

July 23 – Outward Disciplines – Outward Expression of Inner Reality
Colossians 3:1-2 Psalm 139:1-8, 23-24

(Slide 1) We are challenged to “act in such a manner that you are living proof of a loving God.” This past week Thom Rainer listed six “evangelism killers” in local churches. Rainer is CEO of LifeWay Resources with the Southern Baptist denomination. I like this sign—each of us is a living message. If each of us were the only evangelical message some people see, what would they conclude about God?

(Slide 2) God wants to be first in your life. As the psalmist writes in Psalm 139, we are never out of God’s sight. There is nowhere we can go that God isn’t with us. There is no thought we can think that God doesn’t know. God knows all about and loves us! And God is waiting for us to acknowledge our relationship, waiting for us to put God first in our “true heart” (Hebrews 10:22)

(Slide 3) For those of us who already believe in Christ as Savior and Lord, the challenge is presented by this statement by John Ortberg “For most of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of our faith.” We need to be challenged, we are challenged to deepen our relationship with God.

(Slide 4) Last week we began considering what actions we need to take to draw near to God, to have God as our best friend. We called these actions spiritual disciplines or spiritual practices. With our new best friend

- ◆ We meet and get acquainted, learning as much as we can about our friend. That’s the spiritual discipline of Study

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- ◆ We make time for our friendship and for our friendship to grow. By removing distractions taking our attention away from our friend, by fasting, we make time.
- ◆ We spend as much time as possible with our friend. We communicate face to face and through all media available. This is the discipline of prayer. And it is the discipline of silence. Have you ever been part of a one-way relationship?
 - The other did all the talking
 - You essentially remain unknown to the other person.

This is what we do to God when we don’t take time to be silent and listen for what God is communicating to us.

(Slide 5) So the question I asked last Sunday was “Is God your best friend?” And the question I ask today is “How does each of us give evidence of, how might others become aware, of our relationship with God?”

I realized when I make a new friend—or reconnect with a previous friend--my family hears me talk about that person—a lot

But is it possible others might become aware of your relationship with God without us ever saying we are believers in Christ?

(Slide 6) First, Living our Christianity – being Christ’s followers—isn’t like wearing clothing

Clothing has to do with our outward appearance. Our clothes are selected for an event/time/place –

Our choices are a response to what is happening outside of us:

- We choose clothing in response to the temperature
When it’s cold, we bundle up –as protection from the cold temperatures
When it’s hot – wear as little as possible
- We choose clothing based on what is trending today – what is “in style”

Men – Do some of you remember the leisure suits of the 1970s – pastel blue, yellow

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Think about ties – wide, narrow, none, blue/red power ties (Bush, Trump)
Women – How do you choose shoes? Remember clogs? flat and clunky shoes?; spike heels, pointed toes?

(Slide 7) Living our faith, being Christ's followers isn't subject to external circumstances. It comes from our inner reality, our deep relationship with God.

(Slide 8) There are outward spiritual practices, visible actions, that reveal our inner reality:

Solitude –
Submission—
Service –
Simplicity –

We've already recognized the importance of communicating with God in prayer and silence.

(Slide 9) **Solitude** is the visible action we take of being away from others, revealing we need to spend time alone with God

Solitude is being alone, but it is NOT being lonely, it is not loneliness

At age 58, I found myself living alone for the first time in my life. That's when my real lessons about solitude began.

- Loneliness is inner emptiness
- Solitude is inner fulfillment, a state of mind and heart

(Slide 10) Scripture teaches us to make time in solitude for God

- Psalm 46:10 Be still and know I am God
- Lamentations 3:25-28 – The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him...it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord; let him sit alone in silence...
- Jesus made time to go away to pray
 - Matthew 4:1-11 – Jesus in wilderness as he began his ministry
 - Matthew 14:13 – At the news of John the Baptist's death, Jesus withdrew in a boat to a lonely place apart

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- Matthew 14:23 – After the feeding of the 5000, Jesus went off by himself
 - Mark 1:35 – After a long night of work, in the morning he rose and went out to a lonely place
- Solitude gives us time to pray, to listen in silence, to study
Those of you who saw the movie "War Room" will remember the importance of the separate room or closet and time there to pray and just be with God

(Slide 11) **Submission** is the visible acknowledgement that others' interests are more important than our own. Submission takes two forms: submission to God and submission to one another.

To God – Throughout scripture, we read of putting God first.

Psalm 143:10 – Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God

Psalm 40:8 – I delight to do Your will, O my God; your law is within my heart

Submission to God: learning and delighting in following God's way, not our own

Submission also involves our relationships with one another
Ephesians 5:21 tells us "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Value others as a way of showing our obedience and respect for Christ.

Philippians 2:3: we read "In the true spirit of humility, let each regard the others as better than, superior to, yourself
At the airport on my way to visit my daughter in June, I got upset because I thought others who ordered food after I did were being served first. It was a fast food place, with one cook. I complained. And I wasn't even in a hurry. And then, as I sat there, I realized how petty I had been. After all, the cook was doing the best he could by himself. —I waited maybe an extra five minutes for my food. So I tried to apologize. Apologies are good but in that situation submission would have been more Christ-like.

We do need to acknowledge there are limits to submission 4

Submission is not being a doormat, not allowing others to abuse us.

And we need to remember that we submit to God first. Paul was warned not to preach. He was brought before the authorities; he was put in jail. And he continued to proclaim the Good News of Jesus anyway. Paul's submission was to God, not to earthly rulers.

(Slide 12) Service

Service is the visible action of submitting to another, of being willing to put another's needs above your own. Again we look to scripture to teach us the importance of service.

- Jesus set the example. We read in Matthew 20:25-28: I came not to be served but to serve." And "whoever wants to be great among you, must be a servant of all"
- Richard Foster, who has written extensively on spiritual practices, tells us there is a difference between choosing to serve and choosing to be a servant. When we choose to serve, we are in charge: we decide who needs our help and what kind of help others need. When we choose to be a servant, we give up control. We let others tell us what they need and how we can be of service. We agree to meet their need, without judgment from us.

(Slide 13) Facebook video: Fosterhjem Video

Service can be big acts of helping others, as we heard yesterday. Margaret Underwood lived a life in service to others: her family, the Boy Scouts, city activities and county commission, and this church and related American Baptist ministries. Service can be small acts of kindness and assistance, as these classmates shared food from their own lunches with the boy who had no lunch. Service is putting others' needs above our own.

(Slide 14) Simplicity (Fasting)

The fourth, the last this morning, of that outward expression of our inner reality is Simplicity. Perhaps you have sung the Shaker hymn that begins:

'Tis a gift to be simple, tis a gift to be free
Simplicity is living with only those possessions and activities we really need.

Last week I mentioned fasting, which we usually think of as going without food.

(Slide 15) I made reference to fasting from possessions. Have you ever known of someone who was "possessed by their possessions"? They had so much "stuff," their time and money were needed to take care of and to store their many, many possessions. Our possessions contain memories, offer security, confer status. They become a substitute for God in our lives; they crowd out God from our lives.

And there is a caution here: smaller doesn't always mean simpler. Have you heard of the "Tiny House" craze? It's an intriguing idea – choosing to live in a house with only 200 square feet of living space. I would find it very challenging, but I like the idea of living with less—especially after completing a move to Traverse City and preparing to sell my house in Portland.

But here's the crazy thing, now there is something called "luxury tiny house living." Can you imagine building 200-square-foot house costing \$100,000? Location is NOT the explanation for this cost. Most often these modern versions of mobile homes are built on trailer platforms so they can be towed to new locations. \$100,000 just for the actual tiny house!

(Slide 16) But I also mentioned fasting from certain activities – making life more simple by choosing not to be super busy. Maybe we think simplicity is just not owning as much. I found a note from 2001 that read "we are shifting from ownership to access." For a while we thought young adults were deciding against home ownership, and in larger cities, against owning cars. Many of us have chosen not to amass more things (what item/thing do you want for your birthday, for Christmas, etc.), now, instead, we make lists of the experiences in which we want to engage, as in "what's on your bucket list?" We've substituted activity for possession; life is still not simple.

All of these outward practices: solitude, submission, service

and simplicity are desirable and CAN help us refocus on our relationship with God. BUT, we must recognize they can be misused for our personal glory, not for God's glory.

(Slide 17) Scripture tells us the "right way" to fast and the "wrong way" to fast, whether from food, activities or possessions. Old Testament scripture includes putting on sackcloth and ashes when people fasted. Jesus gives other instructions:

In Matthew 6:16-18: "...when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father, who is in secret..."

Fasting is not a show of doing without food, possessions, activities. Fasting is eliminating certain things for a time in order to limit what distracts us from God.

Even in the Old Testament we find reference to heart—our inner being—rather than our outward show. Joel 2:12 does say to fast, mourn and weep but then in the following verse--Joel 2:13 – tells us to rend your heart, not your garments. God wants our inner reality to be in tune, in sync with God's being. This is where our witness begins: in our inner reality.

(Slide 18) As there is caution when we fast, there is caution about any, all, of these spiritual practices: Prayer, silence, fasting, study; solitude, submission, service, simplicity

It is easy to fall into legalism: I MUST pray, fast, study, serve, submit, live simply each day or I'm not a "good" Christian. And because I must do these things to be a good Christian, it's obvious that everyone else MUST be doing these things also. The DOING becomes the standard for defining "good" Christian. And then we've forgotten some very important teaching:

It is by grace you are saved, not by your works so no one can boast Ephesians 2:8-9

NOTHING we can do makes God love us more or love us less

We don't EARN God's favor – the parable of the lost son (prodigal son) is also about the self-righteous older brother. The older brother believed he was entitled to more of his father's 7

love and favor than the younger brother who had wasted his life and his father's money.

Jesus set the example, as we've mentioned, when he said "I came not to be served but to serve" (Matthew 20:25-28). Being a servant requires humility – we've defined humility in some previous message. Humility is NOT thinking poorly of yourself ("Oh what a lowly worm am I, yes that is in scripture) but not thinking of yourself at all. To think poorly of yourself invites others to affirm you, to stroke your ego. That attention, whether you intended to attract it or not, is not humility.

These practices are not clothing we put on for show, for protection. These practices become who we are. Yesterday Bob Shaw talked about Margaret's core values. That's what these practices are: our core values. And each one of them expands our freedom in Christ in some way: **(Slide 19)**

- ◆ Prayer, silence – free to listen to God speaking to us, to not have all the answers ourselves
- ◆ Study – free to not know everything, to have an answer, a "right-wrong" for everything
- ◆ Solitude – free to be alone with God, to not need constant social interaction dependent on the presence of other people **(Slide 20)**
- ◆ Submission – free not to have my own way in everything, to always be right
- ◆ Service – free to put others needs ahead of my own, thus realizing that I am not the center of the world
- ◆ Simplicity – free from dependence on things for happiness

(Slide 21) All of this, all I've talked about this week and last, is about making Christ the center of our being, our life. And then

Living in such a way that others can observe Christ as the center of our being

It's about preparing ourselves to be evangelists. It's about preparing to proclaim the Good News in word AND in deed