

Covenant Church

11/2/2025

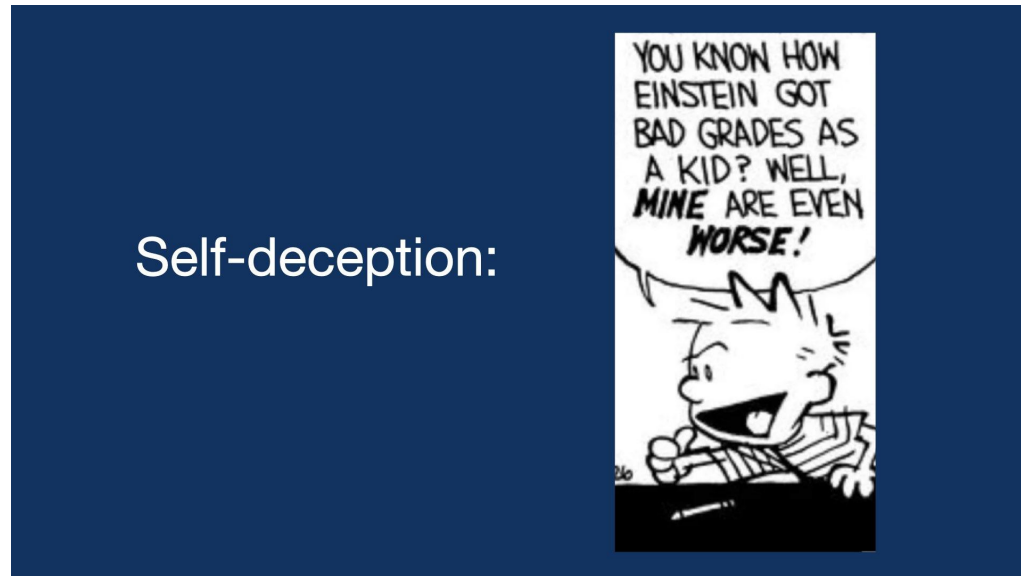
Wes Tillett

Title: Engage Locally

Text: James 1:19-27

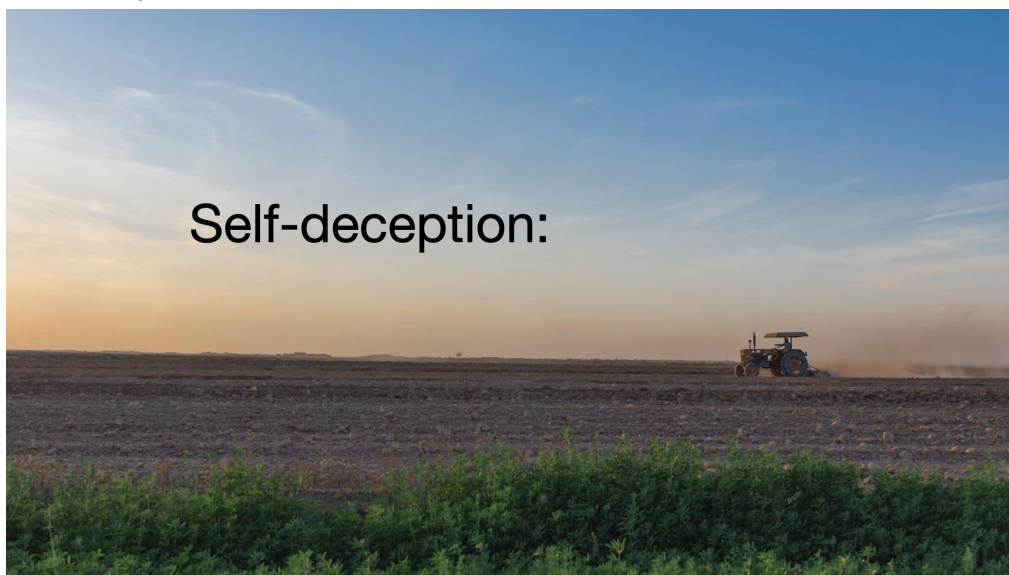
Self-deception is self-defeating.

Here's a good example of self-deception:



– Calvin proudly declaring, “You know how Einstein got bad grades as a kid? Well, mine are even worse!”

I’ve had my own misadventures in self-deception.



In college I helped my grandfather out on his farm. One morning he explained to me how to run the tractor to plow the field. After he left, it took me about two passes back and forth through the

field until I got bored and impatient. I figured out if I raised the plow a bit, I could more than double the speed of the tractor.

Two hours later, I was flying along, a huge cloud of dust behind me, when I saw my grandfather waving his arms, calling me over to the edge of the field. When I drove the tractor over to him, he was doubled over in laughter, tears in the corner of his eyes.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“Plowing the field,” I responded, stating the obvious.

“No, you’re not,” he laughed.” “You’re creating a cloud of dust, but you’re barely scratching the surface. You have to slow down, let the plow under the surface, and turn the soil over. The whole point is to get the soil ready for the seed.”

His observations and explanation shook me out of my self-deception. I was speeding along, skimming the surface, scattering dust, doing nothing. I had to slow down and do the real work.

Self-deception is self-defeating. And usually we need a wise, outside observer to reveal where we’ve deceived ourselves.

This morning, the Holy Spirit uses the book of James as that wise, outside observer to reveal to us three self-deceptions and how to overcome them. We’ll travel through James 1:19-27, and park at the last verse, which is a compelling call to live out the true faith. I’ll share a couple of illustrations, and close by asking you one question. My prayer is that God speaks to each of us this morning and motivates us to meaningfully engage in serving our neighbors in need – locally.

Three self-deceptions and antidotes. Two illustrations. One question.

The first self-deception is implied. Let’s see if we can find it.

James 1:19-21

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Scripture	Self-deception	Antidote
James 1:19-21	Anger	Humility
James 1:22-25		
James 1:26-27		

James 1:19-21

19 *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*

The first self-deception is the idea that our anger will bring about the changes we want to see. We live in a culture of outrage. Rage bait is everywhere. It's easy to think that our anger is fuel enough to force our will onto the world and make it better. But here's the truth: outrage doesn't bring about the kingdom of God. We can't rage our way into who God wants us to be and how God wants the world to be – full of justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). Pervasive anger doesn't help us change ourselves or the world.

True, it's okay –even good sometimes– to feel anger. Jesus himself is described as feeling this intense anger – interestingly enough – when he encountered the hardness of heart of others (Mark 3:5). But anger is not supposed to be our go-to emotion. We are to be *“quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry.”*

Men, we especially need to hear this. Somehow, our culture tells us that as men we should only express two emotions: anger or celebration. Not true. Not good. All of life isn't a Purdue football game... We are not mere cavemen: “Me happy! ... Me MAD!” We need to grow up.

Anger does not produce the righteousness – the virtue, integrity, and justice – God wants for us and from us.

Instead, we must *“humbly accept the word planted”* in us. Humility – surrender – letting the blade of God's word dig down past the hard surface and turn over the soil of our hearts – this is what produces the good fruit of the Spirit – healing, liberation, salvation.

The second self-deception is quite clear.

James 1:22-25

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Scripture	Self-deception	Antidote
James 1:19-21	Anger	Humility
James 1:22-25	Inaction	Obedience
James 1:26-27		

James 1:22-25

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. **23** Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror **24** and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. **25** But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

What is the self-deception here? Inaction – merely listening to the word without obeying it. The Word of God is the truth-telling mirror, revealing who we really are and how we really should live. We should make adjustments to our lives based on what the Word of God says.

When we put God's word into practice – doing what it says – we will be blessed in what we do. Blessed means happy, jubilant, flourishing. It's the same word Jesus uses when he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God" (Matthew 5:3-11). Here, the book of James offers us an additional Beatitude: "Blessed are those who put God's word into action, for they will be truly prosperous and happy in all they do."

Obedience is the antidote to the self-deception of inaction.

The final self-deception is pollution. Not, like, greenhouse gases – but soul-pollution.

James 1:26-27

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Scripture	Self-deception	Antidote
James 1:19-21	Anger	Humility
James 1:22-25	Inaction	Obedience
James 1:26-27	Pollution	Purity

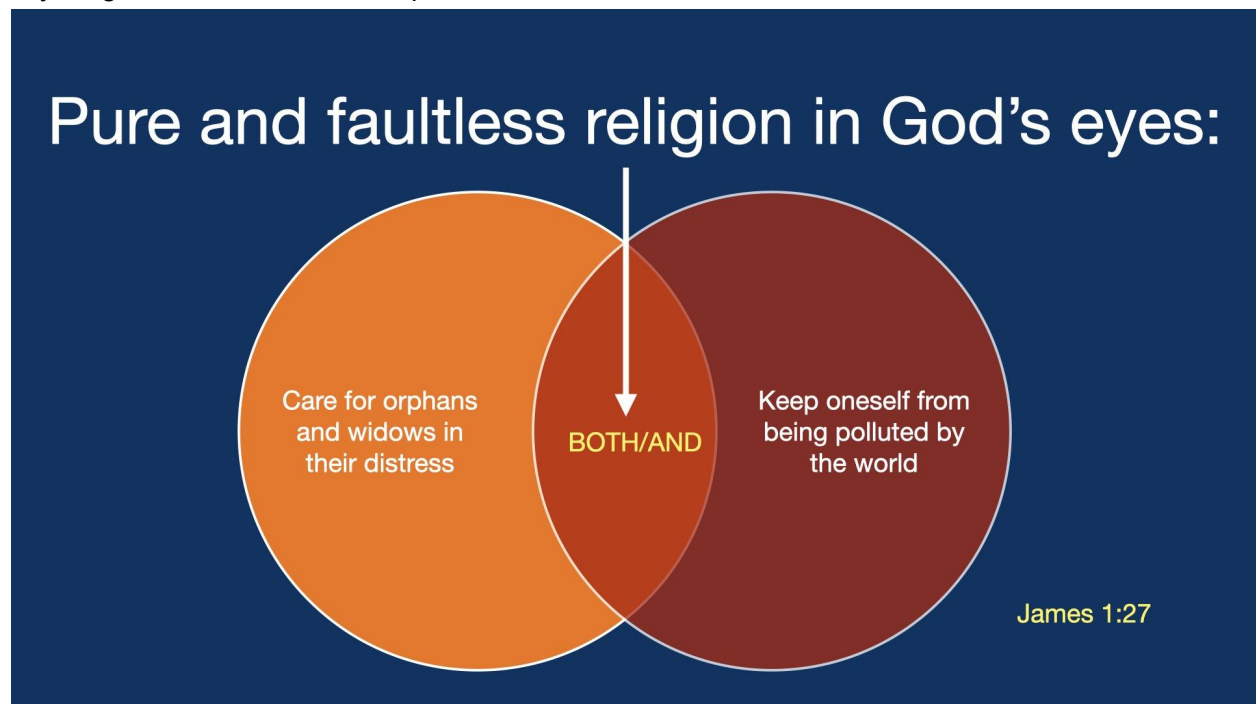
James 1:26-27

26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. **27** Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

"Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Jesus - Matthew 12:34). If we think we are religious – worshiping God and practicing other spiritual disciplines – but we do nothing to control the polluted words that inevitably rumble up through our words – spoken or written or typed – then we are self-deceived.

What is the antidote to this soul-pollution? Purity.

The religion that God accepts as pure and faultless – that is, innocent, sincere, free from anything distorted – has two aspects.



One aspect is to see and care for “orphans and widows in their distress.” “Orphans and widows” is a biblical term that refers to the most vulnerable and needy people. In Matthew chapter 25, Jesus refers to these people as “*the least of these siblings of mine*” – those who are hungry, thirsty, in need of clothes, shelter, medicine, or community. God finds it pure and faultless for us to give practical help to “*the least of these*” – our fellow human beings who need our kindness the most.

God also finds it pure and faultless for us to keep ourselves “from being polluted by the world.” God wants us to be spotlessly free from the corrupting influence of all the temptations, vices, and distractions of this life.

God wants our purity. Pure love for our neighbors in our actions. Pure love for God in our hearts.

It's both/and.

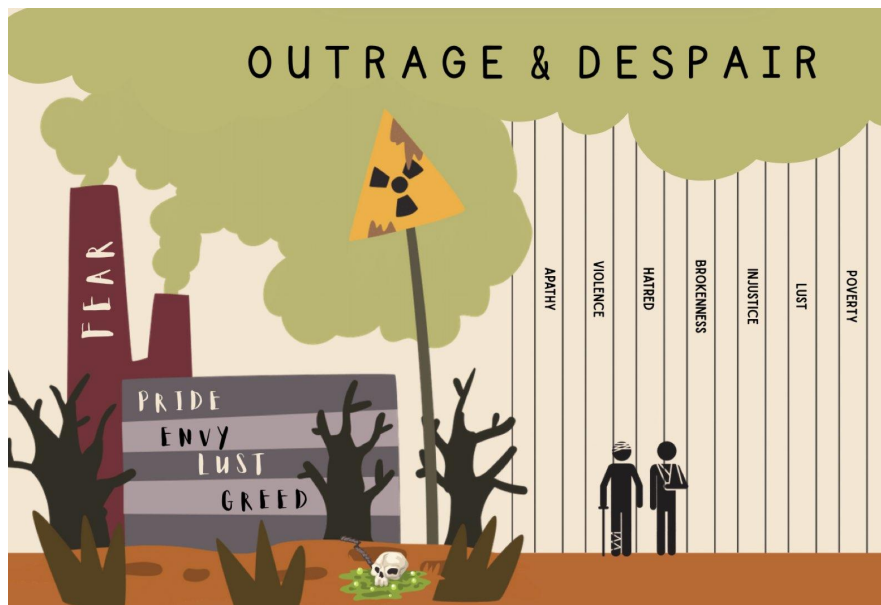
I've seen people who think that because they contend for justice for the oppressed and serve their neighbors in need, they can do whatever they want when it comes to their private lives. And I've seen people who are so focused on sanctifying their souls and keeping themselves away from the grime of the world that they have no concern for the basic human needs of their neighbors.

It's not either/or. It's both/and.

Three self-deceptions, three antidotes.

Now two illustrations - a graphic, and a picture. Then one final question.

A graphic:



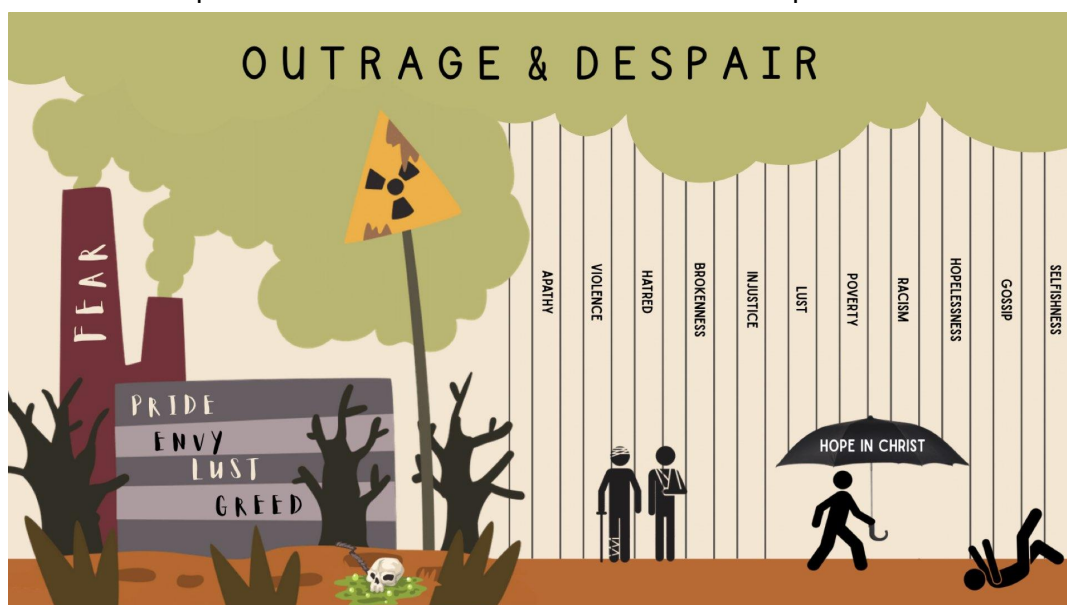
Here's an image of our world. It's like all the pride, envy, lust, greed, and other vices of the world are pouring fear and hatred into the atmosphere.

It creates the atmosphere of outrage and despair in which we find ourselves. There is so much hopelessness and anger, choking out the light.

From this fog, all forms of evil rain down – apathy, violence, hatred, brokenness, injustice, lust, poverty, and all the rest.

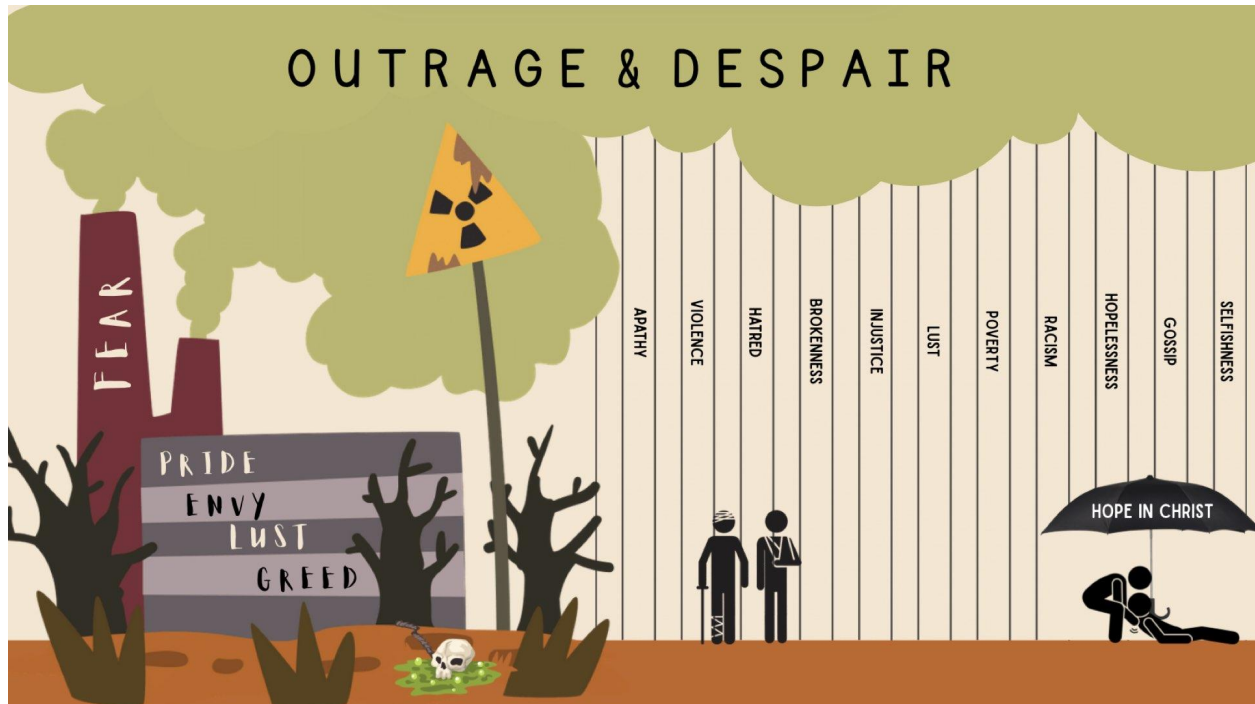
So many people are soaked through and messed up by this downpour of vice.

But we who hope in Christ have the means to overcome this pollution.



As we hope in Christ, healing and virtue well up in our hearts. As we hope in the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, we keep ourselves from being polluted by the world.

And the love of Christ compels us to reach out to our neighbors in their distress.



This is an illustration of how we do what God wants. Not living in anger and inaction, but in humility and obedience. Not overcome by pollution, but overcoming pollution by purity.

A second illustration – a picture.



These people are lined up outside the LUM Winter Warming Station. Every night of every year for the past 41 years, Lafayette Urban Ministry – LUM – has operated an overnight shelter for people in Greater Lafayette who are experiencing homelessness. In the winter, November 15th

through April 15th, LUM also runs a Winter Warming Station, which is a low-barrier shelter that provides a mat on a floor and a sack meal for an additional 50 or more people. The Winter Warming Station aims to keep people from freezing to death on the streets of Greater Lafayette.

Who do you see when you look at this picture? Do you see people who deserve help? Or people who don't deserve the help and need to get their act together?

Do you see Steven in this picture? He was there last December, fresh out of prison, returning to Lafayette with no housing options, and therefore lining up for the Winter Warming Station. He got a job, worked hard, budgeted, and received the love and encouragement offered by the Staff and volunteers at LUM. Three weeks ago he moved into his own apartment.



Here he is with the LUM Homeless Services direct, receiving a check from LUM to his new landlord, as LUM helped him take that major step into long-term, secure housing.



Who else do you see in this picture? Do you see people who have been absolutely drenched by the pollution of this world? Do you see people who are our modern-day "orphans and widows"?

Do you see Jesus here? For Jesus says, *"Truly I tell you, whatever you do for one of the least of these siblings of mine, you do for me"* (Matthew 25:40). Jesus is here in this line, in need of food

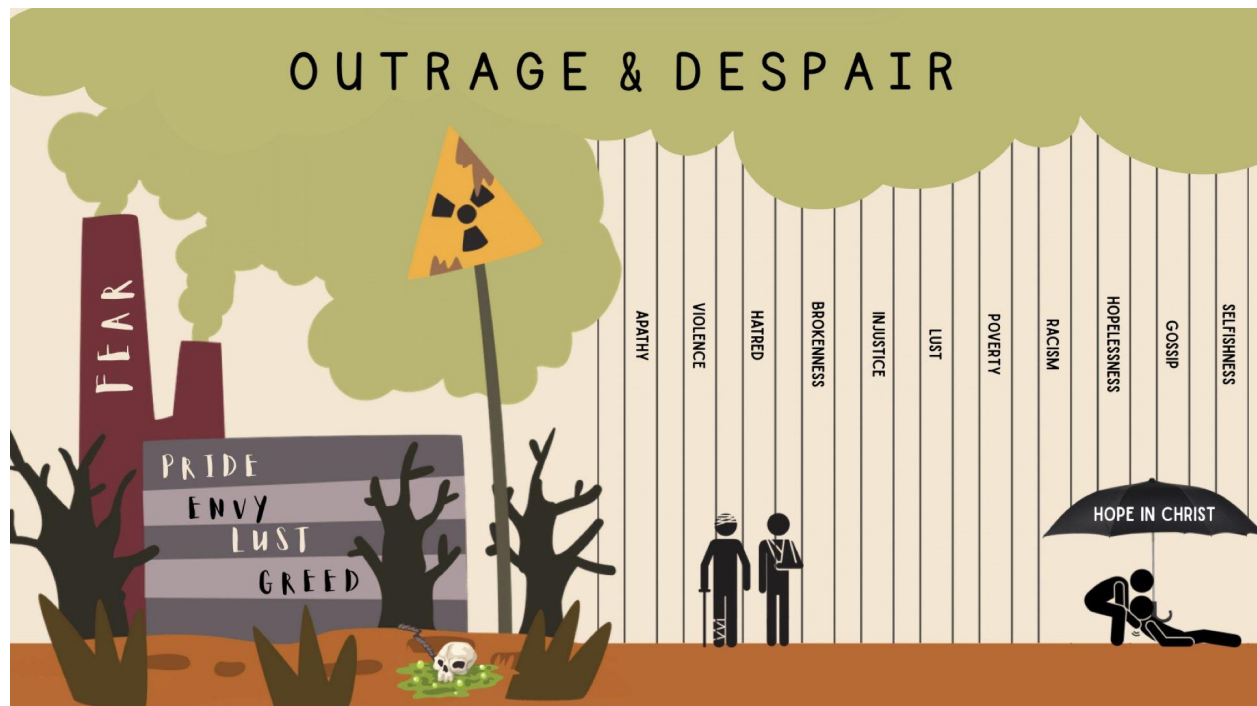
and shelter. We can't give the excuse that we don't see him, for Jesus also says, *"Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least, you did not do for me."*

Do you see yourself here, metaphorically? Out in the cold of this world, relying on grace to welcome you into the warmth and safety of God's embrace?

Do you see yourself here, hypothetically? Knowing that if things went differently in your life, you too could be lining up in the dead of winter, in need of overnight shelter?

Who do you see in this photo?

Going back to our graphic...



one final question and challenge for you – who's under your umbrella?

If hope in Christ is our umbrella of purity in this polluted, corrupted, unjust, broken, outrageous, wounded and wounding world – who are you welcoming into the shelter of your umbrella? Who are you extending hospitality to? Who are you offering love, respect, practical help, a listening ear, a non-judgmental presence, dignified, compassionate aid?

This is a day on which we focus on engaging locally to fulfill the mission of Christ. We are called to care for *"orphans and widows in their distress."* That word "distress" means pressure, affliction, oppression. Jesus uses it to describe the pain of a woman in childbirth. Think of that level of pressure and pain – excruciating as childbirth – that's the level of distress being faced by the most vulnerable members of our community.

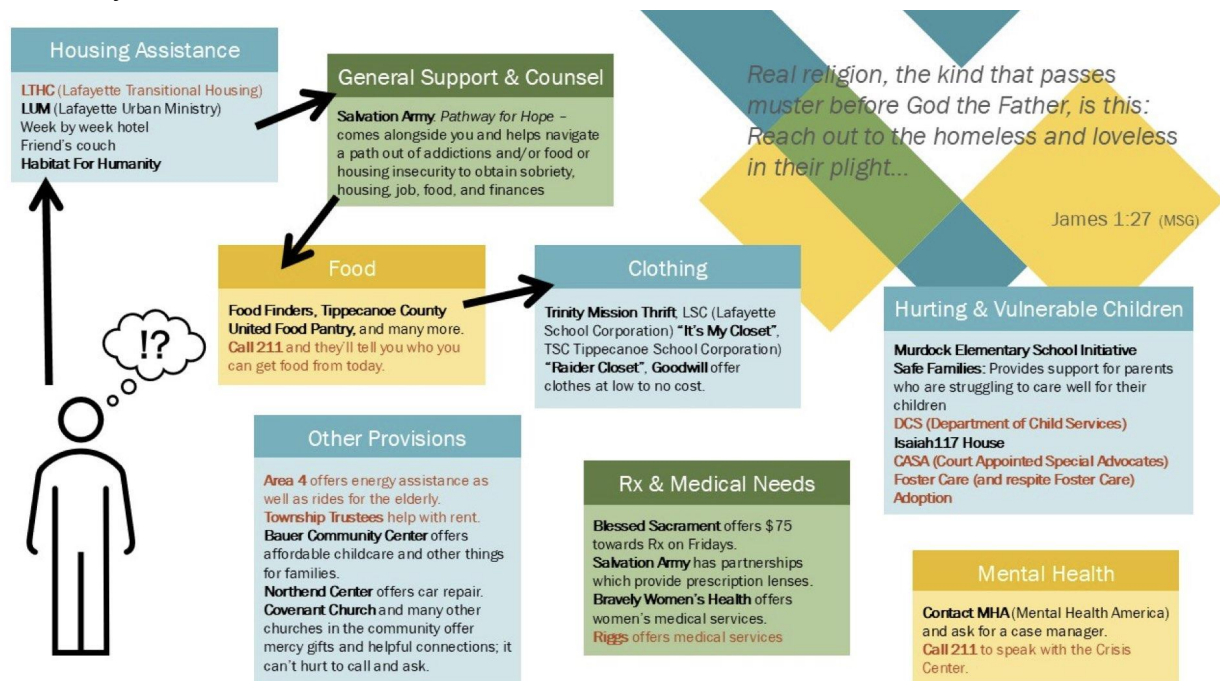
Where do you see people in distress? And are you helping at least one of them?

This is a time for action. Right now we are seeing record levels of need in our community. Our homeless shelter is full with a wait-list. It's been that way for the past 18 months. Our Protein

Food Pantry set a record for the month. The number of people in need of financial assistance has never been higher at LUM. The same holds true for many of our community partners – we are setting records, but not the sort of records we want to set.

The need is there. People need your umbrella of help and hope.

Reaching out might require us to do some repenting. Repentance is what I had to do when I went back to the field with the tractor and the plow, slowed down, and did the real work. Repentance simply means to recalibrate. To repent is to turn around – not in self-hatred, but in self-forgetfulness. As C.S. Lewis wrote so radiantly: *“The happiest moments are those when we forget our precious selves and have only everything else – God, our fellow humans, the garden, and the sky – instead.”*



Have a look at this map of opportunities to forget our precious selves and have only everything else instead. Thanks to pastor Brently Jordan for preparing this map for us. These are practical ways we can escape our self-deceptions through humility, obedience, and purity. Ask the Lord to lead you.

There are ample opportunities. I look at this and it's a little overwhelming. But don't be afraid. Don't be discouraged. True: you can't do it all. But you can do something. True: you can't help everyone. But you can help someone. In doing so you help Christ, who is "the least of these." And in helping Christ you do, in a way, help everyone, for Christ is "before all things and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17).

You want to change the world? Go serve someone nearby.

Who's under your umbrella?

Who will be?