

Sunday school lessons from DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE

Week 2: Vicarious living: The Wise Old Squid

In the book DEEP DARK: A BEDTIME TALE there's a wise old squid that lives in a geode cave. The wise old squid never leaves his cave, but other creatures of the deep have brought him mysterious objects from the bright world above when they've come to seek his wisdom. He's collected the stories of other creatures and tells them with rock patterns in the corner of his cave. He tells Hatch's family about a crab that was caught in a trap and drawn up to the surface.

When Hatch says he's going to the surface, the wise old squid brings out a pair of sunglasses that fell from above in a metal bucket that a sea turtle brought him. He gives these to Hatch...

"The old squid turns to Hatch, "Please take them. When you come back tell me what you find up there. You are courageous, and I think you are right. I've hidden in this cavern my whole life curious about the world outside, but afraid to venture out into it. I think I have missed too much."

The pages about the squid, start by describing him as the "wise old squid", but we soon see him just as the "old squid". He's not the wise one we thought he was. He's had the means to see the bright world above for himself hidden in a corner and he never considered going himself.

Vicarious living is living through someone else's experiences. Our culture is steeped in vicarious living in ways that I don't believe any previous generation has had to contend with.

Facebook is everyone's highlight reel, with the best food we've eaten, the best places we've visited, the best things we've done, shared (perhaps arguably) to validate our lives, to show that our lives have meaning. I'll admit that there are some more positive aspects, like keeping in contact with people that you don't physically see every day, but it's primarily a validation of our lives. Pinterest shows us how to decorate our homes, make them more warm and comfortable, but does it make us feel that we've have to have everything just perfect all the time?

Romans 12:2 (Ask the class to turn to it)

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

How much of the Bible was written by or about the people who conformed with the "social networks" around them? <Pause>

The people that God wanted us to remember, the lives He wanted us to observe and learn from did not conform to the world around them. They stood out from it.

Let's take five minutes to list some of the ways that you've seen the Internet and especially social networks working against God's plan to draw our attention to Him. If you have some examples to share that would be great.

<Ask each group to share some examples.>

I want to say that the Internet is not all bad, I think it is an amazing and transformative innovation. Vicarious living is not all bad either. If it were all bad, I think it wouldn't have penetrated nearly so deep into our lives as it has.

I've talked before about something that I saw on a television series called "Hoarders".

Has anyone seen that show?

For those who haven't, the show introduces three or four different people for each episode. Each of these people live in homes that they've piled with stuff they collect along with usually quite a bit of trash. These aren't situations where these people have left some magazines out, or have books stacked on the counter that they should move to the bookshelf, or have dishes in the sink – these are people that have stuff piled so high in their homes that they have trails to walk from one room to another between stacked piles and they have whole rooms that they can't even go into any more.

During the episode, we see the people's friends and family trying to help them clean up and get rid of the clutter that is actually ruining their lives, but I've never seen even a single episode where the person is able to avoid falling right back into the same behavior, so it seems likely that these people have some kind of mental setting that's different from ours.

Here's why I bring up the Hoarders show. When these people are asked why they collect all the stuff around them, or pressured to get rid of something, they have justifications that would sound completely reasonable – if we couldn't see the result so clearly before us.

They say things like...

- "That's still good"
- "Someone else can use that"
- "I might need that someday"
- "That's recyclable"

But we look at where they live and we see that their interpretation of these reasoned points creates a life that's dysfunctional.

Is the way we use the Internet just a little like the way the Hoarders rationalize their collections? <Pause>

Ideas for new recipes, new vacations, glimpses of places we can't go ourselves, inspirational stories of religious and secular life. Taking each separately, we can make arguments for spending time in vicarious living. We all can. But step back and look at the whole, look at our interpretation of the amount of this vicarious life we consume and I think it starts to look as dysfunctional as the Hoarders look to us.

The first thing I do when I get up is check the news on three news sites, I listen to the news or books on the way to work. I live an actual life while at work – ironically most of the time I spend actually living my life someone has to pay me to do it. Then I come home check out the news or unwind with movies or a book. Did I do anything to really get close to God? Did I achieve anything that I can point to a week later, let alone a year or decades later? Am I painting a Sistine Chapel on the ceiling of my room?

When we look at how much actual time with God, time even with ourselves we're really investing in, it's a little bit scary. It's like coming home after vacation and seeing the mess we left in the den.

When I started to put this lesson together, I found the verse we read.

Romans 12:2

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

I spent some time thinking about that in the context of our discussion of vicarious living. I was really excited about how well it seemed to fit. After I made some notes, I went back to get the verses before and after so I didn't leave any of the Bible's original context out. When I read that, in this context of how we live in today's society, I was amazed by the way God leads us and makes our paths so clear.

Please read the verses that I left on your tables from Romans 12.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Some people today believe that our Constitution was ok as far as it went, but that it just couldn't possibly guide us in a world that is so different from the one the founders lived in. They didn't have the Internet; their world was so much smaller. I believe our Constitution was guided by God and I know our Bible was.

The encouragement that Paul wrote to the Romans could have been written yesterday.

- Offer ourselves as sacrifices that please God
- Do not conform
- Renew our minds, so we can test and approve God's will, his plan, for us
- Don't think too highly of ourselves
- Judge ourselves soberly
- In the same way that we have one body with different members to perform different functions, we should appreciate the differences we see in the people around us
- We have gifts God gave us, and we should USE them.

It could have been written yesterday, couldn't it?

That's what God is so good at, creating things that last forever. He made the world around us, it's been here for generation after generation. He made the people that came before us, some of them have been with Him longer than we've been alive.

He made us and we will last forever, a short time here and a long time in the place we buy for retirement.

Does anyone want to share something you did last week that, looking back, feels like it will last? <Pause for responses.>

We went to a funeral service yesterday. When you heard the condensed version of this man's life, it sounded like a life that was a great investment. Everyone around this man was impacted in some way by his efforts, his humor or his character. Funerals are for the people that continue on this earth. We pause and reflect and hopefully, we readjust for the long term and line back up with the things that matter.

Today, we're going to leave and by this afternoon, we'll all be climbing back on the treadmill. There are things we can do with our lives that will be entertaining, but not last. Or we can try to be more like the God we follow and spend our time creating lives and experiences that will last. God gave us a unique life, made us unique not so that we could follow along behind someone else, but so we could walk a path that no one else could walk.

Verse clippings for the class to read...

Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Romans 12:2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:3

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

Romans 12:4-5

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12: 6-7

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach;

Romans 12: 8

if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.