

RESET- WEEK 3-

Passionate Commitment to Rest

<< Scripture Reading >>

Opening Conversation:

- **New Normal:**
 - Uneasy, uncomfortable. We don't like what we're experiencing.
 - A common refrain that I hear repeatedly, and even one that I have said a time or two, has been, "I can't wait to get back to normal."
 - We established last weekend that normal wasn't working. It isn't working.
 - This season has proven to us that our normal, when faced with a global pandemic, falls apart, leaving us anxious and frightened.
 - Normal wasn't healthy. Normal wasn't sustainable.
 - **Don't pine for normal when normal wasn't working.**
 - **God is giving us an opportunity to define a new normal, to hit the reset button on our lives.**
 - What kind of life will we build for ourselves?
 - **Will we allow God to reform our lives around him or will we settle for a lesser substitute?**
 - God invites us to find a new life, a better life, one that sees us healthier, thriving, and in the center of his will.
- This week we continue looking at specific areas of our lives that God is looking to challenge us to reset, to embrace a new normal, looking at how God is seeking to reorient our lives on him.
 - Last week we began with resetting our addiction to hurry by passionately embracing rest.

- This week, we address the question of reliance.
- A few years ago, I preached a sermon that I called “When the Fasten Seatbelt Sign Comes On.”
 - Sermon about uncertainty.
 - Sermon about our response to difficult seasons.
 - Uncertainty often breeds fear.
 - Look around at our culture right now and you’ll see the impact of uncertainty.
 - One of the central stories that we used from that message was from the book of 2 Corinthians:
 - 2 Corinthians 1: Paul talks about his party’s harrowing travels in Asia, facing difficulties of every kind.
 - Got to the point that their burden felt too much to bear, felt as though they were given a death sentence.
 - 2 Corinthians 1: 9-11: “*In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. ¹¹ And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.*”
 - The message of my sermon was simple: **When life becomes too much to bear, turn to God in prayer.** I promise I did not make that rhyme on purpose. I’m not that kind of preacher.
 - When turbulence rocks your life, allow it to drive you to your knees.
 - **When the storms rage on around you, when things feel uncertain and you don’t know what to do,**

make prayer your core response.

- And for many of us, we are very much in the middle of that proverbial storm.
 - The world around us changes on a moment-by-moment basis, but Scripture tells us that God is faithful and that he will never abandon you.
 - And for some of us, in this season, we are incredibly aware of our limitations. We're fully aware that life is firmly outside of our control.
 - In fact, some of us feel a lot like Paul did in the thick of his trip to Asia: full of despair.
 - Perhaps it's because of the impact of COVID.
 - Perhaps it's due to the injustices that we've seen throughout our country of late.
 - Perhaps it's because of the unrest that has erupted because of it.
 - Perhaps it's something in your life that has been manifest because of the lockdown or at very least has been exacerbated by the lockdown.
 - If this is you, if you're in the thick of it right now, I want to take just a moment to remind you that Jesus understands.
 - God is close by you in your struggles. He is listening.
 - Philippians 4:4-7, ***“Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! ⁵ Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.***
 - ***⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in***

Christ Jesus.”

- God invites to a life of prayer because it challenges us to relinquish whatever control we think we have and re-establish a life of trust in God.
- **Prayer has the power not only to change our circumstance, but it has the power to change us.**
- Prayer changes us because it forces us to place into God’s hands what only God’s hands are capable of handling.
- God doesn’t promise freedom from uncertainty
 - Uncertainty is part of the world we live in, part of being human.
 - What needs to set us apart as Christians is how we deal with those uncertainties, how we handle the turbulence.
- If you’re in the middle of a turbulent season, Jesus promises that he is there with us, walking with us
 - Even Jesus, upon the eve of his own horrendous, unthinkable trials retreated from the busyness of the Passover festival to commune with God.
 - If Jesus does this, how much more must we cry out to God when we are overcome?
- You can cry out to him. He is listening.
- As we heard last week, Jesus calls out, ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*** (Matthew 11:28).
- This series is called Reset because it’s not only designed to challenge our behaviors in this time of crisis, but its purpose is to prepare us for what comes next.
 - And the question that I’ve had on my mind for the last week or so has been, ***“What should prayer look like when we’re not in***

crisis?”

- For the vast majority of Jesus followers, prayer naturally follows times of crisis.
 - When things get out of control, when we feel most vulnerable, when we're at our wits end, we cry out to God.
 - Look no further than times of horrendous national or international crises. I recall profoundly how many people appeared willing to turn to God following 9/11.
 - Even with the recent demonstrations following the deaths of Amhaud Arbury, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, there has been a surge of interest and desire to seek God.
 - It has highlighted for so many the enormity of the situation and the apparent impossibility of the task at hand.
 - In times of crisis, when nothing else seems to be left to try, desperate people turn to God.

- John Ortberg commented that the only religious imagery in football is the dramatic Hail Mary play.
 - For the uninitiated among us, a Hail Mary is a passing play of desperation. When all other plays have failed, when the goal line is far away, and the quarterback is desperate to score the tying or go-ahead touchdown, they may call a Hail Mary.
 - In this play four or five receivers rush down the field, hoping to get clear of defenders and get to the end zone.
 - It's a high-risk proposition, one that only happens at the end, after all other options are exhausted.
 - A Hail Mary is not the first line of offense.
 - It's always last, never first.
 - Ortberg asks the question, “Why is only that one play named after prayer? There are no “hail Mary kick-off returns” to start games or, to use a more common

evangelical prayer, no “Lord, I just want to ask you . . .” draw plays in the first quarter.”

- His answer, “**I believe Mary is brought in for the last play of the game because prayer is something we generally associate with desperation.**”
 - The truth is that most of the game, the teams rely on strategy. They depend on their game plan and personnel. But at the moment of desperation, when all cleverness, systems, strength, and running plays fail, that’s when they go for the Hail Mary.
 - Even outside of the Hail Mary play, football fans know that an ill-advised pass of desperation as “throwing up a prayer.”

○ **Desperate people pray.**

- It’s often reflexive- we do it without thinking.
- Sometimes we do it without being sure that anybody is listening on the other end.
- It has been said that there are no atheists in a foxhole.
 - When bullets are flying and you find yourself in a life-or-death situation, suddenly you find yourself praying to...someone...or something...
 - Often you aren’t even sure.
- Desperate people pray.
 - When the diagnosis comes back malignant, people pray.
 - When you get served with divorce papers, people pray.
 - When your child is missing or in danger, people pray.
- Prayers of desperation are good.
 - **Many lives have been transformed by desperate prayers at desperate times.**

- **The tragedy of too many Christians, however, is that we only**

pray when we're desperate- when we've exhausted all other avenues.

- Prayer, for us, has become our Hail Mary.
- But the pattern that Jesus models for prayer aren't a hail Mary at all. Jesus did retreat at times of grief and pain.
 - He went away to pray following the death of John the Baptist.
 - He went away to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane before his betrayal and execution.
- But Jesus understand that a pattern of prayer shouldn't begin in grief, pain or desperation.
 - **Jesus demonstrated a profound commitment to prayer and communion with God at life's high points, not just at the lows.**
 - In Luke 4, Jesus prepared for entering into his public ministry by spending 40 days in prayer and fasting. These days are seen as preparation not just for his temptations in the desert, but they serve as the foundation to his ministry.
 - In the next chapter, in Luke 6, Jesus' popularity is exploding. He's healing people, teaching people, recruiting disciples. Even though he wasn't seeking fame, fame found him. Even as demand for his attention and time expanded, Luke tells us, ***“But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.”***
 - In Mark 6, we see Jesus empowering his disciples to do incredible things, Jesus' popularity appears to be reaching its zenith with the incredible feeding of the 5000. If he was in demand before, the demand grew exponentially following this event. And yet still, Jesus was committed to communing and communicating with God.
 - ***Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and head across***

the lake to Bethsaida, while he sent the people home. ⁴⁶ After telling everyone good-bye, he went up into the hills by himself to pray.

- Jesus gives his followers a pattern to follow, a lifestyle to emulate: that even when life is great, even when success seems to follow you, communion and communication with God are indispensable.
- At its core, prayer is simply communion and communication with God.
 - *Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.* (Psalm 5:1-3)
 - It's about speaking and listening. It's about crying out and waiting.
- **Prayer does not happen automatically. Prayer is a learned behavior.**
 - Jesus' closest followers observed his patterns of prayer and recognized his intimacy with the Father, which led them to ask in Luke 11:1, "*Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.*"
 - Thomas Merton reminds us that all of us begin as beginners, even in prayer, and must embrace a life of learning to pray. Merton wrote, "**We do not want to be beginners. But let us be convinced of the fact that we will never be anything else but beginners all of our life!**"
 - Regardless of whether you have been engaging in a pattern of prayer for hours, days, months or years, you will always be a beginner.
 - **Prayer isn't something you master. It's something that masters you.**

- As we begin to prepare for life post-COVID, post-lockdown, post-crisis, let us re-engage as beginners, as we learn to seek God's face together.
 - **Here are four things you can implement to develop an effective pattern of prayer that will resonate and grow even after life gets back to "normal."**

1) Start where you're at

- Linette Martin challenges her readers to start small: *"The way to begin is slowly. I advise five minutes a day. This may feel impossibly short, but it is better to get a short time established than to begin with a longer one that you give up later as being impractical."*
- The invitation of Jesus is to begin where you are at. You've probably heard of significant church leaders who would wake up at 5AM to pray for 3 hours.
 - I hear these stories and am immediately exhausted.
 - You probably are too.
 - But if I've learned anything about life, you can't start with step 25; you have to start where you're at.
 - Fitness: Don't start with P90X. You'll pull a muscle and quit.
- Jesus taught his followers to pray simply:
 - *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*
 - **Jesus wasn't just giving us prayer to memorize; he was giving us a pattern to emulate.**
 - How do we start to pray?

- We start with: 1) Praise, 2) surrender (your will be done), 3) Petition (ask God for your needs), 4) Seek forgiveness and a forgiving heart, 5) Protection and deliverance.

- Jesus gives us this model to guide us. We may be tempted to add colorful language or to stretch it out, but Jesus tell us in Matthew 6 that this is of no benefit: ***“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”*** (Matthew 6:7).

- Jesus invites us to embrace a pattern of prayer where we are and to begin where we are.

2) Pray about what matters to you

- Richard Foster, in his book *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, writes, ***“In Simple Prayer we bring ourselves before God just as we are, warts and all. Like children before a loving father, we open our hearts and make our requests. We do not try to sort things out, the good from the bad. We simply and unpretentiously share our concerns and make our petitions. We tell God, for example, how frustrated we are with the co-worker at the office or the neighbor down the street. We ask for food, favorable weather, and good health.”***

- Followers of Jesus often have an odd relationship with prayer because we feel a tremendous level of guilt not just over how much we pray, but what we pray about.
- We often feel guilty for bringing inconsequential things to God. We assume God doesn't care, that God has more important things to worry about.
- We assume that prayer must be reserved for important things, heavenly things, so we clam up until it's really

important.

- But the Scriptures challenge this thinking.
- Remember what Paul says in Philippians 4: ***‘Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.***
 - Paul doesn’t tell us to only pray about important things, grandiose things, or heavenly things. He says everything.
- I like how Dallas Willard puts it in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*: **“Prayer simply dies from efforts to pray about “good things” that honestly do not matter to us. The way to get to meaningful prayer for those good things is to start by praying for what we are truly interested in. The circle of our interests will inevitably grow in the largeness of God’s love.”**
 - God longs to hear from his children. He sees you for who you are and wants to hear from you as you are, not as you could be or should be.
 - God welcomes your trivial prayers because he cares of your trivial prayers. When we learn to bring everything to God- when we pray about everything, as Paul puts it- we engage in a pattern that empowers us to be prepared to bring more weightier things to him as they arise.
- Whether you are sharing your concerns for the day, your appreciation for a summer’s breeze, or your frustration that the baby won’t go to sleep, God longs to hear from you. 1 Peter 5:7 reminds us, ***Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.***
 - Don’t just cast your most major worries, your most significant concerns on Christ, but embrace a pattern that redirects it all to him.

- He cares for you not just in the things we consider significant, but in all areas.
- Don't be afraid of bringing all of this to God, even the things you don't consider important or critical.
- Like a toddler can't create a work of art that a parent doesn't consider a masterpiece, you can't bring a prayer to God that he won't consider meaningful.

3) Pray with brutal honesty

- **American Christians pray too timidly.**
 - Based on how we pray, you would think that we are appearing before a brutal, dictatorial king who is loathe to allow us into his presence.
 - We pepper our prayers with flowery language and we give so many provisos just to give God an out that on the surface it seems as though we wonder if God even cares or will even respond.
 - Few would listen to the prayers of God's people, at least in North America, and use the term bold to describe our prayers.
 - We assume that because God is God, we must timidly, meekly, and bashfully pray.
- Scholar Walter Wink challenges this perception, writing, "The fawning etiquette of unctuous (overly flattering) prayer is utterly foreign to the Bible. Biblical prayer is impertinent (not showing proper respect), persistent, shameless, indecorous (in keeping with "good taste and propriety"). It is more like haggling in an oriental bazaar than the polite monologues of the churches."
- Exodus 5:22-23 demonstrates biblical prayer, "***Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak***

in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

- So does Psalm 13:1-2, *"O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand?"*
- God isn't asking us to pretend for the sake of propriety. He's not asking us to hide beneath a veneer of piety or pretenses. God wants real, honest, vulnerable, authentic prayers.
- **When we bring our authentic prayers to God, it invites him into our mess and gives him the freedom to transform us.**
- Henri Nouwen: **"The more we dare to show our whole trembling self to God, as did the ancients who prayed the Psalms, the more we will be able to sense that God's love, which is perfect love, casts out our fears, purifies our thoughts, and heals our hatred."**

4) Create space for God to respond

- We too often think of prayer as speaking, but prayer is also creating margins to hear from God.
- When Elijah retreated to the wilderness and cried out in hopeless desperation to God, he opened himself up to also hear from God.
 - God didn't speak in the obvious: earthquake, storm, or fire, but in the quiet, easy to miss whisper.
 - *And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*
1 Kings 19:12b-13

- Elijah was willing to be painfully real with God, but he also had to be willing to have God meet him in his pain and respond.
- Job learned this the hard way as well, after crying out in accusation to God, God meets him in his agony.
- God isn't asking us to engage in a pattern of speaking, but in a pattern of communication.
 - Communication only happens when there is two-way street.
 - God wants to hear from us, but he also wants to speak.
 - Jesus said, *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me”* (John 10:27).
 - The sheep know his voice because they spend time with the shepherd. **Presence cultivates intimacy.**
 - When we allow ourselves to spend time in his presence, we find ourselves because more aware of his presence and more aware of how and when he speaks to us.
 - Prayer is a pattern of not just learning to speak to God, but learning to listen.
 - It is quieting your mind and inviting the Holy Spirit to say something to you, to respond to your petitions, to meet you in your pain.
 - **But be warned, often when you encounter God, it will leave your life permanently altered.**
 - Listening for God is not for those who are content with the status quo.
- **INVITE TEAM BACK UP**
 - As we close our time together, I want to challenge to discover the beauty of meaningful prayer.
 - For many followers of Jesus this is the number one guilty trigger in our walk. We don't know how to pray and we

don't know where to start.

- My hope in this service is to empower us to identify one of these areas and invite us to rethink our response.
- SOUND OFF: Team, I'd like to hear about which of these areas you find the most challenging. Where in this continuum have you struggled and how has God challenged you to overcome these obstacles to experience deeper intimacy with him?
- As we continue to seek how God would reset our lives to embrace a new normal, I believe that he is inviting us to engage in meaning prayer that leads to intimacy with him.
 - It is natural, even easy, to pray when we are in crisis, but Jesus models and invites us to find something greater, something better.
 - Even in times of success and times of ease, God invites us to ***“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).
 - Don't make prayer your Hail Mary, make it your first play.
 - Don't make prayer your act of desperation, make it a deliberate pattern of your life.