

Sacred Service

Week 1: From Sabbath to Service

June 21

Introduction

Hey everyone! I'm Mark and I want to welcome you to our service. In our last series, we uncovered the sacred rhythm of Sabbath. This is an ancient Biblical practice whereby we work for six days and then we set apart the seventh day for rest, delight, and worshipping God. Sabbath is just one of a number of spiritual rhythms that have shaped and formed believers for thousands of years. These Spiritual disciplines (or practices) are found in scripture, modeled by Jesus, and include (but are not limited to) prayer, fasting, solitude, generosity, sabbath and so on. But what is the purpose of spiritual discipline? What are we trying to achieve? Is it a healthier work-life balance? Is it less anxiety? Inner peace? How about relational health? Better character or moral goodness?

This leads us to a very important question, "How do you measure your spiritual health?" What gauge do you use for how you're doing spiritually? Is it a sense or a feeling? "Well, I *feel* pretty good this week. I *feel* close to God." Is it based on guilt or morality? "Well, I did something I shouldn't have so I'm not doing great." Is it spiritual practices? "I haven't missed Church in a while and I did Sabbath this past week." How we measure our spiritual health, the gauge that we use, will largely determine what we focus on and what we prioritize. If we measure our spiritual walk based on how we feel, we'll only do things that feel good. If we gauge our walk based on our morality or goodness, the moment we "mess up" we'll disqualify ourselves. If blessing or prosperity is our measuring stick we may face hard or difficult times and conclude, "This Church stuff isn't working." But here's an important follow-up question, "How does scripture measure one's spiritual health? How does Jesus gauge our spiritual health? Do they use the same standards we do?"

The Apostle Paul challenges many of the measures we use to gauge our spiritual health and argues there is a higher standard,

1 "If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing," (1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NIV).

1. WITHOUT LOVE WE GAIN NOTHING!

Love is the standard by which the Bible measures our spiritual health and maturity. "But I'm a great charismatic speaker!" If love was not at the center of it, you gain nothing. "I have a PhD in Biblical Theology!" If your understanding of the Word doesn't produce love you gain nothing. "I operate in supernatural gifts and prophetic unction!" If you were not operating from love you gain nothing. "I give countless millions to the poor! I sacrifice so much!" If you didn't give from a place of love you gain nothing. 'Nothing' is a strong word but this won't be the only time we see it. Scripture is clear, the gauge by which we measure our spiritual health is not ministry proficiency, theology, giftedness, charisma, prosperity, generosity, or sacrifice. It is love.

Speaking of gifts and discernment, we were hanging out with the Fong's and Judah told them, "My Mom has the gift of discernment." And they said, "Oh yea?" And he said, "Yea, my Dad works all week to earn money and then Mommy goes shopping and dis-earns it." A little P.K. humor for you. All you need is love!

Jesus answered the measurement question this way,

³⁶ *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*

³⁷ *Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’* ³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.* ³⁹ *And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’* ⁴⁰ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments,”* (Matthew 22:36-40 NIV).

When Jesus says, “the second is like it” He is putting them on the same level. The entire Christian life is measured by one standard — love. Love for God and love for others. So if love is the rubric by which we measure our spiritual health, how do we make sure we are living from a place of love? Has anyone here ever tried to be a more loving person? How did that go?

2. APART FROM JESUS WE CAN DO NOTHING!

¹ *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in Me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me. ⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing,”* (John 15:1-5 NIV).

The Bible is clear that love is the highest standard. It is our measuring rod. Is God causing you to become a more loving person to the people who know you best? Are you becoming a more loving person to the people closest in your life? In this passage Jesus likens love to fruit. He says that branches that don’t produce love get cut off. But as I read the passage this past time around I noticed something I hadn’t before. In verse 2 Jesus says,

“He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit,” (v. 2).

⁵ *“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing,”* (v. 5).

Jesus seems to be saying we can be in Him and bear no fruit. We can be in Him and still not be loving. Ultimately those branches will be cut off. But if we *remain* in Him we will bear much fruit. Huh? What’s the difference? Apparently there’s a way to be in Christ that produces fruit and makes us a more loving person.

μένω (menō)

Abide, remain, dwell, endure

It may help to know who Jesus is talking to. Right now Jesus is talking to His disciples. But here’s the thing, not all of them are there. One of them has left. Judas. So Jesus is talking to His disciples who remained. Is it possible, that like Judas, we can attach ourselves to Jesus, be in proximity to Jesus, be in proximity with Jesus and not truly abiding in Him? To abide in Jesus means to make your home in Him, to draw life from Him.

Notice the instruction in this passage is never to produce fruit? It is to remain in Him. It's Summer, it's getting hot, so I am constantly picking up dead palm branches around my yard. Sometimes they're still hanging off the tree but it's clear they're dead. I believe it is not enough to be in proximity to Jesus, to be associated with Jesus, to be next to Jesus, we need to see Jesus as our source of life, make our home in Him. This is where fruit comes from. This is where love is formed. So to answer an earlier question, "What is the purpose of spiritual disciplines?" Why do we sabbath, pray, or gather in fellowship? It isn't for spiritual brownie points, it isn't for a more balanced lifestyle or better mood. It is about intentionally staying connected to the source of life and continuing to find our life in Him. It is to draw from His love and remain in it so that it flows out of all we say and do.

1. Love is the most important thing. It is the only measurement that matters.
2. Our aim is not to produce love but to remain connected to the One who is love so that He produces fruit in us (love, joy, peace, patience, etc.) and fruit through us (acts of service to build up the people around us).

3. THE ENEMY'S STRATEGY IS TO SEPARATE.

If love is the most important thing, and love can only be found in Christ, then the enemy will stop at nothing to disconnect us from the source of love. We will constantly face the temptation to separate from God and operate on our own. You will see this in work, home, and ministry.

Adam and Eve were in the garden, they were created in the image of God, they were given authority and invited to co-labor with God to cultivate creation, then they entered into the seventh day of sabbath rest. They were in God, they were communing with Him, they had their purpose in Him. And what was Satan's strategy? To turn them from dependence on God to dependence on themselves. To disconnect them from the source of life through the lie of independence.

Fast forward to Jesus. Jesus is baptized, God proclaims Jesus as His Son, and then Jesus enters into the wilderness. Before Jesus' earthly ministry began He has this intense time of communing with the Father in the wilderness. Talk about dependence and abiding. Jesus is clinging on to the Father and finding His life in Him. And what is Satan's strategy? "Don't do that. Fend for Yourself. Turn these stones into bread." Sustain yourself.

Satan's strategy hasn't changed. He is still convincing people today that they need to fend for themselves. They need to produce. "You don't need God to change, you can change yourself. God isn't your provider, you are. Abiding is a waste of time, you just need to make things happen." Whether it's at work, or home, or ministry. We're trying to produce fruit but we're not connecting to the source of life. We're trying to be loving husbands but we're not abiding, we're trying to be a good parent, we're trying to serve in ministry and love difficult people but we're not abiding. We're drawing from our own giftedness, personal discipline, our abilities. And all the while we're exhausted, we're frustrated, we're discouraged and resentful. Why? Because fruit is being demanded from a branch that is disconnected from the source.

Throughout this series we're going to talk about our sacred service unto God and others. Fruit is never for the tree. An apple tree doesn't enjoy its apples. Fruit is meant for others. We don't produce fruit to feel better about ourselves but to bless others. But what is real fruit? It isn't ministry proficiency, giftedness, or talent. There's nothing wrong with those things but they aren't the measurement God uses. I can stand up here and preach an eloquent and moving sermon with less love in my heart than the person who set up the chairs you're sitting in.

Does God want us to serve with excellence? Absolutely. But the thing He checks first is the love with which we serve. And that love is not something we can produce on our own. We can only love if we remain connected to the source of life.

Let's be intentional this week to make space to abide in Christ and look for practical opportunities to love and serve the people closest to us. Serving doesn't have to start in a foreign country or a neighboring community. It can start right in your home, your classroom, your neighborhood, or your office.

Theresa of Avila

Christ has no body but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which He looks with compassion on this world,

Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good,

Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world.

So may you, like Christ, go now not to be served but to serve.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What measurements have you used to gauge your spiritual health?
2. What things do you abide in for life?
3. What does it practically look like to abide in Christ?
4. What is a practical way I can demonstrate the love of Christ to someone this week?