

I. Set Up

A. Good morning. Welcome. Intro. Guests.

B. We are exploring the way forward. The question is, how do we grow to be more like Christ?

C. This series is focused on those who have made a decision to embrace him. Who have accepted the eternal life He offers. The question is, how do we grow in spiritual maturity? How do we yield more of our heart and live to the Spirit of God so that we can be transformed – have the fruit of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and the like) come alive in our life?

D. This series assumes that we want to get better; that we can get better, and that it doesn't happen by accident. The question is, what is our part? What are things we can do to position ourselves so that God makes us less angry and more patient – more like Jesus?

E. In the first sermon we looked at Confession – our need to own who we are. A willingness to be honest with ourselves and others about our brokenness and sin. Then next area highlighted was prayer. Last week Carlos spoke about rest.

F. Today, Mike is going to use Martin Luther as an example of the tenacity we need to embrace.

G. Right now ...

II. Worship

A. Worship leader needs to read: Philippians 3:8-15

1. I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way,

III. Intro

A. I am recently back from Germany and Turkey. I was in Istanbul, Turkey (show picture #1) with Joel Sensinig, visiting Christ Church ministry partners who are there working among Muslim refugees.

1. There are two million refugees in Istanbul – from Syrian, Iran, Afghanistan, various parts of African, such as Eritrea and Nigeria - which pushes the population over 20 million.

B. Our partners there are doing great work – very strategic. I had a chance to spend three days with them, preach in one of the churches they have started and visit some of their programs. Their equivalent of MOPS – which was a bit different, it includes a free meal and a chance to meet with a nurse, pre-and post-natal education, as well as Bible studies and the like – had so many women trying to get in that you needed a ticket. And they had a bouncer at the door keeping people out.

C. What they are doing is thoughtful, strategic, Gospel-driven and working. Thank you for helping support it. Our goal is to help them expand their work with one or two other churches. They have an Arabic and Afghan fellowships in development. They need space, leaders and money. I'll be telling you more about that in the weeks ahead.

D. By the way, some of you prayed for me – specifically that I would get in. I did not have a VISA and because of some tensions between the US and Turkey, they were not granting them. But... I got in. Everyone was surprised. As miracles go, not as big as, parting the Red Sea, but fun to be a part of.

E. That was Turkey. I was also in Germany retracing some of Luther's steps. And I want to use that to frame my comments today – which come from the Philippians passage that was read – Paul's admonition to the Christians in Philippi, and to us, to press on towards the goal for the prize of the higher calling of God in Christ Jesus.

F. We have been talking about the way forward – how to lean in with God, how to help grow closer to him, more like Christ. So far we've talked about confession, prayer and rest. Today I want to reflect on tenacity, courage, discipline, drive, grit, commitment, whatever – that we need to exercise to run through the tape.

G. And Luther is a good example of this, because he is courageous and relentless – he chases after God. And he does this while fiercely protecting the Gospel.

1. Many think that the equation is: Faith + Good Works = Right Relationship w/ God. This is religion 101. It is not the Gospel. It is not Christianity. The radical, unexpected good news is: we do not earn God's favor nor do we have to try. It is a gift.

2. Faith = Right Relationship with God + Good Works

H. Luther was not perfect. Not even close.

1. He was earthy to the point of being crude;

2. He could be stubborn beyond belief.

3. He said some things we wish he hadn't.

4. My time in Germany persuaded me that Luther was crazier than I thought – which he sort of needed to be to do what he did.

I. Our only flawless example is Jesus. But we can learn things from others and as we sit on the eve of the 500th anniversary of the way he changed the world, it's worth reflecting on him just a bit.

IV. So, here's the deal. On Tuesday of this week, we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, the cultural, political, economic, philosophical revolution that changed just about everything – countries, families, work, worship, the church and more. All of this happened as the Middle Ages were coming to a close.

- A. What we call “the West” starts with the intersection of Greek philosophy and the Hebrew Scriptures – our Old Testament – about three thousand years ago.
- B. Then the Greeks give way to the Romans who mount an Empire
- C. The Roman Empire lasted a long time but everything changed with Jesus. God takes on human flesh, walks among us and shakes things up.
1. He teaches, serves, and ultimately dies in our place.
 2. After his resurrection, he commissions his church to tell people who He is, what He did and to start living it out now.
 3. This church starts small, but it grows quickly and spreads out in every direction.
- D. In the fifth century, Rome falls and Europe goes into the Dark Ages, which are followed by the Middle Ages, which are followed by the Renaissance and then the Reformation.
1. The Middle Ages – also called Christendom - were better than you were told. They are denigrated: by those who do not like faith, and because towards the end the church jumps the tracks a bit. It gets heavy handed.
 2. At the time, the church was the Roman Catholic Church. And lots of groups – both inside and outside the church – were trying to reform it.
- E. Luther didn’t set out to start a new church. But that is what happened.
1. Because he was wicked smart, and because his Dad was having some success in business, Luther had a chance to be the first one in his family to go to college. The family plan was that he would become a lawyer.
 2. But just as his law studies were getting started, he gets caught in a lightning storm just outside Erfurt, and promises God that if God would spare his life, he’d become a monk. God does, and to his dad’s dismay, Luther feels he must honor that pledge. So he enrolls in the Augustinian monastery (picture #2) in town.
 3. But Luther is a troubled monk. He does not like God, and no amount of fasting, praying and good works helps him sense God’s love and presence. Perhaps this describes you!
- F. More has been written about Luther than has been written about any other person ever other than Jesus, so, there are books you can read and movies you can watch, and I have posted my notes from my trip. I am not going to say much about his life other than:
1. After earning his PhD, Luther was sent to Wittenberg, Germany to teach at a new university there.
 2. While teaching, he was also pastoring, and he grew very frustrated by the sale of indulgences – a sort of get out of jail free card that the church was selling to do things like: fund the Crusades and build St. Peter’s Basilica.^{1, 2}
 3. This led him to draft his 95 theses – which was his way of calling for a discussion among church leaders. He wrote them in Latin and posted them on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg (picture 3) – which was the 16th century version of writing a blog.
 4. Around the same time, he had a personal breakthrough.

a) Because the Renaissance had emphasized studying the original sources – their battle cry was *ad fontes* – back to the sources - Luther had learned Greek.

b) In preparation for teaching at Wittenberg, he began to study the New Testament in the original, and he had a eureka moment while studying R 1:17. What the Latin translation he had been using said was: if you do the things set out by the church – penance, go to confession, deny yourself physical pleasure, give money – then you can become righteous. He was doing all of those things – in fact, he was known to spend up to 3 hours a day in confession – but he knew he was still a long way from holy.

c) What he discovered is that righteousness is a gift. We are forgiven on the basis of Christ's work not ours. His righteousness is credited to our account.³ This changed everything. Luther had a eureka moment and immediately started writing about it.⁴

G. This sets off a whole bunch of things:

1. Luther starts to agitate for reform. He says: we've got some things wrong.
2. He goes to Heidelberg for a mtg with his order. (I visited there). We have notes from his presentation at that time, and we see how he was refining his thinking.
3. He gets called to Leipzig for a debate with a prominent theologian named Eck. This is where he is told to recant and he gives his famous line, "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."
4. Frederick the Elector – sort of the leader of Germany (there was no Germany) – has Luther kidnapped as soon as the conference is over and taken to his castle (picture 4) to live in hiding. Luther is there for two years, during which time he translates the New Testament into German.

H. When he gets out of there he needs to put down a rebellion back in Wittenberg. And he will spend the next twelve years working on a translation of the Old Testament.

V. I learned a lot on my trip. Some pieces fell into place and I had some ah hah moments. The Fall colors and perfect weather made Germany amazing.

A. But part of what I was seeking was what I might learn from Luther's life. I knew enough about him to know that he wasn't going to be a hero. He was a bit too crazy for that. But my sense was, there was a lot there to learn. And two things emerged.

1. One was, Luther was courageous. He feared God, which meant, he didn't really fear anyone or anything else. And that was very freeing.
2. The second – which is the one we are focused on, and which actually started to come together before the trip, was: Luther worked hard to grow close to God. He saw it as a priority and he kept at it. Do you? Are you?

B. I think a lot of us think that following God should be easy and fun and immediately rewarding. And one of the reasons that we do not see much growth is because we do not follow God with the kind of tenacity that we get called to.

- VI. As some of you know, discussions about zeal are all the rage in secular circles right now.
- A. There are academic studies seeking to understand why some people are more “successful” than others. And some of the things that get attention are attributes like: zeal, grit, self-control, optimism, courage, resolve, will-power.⁵ I have read some of these studies. They talk about: goal setting, hypnosis, cold showers, positive thinking.
- B. And there is a booming industry where you can hire a former Navy Seal or ultra marathoner to come in and talk about grit.
- C. Some of it I find interesting. Some of these things you think: I want more of that in my life. Or, I want my kids to have more of that. Who can be against this “get back up and keep fighting” resolve.
- VII. Well, I want you to know three things:
- A. First, the celebration of resolve and discipline and courage and tenacity isn’t new. It’s very much in line with what we see in people like:
1. David when he takes on Goliath or rallies his men when all seems lost.
 2. Daniel and his three friends surviving in Babylon.
 3. Paul, who gives us the same kind of advice from Paul, when he compares the Christian life with sports.
 - a) *Not in the sense that there are winners and losers, but in the sense that there is a challenge of endurance that requires training, self-discipline, sacrifice, grit.*
 - b) *Listen to Paul describing what is required in I Cor. 9:24f: Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*
- B. This “make it happen will power” is just a part of the equation. And it’s a dangerous part to highlight.
1. What makes us successful doesn’t necessarily make us faithful.
 2. There were people in the Bible who had a lot of grit and will power. They were called the Pharisees, and Jesus said they were profoundly misguided.
 3. We can be tenacious in the wrong direction, in pursuit of the wrong things.
 4. And there is nothing in popular literature about surrendering to God, or yielding to the Holy Spirit. Nothing about confession or prayer or worship.
 5. We have to be cautious when we highlight tenacity.
- C. But – number three - one of the things we need to grow, and to finish well – to run through the tape – is a commitment to keep doing the right things, even when we don’t want to.

1. This isn't rocket science. Some people prioritize spending time with God – reading their Bible and praying – and some do not. We are called to “work out our salvation.” We are called to “press on towards the goal for the prize.”
 2. When I look at people who I know who have fallen away, I would say:
 - a) *Few did so because of questions they couldn't get answers to.*
 - b) *More simply underestimated the resolve they would need to bring. To cite Jesus in Luke 14, they didn't “count the cost.”*
 3. Have you counted the cost? Or are you losing your resolve?
- D. When I was in Istanbul, I preached in a small Persian fellowship that met in the afternoon. In the morning I went with our partners there to the church they attend.
1. The building is the chapel in the Dutch embassy. To get there, they hike down a half mile hill (they do not have a car), get on a ferry across the Bosphorus Strait (go from Asia to Europe), take a train and then walk another half mile. Then they leave their kids in one building and walk another block to the Dutch Embassy, go through security and then gather in the basement chapel there.
 2. The pastor was setting out a challenge like this. The place was packed, but he was on them about showing up at church. He said something I thought was really on point. He said, “I do not expect you will remember much of what I say. Maybe one or two sermons in your life will get imprinted on your brain, but weekly cadence of showing up and joining others in worship and prayer and sitting under God's Word is something you are expected to do. It's a long obedience in the same direction that will remake you.

VIII. Let me close by rereading Paul's description of his commitment to pursue God.

A. I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way,

IX. Wrap up

- A. The call today is to grit. And in case the obvious is not clear, no one was grittier than Jesus.
- B. In taking the sins of the world on his shoulders, he took on physical, emotional and spiritual agony.
 1. He knew what he was signing up for
 2. And He preserved
 3. He showed amazing grit so that we could be reconciled to God.

¹ In 1516-17 Johann Tetzel – a papal commissioner for indulgences comes into town to raise money to rebuild St Peter’s Basilica by selling indulgences. The Roman Catholic leaders were teaching that we were saved by faith plus good works. Faith alone was not enough. And one of the ways you could gain good works was by donating money to the church. Tetzel was also offering sales for your ancestors. "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." On October 31, 1517, Luther posted an academic rebuttal of this and some of the other abuses he saw in the church.

² Indulgences raised another troubling issue: "...the sale of indulgences undermined respect for the pope, since Christians understandably asked, first, why the pope did not liberate the tormented souls of purgatory for the sake of love, rather than demanding money for it, and, second, why he didn’t use his own money to build St. Peter’s, rather than that of ‘indigent believers.’” (Carl J. Richard, *The Battle for the American Mind* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 5.

³ He writes about this in his commentary on Romans: I greatly longed to understand Paul’s Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, “the justice of God,” because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore, I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that “the just shall live by his faith.” Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the “justice of God” had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. The passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven...He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.

⁴ What helped Luther was the fact that – because of the Renaissance, he had learned Greek, and the idea that everyone should “return to the sources” led him to look at the Greek text not the Latin translation. (ad fonts). The Latin word being used for justification at that moment in church history was *justificare*, which came from the Roman judicial system. It is made up of the Latin words *justus*, which is justice or righteousness, and the verb, *facare*, which means to make. And so, the Latin fathers understood the doctrine of justification to be the process by which God makes people righteous over time through the sacraments. When Luther looked at the Greek word that was in the New Testament it was *dikaios*, which didn’t mean to make righteous, but rather to *regard* as righteous, to *declare* as righteous. And this was the moment of awakening for Luther. He said, “You mean, Paul is not talking about our becoming righteousness like God, but being declared righteous by His grace? That changes everything. He then realized that this was an alien righteousness - *justitia alienum*; a righteousness that belongs properly to somebody else. Luther said, “When I discovered that, I was born again of the Holy Ghost, the doors of paradise swung open, and I walked through.”

⁵ See work by Drs. Martin Seligman of Penn and Chris Peterson of Univ. of Mich.