One of the things that has made the past few months even more difficult than they already was is that it seems like we have been receiving all kinds of mixed messages and conflicting announcements.

Doesn’t it feel like every week we hear something new or different that contradicts what we heard previously

The web and airwaves have been filled with speculation and contradiction, bad science and bad advice, criticisms and second guessing by those with little to no or at best very questionable qualifications

there has been no shortage of conspiracy tales and self-promotion, conjecture, wishful thinking and finger pointing.

And a whole lot of impatience and intolerance towards those who tell us what we don’t want to hear.

We want answers and results just like on TV, where the vaccine is developed and distributed in a matter of days or at least by the end of the hour-long episode.

That said, I think this video pretty much encapsulates all these mixed messages and confusion of the past few months.

**Video**

saying one thing while we do another is not limited to Covid 19. a couple of the more extreme examples we are seeing:

there are the mixed messages we give when we teach our children about right and wrong, the importance of kindness and compassion and honesty, not to lie or spread gossip, not to name calling or promote hate speech, and various other moral values. But then turn a blind eye or make excuses when our favorite celebrity or sports hero or social influencer or politician does it.

the bible actually has two different words for this. The first is hypocrisy which means play acting, to wear a mask, to say one thing and do another in Matthew 6 and 23 Jesus used some of his harshest words for those he repeatedly called hypocrites because they were saying one thing and doing another

the second word used is often translated double minded, having divided loyalties which James 1:8 says makes us unstable in all we do, completely unreliable.
There are the mixed messages that come from those who turn to experts in science and medicine to make their lives better by providing the latest and greatest technologies and treatments and drugs and methods. But as soon as they are told something they don’t like or want to hear by those same experts, things like wearing a mask or keep social distance or avoid large indoor gatherings or that our unrestrained indulgence and desire for more may be damaging our environment, it becomes an inconvenient truth to ignore and attack, spreading unfounded and even dangerous theories in its place.

I saw an example of this just the other day in a news report from the mainland where a group was up in arms, visibly angry with their city council for passing a requirement to wear masks in public with one spokesperson yelling its their right to do what they want and another shouting something they heard from one of their favorite talking heads on TV, that its masks that are killing people not Covid 19.

but as irritating as these masks can be, they are not about us and our rights but about the health and safety of those around us.

Then there is the fact that we are coming up on July 4, which marks the signing of a document almost 250 years ago which declares:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

just last week many marked Juneteenth, also called Emacipation day to remember almost 160 years ago when in the middle of our nations bloody civil war, President Lincoln signed the proclamation stating that all men are free.
in 1948 president Trumen ordered the integration of the military
in 1954 the Supreme Court ruled Brown verses Wade that segregation in schools was unconstitutional
in 1964 President Johnson signed the Civil right acts to end segregation and Jim Crow laws
in 1965 the voting rights act was passed to put an end to the suppression of the minority vote
on 1968 the fair housing act was passed to end housing discrimination

for over 250 years our country has too often given mixed messages, making statements about equal treatment and equal rights, yet today finds it beset by protests pointing out that too often the words have not been backed up or in agreement with the actions.
it was Martin Luther King who noted, “For years now, I have heard the word ‘Wait!’ It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This ‘Wait’ has almost always meant ‘Never.’ We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that ‘justice too long delayed is justice denied.’”

In Romans 2 Paul warned against those giving mixed messages when he wrote:

“You who call yourselves Jews are relying on God’s law, and you boast about your special relationship with him. You know what he wants; you know what is right because you have been taught his law. You are convinced that you are a guide for the blind and a light for people who are lost in darkness. You think you can instruct the ignorant and teach children the ways of God. For you are certain that God’s law gives you complete knowledge and truth. Well then, if you teach others, why don’t you teach yourself? You tell others not to steal, but do you steal? You say it is wrong to commit adultery, but do you commit adultery? You condemn idolatry, but do you use items stolen from pagan temples?

then he says something very significant yet easily missed as he ties it in directly with our faith.

You are so proud of knowing the law, but you dishonor God by breaking it. No wonder the Scriptures say, “The Gentiles blaspheme the name of God because of you.””
(Romans 2:17–24)

If we’re not careful, we can give mixed messages about our Lord and our faith and the things we say that we believe and value. this in turn can have a very damaging impact on how others perceive of God from us

In Luke 6:46 Jesus was more succinct when he asked, why do you keep calling me Lord, Lord when you don’t do what I say

when you keep giving mixed messages by saying one thing and doing another. It is, he goes on to say, like building a house on sand, it will not last

we can have only one Lord of our life or to use Jesus’ own words in Matthew 6:24, no one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.
which brings us back to our years theme, Growing Up, which we put on hold when Covid 19 struck

**our theme verse is 1 Peter 2:2-3** Like newborn infants crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation now that you have tasted or experienced the goodness of God

be single minded in your devotion and pursuit of God by craving the things that will help you get closer

**or as Jesus said, “seek first, above all else, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”**

Paul told the Philippians this one thing I do, forgetting what is behind me and straining towards what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 12 says fix your eyes on Jesus who is the author and perfecter of your faith

**how do we seek first, press on, and fix our eyes?**

that is where the banners come in.

each one represents a spiritual discipline, sometimes called holy habits, which are practices that for hundreds, even thousands of years, Gods people have found helpful for keeping them on track to grow up and avoid giving mixed messages about their love for and faith in God

each artist was given a discipline and verse of scripture to creatively interpret in light of that discipline

you may want to notice that each verse serves as one of our memory verses for the year

let’s take them one by one and see how they can counter giving mixed messages about our relationship with the Lord

• There are the mixed messages that come when we talk about having a personal relationship with God but then cringe if someone were to ask us how much time we really spend with him
spending time with him
the memory verse the banner is based on is 1 Thess. 5:16-18 which reminds us,

    rejoice always, pray (not just during QT or before you eat) continually, give thanks in all circumstance for this is God will for you in Christ Jesus

By way of reminder, some of the growth challenges mentioned for this, ways to grow in our practice of it were: increasing our daily prayer time by just a few minutes a day, learn to practice flash prayers, offering up a quick prayer for every person you talk to, develop a prayer journal, take a prayer retreat, read a book on prayer, develop the practice of simply offering up a simple prayer, maybe even just a few words throughout the day as a reminder of His presence, develop a thanksgiving list to review and add to regularly to become more grateful, take time to remember and count your blessings.

    • we can give a mixed message when we say knowing Christ is important but really don’t know much about him apart from what we are told

while we can and must learn from others, There is only one true and authoritative source to turn to that God gave us to reveal himself and that is the Bible apart from his word we cannot say what we know but only what we think or feel or want to believe about God

    as Jerome so aptly put it in the 4th century, ignorance of scripture is ignorance of God

so Bible reading is the spiritual discipline to help us here and as I had mentioned, this is the most important practice for spiritual growth

    the memory verse for the banner reminds us that all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17

challenges for this include reading through the New Testament together which is only one chapter 5 days a week. another challenge was to dialog with others about what we are reading, it is an effective way to reinforce it

    • we give mixed messages when we talk in church about people needing the Lord, that they are lost without him, but then never say a word to anyone outside of church about him
Telling is the discipline here, simply talking to others about your faith. The simple act of telling and talking about him strengthens our own faith. The verse that supports this is

“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” (Mark 5:19, NIV)

- There are the mixed messages we give about our faith that comes from taking a greater interest and knowledge of our favorite team or celebrity than we do about God and His word.

Study is the discipline, not just reading but taking time and making the effort to get to know what it means and how it applies. Getting to know more than what’s just on the surface or what others tell us.

The memory verse says “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4:7–8, NIV)

As the banner so visually depicts, let your roots sink deep and strong in His word.

- We can give mixed messages about our faith when we have the words to our favorite song or even commercial memorized but can’t really say what is in His word and rarely if ever can say how God is revealing himself and guiding us.

Meditating on God’s word is the discipline for this.

Meditation is simply taking time to ponder and reflect on something, some trait of God or verse. It’s like eating, you don’t just swallow your food but take time to chew on it.

The verse is Psalm 119:11 which tells us, I have hidden your word in my heart so that I might not sin against you.

Meditating on God’s word is the process of hiding it in our hearts and would include such things as memorizing verses.
• there are also the mixed messages that come from talking about loving God but then never expressing it in concrete ways.

rarely volunteering or serving others as a demonstration of our love

John says no one can say we love God if we do not also love our brother service is the discipline and the verse says,

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10, NIV)

• we can give a mixed message when we say we love God but spend so much of our time and energy pursuing our own priorities and goals, our work and entertainment and all the rest, that we have little time left or are too tired to actually spend with him

worship is the discipline whereby we express to God our love and devotion

The Psalmist tells us to, “Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” (Psalm 100:2–3)

worship can and should be done at any time but it must never become merely something we do on our own
it’s primary form of expression is done alongside of others

• There are the mixed messages that come from thanking God for all his wonderful gifts and blessings like salvation but then keep it all to ourselves, doing little to support his work

Giving is the discipline connected to this
it frees us from being enslaved by our possessions
all we have is a gift from God and we are called to be generous not tight fisted with it

Jesus said, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (Luke 6:38)

• We can give a mixed message when we say we are saved but act as if we don’t need the body of Christ, that we can live out our faith on our own or get what we need from TV or the internet
One of God's earliest words were IT IS NOT GOOD FOR MAN TO BE ALONE

we were created for fellowship, to be in relationship with others and saved into God's Kingdom and God's family

we need each other which is the point of fellowship, being part of something bigger than ourselves

so Hebrews says,

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24–25)

• and lastly, we can give a mixed message when we talk about God speaking to us in his word and prayer but then fill up our lives with so much noise there is no way to listen or hear him

Silence is the last of the disciplines
we need to learn to listen, be still and be silent

“But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”” (Habakkuk 2:20)

These are not all the spiritual disciplines but they are some of the most common and important

James 4:8 tells us to come near to God and he will come near to us
as we cultivate habits and practices that help us do this, we discover the singleness of purpose and direction that will free us from being double minded and sending the mixed messages that come from trying to keep one foot in the world and 1 in God’s kingdom.

again, to close, Jesus said seek first, above all else the kingdom of God and his righteousness
Paul tells us this one thing I do
Hebrews says fix your eyes on Jesus who is the author and perfector of your faith

in other words, no more mixed messages,
is there some response you need to make to God, something you have talked and thought about but keep putting off?
now may be the time.