

Drawing Lines - Joe Megacz

My discourse this morning is not along the theme of our Lord's last days or about the memorial emblems, but it does have to do with our consecrations, which is a large part of our thoughts as we contemplate the memorial of our Lord's death and how we endeavor to follow in his footsteps of sacrifice. Lines are something we're all familiar with in many different contexts. When we were young children, we were taught to line up with the other children when we entered school or walked through the halls.

And we learned to stay inside the lines when we colored in our coloring books. So from an early age, we came to know two fundamental things about lines. Number one, lines bring order.

And number two, lines set boundaries. As adults, we commonly use lines as a metaphor or figure of speech for order and boundaries. In history, we learned about the Mason-Dixon line dividing our country into north and south in the 19th century.

We hear people speak of drawing a line in the sand or crossing a line to indicate a boundary of some sort, such as what constitutes acceptable behavior. Also, we sometimes use the expression along that line to suggest an orderly connection from what has just been said to what is about to be said. So as adults, we continue to use lines as a figure of speech to suggest order and boundaries.

Speaking now of our consecrations, I've sometimes used lines as a metaphor. Over the years, I've come to use the expression, much of our consecrated lives are spent learning where to draw lines. Much of our consecrated lives are spent learning where to draw lines.

Lines between truth and error, lines between righteousness and sin, and many other lines that we learn to draw as we walk along the narrow way. Today, I'd like to explore that expression and expand upon it to gain some insights into our Heavenly Father's character, as well as a few insights into our own growth in Christ's likeness. As an overview, I'll divide my discourse into five parts.

A few basic concepts about lines. How the word line is used in the Bible. How God draws lines.

How mankind in general draws lines. And how the new creature should draw lines. So let's begin with a few basic concepts about lines and how we use them.

Among the many usages of lines in our thinking and in our conversation is a dividing line.

That is a line separating the acceptable from the unacceptable or the desirable from the undesirable. A few specifics that come to mind are the separation between righteousness and sin, truth and falsehood, right and wrong, good and evil, or to use another metaphor, between white and black.

That last metaphor, separating white from black, brings to mind another basic concept of how we use lines to organize our thinking. We sometimes draw what we would call a narrow line or a bright line or a red line to convey the idea that there is no middle ground between the two principles we are separating. Everything in this discussion belongs on one side of the line or entirely on the other side of the line.

Something is either entirely true or entirely false. Entirely good or entirely evil. Entirely right or entirely wrong.

The line is so finely and sharply drawn that it is impossible for anything to be right on the line. A little bit of what one side of the line represents, but also at the same time a little bit of what the other side of that line represents. A bright narrow line does not permit that.

But there are times when we find ourselves unable to place something entirely on one side or the other of a bright narrow dividing line that we would like to draw. So we say, to recall the black and white metaphor, this falls into a gray area. It's neither black nor white, but somewhere in between, a little bit of both.

We can illustrate this use of lines like so, with an area between that which is acceptable and unacceptable. I'll call it tolerable for this discussion. We tolerate it, but find that it doesn't really fit into the categories of acceptable or unacceptable.

And so we sometimes call this type of line that we draw in our discussions, a fuzzy line or a broad line. So these are two beginning concepts of how we use lines in our thinking. Sometimes, in some contexts, in some discussions, we draw bright narrow lines between the acceptable and the unacceptable.

But sometimes in other contexts, we draw a broad line or a gray area between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable to encompass what is tolerable. Now let's move on to part two, how the word line is used in the Bible. The English word line appears 24 times in the Old Testament and only once in the New Testament.

Today, we'll look at just the Old Testament usages of the word line, which is translated from six different Hebrew words, which have several meanings. Most of the Hebrew words describe a literal line or rope or cord or a ribbon of fabric, as in the ribbon of scarlet fabric Rahab hung outside her window on the wall in Jericho, as Joshua instructed her to do so that her household would be spared. Sometimes the Hebrew word refers to a particular rope or cord that was used for measuring, a measuring line, like we would

use a tape measure.

The Hebrew words translated line also have the meaning of a literal boundary line, specifically a property line, as in Psalm 78, 55, which reads, He cast out the heathen also before them and divided them in inheritance by line and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents. Here, the psalmist is recalling how God led the children of Israel out of Egypt and brought them to the promised land, which he divided among them and set the boundaries or property lines for each tribe. Now, when I first read this scripture and preparing for this talk, I thought that the phrase an inheritance by line might have meant by tribal lines, by genealogical lines, according to the family lines of Jacob's 12 sons.

But this same Hebrew word is also used in Psalm 105, 11, describing the same dividing of the land to the tribes of Israel. Psalm 105, 11 saying unto thee, I will give the land of Canaan the lot of your inheritance. The word lot in this verse is the same as the word line in Psalm 78, 55.

So we know from these two scriptures that a lot or parcel of property is what these verses speak of when it uses that phrase, a line, a boundary line and not a genealogical tribal lineage. There are also a few figurative uses of the Hebrew words that are translated line, and one of them conveys the thought of a line as a rule or guide or standard to be adhered to without deviation. Another appearance of the word line in the Old Testament is in the verse.

Most of you would have thought of if I asked you to recall a scripture that uses the English word line. You might not have been able to recall the entire verse, but you probably would have remembered the phrase line upon line, precept upon precept. The scripture is Isaiah 28, 9 and 10.

Whom shall he teach knowledge and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little. Here, of course, the building up of an orderly knowledge of the truth and sound doctrinal reasoning by mature Christians are being described using the word line as a metaphor or figure of speech. And we'll come back to this verse a little later on.

So in summary, the Bible uses the word line or the English translation of the Hebrew word for line, much as we do in common usage today to convey the thoughts of boundaries and orderliness. That brings us to part three, how God draws lines. It should come as no surprise that God draws lines.

So let's examine a few of them. Here's a question and it's sort of a trick question. What is the first line God drew? Now the answer that I thought in my own mind and wanted to answer this question when I was preparing this talk is, in the Garden of Eden, God drew a line among the trees.

On one side of that line was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And on the other side of that line were all the rest of the trees. And it was a narrow, bright line indeed, between what was acceptable obedience to God's will and what was unacceptable disobedience.

I'll come back to that discussion later. But first I want to briefly digress to another, even much earlier line that God drew. The trick part of the question is that there was indeed a line God drew long before Adam and Eve were ever created.

The scripture is in Psalm 19, verses 1 to 4. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.

Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. We sang a paraphrase of these verses in Psalm 19 in our opening hymn. Notice the word line in Psalm 19, verse 4. That word line is Strong's number 6957, and it means rule or direction, which have the thought of order.

God's creation is orderly. The trillions of stars in the heavens all move in an orderly direction determined by God. So the first line God ever drew was the orderly paths of the billions and billions of stars and planets throughout the universe way before he created mankind.

So much for our trick question. Now let's return to our subject of how God draws lines. We'll look in a general way at three areas in which God draws lines.

God draws lines for himself. God drew lines for our Lord Jesus, and God draws lines for us. First, how does God draw lines for himself? Several scriptures give us some idea.

The first is Hebrews 6:18, which tells us it is impossible for God to lie. God drew a line upon his own self between the possible for himself and the impossible for himself. And he never crosses that line.

Another text is James 1:17, which says of God, every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the father of lights, with whom there is no variables, this neither shadow of turning. The thought of variableness is change, and God does not change. God does not change his mind or his plans or his ways or his character.

That is another line God imposes upon himself, and he doesn't cross it. This phrase, shadow of turning, literally refers to the gradual darkening of the sun or the moon during an eclipse. The light fades as a shadow is drawn across the face of the sun or the moon.

The simple meaning of this expression is that God will never cause the brightness of his character to be dimmed or obscured in any way. And the overall thought of these two

phrases, no variableness, neither shadow of turning, is that with God, there are no gray areas, no fuzzy or broad lines. As I studied this text, I came across a fascinating deeper meaning to it.

It's somewhat of a digression again, and it's a bit technical, but here goes. I hope you'll be as fascinated as I was. The Greek word translated variableness is paralagi, if I'm pronouncing it correctly, from which we get our English word parallax.

To demonstrate what parallax is, I'm going to position my two hands like so. Now if I asked someone standing right in the center aisle to describe the relative position of my two hands, they would say they are in line with each other and in line with my head. But now if that same person were to walk over to the right side of the room, and I were to ask them to describe the position of my hands, they would say, your left hand is off to the left and your head is off to the right.

Now, this is not an optical illusion. It's a simple visual phenomenon called parallax, which means that the relative position of two objects, one near and one far, my two hands and my head, appear different depending on the position of the observer. On the screen is a picture that illustrates the two different views of a distant object, the colored squares, relative to a near object, the yellow star, depending on the position of the viewer.

As you can see from viewpoint A up at the top left corner, the object, the yellow star, appears to be in front of the blue square, but if the viewer moves down to the lower left corner, viewpoint B, now the object appears to be in line with the red square. This is a common occurrence, and we sometimes describe this with the common expression, I'm looking at that from a different angle. So now what's so important about this? Well, parallax is a very useful phenomenon to astrophysicists because they know that as the Earth orbits around the sun, their position as observers of the planets and stars will change.

And here's the important part. They can use multiple observations of the distant stars relative to the position of the sun at different times of the year, and trigonometry to calculate the distance from the Earth to the stars. Did you ever wonder how scientists can say that star is 10 light years away, that star is 50 light years away? How could they determine that? Parallax.

So, given all that scientific technical explanation, here is an interpretive rendering of James 1:17, and it turns out that James was an early astrophysicist. He was drawing an illustration about God by lifting his reader's attention to the heavens above. This, again, is an interpreted rendering.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from Jehovah God, the Father who created the lights in heaven, the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars. There is no parallax with God. He changes not.

He is the same no matter from what perspective you view him. He is the same today as yesterday and tomorrow. If you think God has changed his word, his character, or his ways, the change is in your perspective.

You have moved or changed in such a way that you see God differently. Neither is the shadow of an eclipse across the face of God to obscure his view of the earth or his care over you. I thought there was a rich, deeper meaning behind the words in James 117 describing how God draws lines.

Okay, back to the subject of this part of our discourse about drawing lines, namely, our second consideration of how God draws lines, and that is upon Jesus when he was on earth. We go to the scriptures again, this time Luke 1250. But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straightened till it be accomplished? We use a form of that word straightened, straight, S-T-R-A-I-T, in a literal way, to describe a narrow waterway bounded on both sides by the lines of the shore.

We also use that word straight in a figurative way to describe restrictions, limitations, boundary lines that we cannot or dare not cross. I am a straight here. Another scripture describing lines God drew for his son Jesus is Psalm 40 verses 7 and 8. Then said I, Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart.

God drew the line of his will, of his law, for Jesus, in Jesus' very being, his heart, and Jesus was both delighted and straightened to perform it. This scripture brings us nicely to the third part of our consideration of how God draws lines, namely how God draws lines upon mankind. In Old Testament times, God gave Israel the law covenant and all of its very specific unambiguous requirements or rules or lines in the Hebrew.

The law was a series of bright, narrow lines defining God's will for his chosen people, what was acceptable and what was unacceptable to God, clearly drawn and commanded to be read to the people so that they would not be ignorant of where God drew those lines. In New Testament times, specifically for the benefit of the consecrated spiritual Israel, God draws lines for his adopted children. I have an illustration I like to use in this regard and this illustration is a little more complex than the first one I used, showing a dividing line between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable.

I first heard this illustration described many years ago by Brother Carl Hagensick and he used the terms the express will of God and the permissive will of God. The express will of God is like a line down the center of a roadway and it applies to all of us. We are to stay on that line and not deviate off of that line to the right or to the left.

God's will as represented by that line is expressly stated in the scriptures, hence the name the express will of God. Among the many examples of the express will of God are Paul's words in Romans 12, 14 and 17. Bless them which persecute you.

Provide things honest in the sight of all men. Also from the pen of the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 4, 15 we read Let none of you suffer as a busy body in other men's matters. And lastly in these few examples from the Apostle John in 1 John 5, 21 Little children keep yourselves from idols.

And there are of course many more examples of the express will of God. Very narrow lines drawn for all of our behaviors in the scriptures. The other part of this illustration is called the permissive will of God.

The permissive will of God is not expressly stated in the scriptures. In the permissive will of God we have some leeway to choose our actions and make decisions within boundaries that are broader than the express will of God. And so in our illustration the permissive will of God is drawn as the shoulder markings on each side of a roadway.

We can move to the left or to the right as long as we stay within these outer lines so that we don't go off the roadway. Everything within these two lines is in accordance with God's permissive will for each of us as individuals. Anything beyond these lines on either side is unacceptable.

Now while the express will of God clearly stated in the scriptures applies to all of us uniformly the permissive will of God is more individual. It is a part of God's training and shaping and molding each of us individually into copies of his dear son. Examples of important actions, decisions, and choices each of us is given to make within the boundaries of God's permissive will are should I go to college or not? Should I live in this city or in another city? Should I attend this ecclesia or that ecclesia? Should I marry or remain single? If I marry, should we have children or not? And if so, how many? Should I take this job or that job? Now there are no scriptures that expressly give each of us individually the answers to those questions in our own particular life circumstances.

However, there are many scriptural principles and precepts and lines of morality which guide our words and actions and help us determine where those outer lines are for each of us. The important understanding we should gain from this illustration is that God can shape us and train us and mold us into copies of Jesus as long as we seek to discern and stay in between the two lines that mark God's permissive will. And I'll come back to this illustration a little later as well.

Let's move on now to part four. How mankind in general draws lines. Here are five interesting facts about how people draw lines.

Fact number one is that for any given issue or context we all draw lines in different places. Here's a simple example, almost a trivial example. When you go to a restaurant, you have a meal, nothing special, not a fancy restaurant or a fancy meal, how much do you tip? 10 percent? 15 percent? 20 percent? More? Again, this is just a regular meal at a regular restaurant where you receive regular average service.

And I think if I asked each of you to respond, we'd find out that in this group we tip in a range of percentages. Not all of us tip exactly the same. Here's another trivial example.

How much TV watching is too much? One hour per day? Three hours per day? Five hours? Again, I think we'd find that we would each answer that question differently. Take it all together in a range of numbers. Now, there are many reasons why we tip what we do and why we feel the way we do about how many hours of TV per day is too much to watch.

Some of those reasons are related to our consecrations, some are related to the way we were brought up, and other factors. And I don't have time to explain the reasons for fact number one today. But closely related to fact number one is fact number two.

That is that we all draw lines with varying degrees of sharpness. Some of us draw sharp, fine, narrow lines all the time. Some of us draw broad, fuzzy lines all the time.

And some of us draw some fine lines and some fuzzy lines depending on the issue or context of the line that we are drawing. When we draw a sharp line, we say there is a principle involved here. It's black and white.

When we draw a fuzzy broad line, we say it's a gray area. It's a judgment call. And I'll come back to that word judgment a little later too.

Fact number three is that we want others to draw their lines in the same place where we draw our lines. And as fine or as broad as we draw our lines. After all, we are drawing lines where they should be drawn in the right place.

If we didn't think so, we would change and draw the lines somewhere else. When I tip, I tip the right amount. And you should do the same if our circumstances are similar.

If you tip less, you're stingy. If you tip more than I do, you're wasteful. Everyone should tip the same as me.

And feel the same about TV watching as me. And draw the lines in the same places I do. That's fact number three.

And not only are each of us convinced that we draw our lines in the right places, some of us are unwilling to even consider that we might possibly should think about redrawing that line in a different place. Such of us not only draw the line, but we also anchor it and set it in concrete. And one who draws his line here marries one who draws her line there.

That marriage is going to be a real character builder. Now, I'm speaking purely hypothetically and not from personal experience. Fact number four is that we sometimes draw lines in our thinking and in our dealing with others without even realizing that we are drawing lines.

Just as God drew the lines of his will for Jesus in the very being of his Son, so too our earthly parents drew the lines of their values and their will for us in our very characters. That's what we call our upbringing, or sometimes we say, well, that's how I was raised. That's how my parents brought me up.

And it is indeed a large part of who we are. Sometimes we are aware of the lines we have in our very being and sometimes we aren't. But in either case, whether we are aware of those lines or not, they do indeed guide our behavior and often even control where we draw new lines when we become adults.

Fact number five is some people want lots of lines in their lives. They respect them. They need them.

Others don't like lines in their lives, especially lines drawn by others. Again, it goes back to how we were raised. If our parents drew lines that we could understand and accept as children, and if we were of a compliant nature, we came to like, even desire lines to tell us what to do in many circumstances as we grew up.

On the other hand, if our parents drew lines we felt were arbitrary, capricious, and inconsistent, and if we were of a more independent, even rebellious nature, we came to dislike lines and often tried to intentionally cross them just to see what would happen. Those are the five facts about lines. My time is moving along, but just before we come to the fifth and most important part of this talk, here is one more illustration using lines, and this time the lines are circles.

There are two examples of how mankind in general draws circular lines that I'd like to briefly discuss. Our first example of how people in general draw lines is circles of concern and influence. It's a well-known idea.

I didn't originate it. One circle represents all the things that concern us, our financial situation, our relationships, both earthly and spiritual, the political climate, world events, even the weather, and so on. The other circle represents those things in our lives which we can influence to a lesser or greater degree.

Examples of simple things that we can greatly influence are which Sunday study do you normally attend? Upstairs, downstairs, or neither? Where will you eat lunch today? At home, in a restaurant, which restaurant? What conventions will you attend this year? All these are simple things that we have much influence over. In fact, we even control them and their outcome. By contrast, there are other things that we have only a little influence over, and some things that we have no influence whatsoever at all over.

This illustration shows the degree of influence over things that concern us by the overlap of the circles. Things that concern me, which I can influence, are within the overlap. Things that concern me, over which I have no influence, are outside the overlap.

In general, people who are concerned about a large number of things over which they have no control, as this diagram illustrates, are unhappy and fearful over what the future holds. Our second example of how people draw circles is circles of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. It's a fact of life that like likes like.

People like and associate with people who are like themselves. Birds of a feather flock together is an old saying that illustrates this same idea. Some people are very exclusive in their associations, limiting them to people who are of the same race, social status, level of education, and economic means, as this diagram illustrates, with the smaller red circle.

Others are more inclusive, associating with a broad spectrum of people from all walks of life and ethnic origin and economic social status. Well, that brings us to the most important part of our discourse, part five. How the new creature should draw lines.

Up until now, I've been laying the foundation of lines as a scriptural and behavioral concept. Now we want to learn how to use lines as a tool to increase our spiritual growth. I have seven suggestions to make, and these are only suggestions.

Take what you think you can use to aid your spiritual growth and leave the rest. My suggestion number one is draw lines how God draws them. As we said before, God draws narrow, bright lines, not fuzzy, broad ones.

Remember the line among the trees in the Garden of Eden. Recall the provision of the law covenant using the illustration of a line drawn to separate sin from righteousness. Now, on occasion, we might be inclined to want to blur the line a little bit to accommodate the flesh to draw our line this way.

Our flesh will try to entice us to say, you know, there's a gray area between righteousness and sin. Let's call it unrighteousness. God does not approve it because it's not righteousness, but it's not outright sin.

So go ahead. Indulge. Do that.

But no. 1 John 5.17 declares, all unrighteousness is sin. The manna comment for January 27th includes these words.

It is not sufficient that we acknowledge sin and its various forms to be evil, and that we resolve that we will strive against it because it is under the Lord's ban. In addition to this, we are to root out of our hearts every longing, every desire for everything not thoroughly approved by the Lord. That last thought connects nicely with my suggestion number two, which is draw lines where God draws them.

For the consecrated, God draws lines to exclude quite a bit. Everything that is worldly and feeds the flesh is, of course, excluded. But also excluded are things that are not

conducive to spiritual growth.

And drawing this line in the best place will lead to a struggle with the flesh. The flesh will try to persuade the new creature to draw the line a little more in this direction to include a little more of what we perhaps previously thought was unacceptable. To draw that line a little more leniently, not so severely.

Don't be such an oddball in the eyes of your friends and neighbors. Don't be such a fanatic the flesh suggests. Relax.

Enjoy the good things of life a little. Along this line, recall how the law covenant given to the nation of Israel was quite restrictive. And that the new creature is charged with keeping the spirit of the law.

Now, in common usage of that term, you hear it used among corrupt politicians of the day. They say, well, I followed the spirit of the law, as if somehow the spirit of the law is less restrictive than the letter of the law. But no.

The contrary is true. The spirit of the law, which we are to follow, is much more restrictive than the letter of the law. Remember in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, how Jesus told his hearers that the letter of the law said, thou shalt not kill.

Whereas the spirit of the law, much more restrictive, says, thou shalt not hate. Four more examples of how the spirit of the law is more restrictive than the letter of the law follows in Matthew 5, culminating with the most important of them, the law of love. And each of these examples illustrating how the spirit of the law, which Jesus' followers are to obey, is more restrictive than the letter of the law.

I showed before the illustration of the express and permissive will of God. And the point I'd like to make here is that when we seek to know God's permissive will, and discerning God's will is a study all in itself, but when we seek to know for us individually God's permissive will through prayer and the study of his word, perhaps we would do well to draw those lines narrow, close together, because we are in the narrow way. I also showed before how people in general draw lines in different places.

Sometimes it is important for new creatures to draw their lines in the same place. Acts 4.32 says of the early church, And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. Paul in Ephesians 4 verses 1 and 3 beseeches the brethren to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

It seems to me that on the occasions where we are not of one mind, when we fail to keep the unity of the spirit and are not at peace with each other, it is the flesh that has gotten in the way. Which brings us nicely to my suggestion number three. Make sure it's your new creature drawing the lines and not the flesh.

Frequent self-examination is the key, and if it is warranted, don't be reluctant to say, maybe I need to redraw that line because it was drawn, at least in part, by my flesh. It's often painful to examine ourselves because we don't like what we see. But on the contrary, that's where spiritual growth starts.

With the recognition of an area of our developing Christ-likeness that is lacking and needs improvement. So take heart when you see that the battle with the flesh is not going as well as you would like. And recall Paul's brutally self-honest depiction of his struggle with the old creature and how he often failed.

In Romans 7, 15-25. I'll read just three verses. Romans 7, 18-20.

For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I, my new creature, would do, I do not.

But the evil which I would not, that I, my old creature, my flesh, do. Now if I, my flesh, do that I, my new creature, would not, it is no more I, my new creature, that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. This is the struggle that each of us faced as the Paul did.

Another point is worth mentioning here. When we draw lines, where God's principles dictate they should be drawn and are clearly stated, then anchor them there and set them in concrete. Principles clearly stated in the scriptures and plainly applicable to the context of the line we are drawing should never be compromised.

Mere preferences, however, can and should be sacrificed in the interest of unity and peace among us. That's a well-known concept with which we are all familiar. My suggestion number four recalls the illustration of the circle of concern and the circle of influence.

Recall how I said that people are unhappy whose circle of concern outside the overlap of their circle of influence is large. There are many things that concern them that they have no influence over. My suggestion for those in this situation is as Queen Elsa so passionately sang it in the movie Frozen, let it go.

And we Bible students will often say, I left that in the Lord's hands, but did we really? Sometimes we leave things in the Lord's hands, wanting the Lord to work it out the way we want it to work out, but are unable to make it happen. So we put it in the Lord's hands, but we still have a few fingers on it, and we try to move the Lord's hand to work things out the way we would prefer. Let it go completely, and then be prepared for the thing that concerned you, which you did truly put in the Lord's hand, to work out differently than what you would have liked it to be.

And yet it will work out profitably for your spiritual growth. Sometimes the difficulty lies with our inability to realize that the issue troubling us is outside our circle of influence.

So we try this, and we try that, all without success, and we become increasingly frustrated on top of being unhappy.

In this circumstance, I've always appreciated the well-known serenity prayer attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr, and it's paraphrased in several ways. The version I like says, God grant me the strength to change the things I can, the serenity to accept the things I can't, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

My suggestion number five is also along the line of circles. The other circles I talked about, circles of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. Just as the flesh will try to influence where we draw lines, so it will try to influence how big or how small we draw the circles of inclusiveness and exclusiveness in our relationships, especially amongst our brethren.

My suggestion is simple, and the same as I have said before. Draw your lines where God draws them, and draw your circles of inclusiveness and exclusiveness where God draws them. Sometimes I fear we give only lip service to our Lord's commandment, the express will of God, to love the brethren.

We say, I love all the brethren, with agape love, in fact. But then our actions contradict our words. We gossip, we miss opportunities for service, we exclude, we avoid.

Adapting 1 John 3.18, draw your circle of inclusiveness among your brethren, not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. My suggestion number six is ponder God's word. And it recalls verse four of our opening hymn, which says, But not alone do worlds of light and earth display thy grand designs, tis when our eyes behold thy word, we read thy name in fairest lines.

When we look up, we see God's name and his character in the order and beauty of the heavens. When we look around, we see God's name and character in the wonders of nature. And when we look down at our Bibles, we see God's name and character in his word, in fairest lines of truth.

Line upon line, precept upon precept. Ponder God's word. Don't just read it or even study it.

Ponder it. Dwell on it. Reflect on it.

Act on it. Live on it. Line upon line, precept upon precept, as Isaiah 28, 9 and 10, which we read before, puts it.

I'll read it again. Whom shall he teach knowledge, and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breast, the mature Christians who have exhibited spiritual growth. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line.

Here a little, and there a little. We gain a little here and a little there by continually reading, studying, and pondering God's word. As Peter said in closing his second general epistle, his final, ultimate words that he wanted to leave in the minds of his readers among the brethren.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Grace without knowledge is incomplete and insufficient, as is knowledge without grace. Ponder God's word, and develop both.

My last suggestion, number seven, uses an illustration I didn't show you before, and it's a little different from the others. I call this suggestion Walk the Line. We learned in high school geometry that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

That reminds us of the scripture in Hebrews 12, 13, Make straight paths for your feet. In the Old Testament, in fact, the word translated iniquity has the thought of to make crooked. So the shortest distance between where we are now on this side of the veil and our destination, making our calling and election sure on the other side of the veil, is a straight line.

Walk the line. A few concluding thoughts. It has probably occurred to you that learning where to draw lines is a lot like learning to exercise sound judgment, and indeed it is.

Developing sound judgment is a much broader endeavor, and learning where to draw lines illustrates just one small part of learning to exercise good sound judgment. There's a familiar saying about good judgment that I've always enjoyed. It says good judgment comes from painful experiences.

Painful experiences come from bad judgment. So don't be afraid or discouraged when you occasionally exercise bad judgment. The painful experiences will likely follow, after which you will have learned to exercise good judgment in the future.

Learning to exercise good judgment often requires us to make the right decision when it is difficult to do so. A person much wiser than myself once said, the right decision is difficult to make, but easy to live with. The wrong decision is easy to make, but difficult to live with.

So to come full circle to my opening thought, much of our consecrated lives are spent learning where to draw lines. In this memorial season, as we reflect upon our consecrations and our spiritual growth since we last partook of the emblems together, may we continue to draw lines of good judgment in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and ultimately in our characters, because it is our characters which will last for eternity and if faithful be found fit for a place in the heavenly kingdom.