

Intentional Faith Development 2017
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Please turn the lights off

Turn the lights on

Turn the lights off

Now turn them on again

Wasn't that fun? I hope I got your attention!
I had teacher once in the third grade who did that all the time to get her very rowdy class to quiet down. It worked every time.

But that's not why I had them turn off the lights and turn them back on again this morning.

I wanted to make a point about Intentional Faith Development which is #4 in our 5 Core Values here at WVPC that we are working through. What I want you to remember through this on again, off again moment is this...

Faith is not like a light switch that is either on or off. Faith is a journey with God and we are either moving forward in our faith or sliding backwards, bit by bit.

Sometimes the backward slide is so subtle we don't even realize its happening. Its kind of like the old idea of putting the lobster in a cold pot of water and heating up...he doesn't climb out cause the warmth of the pot is so subtly changing.

As Christians, we are not static entities. We are either moving closer to Jesus Christ or further away.

So it is very important for our spiritual health that we engage in things that develop us as Christians. And must intentionally choose these

things, otherwise with the busyness of life, we just are not going to do them.

One of the ways we grow spiritually is in groups where we can stay in step with God's spirit and work in our lives. These groups might be Bible Studies or Mission Groups where scripture is used to inform and stretch us.

Small group participation is different than coming to worship

The sanctuary is the big room where everyone is welcomed every Sunday.

I grew up in a big faculty home...and everyone would come in the front door who came visiting for the first time. They'd be ushered into the big living room that had a massive fireplace and the best furniture. These were the people we entertained but who we didn't know very well yet.

But the people we did know – they came in the side door of our home, and they sat at the kitchen table. That's where the real conversations happened. It wasn't as formal, and people opened up.

That's how I see the church. When you come into worship you are in the livingroom. Everyone is welcome but we don't everyone very well yet. The more personal conversations, prayers and concerns; the knowing one another happens during the week, around tables and in homes as we pray together, share together, and do ministry together. This is where spiritual growth happens. We invite you, if you are not already to sign up for a small group at the welcome center today. Just fill out a card that states your interest. Choose to do this as a sign of intentional faith development...

Now this next thing I am going to say is to a certain segment of you who are very involved here. You know who you are. Let me just be clear that being involved in a flurry of church activity does not necessarily mean you are growing spiritually. It could just mean you are getting burnt out. One of the things I say all the time is that the church is a service station and a filling station – it is both things. You cannot give out all the time – go, go, go...you will run out of gas. You

need to be filled...receive. Ask yourself if you are someone who is very involved here...

Then ask...Where, in what I am doing, am I growing spiritually? What feeds me? What, in all that I am doing, is making me feel closer to Jesus Christ – inspiring me?

As we begin to put growing in Christ first in our lives, the challenge for many of us is that there are just so many things that infringe on our time.

We are pulled this way and that. This is why the word *intentional* is in here...We must make a choice to put our spiritual growth at the top of our priority list. And what does Jesus say will happen when we do this? (read together)

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you as well.”

I heard a story about..

A man meets a woman at a party, and he is stunned by her beauty. He thinks to himself,

I cannot let this woman get away. I've got to figure out some way to create a connection.

So he says to her,

You know, I may not look like much, but my father is a very wealthy man, and he's in bad health. He's an old guy. He's not going to live more than two years at the outside. And when he dies, I will be worth fifty million dollars.

And you can tell the woman is impressed. And she asks for his business card. And three days later he gets a note that she is now his stepmother.

Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven is kind of like that. What do I mean by saying this?

What I mean when I say this is that...

This woman will do anything she can to get at a treasure that is so great that she is willing to sacrifice anything for it....

This is an opportunity of a lifetime. She thinks:

I'll just do anything...anything at all that lets me get a hold of this one thing that I absolutely have to have.

She is intentional, and determined.

The scripture this morning talks about someone who finds a treasure in a field. He is overjoyed and sells everything he has to buy it. He wants it so badly. He'll do anything to get it! This is an opportunity of a lifetime..

The psalm we read said in the middle "This one thing" I have desired of the Lord...and this is the one thing I will seek after..."

Not ten things, or fifteen things am I meant to seek after...but **ONE** thing and **ONE** thing only, is what I seek after...and **That one thing is to GROW to know the Lord, and stay in his presence!**

Isn't it hard now a days to focus on just one thing?

Most of us are constantly multi-tasking

We are spread thin, with multiple things happening that we are attending to all the time. We are almost forced into this way of life.

Studies show that the human brain is actually designed to only attend to one thing at a time.

Studies also show that despite all the technology that allows us to do multiple things all at once, we are actually accomplishing less .

Why would this be? Some people say it is because we aren't doing one thing really well ; we are doing multiple things less well; they aren't thought through, they are done quickly without the investment of time, and so what we manage to accomplish doesn't last.

What if we focused on just one thing. Getting to know Jesus Christ in deeper more profound ways every day?

This **ONE THING** I have sought after, says the psalmist...and that one thing is my relationship to God. I am intentional about that.

Let me tell you that **No matter how long you've been a Christian there is still a NEXT STEP to take in moving toward a deeper walk with God.** All of us are called to take **NEXT STEPS.** None of us have arrived at some idealistic place where we can just stay stagnant in our Christian walk....

It doesn't work that way. We are either moving forward spiritually or going backward...

Dallas Willard says...

We can always grow more like Christ. Spiritual transformation is authentically possible through faith and grace if I am willing to arrange my life around the activities Jesus Himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of God.

What did Jesus practice that connected him to God? (*come up one by one*)

He would go out into the hills...into creation.

He would regularly pray alone, away from people;

He would worship in the synagogue with people

He would immerse His mind in the scriptures so they overflowed from him onto others.

He would engage in fellowship with His close friends, and discuss spiritual things with them.

He would give generously and live simply.

He would engage in acts of service and compassion.

Now, if Jesus felt like He needed to intentionally live with these lifestyle patterns to be connected to God... and He was the Son of God, there's a good chance I will need to intentionally choose to do these things also in my life that will connect me more deeply with God

But in order to make the choices I need to make, to intentionally grow in my faith

I have to actually come to believe that Jesus was **so** right,

That He was **so** smart,

That His information about God and life and how to live was **so much better** than any available alternative, whoever else you might think about,

Until I'm **so** convinced that this is **so** true about Jesus, that I think to myself that **I'd be a fool not to drop everything and pursue this**

ONE THING with everything I've got I'm not going to make that choice.

Dallas Willard says:

My central claim is that we can become like Christ. Spiritual transformation is possible by doing one thing—by following Him in the overall style of life Jesus chose for Himself.

I have had some very strong experiences in my life that have convinced me of Jesus' love for me.

And after these experiences of grace and utter blessing
And many of you have shared with me experiences of God's presence that you have had that have blessed you deeply...

After one of these encounters with God I remember thinking, **There's nothing better than this!**

Why do I go around focused on other things when this relationship to Jesus is all that I should be pursuing; it ought to be the passion of my life...

This is it...this is the pearl of great price....the treasure in the field

That I would sell anything to attain...

And then of course

After awhile the vision fades

And I get distracted by other things

That means I have to be intentional about making choices that keep me on track; that I have patterns and ways of living that keep me focused on Jesus, and my continuing need to grow in him...

What are some of these practices I can engage in?

Before I tell you, Let me just say that all of this

will look a little different for each one of us....we all have different temptations that we struggle with and different wiring patterns and so on.

And the purpose of these spiritual practices, is never to earn brownie points with God or show how spiritual I am or something like that. The purpose of methods or disciplines or practices is freedom to just be able to do the right thing in the right way at the right moment, and in so doing grow into the grace and knowledge of our LJC...

So here are some suggestions for you: (SLIDES SHOULD SOMEHOW SHOW G-R-O-W as an Acronym)

G – Get Involved! If you are not already, get involved here in a small group Bible study as well as join us for Adult Education after church.

As far as Adult Education goes, there's some really good options, and we keep changing them so no one gets bored. Next week is our last core value and then we are doing a short series on HEAVEN. You want to know what heaven's like? Join us for worship and after Adult Ed.

R – Read scripture and pray daily. Just for time management purposes its worth it. When you wake up on an ordinary day, and begin your day with prayer and scripture, you will notice that you save time and are actually in a better place to deal with all that comes your way.

You will also find after awhile that doors open up for you, options present themselves, and circumstances work out. Over time you begin to experience a deep peace in your soul as a result of meeting with God at the beginning of each day. (some people do this at night whatever)

One woman told me that when she wakes up in the morning, she makes the intentional choice not to let her feet touch the ground until she prays for 20 minutes. She created this idea, so she is certain to do it, even if she doesn't feel like it. A

LSO APPS

O – Organize and prioritize your life, so that you can put first things first. This is very difficult, I know, but it will make a huge difference in how you grow spiritually. You must create the

space in your life to seek first the kingdom of God...for yourself and for your kids. If kids see that going to church is important to you, Bible study is important to you...service and mission is important to you...not because you tell them, but because you live it out, ***your faith and the way you live your life will be caught...not taught.*** Kids smell hypocrisy a mile away. Let what is most important to you SHOW.

W – Welcome God’s interruption into your life! Once you start living in this way, you will find that God is going to mess with you. Intentional Faith Development changes you, as any kind of growth process does.

That’s the scary part about all of this. God loves us too much to keep us where we are. He will always move us forward as we open ourselves to him – sometimes it comes in unexpected ways.

Notice the surprises. The new people who come into your life. The door that opens. The other door that shuts. The opportunities for service. The new awareness of a need or concern you weren’t noticing before. The tug on your heart from the Holy Spirit to go here, minister there, be a light, speak truth, pray. All of this starts to happen when we make the intentional choice to develop in our faith and move toward intimacy with Jesus Christ.

Let’s read from Philippians together ...great words to close this message on IFD.

“I consider everything a loss, because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ....not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

Philippians 3:7-8, 12 (TNIV)

