

Christ Presbyterian Church
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Reflections; Living Intentionally
Acts 2:42

How's everybody doing? It's summer in Minnesota. Almost August. So exciting and depressing all at the same time. Before we jump into the Word, let's pray.

God, we pray that Your Spirit will speak, that You would move in whatever small or big ways You will, Lord, and that we would walk out of here more faithful followers of You. To the glory of Your Name, by the strength and power of Your Spirit, all God's people said,

All: Amen.

If you have your Bibles, turn to Acts chapter 2. We are starting a six-week series called Reflections. August is one of those months where we are not always consistent coming to church. Is that fair to say? We just thought it would be fun if you would hear over the course of the next six weeks, six different speakers sharing what God is doing in their lives, and we are going to show you from God's Word what God is saying to us. Our hope and our prayer is that it connects with each one of you on some level, that God will take the message into you through the Spirit and use it to encourage you and get you thinking. So this week I get to talk about something God has been truly working on in my life over the last couple of years. It is this idea of intentional living.

I want to start with a question, and here is my question. **What are the things that you are purposeful or intentional about?** When you think about your life, what are the things that you are intentional about? Being the good person that I am, I started judging the people around me. Seriously. We have these neighbors next door to us, just to the west. They have a flower garden around their house that is amazing. I try not to touch soil because if I touch soil, whatever is in it dies but they, the moment the snow is off the ground, are out there pulling weeds, clipping, doing all that stuff that you do. The thing that I've noticed though, it is almost daily, right? If you are a green thumb type of person, if you work in your garden, it is day in, day out. You are committed to making your garden, flowers, vegetables, herbs, whatever, grow, but it takes care. You have got to step into it.

We just got back this last Tuesday from a 4,000 mile road trip as a family. I'm happy to say we still love each other. It was absolutely amazing. One of the stops on the way was at my parents' house in Colorado. My dad is an amazing man. My dad has always just loved and cared about his house. I mean the guy will find a pile of rocks to move 10 feet, just so he will have something to do around his house. That is the way we grew up. He was always painting. He would have the best lawn. Just always caring, purposely focused on his house.

From Colorado we drove up to Wyoming and had my grandpa's 90th birthday party. Just a sweet, sweet time. My grandpa is a 90-year old guy who wakes up every morning, opens his laptop, gets online and checks all his stock for hours and hours each day. There is a lot going on there but he is devoted to it. It is what he cares about. It is what he thinks about. My wife is just completely in love with working out. I usually say she works out enough for both of us, so I don't. Sometimes she will teach a class in the morning and then she will say, "I want to go run 5 or 10 miles," and my mind is like, "Are you kidding me?" She is devoted to it. She cares about it. For some of us, it is our kids. You know we have them scheduled. We were talking about August, which is supposed to slow down, but the schedule we have for our kids in August makes it the busiest month. There is something in our minds that says we need to schedule all this and be very intentional about giving them every opportunity possible.

So after judging everybody else, I finally looked into my own heart and said, "What am I intentional about? What am I purposeful about?" There are two things that I often think of when I am lying awake at night. One is my daughters. I had somebody say to me when my daughters were very young that my girls will wait to have sex in direct relation to the amount of self-esteem they get from me, their dad. And that, whether in healthy or unhealthy ways, has driven the way I relate to my daughters. I spend time with them. I want to be with them. I try to tell them I love them multiple times a day. I tell them how beautiful they are, and I am very, very, very intentional about it. We have date times that are set aside. This is something that drives me.

The other thing I get very intentional about, especially in summer, is my golf game. I absolutely love golf. A couple of weeks ago I developed a shake. If you are a golfer, you know what the shake is. You stand over the ball and want to hit it *this* way, and it goes 7 feet *that* way. So what do you do? You go to the driving range. You start trying to work it out. You try to figure it out. You are intentional about changing. Now here is what I think is the problem for a lot of us.

The problem is, **how many of us take our relationship as followers of Jesus Christ with the same intentionality?** I think the challenge is, we think this whole Jesus thing sort of happens by grace. We don't have to do anything. We don't have to work at it, right? It is faith; not work. It happens through us. If I hang around the right people, if I go to church, then I am just naturally going to become a more faithful follower of Christ. The reality is these statements aren't true. About a year and a half ago, I just hit spiritual, emotional and personal walls. Over the past 18 months walking through this with a couple of people, one of the things that I found out is for years that that is how I treated my spirituality. The truth is it takes something very different from that.

We are going to be in Acts 2:42, but before we jump into this verse that most of you have probably heard numerous times, let me set it up a little bit. We go back just a few weeks. Jesus has died. He has risen again. At the end of Matthew, He has appeared to His disciples. It is so intriguing. In Matthew 28 towards the end of the chapter, right before He gives them the great commission, it says,

¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

So these aren't perfect people. These are struggling, normal people like us and Jesus says to them,

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations....

He said, “Go and make disciples,” to people who would be life-long learners of the way of Jesus Christ. If you jump to the beginning of Acts, the chapter before the one we are going to look in, between the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and His Ascension, He spent 40 days. It says He talked about the Kingdom of God. Here is the image. If you were here throughout the Philippians series, we talked about this again and again and again. What we are called to do in our relationship with Christ is to be disciples, life-long learners, reframing the whole of our existence under His reign, under His leadership so that we are submitting our lives to follow Jesus Christ. That is the Kingdom of God.

I love Dallas Willard’s definition of a disciple. “A disciple is a person who has decided that *the most important thing in their life* is to learn how to do what Jesus said to do.” A disciple is not a person who has things under control or knows a lot of things. Listen to this, “Disciples simply are people who are constantly revising their affairs to carry through on their decision to follow Jesus.” That is good, isn’t it? “Constantly revising their affairs” so that their lives reflect their decision to follow Jesus Christ. Here is what it says in Acts 2:42. After Peter has preached this amazing sermon, people are coming to follow this Jesus Christ. It says,

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

The word *devoted* is the word I want us to sit with. It is this Greek word *proskartereo*. It can mean a lot of different things. It can mean steadfast, courageous, persevering, but here is the one I love that I hope sits with you. It can mean *to give unremitting care* to certain things so they truly were disciples of Jesus Christ, living in the Kingdom of God. It is similar to what Paul said back in the Philippians chapters we walked through,

¹² ...work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

“Work out your (own) salvation.” In athletics, work out means sweat and toil, put the work in, do the right thing so that you can get it done. The same word that is used in Acts 2:42 is used in Acts 6:4. When the church is growing and the leaders of the church are like, “What do we do? We don’t know what to do.” And they come up with this idea of deacons that will care for the needs of the community. The leaders of the church said, “We

⁴ will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

The word attention is the same word. *We will give unremitting care* to the Word of prayer. What does it mean to have this intentional life? If you keep reading on, I think this is why it is so intriguing, they gave *unremitting care*. This is right after Jesus left. They were devoted to the apostles’ teaching, which is simply, they devoted themselves to learning the ways and teachings of Jesus, what Jesus did, how He acted. They wanted to understand that, from fellowships to the breaking of bread, the scholars say that is the table behind us, and to prayer. Let’s keep reading. Acts 2:43,

⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together

with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

“Enjoying the favor of all people” literally translated means having grace. Because they were giving unremitting care, devotion, intentionality to a certain way of life, because they have chosen to follow Jesus Christ, it will happen. Grace with all people. What does that define in your intentional life in Christ if you had grace with all people? Here is the challenge. When you think of your life under the reign of God, it is a lot, isn't it? I mean, it is my marriage. It is my work. It is the way I talk. It is the way I think. For me it is my preaching. It is my calling, what I do, my relationship with my kids, my friendships, my home, my neighborhood. The list can go on and on. All of that is under the reign of God as followers of Jesus Christ. So how do we bring intentionality to that?

Let me just give you a couple of suggestions before we enter the table. One of them is this. I think **it starts with understanding**. I think if you want this intentional life, it starts with understanding. The invitation to you and the invitation to me is that we are invited into this life of the Kingdom of God *now* through the grace and love of Jesus Christ. Now! And as followers of Christ, here is the simple truth. You need to understand what that is all about, and 20 minutes on Sunday morning of somebody standing up here is not going to do it for you. **You need to be in the Word**. You need to be in a community, a smaller community of people, helping you understand what this life in the Kingdom of God is really all about. You are a disciple, a life-long learner of Jesus Christ. Understand what that means. Too easy? Not easy.

To follow that up, two simple questions: The first one is **to get toward this intentional life, what is getting in the way?** Look at your life, and I would encourage you to spend August getting intentional. What is in the way? Is it a fear? Is there an obstacle? Is there something in the way of your getting intentional about being a follower of Jesus Christ and framing the whole of your life around Him? Is it a sin? Is there some unconfessed sin in your life that you need to get right with God or maybe a brother or sister in Christ? Maybe it is a distraction?

There were a couple of us who had an amazing opportunity a month or two ago to meet with this guy, Nathan George. Nathan George is the founder of Trade As One, an amazing organization. I would encourage you to look at it. Well, Nathan George was telling us about his journey to start Trade As One. He was living in England and one day it hit him as he looked at his neighbor next door who didn't confess to follow Jesus Christ, “I noticed that my life was absolutely no different from his and yet I claimed to follow the radical king, Jesus.” For him what he realized was that it was distraction. It was the distraction of things, of money, of getting. It was the distraction of schedules. I am not saying everybody needs to go and quit their job or anything like that, but what I am saying is this. What is the distraction? What is the obstacle? What is the fear? What is the thing? What is getting in the way of your intentionally, with unremitting care following Jesus Christ?

The next question, **what needs attention?** As you look at your life, what needs attention? When this hit me about a year and a half ago, and I know as a pastor, I am not supposed to say this, but one of the things that needed attention was my daily walk with Jesus Christ. Just a daily quiet time of connection with God. It wasn't fair. I wanted it. I didn't know how to get it, and I needed the intentionality of a couple of purposeful relationships, helping me find out how to get

there, how to move past any distractions or sins that were in the way so that I could get connected to the one who gives me life on a consistent basis.

What needs attention? Is it a friendship? You have so much going on but you know there is that one friendship that you need to pour into because they breathe the life of Christ into you. Make time for it. Maybe it is your marriage. I've had couples come into my office who said, "We give crazy, crazy amounts of attention to our kids but rarely the same intentionality to our marriage." What needs attention? Maybe it is your gifting. Maybe it is your church. Maybe you are that person who has been coming here for five years, singing and hanging out. That is not what this is. This is a community of followers of Christ who are trying to live in a certain way as followers in the Kingdom so that people would know the grace of God. Maybe you need to get committed in your community. What needs attention? My hope for you is that you will find ways. You will find relationships. You will find environments where you can get intentional about the fact that you are a follower of Christ.

One of the verses that I shared with you in the front side is Philippians 2:12. It says,

¹² ...work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

This is one of those messages where it can feel like I've just said a lot of, do this, do that, but then there is the second part of Philippians 2:12,

¹² ...work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you....

The beauty of the intentional life is that we are called to join in with new life, the strength and the power that is there so that we can live as faithful followers of Christ. Let's pray.

God, I pray that any words of mine that are untrue, that are simply from me but not from You, God, I pray that they would fall straight to the ground. Lord, I pray that what is from You would pierce our hearts and would comfort us today, Lord, now as we enter the table, God, where we have the privilege of eating. In Your Name. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.