



40 Days of Transformation

REMOVING HINDRANCES TO LIFE-WITH-GOD

Lessons from Jonah

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.... When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. -- Jonah 3:1-5,10, 4:1

The Warning to Nineveh

40 days – a season – the time is short!

Nineveh

- a great city, renowned for art, culture, wealth and military might.
- an ungodly city, committing evil – a city of idolatry

The Lessons for Jonah

Jonah doesn't want to do this
perhaps because of his own idols

Elitism/Racism – the people of Nineveh are not Jewish

Reputation – doesn't want to look bad – his prophecy didn't come true

Comfort – shade tree from heat – effort to go to Nineveh

The Human Proclivity to Worship

What are our idols – the idols of our lives and our world?

What things in your life have the potential to dominate your life?

- ▶ Spouse
- ▶ Children/Family
- ▶ Achievement
- ▶ Status
- ▶ Busyness
- ▶ Comfort
- ▶ Security – Financial or otherwise
- ▶ Food
- ▶ Wine
- ▶ Other People/Relationships

How Are You Doing?

How is your faith-filled living?

Prayer life? Time with God?

Time in service to others?

How are you doing

– Sins of Omission

-- Sins of Commission

“All people of the modern world exist in a continual and flagrant antagonism between their consciences and their way of life.”

-- Leo Tolstoy

The Need to Turn to God

Perhaps our time is short as well – perhaps we have idols of our own making, be they like Nineveh’s or Jonah’s idols.

We continually have the need to turn from the sins and idols of our lives and turn back to God – repent

Repentance is an on-going need for all human beings
for “All sin and fall short of the glory of God”

God's Call is to Abundant Living

Our Creator designed us for a particular kind of life – one lived in connection to, dependence upon, and interaction with our God.

We will flourish and experience profound love, joy and peace if we live that life. We will struggle, be fearful and anxious, be frustrated and unfulfilled to the extent we drift away from our Creator's Intention.

What we are talking about tonight is freedom – freedom from bondage to self and freedom to become more and more the person God intends me to be – which will bring great joy!

The Invitation to Abundant Living

From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” -- Matthew 4:17

(Repent – to literally turn 180 degrees around)

Jesus said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” -- Matthew 22:37-40

Then Jesus said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. -- Luke 9:23-24

From the Book of Common Prayer – the Baptismal Covenant

- ▶ Will you turn to Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Savior?
- ▶ Do you put your whole trust in His grace and love?
- ▶ Do you promise to follow and obey Him as your Lord?

Do you really, truly intend to live this way?

- ▶ Not a matter of willpower
- ▶ March Madness – amazing basketball in the heat of the game...
....children imitating in the heat of the game....but more is needed
- ▶ Athletes, musicians, military personnel, surgeons know this:
“The reason you practice so much is so that you will always do things automatically the same way every time.”

In the heat of the game of life...

- ▶ Ever find yourself doing, saying something and then later regretting your action? Your intentions may be good, but you seem unable to make any real progress against that sinful tendency you know about – you wish you weren't that way....but seems like you always do it.
- ▶ We approach the spiritual life as if willpower in the heat of the moment is enough, when in other areas of life common sense teaches us that training, planning and preparation – a lifestyle that prepares one for the heat of the battle -- is necessary.

How do we follow Jesus?

Those first disciples heard Jesus call them to follow Him.

And it was clear how they were to do that....drop their nets, leave the tax table, leave their father in the boat and go follow Jesus.

For us it is not so clear. There is no man Jesus in front of us. How do we follow Him?

From Dallas Willard

“When Christ walked the earth, the Christian method of spiritual growth, though perhaps harsher, seemed much simpler...He called out: ‘Follow me!’ They obeyed, literally leaving what they were doing to be with Him. In this way they learned by observation and direct contact and involvement to do what He did and be as He was...How can ordinary human beings such as you and I—who must live in circumstances all too commonplace—follow and become like Jesus Christ? How can we be like Christ always—not just on Sundays when we’re on our best behavior...not as a pose or constant grinding effort, but with the ease and power He had—flowing from the inner depths, acting with quiet force from the innermost mind and soul of the Christ who has become a real part of us?” -- *The Spirit of the Disciplines* p. 13-14.

How Did Jesus Do It?

- ▶ He learned to do it!

“Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered” -- Hebrews 5:8

- ▶ He trained for it

He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where He fasted for 40 days...

He spent time in solitude and prayer

He memorized the Scriptures

He adopted a simple lifestyle

He gave Himself in all-out loving service to others – He lived a life of sacrifice

Jesus Adopted a Lifestyle that Trained Him in Obedience to God

- ▶ Jesus lived in such a way that His very automatic habits were directing His life and practice toward God.
- ▶ Rule of Life

Jesus Accomplished His Work in a Human Body

- ▶ Incarnation – He became man – He had a body just like ours
Revealing God to us – showing us how to live
- ▶ Crucifixion – He died an excruciatingly painful death in the body
Undoing the power of Sin over us – forgiving us
- ▶ Resurrection – He was raised in the body to new life
Breaking the power of death – offering us new life

Following Jesus is a Bodily Action

- ▶ Just as Jesus lived and accomplished God's purposes in a body....so too to follow Christ – to grow 'spiritually' is a bodily activity.
- ▶ Not merely an inner attitude, it is the giving of the full self – the body included to follow Christ
- ▶ If we try to follow Christ apart from our bodied selves we will not be following Him in our real lives.
- ▶ Thus – Spiritual growth is a bodily activity!

Dallas Willard:

“It is with our bodies that we receive the new life that comes as we enter the Kingdom of God. Spirituality does not consist of special inward acts even though it has an inner aspect. It is rather a relationship of our embodied selves to God. That has the natural and irrepressible effect of making us alive to the Kingdom of God – here and now in the material world.”

How Did Jesus Do It?

- ▶ Lifestyle – a Rule of Life – that trained His
- ▶ Body to naturally, habitually follow God and His ways.

- ▶ How can we do it – follow Jesus – really? The same!
by developing a rule of life that trains our bodies to naturally
do as Jesus did!

“The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”



The Challenge

- ▶ Our inner depths are sometimes, perhaps most often, not consciously understood or visible to us...
- ▶ It is hard to submit the whole self with the will and personality of God.
- ▶ Hard to discern and harmonize our parts...thus Paul:

"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me."

-- Romans 7

How Am I Transformed?

- ▶ It is most certainly by the grace of God – His gift
- ▶ And by the work of the Holy Spirit within me
- ▶ And yet...I have choices to make that have real consequences
- ▶ Choices that can either draw me closer to God or pull me further away

Training through Spiritual Disciplines

- ▶ What I need to do is apply the acts of the will at my conscious disposal in such a way to put me on a course of action that will train all parts of me – even those beyond my direct willpower to control in the heat of the moment – to follow Christ.
- ▶ “The entire question of discipline is how to apply the acts of will at our disposal in such a way that the proper course of action, which cannot always be realized by direct and untrained effort, will nevertheless be carried out.” *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard, p. 151-152.

Spiritual Disciplines and Lifestyle

- ▶ Living my life in such a way that I am creating habits, natural impulses to naturally respond as Jesus did and would.
- ▶ *“Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” -- 1 Timothy 4:8*

The Classic Spiritual Disciplines

Over the years the church learned and practiced these, following the example of Jesus and in Scripture and found them to be of great help in growth in godliness and Christlikeness.

2 Kinds of Spiritual Disciplines

- ▶ Abstinence: keeping our appetites and bodily hungers in check—addresses sins of commission
- ▶ to train natural desires (not that things are wrong, eating for example when hungry is not wrong) but...
 - ▶ If my appetite controls my life that is another story!
- ▶ Engagement: replacing the old habit with a new one – addresses sins of omission.

Disciplines of Abstinence: Solitude

- ▶ Solitude: frees us from attachments for a time
- ▶ Cracks open the abyss within

It takes 20 times more the amount of amphetamine to kill individual mice than it takes to kill them in groups. Experimenters also find that a mouse given no amphetamine at all will be dead within ten minutes of being placed in the midst of a group on the drug. Willard

That is the only reason why I desire solitude—to be lost to all created things, to die to them and to the knowledge of them, for they remind me of my distance from You: that You are far from them, even though You are in them. You have made them and Your Presence sustains their being and they hid You from me. And I would live alone, and out of them. O beata solitudo!

Disciplines of Abstinence: Silence

- ▶ Noise of distractions/inner noise
- ▶ Quiet – just us and God
- ▶ Reminds us of death which will cut us off from the world to be alone with God.
- ▶ Another kind of silence: not speaking!
- ▶ Speaking can be a means of control
- ▶ Helps us to listen!
- ▶ A story from my retreat time with Dallas Willard – in silence

Disciplines of Abstinence: Fasting

- ▶ How much of our peace depends on pleasure from eating?
- ▶ How might I be using my eating to compensate for, make me feel better about things?
- ▶ Reminds me of my utter dependence on God.
- ▶ “I have food to eat the you do not know about”
- ▶ Trains us in self-denial – its not just about me and feeding my appetites!

Disciplines of Abstinence

- ▶ Frugality: not using money and resources merely to gratify our own desires or hungers for status, glamour or luxury.
- ▶ Chastity: turning away from dwelling upon or engaging in the sexual dimensions in relating to others – even in marriage!
- ▶ “Contrary to modern thought, it is absolutely vital to the health of our marriages that sexual gratification NOT be placed at the center.” We need to learn to appreciate the spouse as a whole person.
- ▶ Secrecy: doing good, no one sees but God
So as not to do things for the esteem we receive in the eyes of others

Disciplines of Engagement: God's Word

- ▶ Study and or Meditation
- ▶ Turning of the mind toward God...training our thoughts to dwell upon God.
- ▶ Learning to focus in a world of distraction
- ▶ Christian meditation is not merely emptying the mind, but filling it with the Presence of God.
- ▶ Listening for God to speak to us through His Word
- ▶ Ignatian style meditation
- ▶ Left brain study

Disciplines of Engagement: Worship

- ▶ Seeking God present
- ▶ To perceive Him as Lord
- ▶ To train ourselves in those moments to remember what life is about: All for God!
- ▶ To fill the mind with the experience of God
- ▶ Eucharist: commanded by Christ, central to see who God is, mystery of God's presence

Disciplines of Engagement: Celebration

- ▶ Enjoying God! God created joy – He wants us to flourish and enjoy Him and life in connection with faith.
- ▶ Christ has triumphed – joy!
- ▶ This is commanded: “Rejoice in the Lord” Philippians 4
- ▶ Jesus in John 17: “that my joy may be in them.”

Disciplines of Engagement: Service

- ▶ Not to enhance me or my abilities but to do things that show forth Christ's love to others
- ▶ Trains me to be selfless
- ▶ Jesus said, "learn to be the servant of all."

Disciplines of Engagement: Prayer

- ▶ Not just BCP!
- ▶ God moves in answer to prayer – it is real!
- ▶ Listening too!
- ▶ God wants to hear and answer – greatest resource of all – in God
- ▶ At times prayer is “discerning where God is at work, what He wants to do.”
- ▶ Throughout the day, connecting our lives to God, learning to pray without ceasing (I Thes 5)

Disciplines of Engagement

- ▶ Fellowship – experiencing Christ’s body – all the members, more of Christ than any one individual
 - ▶ We have a common purpose
 - ▶ We can strengthen and encourage in Christ
 - ▶ Connecting “us” to “Him”
- ▶ Confession – being real with one another, vulnerable/weakness hearing the assurance of pardon...taking a personal inventory
- ▶ Submission – yielding to God and others...opposite of sin

Developing a Plan: a Rule of Life

- ▶ Example of St. Antony
- ▶ This is MOST IMPORTANT – put it into your life!
- ▶ 1. Develop a plan – times, start and end the day, more?
 - ▶ Prayer
 - ▶ Water three times in the morning
 - ▶ Special prayers for occasions
 - ▶ Scripture
 - ▶ Solitude/Silence
 - ▶ Examen/reflecting on the day or praying through day ahead
 - ▶ Worship
 - ▶ compline

Developing a Rule of Life

- ▶ 2. Collect Resources
 - ▶ Meaningful prayers
 - ▶ Book of Common Prayer
 - ▶ Other resources
 - ▶ Devotional books
 - ▶ Read through Bible plans
 - ▶ Daily Office Readings
 - ▶ Weekly lectionary Readings

Developing a Rule of Life

- ▶ 3. Planning Weekly Activities
 - ▶ Worship
 - ▶ Service
 - ▶ Fellowship
 - ▶ Bible Study Groups or other small groups
 - ▶ Christian Friendships/Prayer Partners
- ▶ 4. Planning Seasonal Activities
 - ▶ Mission Trips
 - ▶ Days at a Soup Kitchen, etc
 - ▶ Lenten Series
 - ▶ Stewardship/giving planning to give back to God