

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Deception & Discernment

March 19, 2023
Series: Taking Ground
Joshua 9

**BIG IDEA – HOW WE ARE DECEIVED AND HOW TO CULTIVATE
DISCERNMENT IN OUR LIVES**

Guys, we're excited. I'm excited about Easter. Easter is three weeks from this weekend. Mark your calendar. We're doing something unique. When you got in, you got *this* little card on your seats. We are doing five services across more than just a weekend. We're going to do something we've never done before. We're going to do a Thursday service. That's at 6:30. That's for everyone who wants to come, but especially...

Here's what we've found. We're only six years old. Over the last five or six years, there are certain people who have never been able to be part of an Easter service with us because they go and visit... They're a young couple, so they go and visit the in-laws. Or our college students. We have about 150 college students. They always go home to visit their parents. So we wanted to celebrate Easter with our young couples and our college students, anyone who can make it Thursday night.

Then we have Saturday night service. If you can come Saturday night and serve Sunday, that would be huge. We are anticipating record crowds, record people coming. Let me get really personal for a second. When it comes to Easter and Christmas, it is simultaneously the easiest and the hardest sermon I write each year.

There are certain people... We love them, but we call them *CEOs* (Christmas and Easter Only). They come only those two times. They always complain. "I don't go to church because every time I do, they only talk about the virgin birth and the resurrection." It's like, "Those are the two Sundays you come."

So, I'm going to be talking about the resurrection, but I just want to let you know ahead of time so you can be praying for me and for us and know what you're inviting your friends to. I promise to be on my best behavior. Here's what we're going to be talking about: Luke 24:5. It's very interesting.

It's when the angels asked the first disciples at the empty tomb a question that I think is very relevant for today. "Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" Or "Why are you looking for life in places that only lead to death?" Or, maybe the most positive way to say it, "Why are you looking for the right things in the wrong places?"

So, we gave you a card. That's just for you to invite one person. If you want to get more cards and invite more people, you can stop at the welcome tent. Here's what we know about Easter. There are three times when a person who otherwise would not come to church will come to church. Let me give you those three times.

The first time is when life is not going well for them. We never know when that's going to be. For some of you, that's why you're here. "My marriage fell apart" or "My kid is breaking my heart" or "I'm stressed out" or "I experienced tragedy." What does C.S. Lewis say? Something like, "God whispers in our pleasures, speaks to us every day, but uses a megaphone in our pain."

So, we never know when that's going to happen. We have relationships with people, and then when the chance opens up, we say, "Maybe this would be a good time for you to come to church." The other two times are Christmas and Easter. People come at Christmas because it gives them all the holiday feels. People come at Easter because they feel like, "If I'm ever going to go to church, I'm going to go to church when everybody goes to church."

So, here's what we would ask. Here's how relationships work. You know this. It's kind of like a bank account. You make a lot of deposits in a relationship so that at the right time you can make a withdrawal. It'll be up to you who you would want to invite and if it would be the right time. We never wanted to be a church that said, "Please invite your friends." We wanted to create an environment, hopefully, where you're like, "This is changing my life and my family's life, and I'd like to bring other people into it."

In preparation for our prayer night... Let me just tell you that tomorrow night, if you can make it, is going to be really special. We're going to be doing our first night of prayer and worship. Donovan and his team are going to be leading us in worship. I'm going to be leading us in an extended time of prayer together.

We're going to be celebrating all that God has done so far this year together, as well as we're going to be praying for our church and for our city as we head toward Easter

and head into the new building. So, let me pray for us, and then we're going to be in Joshua, chapter 9, for the rest of the morning. Let's pray.

Lord, we are thankful that we still live in a time where, especially at Christmas and Easter, people in our lives, maybe who we would be surprised, are willing to come to church. I read a study recently that said 51 percent of Americans said if they were sincerely invited by a friend, they would try church. So, sometimes we're more afraid to ask people.

Lord, we know Christianity is primarily a "Go and tell" faith. We go and tell into our neighborhoods and into our workplaces, but we also know that as we're going and telling, every once in a while it's time to have a "Come and see." "Come and see my family. Come and see my Christian friends. Come and see my church." Lord, would you give us a winsome personality in a wise way to invite those who are far from God and close to us to their next "Come and see"? We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

How do you know when you're being deceived? I guess you don't. If you know you're being deceived, you're not being deceived. What's interesting about being deceived is when you're deceived, it feels, in the moment, the exact same as being told the truth. It's only an hour later or days later or sometimes years later that you realize you've been deceived.

Today in Joshua, chapter 9, we're going to see God's people are deceived. Now, there are not many bad things said about Joshua. He's one of the guys in the Bible... It's like, "Man, for the most part, he's a great guy." He has two defeats. We looked at the first one. We're not going to go back there. That was the defeat at Ai. That was spiritual pride. That was secret sin.

The other thing that defeats him is deception. I just felt like we have to talk about this for a whole morning because deception is a big deal. I mean, think about Satan. Satan has many names in the Bible... Lucifer, the Accuser of the Brethren, as well as the Deceiver. In fact, the first time Satan shows up, what does he show up as? A crafty serpent who tells us lies.

The New Testament says that Satan shows up as a roaring lion, seeking those to devour, but I think in America he mostly shows up as the crafty, deceiving Serpent. So, here's where we're going. Here's the big idea for this sermon and for this text. We need to understand how we're deceived, and we need to cultivate discernment.

John MacArthur (maybe you've heard of him)... He's 82 years old, still pastoring in California. His diagnosis of the American church is the American church's greatest problem is a lack of discernment. Discernment is the unique ability... It's really a spiritual ability because we have the Holy Spirit inside us and because we have God's

Word. Here's what discernment is: "I know the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and lies."

Do we ever need this more than now in an information overload society? Do you remember during COVID all the information and misinformation and disinformation? It doesn't matter what side you were on, because everybody switched sides and the sides said different things at different times.

Did any of you bleach your groceries? We had people who did that. How about false advertising? That's more everyday. On your social media account or on television or wherever you're watching something, you get all this false advertising. You kind of feel like, "Am I being deceived?"

I got this advertisement for these little things you put on your stomach that shock you to give you six-pack abs. Has anyone else seen these? Literally, I thought to myself, "This is ridiculous!" And I also thought, "I might buy this." I didn't buy it, but I literally was like, "It's not that expensive. I could try it. The guy eats potato chips and has a six-pack."

On a serious note, there's a lot of political propaganda, which is when the state lies to you. That's a very old story in human history. If you go back and read the story of the Nazis... Just Google "Nazi propaganda." Google "Soviet Union propaganda," and you'll see how the government will lie to you at times and tell you the exact opposite of what's happening.

For example, in North Korea it's called the *People's Republic of North Korea*. If there's one thing it's not, it's the people's republic of anything. So, on a serious note... By the way, some of this sermon will be offensive. The rest of it will be very offensive. Think about right now. I'll give you the only two examples I can think of, but they're so prevalent.

Right now, abortion is talked about as a woman's reproductive right. It's not talked about as the innocent killing of an unborn baby. Right now, a healthy 16-year-old girl will get a double mastectomy because she thinks she's a boy, and we'll call it the Orwellian phrase *gender affirmation surgery*. You couldn't call it more the opposite of what it is.

This is why people believe in conspiracy theories. Do you ever wonder why your grandmother or your aunt is posting about conspiracy theories on her Facebook page? Conspiracy theories are very interesting. I heard a guy say, "Do you want to know why Americans believe conspiracy theories? Two words: Jeffrey Epstein." The fact that that guy existed, he was friends with celebrities, he had a private plane, he had a private island, and he killed himself while the cameras weren't working...

We have so much information. We're trying to figure out what's true, what are lies, what's right, what's wrong, what's good, and what's evil. I want us to look today at the story of Joshua and learn some lessons about how we're deceived, so hopefully we can not be deceived, and how we can cultivate discernment. Turn with me to verse 1. I'll show you this. This is kind of intro.

Joshua 9:1: ***"As soon as all the kings..."*** Not *some...all*. ***"...who were beyond the Jordan in the hill country and in the lowland all along the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites* [the termites, the electrolytes]...***"*** A lot of "-ites." ***"...they gathered together as one to fight against Joshua and Israel."*****

I'm not a doomsday person, but I want you to realize the kings represent the enemies of God's people. What often unites a lot of people is their hatred toward God's people. It's very interesting. I don't know exactly when this changed. They say that up until about 1990, the view of the average American toward Christianity was positive.

It had to do with, basically, our morality and the morality of the culture were similar enough. There was the haunting of the Judeo-Christian worldview. There was a lot of agreement, so they viewed Christianity as positive. There was a time in our nation a long, long time ago when if you were going to get a mortgage on your house, you had to show that you were a member of a church or a synagogue.

Then somewhere around the late 90s and 2000s (we don't know exactly when), there became more of a, we call it, neutral view toward Christianity. "Take it or leave it. I don't care what you believe, but just don't bother us." Now, since about 2010, there has been more of a negative view.

Here's what happens. If you read the *New York Times*, and different things like that, and these opinion articles about Christianity, they'll always say the same thing, which is kind of scary, because I'm like, "Who came up with this, and why is everybody quoting everybody?" They'll say something like this about Christians: "Their faith should just be in their homes and their hearts."

The world doesn't mind personal, private faith. The world minds public faith. The world gets most angry at Christians over two things: our ethics and our evangelism. Anytime we say, "This is what God has said about this area," that's when they get upset, or when we say, "Actually, we have a message that's for everybody, and we believe in conversion. We believe in personal repentance."

So, I want you to see at the beginning what happens is these five little empires come together to fight against God's people. That's kind of the intro. Now we're going to be

introduced to the Gibeonites, and let me just tell you what happens, because it gets a little confusing.

We'll see in a minute the Gibeonites only live 10 miles away, but they're going to dress and act and talk like they live really far away. This passage is called the *Gibeonite deception*. The Gibeonites are going to come in, and they are going to deceive God's people, particularly, by deceiving their leaders.

Then almost immediately after they're deceived... Sometimes you find out you're deceived years later. That's really painful. A lot of times you find out shortly after you've been deceived, like, "I was just deceived." They figure that out. Then the third thing is they have to live and learn from their deception. I'll show you all this.

01 HOW ARE WE DECEIVED?

Let's look at verse 3. ***"But when the inhabitants of Gibeon..."*** That's who we're going to talk about the rest of the time. ***"...heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai..."*** They heard about the victory of God's people. ***"...they on their part acted with cunning [craftiness] and went and made ready provisions and took worn-out..."*** That word will be used four times.

"...worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes. And all their provisions were dry and crumbly." We may not understand this because today we think it's cool to wear worn-out clothes. It's like, "Look. I've got holes in my jeans. These are vintage." Back then, if you wore worn-out clothes, people thought, "Oh, those are old." That's what people used to think.

What they're doing is dressing in such a way to look... Though they're 10 miles away, they're trying to deceive God's people and look like they're from very far away. Verse 6: ***"And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, 'We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us.'"***

Let me talk a little bit about how we're deceived. This is very simple, but most simple things are true; we just need to embrace them. The first thing is we tend to be deceived by *appearances*. We can be deceived by the degrees somebody has, the position they hold, or the way they dress.

Remember that story, the famous movie that came out about 20 years ago, *Catch Me If You Can*? Frank Abagnale Jr. What an amazing story. What a profound and fascinating story. Somehow, just by the way he... He was also smart, but by the way he would

dress and the confidence he had, he impersonated a pilot (yikes), a lawyer, and a doctor. It's really a fascinating story. It shows you the power of people to believe appearances.

I think, for us in the church today, often what happens is we tend to believe... You wonder, "How do all of these nice Christians end up listening to these false teachers?" I think part of it is we think false teachers are going to have small horns coming out of their head and are going to be very mean. Most false teachers are very nice. They smile a lot, and they ask a lot of questions of the Bible and give no answers.

If we are deceived by appearances, how does that work? I want to go one level deeper with us. I'm going to give us some big phrases, but I think they're helpful. Three reasons, as people who study...just in general, not just Christians...why people are deceived. We all know this too. Certain people are more deceived than others.

Certain people are a little bit more gullible. Did you know they took *gullible* out of the dictionary? If you believe that, you're gullible. That was a test. It's still in the dictionary. There are certain people who are a little bit more gullible, who are a little bit more naïve, but let me tell you three reasons people tend to be deceived. These are big phrases.

The first is what's called *confirmation bias*. It's that we are most likely to continue to believe what we already believe, obviously. Or we're most likely to believe what we want to believe in a situation. So, in this situation, we don't know for sure. I'm imagining a little bit.

Maybe Joshua and the guys didn't want to fight another battle right then, so maybe the best thing they would want to believe (we don't know this for sure) is "Man, this is great. We have friends in the area. They live far away. This is a battle we won't have to fight. We can enter into covenant with them." Confirmation bias is the reason... Well, let me even go back one level lower under this.

Basically, what happens is whenever your beliefs are challenged... Part of what your beliefs do (not just Christians...anyone's beliefs) is they regulate your emotional state. So, as soon as you find out you're wrong about something, it's like, "How wrong am I, how long have I been wrong, and what else am I wrong about?" We don't like to feel that.

This is why people choose to live in areas with people who believe the exact same things as them. This is why if you lean more left politically, you'll feel very comfortable in Ardmore or West End. If you lean right politically, you'll feel very comfortable in Clemmons or in Lewisville or on the other side of the river in Davie County.

We don't like to be around people who believe the opposite of us because it makes us have to rethink our beliefs and if they are really true. I'll give you a really practical example. This is why a parent who has a confirmation bias that their kid could never do anything wrong... Have you ever met that parent? It's very hard to talk to them. The teacher tries to tell the parent, "This is how your child..." "No, little Johnny would never." Johnny does.

Confirmation bias is the whole idea that we see life through a lens, and we are looking for things to affirm what we already believe. I saw this event where a guy was talking to a leader. They were doing kind of a Q&A. He said, "I just found out my spouse is cheating on me. What should I do?"

I thought the leader was so wise. He talked back to the guy. He said, "Well, let's be honest. Did you just find out or have there been signs for months, or maybe even years, but you didn't want to see it?" Part of the reason we're deceived is there are certain things we don't want to see. That's confirmation bias.

Secondly, *emotional vulnerability*. The more emotionally unstable you are at any given time, the more likely you are to be deceived during that time. This is why, if you ever... Some of you have been a part of these programs. If you've ever been a part of anything like Alcoholics Anonymous or any anonymous recovery group, one of the things they teach you very early on is the acronym *HALT*, which is just a good acronym for all of us to know struggling with any sin. It stands for *hungry, angry, lonely, tired*.

Basically (this is great advice), what they tell people is, "Hey, listen. No matter how many alcohol-free days you've had, no matter how long you've done it, don't ever think you couldn't find yourself in a situation where you believed the lies again." They kind of go together. If you're hungry *and* angry...

Here's what happens. A lot of times, somebody gets out of a relationship. Sometimes it's a divorce, God forbid. Sometimes it's just that you had a really serious relationship for a couple of years, and it didn't work out, and you broke up. Usually, both people (I'm not speaking this over anyone) or one of those people becomes unbelievably emotionally vulnerable.

They start dating someone they never would. They start doing things they never... They start drinking more than they... They become unbelievably emotionally vulnerable, and we're more tempted in that moment to believe lies.

The third is very simple. It's just a *lack of information*. Here's kind of the triad, or the trinity. If you have a confirmation to already believe something, it's going to be easier to deceive you in that area. If you're also emotionally vulnerable, and then, thirdly, if

you know very little about that area... This is basic truth. You and I are most likely to be deceived in an area we know the least about.

I mean, pray for my wife. She married the least handy person ever. I know nothing about any of this stuff. Anytime I take my car to the shop, I like to act like I know what I'm doing. I'm like, "Yep, just get that oil changed, and rotate those tires while you're doing it." That's all I know.

But they can come back to me like, "All right. You need a new flux capacitor." I'm like, "I guess we need it. It's \$1,000." We've all felt that. The contractor comes over. It's like, "What should this cost?" We're usually trying to call somebody else to figure out, because in an area we know little about, we're most likely to get deceived.

Let's see how the story continues. Look at verse 7. We get kind of the first thought that maybe they realize something is off. **"But the men of Israel** [Joshua and the leaders] **said to the Hivites...**" Look at this. You can see in the text that they have a feeling something may not be right. **"Perhaps you live among us; then how can we make a covenant with you?"**

I want to give you the first principle of discernment, which is *listen to your gut*. God has given us a gut. Every human has kind of that gut, but when you become a Christian, you get the Holy Spirit who lives in us and who leads us. A friend of mine calls this the *God pause*.

Something is happening, and you're like, "I just need to pause about this, and I just need to listen to my gut." I would never ask anyone to stand and share this, but I bet a lot of us in here, if we looked back over some area of our life where we really fell into some sin or got into some unhealthy relationship or ended down a path...

We're like, "How did I get here?" The answer to "How did I get here?" is always "One step at a time." But if we look back, oftentimes, if we're really... It's hard to be this honest with ourselves. If we're really honest with ourselves, we'll say something like, "Man, I knew on date two that he or she wasn't right for me. I could feel it."

This is why whenever I do premarital counseling (I learned this from the guy who did our premarital counseling), the first question I ask after, "Great to meet you. What are your names? Tell me your testimonies. Tell me a little bit about your family..." The first question I was taught to ask is "Hey, have either of your parents expressed any concerns about this relationship?" It's the gut question.

Even if they're not Christian, Mom and Dad usually have a unique gut. Let me just encourage parents. Now some parents... I can't say everything to every parent. Some parents have a bomb shelter mentality. They're too protective of their kids. But I

want to encourage parents, as well, to just lean in. If you're a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. Sometimes you'll just not feel good about something, and that's okay.

You don't even have to tell the whole story to everybody. You might just be like, "I don't feel good about my kid sleeping over at their house. I don't know why." My grandma used to say some people just give you the heebie-jeebies. I know you're not allowed to say that today. That's not being judgmental; that's judging. That's wisdom. That's discernment.

So, the first thing they don't do is they don't check their gut. Let me ask *you*. Where do you not have peace? Don't make progress if you don't have peace. We can talk about how you get peace. You go to the Scriptures. You talk to others in community. But so many of us... Here's another way to talk about this really quickly. Don't go against your conscience. It's the same thing.

I've talked about this before, but your conscience is the last internal line of defense God gives you. The conscience is a very interesting thing. Romans 14 talks about the conscience. Basically, here's the whole teaching of the conscience in a sentence: Never go against your conscience. Even if the Bible says you can do something, if your conscience says, "Don't do it," don't do it.

There may be an area... This happens a lot of times. The Bible says, "You're free to do this." Alcohol is a great example. Jesus drank in moderation, and we know all the Christian summary of why it's okay to drink in moderation, but there are some people who go, "I just can't, because I've seen what it has done to my family, and though the Bible allows it, I cannot go against my conscience."

If you go against your conscience, it's like lying to your spouse. The first time you do it, it's hard. The second time you do it, it's a little easier, and then it becomes natural. If you wake up one day, and you're the kind of person who can just do a bunch of things, and your conscience is what the New Testament says is seared, that's not a great place to be.

Let's continue on. Here's what happens. The first thing they're deceived by is appearance. The second thing they're deceived by is *words*. Look at verse 8. "**They said to Joshua, 'We are your servants.'**" That sounds good. They tell them what they want to hear. That's confirmation bias.

"And Joshua said to them, 'Who are you? And where do you come from?' They said to him, 'From a very distant country your servants have come, because of the name of the LORD your God. For we have heard a report of him, and all that he did in Egypt...'" I mean, give these guys the Academy Award. They deserve an Oscar. Look at this. ***"...and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the***

Jordan, to Sihon the king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, who lived in Ashtaroth."

Now, they're very smart. News did not travel very quickly back then. You'll notice they don't mention the battle at Jericho. They don't mention the battle at Ai. Why? Because if they mentioned those two battles, they would give it away that they live nearby. They mention these faraway battles in Egypt.

Here's the second thing. I'm particularly speaking to Christians. How are we deceived by words? Christians tend to be deceived anytime anyone talks about God. I think it's just because we so badly want people to believe. We're sheep. Christians are sheep. We want to assume the best of people. So any politician who mentions God, we get excited. Any celebrity who mentions God, we get super excited.

This week, I had three different people send me that Jim Carrey... Did anyone else see this? I don't know anything about it except that Jim Carrey was speaking somewhere, and he said something that was like, "Hey, listen, guys. We just need to forgive each other like Jesus forgave us." Multiple people were texting me. "Is Jim Carrey a Christian?" I don't know. I got excited too for a minute.

Some of us are like, "He's a Christian. He said, 'God bless you.'" It's like, "You sneezed. I don't know if he's godly. I think he's polite." The temptation for us is anytime someone starts to talk about God... I've seen young women be duped by this before. They meet a guy who says he believes in God, and he'll go to church, and that's enough because she so badly wants to believe he's a Christian, and then she finds herself in a very painful and unequally yoked marriage.

02 WHAT LIES DO WE BELIEVE TODAY?

With the time left, I want to show us how to cultivate discernment, but before I do that, I want to stop for a minute and talk about some of the lies we believe. Let me give us a category of lies we believe in culture and lies we believe in the church just quickly, because I think it's helpful.

I spent all week thinking, "What are the unique lies...?" Every generation, every nation, has the lies it believes. I'm going to give you a few lies we believe in culture today that most people believe and are deceived by and a few lies we believe in the church.

The number-one lie in the culture today is that tolerance is the highest value and highest virtue. *Tolerance* used to mean, "I disagree with you, but I'll put up with you. I disagree with you, but I'll fight for your right to be able to say what you believe. Fair

enough." *Tolerance* now means, "I approve. I affirm. I celebrate." This, by the way, is everywhere.

Anywhere you see diversity, inclusivity, and equity signs, that's the language of the new tolerance. Let me explain what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches the highest value isn't tolerance; the highest value is truth. The culture believes the most important thing is my rights. Everything is about my rights, and I just keep needing more of them, and more and more people need to understand my rights. The Bible says, actually, it's not as much about your rights as it's about repentance.

We live in a culture right now that people think the most mature person is the most tolerant person, and what they mean by that is can put up with the most goofy and strange things and act like they're normal. That is the most mature person in a tolerant culture.

The second lie we believe is that love equals love. Have you ever seen those bumper stickers? We define something by itself. Now, obviously, the Bible has a huge value for love. God is love. But we have a very therapeutic view of love in this society that love is a feeling. It may be a romantic feeling.

There are three things about love in the Bible. Love is allegiance, action, and affection. It's all of those. You can think about a wedding. That's a perfect example of love. I stand up in front of everyone and make an allegiance, and I tell you all of the actions I'm going to do because of the affections I feel. That's love.

We live in a society that thinks love is a feeling. That's how you can fall out of love. Even that language... "We fell out of love." Okay, so, it's kind of out of your control. Or we think love is "If I love you, I will make you feel good." Have you ever gotten in a fight with your spouse, and your spouse said, "You're not being very loving right now"? Well, you might not be being very loving, so you need to check that, or you might have just told him or her the truth and it didn't *feel* loving in the moment.

Here's a great definition of *love*: "I'm committed to your highest good." Your conscience can be clean, and you can sleep well if you're like, "That was a really hard conversation, but I've checked my heart. I was trying to be committed to their highest good in that conversation."

That sometimes means you have to upset present spouse because you love future spouse. There's a lot more future spouse than present spouse. You have to tell him or her or your son or your daughter something hard in the moment because you love who they're going to be in the future, and you care about that.

The third lie, and this is a huge one (I'm not trying to pick this fight; this is a fight the culture is bringing toward us), is that your sexual identity is the most important thing about you. Adolescents have, for all of human history, been confused about sexuality. We're not doing them any favor in telling them it's the most important thing about them.

By the way, if you just think about it... This is how deception works. If you think about it for a minute, you're like, "Wait a second. Hold on. I just need to think about this. It's not logical." Here's what the society is telling us. It's telling us two things that can't be true at the same time. "Your sexuality is the most important thing about you. And if you don't like it, you can change it." Do you see how they both can't be true? "Your sexuality is paramount, and you can be non-binary the next day."

The truth is sexuality is a component of our lives, and humans for all of human history have struggled to figure out how to integrate their sexuality into the rest of their lives. That has been a struggle for everybody. We're to bring our sexuality under the lordship of Christ and ask him to help us with our sexual brokenness and our sexually disordered desires.

The fourth lie our culture believes is that you will find the most happiness in your career. This is a lie that's told to everybody, but young women are believing this more and more and more because it's young women who are in college. It's young women who are really excelling in medicine and law school and all of those things. Praise the Lord for all that.

But I think the lie we believe is "Somehow, I'm going to find this unbelievable career. All I need to do is get to the best schools and get into the best companies, and somehow, if I make whatever it is, and I'm in *this* company and have *this* position, I'm going to be happy." Here's the truth: most people don't have fulfilling careers; they get jobs. A job is something you wouldn't do if someone wasn't paying you. You're like, "Yeah, I've got one of those." Most of us are like, "That's what I have."

You know, I'm not trying to make this about me. I cannot believe what I get to do for a living. I have an unbelievably fulfilling career, but it's not nearly as exciting as my family. My brother and I were talking about a golf trip we're hoping to do this summer. I'm so excited. I have one brother. Your family of origin, your marriage and your kids if God gives them to you, your relationship with God, and your friendships are going to be way more rewarding.

I'm watching a generation give up on all of those things for their careers, and I'm just preparing to have a bunch of upset 40- and 50-year-olds who are brokenhearted by all of the lies of the culture. We're not going to say, "We told you so." We're going to love them and minister to them when they come back to church.

The fifth lie the culture believes is that this life is the only life we get. We're not against travel, but why does everybody want to travel? Why does no one want to get married or have kids? It's like, "I have seven or eight decades, and I need to go to Europe again. I need to live in 15 different cities." Why? "Because this is the only life I have." If this is the only life you have... YOLO, as they say. "You only live once." Christians believe in YOLT, "You only live twice," here and in heaven.

You lose the value of service, the value of sacrifice, the value of generosity, and the value of delaying something if you believe, "I have to get everything right here." Those are, as I can tell, the big lies in the culture. I'll give you a couple of lies in the church. The lies in the church are more the same as they've always been. I'll just give you three of them.

One lie in the church is what's called *legalism*. That's a big word. Basically, it means that Christians tend to believe that somehow God loves them more when they obey. Here's the truth. We relate to God by grace. On your best day, you still need God's grace, and on your worst day, you're not out of reach of God's grace. That's what we live in.

There are some days you might be tempted to think, "I don't need God's grace. God is very lucky to have me on his team." There are other days where you'll have completely blown it, and you got caught or your sin found you out or you disappointed someone, and you'll feel like you're outside of God's grace. Those are both lies. You're never outside of the grace of God, and you never don't need the grace of God.

The second lie we believe is on the opposite side of the church. It's not legalism; it's license. These are always the two... I think I've told you before Martin Luther said the Christian is like a drunk man on his horse. He falls off one side, gets back on the horse, and falls off the other side.

License is basically, "It doesn't matter how I live," which I think may be even more of a temptation for the younger generation in the church. Kevin DeYoung, who is a well-known pastor in Charlotte, North Carolina, said he thinks the one thing missing from young Christianity, Christianity under 40, is holiness.

We're very excited about church planting. We're very excited about world missions. We're very excited about social activism. We're not very passionate about our personal holiness and that it matters and makes a difference. The truth is your personal holiness is one of the greatest gifts you can give to anyone you're in relationship with.

The third lie in the church (I think this is maybe the most pervasive lie) is that somehow everybody is going to be okay. This is what we call *functional universalism*. Now, I know we would say up here, "No, we believe in heaven and hell." Well, do you think anyone is going to hell?

I think we're losing an intensity and urgency and the necessity of evangelism. We give lip service to, "Yeah, we have lost people, and we want to reach them," but we kind of think at the end of the day they'll be okay. Aren't they going to just have a deathbed conversion moment? "Yeah, she's a good nominal Catholic. She probably knows the Lord." We want to kick them in the kingdom.

"Yeah, I'm sure Dad... I know he doesn't read the Bible. I know I've never seen any life change in him, but I think he'll be okay." There needs to be an urgency. I think Satan is deceiving us. Everybody isn't okay. It doesn't go well for everyone forever. As Christians, there should be a necessity and an urgency to our evangelism.

03 HOW DO WE PROTECT OURSELVES FROM BEING DECEIVED?

So, those are the lies. Let me show you how we can not be deceived now. I showed you the first thing with the gut. Let me show you the rest of it. Look with me at verse 11.

"So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country said to us, 'Take provisions in your hand for the journey and go to meet them and say to them, 'We are your servants. Come now, make a covenant with us.'" Here is our bread. It was still warm when we took it from our houses as our food for the journey on the day we set out to come to you, but now, behold, it is dry and crumbly. These wineskins were new when we filled them, and behold, they have burst. And these garments and sandals of ours are worn out from the very long journey.'"

Verse 14: ***"So the men took some of their provisions..."*** Here's the key verse in the whole chapter. You can see it. ***"...but did not ask counsel from the LORD. And Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live, and the leaders of the congregation swore to them. At the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, they heard that they were their neighbors and that they lived among them."***

So, we see they're deceived, and then they find out that they're deceived. Let me give you four more things quickly that'll help you and me not be deceived. They're very simple. You probably know what I'm going to say before I say them, but let me just give them to you.

The first thing you need if you're not going to be deceived is *time*. Do you notice the Gibeonites didn't want to give them time? "Hey, you need to make a decision." In fact, we find out that it's three days later. That's all it is. You're like, "Three days? So if they would have waited three days..." If they would have said, "Give us a few days to think and pray about this and decide whether or not we're going to enter into this covenant with you..."

If they had had three more days, they would have found out the Gibeonites were lying to them. Where do you need to...? I know it's different based on your life stage and based on your schedule and based on your work. When and where do you need to get away (with your spouse if you're married) and say, "There are a couple of things we need to stop working in and start working on and working above"?

Here's what I find. You may say, "I don't have time, Kyle. I don't have time to get away and really think about my kids or our marriage or where we're headed or our finances." Here's what I've found. People don't think they have time, but have you ever met the family that has a very, very rebellious son or daughter? All of a sudden, they find time. It doesn't matter how busy they are. They found time. They were able to get away. He was able to not travel as much.

Sometimes it's on the back end. It's when things have already happened. It would be much better to go, "We need to get away." Here's a principle for my life. If you're in leadership, I'm sure this happens to many of you too. People come to you all the time with ideas and requests. If anyone pushes on me for something, I say, "If you need to know now, the answer is no." It's a great thing to tell your kids as well.

It's very, very helpful. I learned that from somebody else. "If you need to know now, the answer is no. If you'll give me some time, I'd love to pray about this. I'd love to get to a 'Maybe.' I'd love to get to a slow 'Yes.' I'd love to get to a third way, but if you need to know now, the answer is no." Here's a principle for life: time is the enemy of options. The more time you have, the more options you have, obviously. The less time you have, the fewer options you have.

The first thing is time, and that creates the space for everything else. The second thing is *prayer*. You know I'm going to say these things. Of course I'm going to say prayer. It says they didn't ask counsel of the Lord. I think our main way that we show our pridefulness is our lack of prayerfulness.

Most of us have been raised well enough that we're hopefully not going to be overtly arrogant and prideful, but the main way our pridefulness shows up is a lack of prayerfulness. Here's a helpful question: What in your life do you not just need to think about but you need to pray about?

I find there's a big difference between thinking about your marriage and praying about your marriage, thinking about your kids and praying about your kids, thinking about your finances and praying about your finances, thinking about your future and career and praying about your future and your career. It brings you God consciousness in a new way. It invites God into the situation.

Here's the key. This is so hard to do. I don't even know exactly how to do this. It's more of an existential feeling. When you're praying about a decision... Someone told me years ago that 90 percent of prayer when it comes to decision-making is getting neutral.

You already know what you want to do and what you don't want to do. It doesn't mean that's the right thing. So much of prayer is, "Lord, get me to the place... I might need to fast. I might need to search the Scriptures. I might need to confess things, but get me to the place where I am neutral, and from there you can lead."

Thirdly, you need to *know what the Bible says*. Remember I said "lack of information"? You're going to be tempted most and most likely to be deceived where you know the Bible least. So, let me just encourage you. There are certain areas... This would be a time to really understand what the Bible says about personal identity.

It's not optional, as a Christian, to not understand what the Bible says about identity in a season where everybody is confused about their identity. This would be a great time to buy a book on the Bible and study biblical manhood and womanhood, male and female, sexuality and gender, singleness and marriage. These are topics you want to know.

Finally, you need *Christian community*. These are all of the things you knew I was going to say. Right? We all know these things already. With Christian community, you need maybe one or two people in your life who you can ask this question to and they would be honest: "Do you see me believing any lies?" If you would ask that... That's a dangerous question to ask. Try not to get too defensive. I mean, speak your piece. If you're like, "I disagree," tell them you disagree with what they're saying.

"Do you see anywhere where I might be believing lies?" They may say, "To be honest with you, if you'll let me say something, yeah. Here's what I think. I think you're believing the lie that work is going to satisfy you." Or "I think you're believing the lie that the more you have, the happier you'll be." The principle of Christian community is we cannot see ourselves by ourselves, so we need other people to help us see what we have been unable or unwilling to see.

04 WE MUST AVOID SYNCRETISM

So, we're easily deceived. We talked about that. I gave some principles of how we practice discernment. Now let me show you what you do when you figure out you've been deceived. Turn with me to verse 17. ***"And the people of Israel set out and reached their cities on the third day."*** And they mention those cities in verse 17.

Verse 18: ***"But the people of Israel did not attack them, because the leaders of the congregation had sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel."*** There's a whole other sermon in here about keeping your word even when it's hard, but that's not what we're going to talk about right now. ***"Then all the congregation murmured against the leaders."*** See, when you believe lies, it affects those under you. Sometimes... We don't even see them do this. They *do* do one good thing.

Sometimes, if you've been deceived, the best thing you could do is tell the people it has affected, "I'm sorry." You need to tell your kids, "I'm really, really sorry. I have created a culture of materialism and consumerism in this home, and I just want to repent of that. I don't want you guys to grow up and think that the more you have in your hands, the happier you're going to be in your heart. I'm sorry. Dad has believed that lie."

That's the best thing you can do when you've been deceived. "I have to say it out loud. I've been deceived. I'm sorry for how it has affected you." "I'm sorry. I've been drinking way too much, and it has affected our whole family. I've not been present, and I'm sorry. I believed the lie of alcohol. Let me just tell you that." They're actually not doing that. That's what they should do. They *do* do something helpful. They say how they're going to fix it.

Look at verse 19. ***"But all the leaders said to all the congregation, 'We have sworn to them by the LORD, the God of Israel, and now we may not touch them.'"*** I'll explain that. That's the language of defilement. God's main warning, by the way, was "If you bring these other people in and you intermarry, their gods will become your gods. You'll have syncretism." *Syncretism* is where you try to combine a bunch of religions together. He warned them of that. So they said, "Don't worry. We're not going to touch them."

"This we will do to them: let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath that we swore to them.' And the leaders said to them, 'Let them live.' So they became cutters of wood and drawers of water for all the congregation, just as the leaders had said of them."

In other words, they're saying, "Okay. We're not going to let these Gibeonites influence us. We are going to influence them, and we're going to put them in the

tabernacle." Because when they're in the tabernacle, they're going to be around the Levitical priests, so they'll be around God's people; they're going to be around the Word of God, and they're going to be around the Spirit of God, and those are the things God uses to change people.

The crazy story about the Gibeonites is they show up 45 more times in the Old Testament, always spoken of positively. It's one of those confusing things. We're like, "Wait a second. God said to kill all of the people in this area. They get deceived. They enter into a covenant. They honor the covenant. God ends up working through all of that mess, and the Gibeonites become part of God's people." We've said this before, but God can hit a straight shot with broken sticks. Praise the Lord.

The right place to end a sermon on deception or a text on deception is to talk about truth. Truth is central. When Jesus Christ came and testified to Pontius Pilate in John 18 and Pilate asked him, "Why are you here?" his answer was, "I was born to testify to the truth."

For Jesus, truth was such a big idea that he says in John 14:6, that famous verse, "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life." Truth is such an important concept that Jesus identifies himself with it. Here's what he says. This is a very famous statement that people don't even know Jesus is the one who said it. He said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Here's the truth about that: it might also make you miserable first.

I think a lot of times we believe lies because we don't want to know the truth. Maybe that's a question for you. Do you really want to know the truth about yourself? Are you really open to knowing where you're being deceived? It's kind of a strange thing to quote Nietzsche, but Nietzsche, though he was an adamant atheist, really understood the human condition.

One of the things Nietzsche said was, basically, "You can tell the character of a man or woman by how much truth they can handle." Can you handle the truth about the struggles you're having with sin? Can you tell yourself the truth? Can you tell yourself the truth, "This is where our marriage is"? Are you willing to embrace the truth about your kids if it's hard?

We talked about church lies. We talked about culture lies. I want to end, just for a moment, talking about something called a *demonic lie*. I was introduced to this concept about a month ago. A guy introduced it to me. He said, "A demonic lie is a lie that has a will with it." It kind of keeps coming. Every individual person has different lies that just... It's the lie that won't die.

The guy was telling me about it. He said, "What I've had to do is I had to write down..." He said, "I identified seven specific lies I believe are demonic in my life." He said one of them was "No matter how much money I make, I would be happier if I made more money." He said, "I had to write that lie down. I had to get it really specific. What is it? Why do I believe this?" He said, "Then I had to search the Bible, and I needed to find truth and promises as compelling and as specific as that lie."

So, if you'll close your eyes and pray with me, I want to give you a moment (maybe this is just the beginning of something) for you to think about where you are believing lies. It's easy to pick on the culture and say, "Here are the culture lies." It's easy to pick on the church and say, "Here's what the church has believed." What have we believed?

People believe lies all the time. If they're single, they believe they'd be happier if they were married. Sometimes if people are married, they believe they'd be happier if they were single. People believe they'd be happier if they had more money. People believe they'd be happier if they were more sexually free, whatever that means.

Lord, would you give us the ability to diagnose our own hearts and to welcome community into our lives? Lord, as we learned today, would you give us peace? Would you not let us move forward if we don't have peace in an area? Would you give us passages so we know our Bible? Would you give us people? Would you turn us to prayer, Lord? And would you make us a people who want to know the truth so it will set us free, even if it's painful and makes us miserable first? We ask all this in Jesus' name, amen.