing about this," does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? (Proverbs 24:11-12).

Because in rejecting God and His ways, we choose between eternity in heaven or hell.

REV 21:6-8 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Because of the time and example spent well or spent poorly – that others might come to reject or know God through us.

1CO 10:31-11:1 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-- even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

1PE 2:11-12 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

A certain teenage asked his parents why God made staying pure so very difficult.

1. God didn't – man did. Mankind chose sin and sin became a hereditary disease. It is mankind that invented pornography. It is mankind that decreases governing laws. It is a human hand who has control of the mouse or remote that increases or avoids lust and temptation. It is mankind that allows its daughters to dress in a manner that does not honour their preciousness and it is mankind who encourages its sons to look upon them.
2. Choice is only choice if there is a real choice involved. When a mother wants her child to choose the red or the blue shirt, she might offer him the two as a choice. That is not a real choice, it is manipulation – either shirt is still what she wants. She might offer him the whole wardrobe and hope he chooses what she wants but when he chooses green she overrides him. That is not a real choice. That is no choice at all. God does neither. Since before the creation of the world he has been allowing and accommodating real choices that have real consequences. Anything less is not a real choice. Anything less in terms of relationship to Him does not allow for a relationship of free will through obedience and love by CHOICE. Anything less would be robotic. WE all need to realise that the opportunities that arise to choose sin are EQUALLY an opportunity to choose faithfulness to Him.
3. "Anything that holds great power for good, also holds great power for not good". Maryanne Layden. When we look at the damage in the world caused by sexual sin and broken ness we see something of this power for "not good". This in turn is an indication of the good it IS intended for when lived according to God's beautiful design. Sexuality that has been guarded and protected for the one other has great potential for good. It is part of the 'glue' that holds a couple together through the difficulties of life that can often wrench a couple apart. Imagine two surfaces bonded together with glue. Then ripped apart and bonded to two separate surfaces. The ripped and repeated any number of times. The bond is never as strong after the first. Not only that but repeated bonds cannot be as close as the initial due to the build up of residue from previous bonds that now comes between. This is easily demonstrated by the increased divorce rate going beyond the first marriage.
4. The single years are the time for training in self control. A lack of sexual self control within marriage has more destructive power within marriage than outside of it. Women and men are hurt or harmed. Children lose parents. Families lose their homes, possessions and futures together. Self control is

NEVER not needed. Yes it's difficult in the single years, but when understood these years can be the training ground that builds a great and trustworthy and intimate marriage with security in its borders for all. These years are far from wasted – they can be immensely valuable. This is the time to be building up your spiritual muscles!

SO HOW DOES A YOUNG MAN KEEP HIS WAY PURE?

Or woman keep her way pure?

The Bible asks that very question – and provides the answer.

Psalm 119:9-11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Sounds so simple doesn't it. What these verses represent is a lifelong commitment to learning and living God's ways. There is no one-off answer that will relieve temptation once and for all. But there is an answer – of which the above verse is really the tip of the iceberg.

2 Peter 1:3-4 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

The Word of God contains all the answers to the issues we face in this life but we have to enter the process of finding the answers that instruct in each of life's circumstances for ourselves. We might wish for an easier way, but the search itself, the journey itself IS a part of the answer and provides us with so much more than just the answers we seek.

Along the journey we get to know the Heavenly Father, His purposes, His love and grace, His plans, His justice. But we need to be purposeful about it. To grow up and look for the answers we need instead of expecting them to be spoon fed to us – like babies.

A rich man who hires a team to follow a treasure map in order to find the treasure to make himself richer - will pace the floor and wear out the carpet with worry while his team is away. How are they going? Will they find it? Will they doublecross him? Agitated that they return and enable him to spend his still ungained but often dreamed-of funds. The men on the trail are having the adventure. They care less of the funds and more of the journey and managing it safely. They face dangers and problems which keep them occupied but they are living the life rather than wearing out the carpet at home through imagined and self created worry. The men on the trail pass the days much more quickly and usefully than the rich man at home who waits to be 'fed'.

In the Old Testament there are many examples of rituals that included washing and part of a purification process. Purification is purposeful in and of itself. You get to be nice and clean. You get to have to dirt of the earth washed away – whether that is physical dirt from the body, or moral dirt within the heart. It is good to be clean. But God means more than just for us to be clean.

We are also cleaned in order to

- Leave to old life behind
- So that we can come into the presence of the Lord
- And so that we can be prepared for serving Him.

As Christians, the primary goal of life is to know and serve the Most High God. We cant enter His presence impure. We can't be used in His service impure. Jesus death paid the price for us to be made clean, we just have to come to Him to be washed.

Moses brother Aaron was the first High Priest of Israel. He served in the Tabernacle that God had given instructions to be built while the Hebrews were in the Wilderness. The first item within the gates of the Tabernacle was the alter on which the animals were sacrificed. This represents the cross of Jesus. The next item within the Tabernacle was the laver – or basin, for washing. This in part, represents our need to be cleaned, washed and purified by Him. The purification from sin that can only take place after accepting His

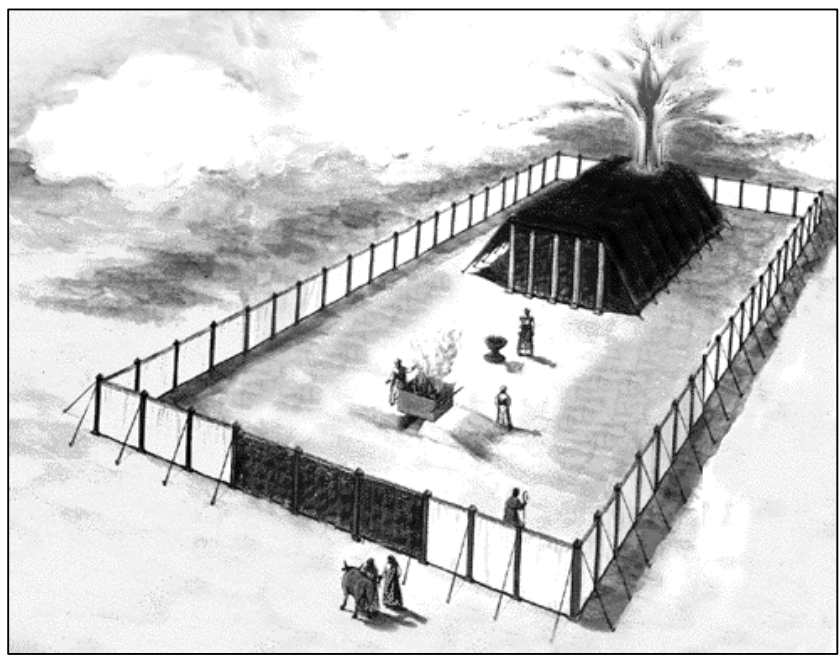
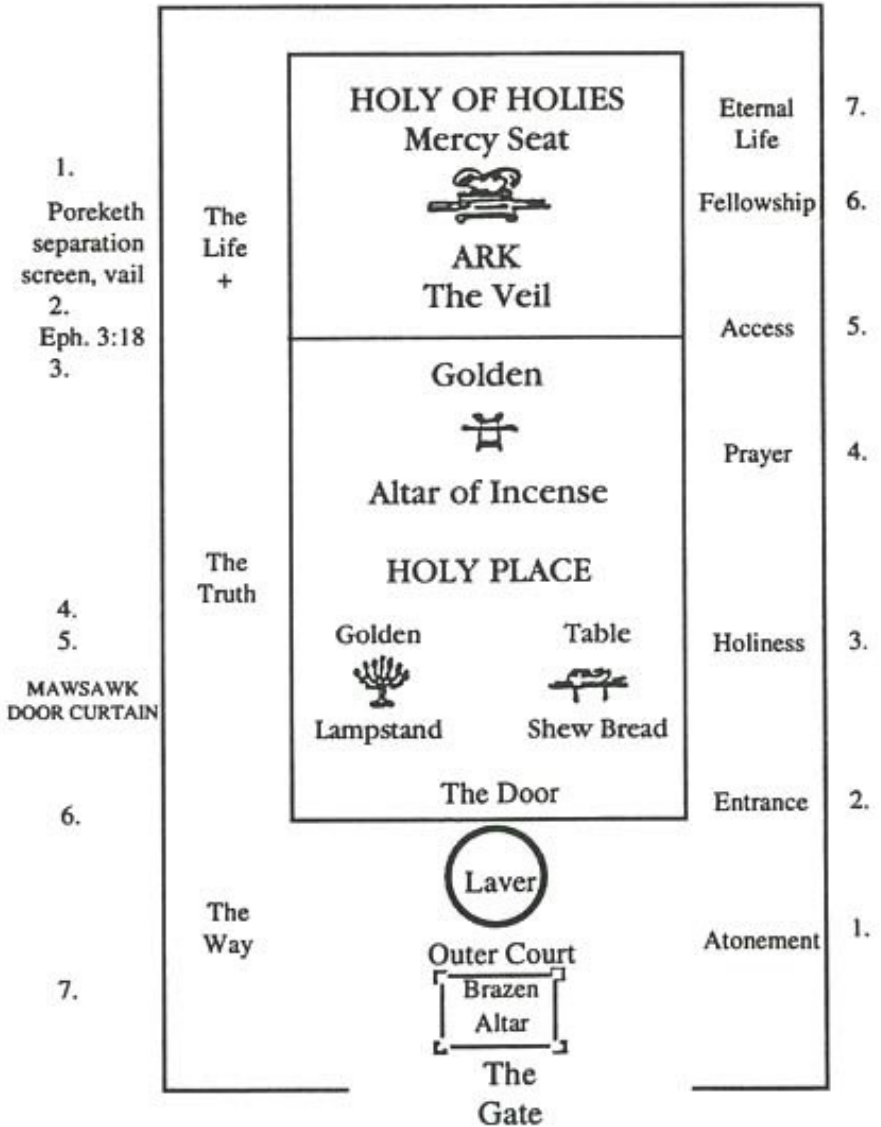
death on the cross for our sin. This washing can also represent baptism – a practice that did not begin with John the Baptist, but in with the ancient Hebrews who recognised their need of Baptism as a familiar concept of purification from the earth and from sin.

Beyond the alter and the laver, there were several other items. Aaron as High Priest had to follow the ritual God laid out, to the letter, lest he die. This also is a picture of needing to live for God in obedience. Spiritual death is the cost of not doing so. The sacrifice and the washing at the alter prepared Aaron for the remainder of the service he needed to fulfil within the Tabernacle. This also is a picture for us, that there is much more to be done as a follower of Jesus – after accepting the sacrifice and being made clean. We too are made clean for service to The King of Kings.

The alter and the laver are in the outer court. God doesn't intend for us to stop there. But we cannot go deeper into the things of God UNLESS we visit those two places first.

Most will never enter the gate.

Some think accepting Jesus sacrifice is the total of the journey.



Some believe and are baptised and think it ends there. Some play in the dirt and wash frequently in the laver, running back to the alter to re-commit themselves not knowing God has depths for them to discover.

There is more to be learned from the tabernacle, but the point here is the significance of purity (the purpose of the laver) – partially as an end in itself, but more so as a step on the way to the deeper things of God.

As mentioned many people live their Christian lives in the outer courts, and their experience of sin, be it sexual or otherwise, is like this parable of the do nut shop.

Parable of the Doughnuts R. Alcorn

Imagine someone whose weakness is eating doughnuts. His doctor says, "No more doughnuts." He vows to God, "No more doughnuts." He promises his family "No more doughnuts." He calls the church and gets on the prayer chain. He even goes to a doughnut deliverance ministry to have the demon of doughnut desire cast out of him.

Here's a guy who means business, right?

But then what does he do? Well, if he's like a lot of us, he goes right on reading about doughnuts, listening to doughnut music, and watching television programs about making doughnuts. He spends his time with other doughnut lovers talking about doughnuts, joking about doughnuts at the office, where he often glances at the doughnut calendars on the wall. He looks through the newspaper for doughnut coupons and subscribes to Doughnut Desires, with its glossy, colour photos.

It's not long before he's driving to work the long way that "just happens" to go by a doughnut shop. He rolls down the window and inhales. Pretty soon he's buying the morning paper from the rack right outside the doughnut shop. He's lingering just long enough to check out doughnuts through the window.

Then he remembers he has to make a phone call, and hey, what do you know, the doughnut shop has a pay phone. And since he's there anyway, why not have a cup of coffee?

Now, remember, this man has no intention of breaking his vow and eating doughnuts. But the totally predictable and inevitable result is—what? That he will give in and eat doughnuts!

And can't you just hear his sad lament? "What went wrong? I prayed! I asked others to pray. I asked God for deliverance. Why try? I give up. You do your best and look what happens!"

Have you thought about how it is God may want to use you in service to Him? Going beyond the altar and the laver? (Salvation and purity)

HEB 6:1-2 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

With the foundational things in place – faith in God and becoming purified daily, we will move in future chapters to some deeper issues.

Exercise

Write a paragraph on why understanding the purposeful use of the single years is relevant to your age. Can you think of anything further to the four points listed on page 20 that contribute purpose to these years of YOUR life?
