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Overcoming the Pervasive Negative Influence of the Spirit of the World

At the close of the previous message, we broadly considered the pervasive negative influence of the spirit of the world. In this message, we will look further into music and fashion, two areas in which the influence of the spirit of the world is very evident. We will also consider how we can overcome the world's negative influence while living in this fallen world.

Attractions of the world

Let us begin by observing from Matthew 4 how Satan sought to tempt the Lord Jesus with the attractions of the world and how the Lord Jesus overcame the temptations.

Matthew 4:8-10

8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;

9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.' "

The devil showed the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and said, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me."

The evil one used the things of the world to attract the Lord Jesus and lure the Lord to worship him. If the Lord had yielded to the temptation, He would in effect be worshipping the devil.

The evil one likewise seeks to tempt us and destroy us by using the world and the things of the world. We need to recognise his strategy and reject both the tempting things of the world and the evil one at work through them. It is not just about the things of the world and us. It has to do with how the evil one uses these things to tempt us and bring us under his influence.

If we yield to the temptations of the evil one, we will come under his influence. Let us learn from the Lord Jesus in being very decisive and categorical in rejecting the evil one. This is how He replied the evil one: "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.' " If we want to worship God and serve Him only, we must, like the Lord Jesus, take a firm stand to reject the evil one

and his working through the world to affect our lives. We must not allow ourselves to come under his influence in any way because the issues at stake are significant.

The Scriptures gives us clear injunctions on this subject. Paul emphasises the need for us to deny worldly desires (Titus 2:12). He also cautions us against being entangled in the affairs of everyday life (2 Tim. 2:4). In 1 Corinthians 2:12, he reminds us that we have received the Holy Spirit, and not the spirit of the world. James remarks that true religion is seen in God's children keeping themselves unstained by the world (James 1:27).

Satan and the powers of darkness are working in and through the things, activities and people of the fallen world, influencing its trends and values. It is therefore not surprising that the presence and negative effect of the spirit of the world are very pervasive. However, it is not always easy to perceive the spirit of the world at work because it can work very subtly. Many Christians may not be conscious that the spirit of the world is actively working through songs, music, television shows, movies, literature, art, and the like.

I shall now elaborate on the two areas that affect many people in this world: (1) songs and music and (2) clothes and fashion. What I will be considering with you on these two areas is also intended to serve as illustrations of helpful aspects to bear in mind in our approach and response to other issues we encounter in this fallen world. We must be vigilant and learn to recognise and effectively overcome the pervasive negative influence of the spirit of the world, so that we can be "in the world, yet not of the world". At the same time, it is important to have a wholesome appreciation of the biblical perspective of the issues involved and the proper place some of these areas can have in our lives.

1. Songs and music

I will be considering this subject from the spiritual perspective and not from the technical angle.

Many are not conscious that the evil one is actively influencing peoples' lives through songs and music. He often works subtly to influence our lives and values. Even Christians are vulnerable to the negative effects of songs and music.

Many contemporary pop songs are associated with fleshly lifestyles, a rebellious spirit, sensuality, emotionalism, promiscuity and the drug culture.

The spirit of the world can be expressed in various aspects of songs and music, for example:

- the lyrics
- the tune, tempo and rhythm of the music
- the way the song is sung
- the types of instruments used and how the music is played
- the arrangement of the music

Some may then ask: "Is there a place for songs and music in the life of a believer?" The answer is a clear "yes". Songs and music have a wonderful place in God's kingdom. We see this truth in the Scriptures and we can experience it in our own lives.

Let us take a look at how music featured in the life of David—a man after God's own heart— before considering songs and music in the context of the Old and the New Testament.

David the "sweet psalmist of Israel"

David, anointed by the Lord and filled with the Spirit, was described as the "sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1).

David said, "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). The Spirit of the Lord inspired David to compose many psalms, and many of them are found in the Book of Psalms.

Written above the psalms are comments on the musical aspects. In Old Testament times, these psalms were sung. We do not know the accompanying music used then, but many have sought to set the words of the psalms to music.

The psalms are very instructive. They have, over the centuries, helped many in their worship of God.

The Scriptures describes David as a gifted and skilful musician. But he was not merely naturally gifted. The Spirit of God enabled him to play the harp skilfully and with positive spiritual impact. We catch a glimpse of this in 1 Samuel 16:13-23.

Whenever an evil spirit terrorised King Saul, David would play the harp. Saul would be spiritually refreshed, and the evil spirit would depart from him (v. 23). The kind of music David played and the way he played it had a positive spiritual impact on King Saul. Likewise, songs and music can have a positive spiritual impact on our lives.

Songs and music in the Old Testament

In Old Testament times, music and singing were an integral part of worship. Many passages in the first Book of Chronicles depict this aspect in the national life of Israel. Let us first look at 1 Chronicles 6.

1 Chronicles 6:31-33

31 Now these are those whom David appointed over the service of song in the house of the Lord, after the ark rested there.

32 They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem; and they served in their office according to their order.

33 These are those who served with their sons: From the sons of the Kohathites were Heman the singer, the son of Joel, the son of Samuel,

In verse 31, we see a category of service in the house of the Lord known as “service of song”. It had to do with the worship of God. It was not ordinary singing, but a ministry through songs as part of service to God (v. 32).

Verse 33 tells us that Heman was a singer. The context suggests that he was appointed a singer not just because he had a natural ability to sing, but also because he was spiritually gifted to minister through songs. Verses 31 to 33, together with the subsequent verses, tell us that others ministered together with Heman through singing. This shows that singing is recognised as a form of spiritual ministry.

We turn to 1 Chronicles 15:

1 Chronicles 15:16

Then David spoke to the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their relatives the singers, with instruments of music, harps, lyres, loud-sounding cymbals, to raise sounds of joy.

David deeply appreciated songs and music and played a major role in facilitating the ministry of songs and music as an integral part of corporate worship of God in Old Testament times. In this verse, David gave instructions for singers to play musical instruments and raise sounds of joy. Notice that different types of instruments were used: harps, lyres, and cymbals.

1 Chronicles 16:7-10

7 Then on that day David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to the Lord.

8 Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name;
Make known His deeds among the peoples.

9 Sing to Him, sing praises to Him;
Speak of all His wonders.

10 Glory in His holy name;
Let the heart of those who seek the Lord be glad.

David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to the Lord and to make known His deeds among the peoples through singing. Singing praises to God, thanking Him and speaking of all His wonders are part of worship. Meaningful and appropriate lyrics that portray the greatness and goodness of God can help us express our worship of God.

In 1 Chronicles 25:1-7, we again see that some people were set apart to serve through music—"to prophesy with lyres, harps and cymbals" (v. 1). Among them were those "who prophesied in giving thanks and praising the Lord" (v. 3). God gave Heman, one of the leaders, many children and Heman directed them to serve in the house of God through singing and the playing of musical instruments (vs. 5-6). The total number of those skilfully trained in singing to the Lord was 288 (v. 7).

Thus, we see that songs and music were an integral part of corporate worship in Old Testament times, and were a part of service to God.

Songs and music in the New Testament

We shall now turn our attention to the New Testament.

The Lord Jesus singing with His disciples

The New Testament records the Lord Jesus singing with His disciples at the conclusion of the institution of the Lord's Supper, just before He was arrested and subsequently crucified. Matthew 26:30 records that "after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives". This was a significant moment in the life of our Lord, and He found it appropriate to sing a hymn with His disciples before spending an evening agonising in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. This shows to us that the singing of hymns can have a meaningful place in our life.

Singing spiritual songs—part of a Spirit-filled life

Let us look at more verses in the New Testament regarding songs and music, beginning with Ephesians 5.

Ephesians 5:18-20

18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,

19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

Here Paul exhorts us to be filled with the Spirit instead of being drunk with wine. When we are drunk, we may say and do things that are repulsive. In contrast, a Spirit-filled life would manifest itself in conduct that is edifying. Paul in this passage highlights songs and music as meaningful expressions of a Spirit-filled life. Our hearts breaking forth into songs and music is a spontaneous expression of appreciation of God and worship of Him.

In Colossians 3:16, Paul speaks on the same subject.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

When we are filled with the richness of God's truths, we will find it hard to contain the joy within. Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs will flow from our grateful hearts. Indeed, this is an appropriate way to express how much we appreciate God and His truths. Songs not only help us express our worship of God, they also teach and admonish us. Often the hymns we sing warm our hearts with a word of encouragement or pierce our hearts with a word of admonishment.

Songs and music in church history

Whether at the congregational or personal level, the singing of hymns has been an integral part of true worship of God throughout church history and all over the world.

Good hymns, such as those composed by believers like Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts, have enriched the lives of Christians and their worship of God. We can say such composers have been raised up by the Lord and they are spiritually gifted in this area. Their hymns have stood the test of time.

Songs and music in eternity

Some may wonder what life will be like in heaven. What will we do there? Although we do not know many of the details, the Scriptures clearly reveals that there will be singing in heaven and in eternity.

Let us refer to three passages in the Book of Revelation on this subject, beginning with Revelation 5:8-9.

Revelation 5:8-9

8 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

9 And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

In these verses, we see four living creatures and twenty-four elders, each with a harp, singing a new song in heaven. They were singing a song with spiritual content, a song in worship of the Lamb of God who was slain.

Revelation 14:1-4

1 Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.

3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.

4 These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

In this second passage, we see one hundred and forty-four thousand singing a new song before the heavenly throne. It was a song that only they were privileged to sing, for they have been faithful followers of the Lamb, and have kept themselves undefiled.

Revelation 15:1-3

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.

2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

3 And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and marvelous are Your works,
O Lord God, the Almighty;
Righteous and true are Your ways,
King of the nations!

In this third passage, the apostle John saw a sign in heaven. This sign gives us an insight into the kind of singing in eternity. Those who have overcome the enemies of God were seen holding harps and singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, praising God, His works, and His ways.

From all the passages of Scriptures we have referred to, we can conclude that songs and music are an integral part of the worship of God in both the Old and the New Testament times and in heaven and eternity as well. They tell us that the singing of hymns has meaning and significance in the spiritual realm.

Influence of songs and music

There is a spiritual dimension in songs and music that can be positive and edifying or negative and destructive. We can describe the direction of their influence and impact in the spiritual dimension as "the spirit of it".

"Christian" songs can be negative, neutral or edifying

We can classify "Christian" songs into three broad categories: neutral, negative or edifying.

"Neutral" songs are songs that are neither edifying nor negative and jarring.

"Negative" songs are those that are negative and jarring to our spirit. The negative aspects can be manifested in different ways. For example, the lyrics can reflect wrong doctrines, wrong understanding of the Scriptures or wrong emphasis in doctrine and practice. As mentioned earlier, the spirit of the world may also be manifested in the tune, tempo, rhythm, the kind of instruments used and the way the music is played, and the music arrangement. It may also be reflected in the degree of loudness. Apart from the lyrics and music, the approach and spirit of the person singing or playing the instruments are the more significant factors.

To sing in a manner that edifies, the singer must concentrate on the worship of God. He should seek to convey the positive meaning of the song from his heart so as to promote worship.

A singer may have a good voice, and technically, a song may be well sung and the music well played, yet it may not promote the spirit of worship.

A good voice can even be a hindrance if the singer is too self-conscious. Instead of concentrating on worshipping the Lord and conveying the meaning of the song, the singer may be wondering how others will view his singing. He may also be paying too much attention to the technical aspects of his singing. And if he sings to display his ability or if he has an arrogant spirit, the effects can be jarring and negative.

"Edifying" songs are those with meaningful lyrics and appropriate tunes. When they are sung prayerfully, they will be pleasant to the ears, and will draw our hearts towards God, promoting worship, faith, Christian values and sound convictions.

God gives spiritual gifts to some people to enable them to minister through hymns. Good hymns sung by the spiritually gifted can be very refreshing if they are sung prayerfully and with the right attitude. One who is gifted, though less mature spiritually, may be able to sing in a manner more edifying than another who is not gifted but more mature spiritually.

But it is also possible to be gifted in singing and yet sing in a way that is not helpful. A person's attitude of heart and approach in singing can make a significant difference

in the spiritual influence and impact. The gifted singer may, on one occasion, sing in a prayerful spirit that edifies others. Yet, on another occasion, he may sing in a self-confident manner, with a desire to impress others, thus projecting a negative spirit and would therefore not be edifying.

There can be a range within the three broad categories of songs. For example, in the category of songs that edify, some songs can be slightly edifying while some very edifying. There can also be a mixture in that a hymn can have positive aspects such as meaningful lyrics and appropriate tune, but the musical instruments used may be unsuitable, the way the music is played may be jarring, or the singer may be trying to display his voice and draw attention to himself.

The situation can be further complicated by another kind of mixture. This has to do with what is coming forth from the heart and spirit of the singer. He may be seeking to worship the Lord through his singing, but at the same time, there are negative elements in his spirit, for example, bitterness, anger, a covetous spirit or an unforgiving spirit. All these can be reflected in his singing.

"Non-Christian" songs

Many "non-Christian" songs are not worth listening to. Of greater concern is the negative effect they can have on us. This is often true of pop, rock or heavy metal music, where "the spirit of it" is negative. Such music also tends to be very loud, as is evident in discos, teen parties and rock concerts and can damage our hearing. What is even more serious is that they can damage our spiritual health. Many of these songs promote or glorify worldly values. If we are constantly exposed to such songs, our values may become worldly and our spirit adversely affected.

Some "non-Christian" songs can be classified as "neutral". For example, some folk songs and music can be relaxing to listen to. It is not wrong for us to appreciate them. God does give talents and skills to man, even to non-Christians, and it is not wrong for Christians to appreciate expressions of such talents in music and art. Just as we may appreciate beautiful pieces of art and paintings of God's creation, we may likewise appreciate good music pieces. However, we need to be conscious of the influence of the spirit of the world in the arts, whether it be paintings, theatre, movies, songs and music, dance, literature, or fashion.

How can we overcome the influence of the spirit of the world in songs and music? As Christians, we should avoid songs and music that are associated with fleshly lifestyles and worldly values. More importantly, we should concentrate on what edifies our spirit and promotes worship of the true and living God. We can sing and reflect on songs that help us in this direction, making melody in our hearts to the Lord.

2. Clothes and fashion

I will now elaborate on the manifestation of the spirit of the world in clothes and fashion. We will consider the biblical perspective and seek a wholesome appreciation of this area.

The spirit of the world is clearly manifested in this area, especially in affluent countries. We can see much extravagance, showing off, attention-seeking, and indecency in what is called "fashion". Some of these expressions can be rather outrageous; others are just silly.

Some people seek attention by being different from others. They want to project themselves as "non-conformists". They may dye their hair blue, green, red or multicolour. They may also put on unusual hairstyles and keep changing them. Some will wear unusual clothes such as patched jeans or trousers bought in that condition, while others will put on clothes and accessories that they hope are of a style no one else has ever worn.

There are also those who want to keep up with the latest fashion. They will wear the same style of clothes or accessories others are wearing just because they are in fashion, without considering their suitability or propriety. They may also blindly copy the clothes or hairstyles of celebrities.

But fashion changes with the whims and fancies of the day. Tomorrow, there will be some other "latest fashion", but they may be just as strange and vain.

Preoccupation with fashion is a waste of time and money. And such a preoccupation is not confined to women. Some men also spend extravagantly on such things. Even young people and students are spending large sums of money on clothes and fashion accessories.

However, while we exercise caution against worldly fashion, let us not swing to the other extreme and neglect our appearance. There is nothing commendable about ugliness or sloppiness in dressing. We must not take pride in or measure spirituality by how dull or drab our dressing is. We should not think that if we are committed Christians, we must dress in this way. There is a place for beauty. It is proper for us to pay some attention to the way we dress, and to dress in a manner pleasant to the eye.

Outward beauty in itself is not offensive to the Lord. God has created many things of great beauty, variety and colour. What is of concern is the wrong attitude in our approach to beauty.

It is all right to dress pleasantly, but we should not use this to rationalise indulgence in dressing. We should not seek attention by the way we dress or allow this area to be a distraction to ourselves or to others. Let us beware of vanity.

What counts is inner beauty

The world places emphasis on outward beauty, but outward beauty cannot make us better people. To God, it is inward beauty that counts. Let us look at 1 Peter 3:1-4.

1 Peter 3:1-4

1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives,

2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

3 Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;

4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

Although Peter is addressing women in this passage, the principle he is highlighting applies to men as well.

Women tend to be more preoccupied with this area of dressing. The wardrobes of many women are very costly. They spend much time, effort and money on make-up and various forms of beauty treatment in an attempt to improve their appearance.

Some women put on such heavy make-up that their natural beauty becomes obscured. Occasionally, we read reports of beauty treatments that have gone awfully wrong, and how the hapless customers have to undergo costly and painful remedial treatment.

In 1 Peter 3:1-4, the apostle Peter tells us not to concentrate on outward beauty, like braiding the hair, wearing gold jewellery and dressing. Instead, he urges us to develop inner beauty, the "hidden person of the heart", the "imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit". This is precious in the sight of God and has abiding, eternal significance. Such inner beauty will manifest itself in "chaste and respectful behavior".

In 1 Timothy 2:9-10, Paul instructs women on the way they should adorn themselves.

1 Timothy 2:9-10

9 Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments,

10 but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness.

In this passage, the apostle Paul instructs women to adorn themselves with modest and discreet clothing, and not ostentatiously. They should not adorn themselves with

braided hair, gold or pearls or costly garments, "but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness" (v. 10).

We see then that the scriptural emphasis is on inward beauty, not outward beauty. This is true for both men and women. Inward beauty is what God is concerned about, and we should seek to develop this in our own lives and encourage others to do likewise.

The spirit of the world—areas of greater significance

In different areas of life, the spirit of the world influences us in different ways and to varying extents. It is more serious in some areas than in others.

From my observation, it is more significant and pervasive in areas involving values, attitudes, emotions, human nature and the moral and spiritual dimension, compared to areas of a more technical and mechanical nature. For example, it is more problematic in the arts than in mathematics and science.

The approach that people take in physical sciences like physics, chemistry, biology, or engineering, is basically the same. For example, when we do calculations, study the different muscles of the human body or the reaction between two chemicals, it is unlikely that the spirit of the world is involved in the results and findings. Whether Christians or non-Christians, we calculate in the same way and we get the same result. And a non-Christian engineer may be more capable in his field than a Christian engineer.

There can however be problems when scientists go beyond observing and recording their findings of the physical world and allow their personal world view, attitude, values and ambition to affect their studies and results. It is also problematic when they venture into the studying of supernatural occurrences from a "scientific" viewpoint. Such areas cannot be approached merely in a "scientific way". The usual tools and approach to scientific studies are inadequate for the study and understanding of such occurrences. A person's spiritual health and knowledge of the realities in the spiritual realm will have a direct bearing on his ability to understand and interpret such occurrences.

Areas of a technical and mechanical nature in themselves, like the making and repairing of household appliances, machinery and vehicles, pose less of a problem. However, when attitudes and values are involved, the spirit of the world becomes an issue. Take a manufacturer for example. He may compromise moral and ethical principles in his desire to maximise profits. This desire may influence how he does his business and the quality of his products.

Unlike areas of a technical and mechanical nature, psychology and philosophy have to do with expressions of human emotions and experiences, thoughts and ideas. In such areas, it is easier for the evil one to lead us astray in our contemplations and study, and the influence of the spirit of the world is therefore more significant. This is also true, as we have noted earlier, in areas such as music and the arts¹.

Whatever we are involved in while living in this world, it is important that we are not distracted by the things of the world, nor drawn into its values and ways.

Spirit of true discipleship

Having seen the negative influence the spirit of the world can have on us, how can we keep ourselves from being absorbed in the things and issues of this fallen world? How can we be free from the influence of worldly trends and values?

We can do so by living with a spirit of true discipleship, constantly maintaining the proper values and perspective of God's eternal kingdom. Our spirit need not be negatively affected while we live in this fallen world. All the water in the world cannot sink a ship unless it gets inside. Likewise, all the evil and sin in this world cannot affect us unless we allow them to penetrate our hearts and corrupt us.

It is helpful, from time to time, perhaps each night before we sleep, to examine before the Lord whether we are living with the spirit of true discipleship, or whether we have allowed the spirit of the world to seep into our lives. We need to nurture our relationship with the Lord and our spiritual life. To do that, our personal time with the Lord and our active participation in church life are very important.

Most of us are subject to many hours of worldly influences each day. We need therefore to jealously guard our time with the Lord, to draw near to Him, renew our minds, strengthen our spirits, and affirm afresh our convictions and our commitment to the Lord. And whatever context we may be in, we need to remain in close fellowship with the Lord, maintain the right perspective and be ever conscious of the fact that we are citizens of heaven living in a fallen world. This is necessary if we are to overcome the powerful negative influences the evil one seeks to bring into our lives.

A "friendly" and attractive world may be more dangerous and damaging to our faith than a persecuting world. In the face of persecution, we may be very conscious of the need to seek the Lord and draw near to Him. But in the midst of a "friendly" world, we can easily lose our guard and yield to negative influences. It is easy for us to increasingly receive into our lives what the world is subtly offering us. It is more comfortable and pleasurable to follow the trend of the world. But our love for God will grow cold as a result.

¹ A more detailed consideration of these issues is covered in messages AR235-241, which can be found on the website www.godandtruth.com.

If we want to be worthy disciples of Christ, we cannot let the influence of the world corrupt us spiritually. Whatever our environment, we must remain prayerful and vigilant.

Let us live with the spirit of true discipleship, determined to overcome the pervasive negative influences of the evil one. As we do so, we will be more able to grow and contribute to the advancement of God's kingdom. I will expand on this subject in the next message and consider with you how our time on earth can be meaningfully spent and how we can grow and contribute to the advancement of God's kingdom.

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