

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
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**James Madsen**  
**Elemental: Living Water | Proverbs 4:23, John 7:37-38**

Good morning everyone! I am James Madsen. I'm the pastor of discipleship here and I'm passionate about helping you fall more in love with Jesus. I think a good way to begin that journey this morning is to open in prayer, so let's pray together.

Spirit of the living God, we're so thankful that You're here with us and we just ask that You would stir our hearts this morning. Speak to us about the things in our life that get in the way of receiving living water. Open our hearts to hear Your voice tell us how much You love us, that You are with us, and that You are for us. In thy name we pray. Amen.

Well, hopefully by now you know we've been in this great series through the summer looking at how God speaks to us through the elements: the earth, the wind, the fire, storms, and so on. And because we are good Minnesotans, the most popular element for the preachers to talk about has been water. Raise your hand if your happy place is on or near the water? Apparently everyone else is at their happy place right now...I see how it is. The video that is showing here is from my happy place. My family has had a cabin here for over sixty years. It's a place that really does refuel my soul, and it's where I connect to God most deeply. My favorite thing to do is to get up as the sun rises with my thermos of coffee and my fishing rod and to be on the lake before anyone else. God's voice always seems loudest in the quietest places. Isn't there something about water that just fuels your soul? Even if it's not your happy place, I think it has that impact on us. And this is an image that is used often in the Bible—that water is representative of the fullness of life, and at times, water is used to talk about your very heart condition.

Heather already talked to us about Proverbs 4:23:

<sup>23</sup> Guard your heart above all else, for from it flows the wellspring of life.

We see here that what our soul drinks in impacts the condition of our whole life. How is your soul today? Imagine that this cup represents your soul—you probably thought your soul was better looking than that—and the water in your cup represents the fullness of life. And it is out of the fullness of this cup then that you love your spouse, (pours out water) that you take care of your children (pours out water), that you are fueled for life and for work, (pour) and that you love your neighbor (pour). Your cup is starting to get empty, and not only that, but life finds a way of punching holes in your cup. You're not really sure if your boss likes you (punches hole in cup), your loved one gets cancer (punches hole in cup), one of your children is struggling in school (punches hole in cup).

You can see where I'm going. Your soul is leaking like a sieve; you really need to refill your cup now. Before we talk about how to fill your cup, let's talk about what's keeping us from fully receiving this living water.

I feel like some of us have become pretty casual about what we are putting into our hearts. What we are taking in isn't creating a wellspring of living water. God promises to provide us with this living water, but we have turned elsewhere to try to find life.

Jeremiah 2:13 says:

<sup>13</sup> My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and they have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

Cisterns were manmade wells, made to catch rainwater where there wasn't a spring or river. One of the problems with cisterns is that the water was stagnant, and they crack and leak. You see, this thing that you thought was going to bring life instead brings us disease and death. It's a pretty grim picture of what we sometimes put into our soul. What are you feeding your soul?

I realized a couple years ago that I had gradually slid into preoccupying my free time with somewhat mindless things, and most of these things are found on my cell phone. They weren't bad things in and off themselves—in fact there is a lot of good stuff on my smartphone—but the general effect of it was I began to have an addiction to fill the free spaces of my life. Anyone here know someone who spends too much time looking at their phone or their iPad? Really? That's all? Where are the rest of you living? That's what I want to know. It's a tough crowd I tell ya! I think that this has really become the cultural norm. It has replaced human conversation. Deaths caused by smartphone distractions are on the rise and yet the most subtle and deathly aspect of the smartphone is the numbing of our souls.

I was reflecting on Psalm 42:1 "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God." And as I sat and meditated on that, it hit me. I just had to confess to God and say, "God, if I'm honest, sometimes my soul pants more for my iPhone than it does for You." Isn't this our main problem? That when our soul is thirsty we don't come to God to let him fill it? We run to lesser things. We expect them to fill us, but they leave us wanting more. This is the hallmark of any addiction; addictions promise us life, they give us a buzz, and they leave us wanting more. The Psalmist says, "Be still and know that I am God." But I am afraid we have lost our capacity to be still, to allow for that quiet space in which God can speak to us.

Phillip Holmes says that "Addiction to entertainment (like your smartphone) is similar to drug addiction. The health effects are not as noticeable as heroin, but the spiritual effects are costly. Many have unrestrained affection for entertainment devices. They

may seem to harmlessly distract us from the guilt of sin, friction in relationships, or anxiety about work. They become what daily prayer and Bible reading should be—a sanctuary for rest and comfort of our souls.”

Every addiction reduces our capacity to give and receive love. Think about that for a minute. Every addiction reduces our capacity to give and receive love. When it comes to smartphones, the illustrations are plentiful, right? If I choose to look at my work email instead of playing with my children, I’m missing an opportunity to give them love, and maybe my wife Anna wants to tell me how much she loves me, but I’ve tuned her out because I’m looking at Facebook.

Maybe you don’t feel like you are addicted to anything and certainly not your smartphone, but I want to encourage you and me to ask those who are closest to us if they think we have any addictions and ask them how it has impacted them. Sometimes what we need to hear is how our addictions have hurt our loved ones. We need to give those closest to us permission to speak into our lives. Maybe you don’t have a smartphone addiction, but you know that your tendency in the morning is to reach for your phone instead of spending time with Jesus, or maybe what is keeping you from connecting more deeply with God isn’t your smartphone, but it’s something else that you love more than God.

I asked one of my closest friends what hinders his ability to spend time with God and to connect with him without hesitation. He said, “The cares of the world.” He was referring to the parable of the sower where Jesus talks about the four soils that describe the human heart condition. About the third soil it says there were thorns that grew up and choked the seed that fell there. Jesus said the seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word of God, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

I was trying to figure out how to blend these two metaphors together—plants and water, and I thought about Eurasian Milfoil—that’s probably what you thought of as well, right? If you spend any time on a lake in Minnesota, you are probably familiar with it. My brother just happens to be the foremost expert in the universe on Milfoil. I’m sure when he was five that’s what he thought he was going to grow up to do. What he would tell you about Milfoil is that if you leave it unchecked, it begins to choke out the ability for anything else on the lake to live. I think this gives us a good picture of what the cares of the world do to our soul. I’ve got my pretend Milfoil here—it’s a different invasive species from my yard, but, right? The cares of the world—this is what it does to our soul—it clogs up our ability to receive living water.

How about this next picture here? [Picture shown] Can you relate to this guy here? You feel like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders. You are overwhelmed. You feel so busy. The kids are wearing you out. You’re wondering if this is the week that you will crack. There’s not enough of you to go around. Maybe you don’t feel like that yet

because you've been refueled by summer, but give it a few weeks, right? This same image of being overwhelmed can also represent the person who feels capable of managing the whole world and doesn't see a need for God. The person who says, "I'm in control, God. If You need my help, just let me know." There's a correlation between those who worry and those who are self-reliant. Neither one of them trust God. I can experience both of these places in my life, even on the same day. I think there's a great danger for church professionals to think *I know how to do this*, and they never turn to God to ask Him for help. Pastors can go on autopilot and suddenly Jesus becomes very small in their life. Yet at the same time I'm self-reliant, I can be anxious about my financial security, or wondering if my five-year-old is going to make it in kindergarten, or whether or not you're going to like my sermon. These are all expressions of my pride and my lack of faith. And when I am in that place of worry or self-reliance, the result is that my heart starts to turn away from God and tries to find life apart from Him.

This statue in Rockefeller Center in New York City is supposed to be a symbol of man's independence and achievement. It proclaims that we have conquered the world and we have no need for God. Yet in the myth about Atlas, the burden of carrying the world is really a curse. When we live an anxious or a self-reliant life, we are putting ourselves under that same curse. It's interesting that Atlas here is facing St Patrick's Cathedral. If we were to walk across 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and enter the Cathedral, we would find a little statue. It is a statue of Jesus as a child. What do you think Jesus has in His hand? The whole world. Should we break out in song? I find it interesting that we try to carry the whole world on our back when Jesus was willing to carry it for us in the palm of his hand.

In John 7, Jesus says:

<sup>37</sup>...let anyone who is thirsty come to Me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.  
[John 7:37-38]

You see, Jesus not only offers to forgive us for our sins and give us eternal life if we believe in Him, but He offers us an abundant life. He offers to fill our hearts with grace, love, and joy. Jesus is not only the door to our salvation, He is also the means of our transformation. This is a daily, almost moment-by-moment promise because our need is ever present. We are constantly coming up against our own sin and brokenness, and every single day we need the life that Jesus offers.

What happens when we come to Jesus in the morning? We begin by hearing His voice telling us:

<sup>28</sup> Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. [Matthew 11:28]

And the Holy Spirit begins then to remove worry and self-reliance from our cup. And then we read the Scripture that says:

<sup>22</sup>Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail. <sup>23</sup>They are new every morning  
[Lamentations 3:22-23]

And as we experience God's grace, the Holy Spirit begins to heal the holes in our cup [uses duct tape to cover holes]. Everyone knows the Holy Spirit uses duct tape, right? And then we hear the apostle Paul say, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." Right? And as we experience God's love, our cup begins to fill [pours water in the cup]. The reality for us is that grace leaks and we need to be refilled every single day. Every single day we need to be reminded that Jesus died on the cross for our sins—that it is through Christ's life, death, and resurrection that we are forgiven, that we are cleansed, that we are made new, and that we are filled with His Spirit to love God and to love others.

Let me leave you with four quick "thoughts" on how we can receive this living water. **First, focus on your relationship with Jesus.** Jesus wants us to know the fullness of His love for us. Jesus wants us to know that life and life abundant is found in this daily love relationship with Him. How is your relationship with Jesus? Sometimes I'm afraid spiritual disciplines become problematic if we focus too much on our self-improvement or if we are doing it out of duty. It becomes more about me and less about Jesus, and that always drains my soul. The goal of spiritual disciplines is to connect us to Jesus, and transformation becomes the byproduct of that relationship.

I read an article in Relevant Magazine that had this quote: "Spiritual discipline is more romance than formula." I really like that idea. What do you think will help you fall more in love with Jesus? I asked several of my favorite people about their relationship with Jesus and what is effective for them. One thing that I noticed is there is not one right formula for receiving this living water. Everyone, because of their personality and their schedule, found different things that were effective for them. I think trial and error will help you find what will fit you for your current stage of life.

**The second thing is to be intentional.** Doing nothing is not an effective way to connect with Jesus. There needs to be intentionality and you need to have a plan, and this is where the word discipline comes in. John Maxwell said, "We don't like that word discipline, but the reality is that everything worth having is hard work". He says we have uphill hopes and downhill habits, and the only way to break downhill habits is to be intentional. Right? So if you want to be a good parent you actually have to be intentional. If you want to be a good spouse, you have to be intentional about that relationship. If you want to receive living water from Jesus, you need to be intentional. Did I mention that this gift of grace is free? We just need to show up with open hands and receive it. So, to be intentional you need a plan. You need to figure out how to create space in your day to meet with Jesus. For me, I just had to bite the bullet and set

the alarm earlier to get up before the kids did. There are so many resources out there for you to choose from, but I think all effective plans include prayer, reading the Bible, community, and worship.

In some of your bulletins there is a handout of suggestions. For those of you who have never made it a habit to spend time alone with Jesus, let me give you a couple of suggestions, okay? First of all, begin with a shorter period of time—15 or 20 minutes. Don't be like Martin Luther who said, "I have a really busy day today, I'm going to get up two hours early." You're probably not going to last very long if you try to do that. If you have never read the Bible before, I'd encourage you to start with the *Jesus Storybook Bible*. It might seem silly that I'm recommending a children's Bible, but really this book does such a great job of telling God's story—of telling how much He loves you and His plan to rescue you. And I think better than any book I've ever read, it explains what the Old Testament has to do with the New Testament. I use it all the time when I teach adults. Secondly is *Habits of Grace* by Dave Mathis. This is good book for those trying to start spiritual disciplines. It really outlines for you how to have a prayer life, and how to read the Bible, and how to try out other spiritual practices. And for everyone here, also a reminder that the most effective spiritual growth happens in community. How many people here are in a small group, a Sunday Community, or a Bible study somewhere? Great. So I have an assignment for everyone who raised their hand and that assignment is to invite someone to come with you this year.

Okay, so we've talked about focusing our on relationship with Jesus, and we've talked about being intentional, so **the third key is daily repentance**. And by daily, I actually mean throughout the day. Repentance is first and foremost about our relationship with God and repentance is a means by which God draws us closer to Himself. The more we deepen our repentance, the more room our heart has to receive springs of living water. The spring from which the joy flows gets clogged up by our sin. If we have a superficial view of sin, then we will not turn daily to God for grace and forgiveness; and we won't experience joy. You see, sin has a numbing effect on our heart, but if we come to Christ moment by moment, the dominant theme of our life will be joy. The way we know that we are doing repentance right is that we experience joy—the joy of Christ's wondrous grace washing away all our sin. So, repentance is returning to God as the center. Repentance is simply a way of finding God again, of resting in Christ's love for you and receiving your forgiveness, just like the prodigal son running into his loving Father's arms. And I think repentance and worship then are two sides of the same coin. Repentance relinquishes the center of your world to God; and worship proclaims God as the center of your world.

So, my final thought is that **our hearts need to worship God all day long**, not just on Sunday morning for an hour. And for me my heart is so prone to wander. It drifts so quickly toward selfishness and self-reliance. Worship becomes a powerful way to realign our hearts and lives to the way they are intended to be. Worship is a response to

seeing Jesus for who He is, and then our hearts come alive as we see who we really are in light of what Christ has done for us. The reality is that everyone is worshiping something all the time, but repentance allows us to place our worship upon Jesus, the one who will actually give us life. So for example, I try to use my time in the car to realign my heart to worship by listening to worship music or to a sermon that points me to Jesus. It always fills my heart with living water.

I want us to end today by spending some time in worship. We're going to sing a song called the "Untitled Hymn". If you don't know this song feel free to just sit and listen to the words—to receive the invitation that Jesus makes to you.

Lyrics to *Untitled Hymn* by Chris Rice:

Weak and wounded sinner  
Lost and left to die  
O, raise your head, for love is passing by  
Come to Jesus  
Come to Jesus  
Come to Jesus and live!  
Now your burden's lifted  
And carried far away  
And precious blood has washed away the stain, so  
Sing to Jesus  
Sing to Jesus  
Sing to Jesus and live!  
And like a newborn baby  
Don't be afraid to crawl  
And remember when you walk  
Sometimes we fall, so  
Fall on Jesus  
Fall on Jesus  
Fall on Jesus and live!  
Sometimes the way is lonely  
And steep and filled with pain  
So if your sky is dark and pours the rain, then  
Cry to Jesus  
Cry to Jesus  
Cry to Jesus and live!  
O, and when the love spills over  
And music fills the night  
And when you can't contain your joy inside, then  
Dance for Jesus

Dance for Jesus  
Dance for Jesus and live!  
And with your final heartbeat  
Kiss the world goodbye  
Then go in peace, and laugh on Glory's side, and  
Fly to Jesus  
Fly to Jesus  
Fly to Jesus and live!  
Fly to Jesus  
Fly to Jesus  
Fly to Jesus and live!

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.