

## I. Set Up

A. Good morning / Welcome / Excited for today because it is a gift from God to us. Jesus said that we were not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for us. This is a day to regroup, realign our life, be encouraged by time with God and by being reminded of how loving and gracious he is.

B. This is also a fun day because today we are opening up Christ Church Crossroads and we are excited for that.

C. The series we are in is called Broken: Preparing for the day When Life Stops Working and Your Faith is Tested. It is based on the idea that if we live long enough we will get knocked down. We will suffer a major loss. Our heart will be broken. This is the fifth message in this series. What we've established so far is that after a major loss we move through four phases: Numbness to sadness to anger to peace to today

D. Or, shock to sorrow to sadness to surrender to today – which is sanctification, a 25 cent theological term that means growth.

E. We are glad you are here.

F. Right now...

## II. Transition into film clip about sport's movies

A. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKZSQDHLtrY>

B. What follows is a brief collection from a special corner of American film. The locker room motivational speech.

## III. Introduction

A. Welcome to those at The 01 services and Highland Park, and as of today – for the first time – welcome to those joining us at Crossroads.

B. I didn't realize it until I went looking, but there is a special genre of film dedicated to pre-game or half time motivational talks.

1. Gene Hackman in Hoosiers
2. Kirk Russell in Miracle
3. Matthew McConaughey in We are Marshall

C. Generally the talk is given to the underdogs and it's all about going out there and doing your best.

D. This all ties into today's talk, which is ultimately about being better – and doing better as defined by God.

E. There are actually a number of theories in play about how we get better – that is, grow, mature, advance, take ground.

F. One of the reasons there are so many is because there is no real agreement today about what better looks like. What does it mean to be better? Are we talking about happier, healthier, richer, smarter, kinder, thinner, lower cholesterol? All of the above? What does a good person look like? How is a better version of you better?

G. I touch on this briefly in Book Five – noting how our inability to define better has shaped higher education.

1. There is no longer anything unified about a university. If you were to show up at a typical faculty meeting at a state school or most private schools and say, “What are we trying to do here? What's the goal? What does a well-educated person know, believe, do?” you'd have chaos. If you suggested that you wanted virtuous graduates you'd have a riot.

H. About all that can be agreed upon today in secular higher education is that we will objectively measure results – which is why science dominates. And that we will not take a moral position other than we will approve of the complete autonomy of everyone to do anything except cheat on an exam or do something that will bring the police on campus or garner bad press.

I. I realize how cynical that sounds. Please know, I love much of higher education. I spent 8 years as a college pastor; and we sent all three boys to college. I'm not arguing against it. It has much to offer.

J. I'm just pointing out, at a societal level right now, we can't agree on what good is, so we can't agree on what better is.

K. We do not just see this on college campuses; we see it in the various schools of therapy. Someone's life stops working to the point that they are looking for help. Well, a therapist has a set of assumptions about what kind of help they need based on their view of what good looks like, and tries to steer people in that direction.<sup>1</sup> Different understandings of who we are, what matters and what good is, leads to significantly different kinds of advice.

IV. Let me jump to my point: we do not need to be confused. We know what better looks like and we know what we need to do to get there.

A. God has weighed in. He has defined good, and he has mapped out a path towards the goal.

B. God's plan is that we become like Jesus Christ, who is the perfect example of a good person.<sup>2</sup>

1. Many read Romans 8:28 and then stop. You need to read the next verse. I'll read both:

a) We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

C. I'm not going to unpack all of the big ideas in this passage right now. What I want to focus on is the idea that God wants us "conformed to the image of his son."

1. For those God foreknew he also predestined to what? To be conformed to the image of his Son – i.e., to be like Jesus.

2. In Ephesians 4, Paul explains that we are to advance to, move towards, mature, "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine... Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ

3. God wants us to grow up and become like Christ.

4. In Colossians 1, Paul writes this. Talking about Jesus he says: He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

5. Jesus is the template. We want to become more like Christ. He is the one who got it right.

D. You are supposed to become more like God. We do not become a god, but we are to become more god-like, or godly. We are to become more like Jesus. Or, another way to think about this, we are to more fully embody and display what Paul calls the Fruit of the Spirit.

1. In Galatians, Paul lists nine qualities that we manifest as we get better: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control.

2. That is the goal. When someone says, “Do you know Justin? Or do you know Amber or Jean or Walter?” – when they say your name. The person is supposed to say, “Are they the one who is “loving, patient, kind, gentle, good and faithful?”

E. That is the goal. That is what better looks like. What is the better version of you? It’s more like Jesus. It more fully reflects the nine qualities Paul lists in Galatians 5.

F. We know what good looks like. And! And we know how to get there.

V. What has to happen for you to grow? How do we become like Christ?

A. Well for starters, the inputs need to change. Your life is perfectly crafted to deliver the results you are getting. If you want to change the results, you have to change the inputs. What you are doing, reading, watching, thinking about, praying about gets you your present results. If you want to get better – a process theologians refer to as sanctification – then you need to do some different things.

B. To diagram this, we could put up the ever present arrow. **(SPECTRUM HERE)** Now the question would be: how do we move closer to God, to positive five.

1. We are all on this spectrum. We have all been spiritually formed. The terrorist and the saint are somewhere on this chart. We are born in negative numbers and cross over into positive numbers on the basis of the work of Christ.

C. I wrote about this in Book One, noting that:

1. We become a Christian – we gain eternal life, we are adopted into the family of God, we are justified – by embracing Christ, which is an instantaneous process, based entirely on what Jesus does.

2. Moving from plus .01 towards 5 requires our effort. We call this sanctification not justification and it’s understood that this is a partnership. God works with us.

3. To quote Augustine: We cannot do this on our own and God will not do it on His own.

VI. So, what do we do to get better, to move towards God, to become more Christ-like, more holy, to be sanctified? Well, that sort of depends a bit on where you are and how long you've been there.

A. My counsel to new believers or those who haven't traveled very far down the line is to highlight five areas: Worship, Connect, Grow, Serve and Share, arguing that as we do these, we put ourselves in a place where God acts.

B. What we want is for our heart – our character, our desires – to be changed. But we can't do that on our own. We can't just stop getting angry by deciding we are not going to be angry. We need God's help to not only change our actions (which we can control) but to change us, our heart, our desires.

C. So, we do what we can and depend on God to do what only He can. And the five areas where we should focus fall into this WCGSS paradigm.

1. Worship is more than singing and more than a weekend service, but do not neglect either. Make showing up at church a non-negotiable. There is something sacred about placing yourself in the grove God established for us and that has been going on for several thousand years.

a) I had two conversations this week with men who stopped showing up and who are not doing well – by their own admission. And I called them out, saying this is not a little thing.

b) And it really needs to not be something you wake up and decide about. Someone will say to me, "You're never going to believe this. But this morning I heard this song and I started thinking about this and then you said the same thing. It was amazing. And to think that I almost didn't come this morning." And they want me to comment on how neat it is that God worked out this little coincidence and all I'm thinking is, "What do you mean you almost didn't come?" You need to come. Don't wake up and decide whether you feel like it. You need more resolve and commitment than that or you are shark bait. Dig a deep grove so it gets easy.

2. Connect drives home the point that we need some deep connections with others who love God and love us. Some of you are getting a taste of this with your small group. It's not yet what it could be, but it's moving that way. And I spend most of Book Four talking about this. The goal is not small groups, the goal is a few deep connections with people who you can count on to help you seek after God.

3. Grow: You are responsible for your own growth. The church staff and leadership will do our best to create an environment where growth will happen, but as I've said before, it's ultimately up to you.

a) If you read *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer's book about an ill-fated attempt to climb Everest, you know that a guide can only take you so high. After that point, you have to do it on your own.

b) I feel the same way about your spiritual growth.

c) God changes you, but you have to do some of this on your own. I don't think we can get you much past 2.

d) 10 + 10 – ten minutes of Bible reading per day and ten minutes of prayer – are transformative practices. If you are not at least doing that, start there. Grow it as you can, but start there. That alone will carry you forward.

4. Serve: Use your gifts to help others. That is your assignment from God. Ephesians 2:10 reads:

a) We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

b) We need to do whatever needs to be done – whether we want to or not, whether we find it life-giving or not – and we need to be looking for the intersection of the world's needs and our passions and gifts and then jump in in a big way.

(1) On this second part a few people recently started a CARS ministry. You might have seen it displayed out in the lobby. The mission is two-fold

(a) To help those who are struggling – especially single moms – keep their cars running;

(b) And to receive used cars – providing the donor with a tax-deductible receipt and either sell them for scrap or to repair them and then give them to someone in need.

(2) This is a creative example of someone who enjoys working on cars to help others; and we hope that over time it becomes a place where fathers and sons might spend some time together working on cars.

5. Share: Share your life, your money, you faith. Give. Give. Don't be a consumer but a contributor. Be a spiritual catalyst for others. We are to live sacrificially. We are to be generous as our God is generous.

D. Worship, Connect, Grow, Serve and Share – as you do these things, what we can do – God acts within us.

1. The way to get over you anger is not to try not to get angry. That seldom works. You need your heart changed. That is what god does.

E. I keep repeating these five because:

1. Although the process of growth is fluid – we are all unique and your path forward and mine will be different. While the path is somewhat fluid, it's not free form.

a) It's not random, and there are aspects of it that are the same for everyone – such as baptism and communion, Bible study and prayer, serve and share.

2. And also because we never graduate from the basics.

a) 18 months ago, well before we started having conversations with the folks at Crossroads, we were doing some early work trying to find a third site. And Garth was working on this and he said, "I don't think there is any possibility that this will work because there is not much parking, but the Bulls' training facility is coming on the market and the realtor is going to walk me through it. Do you want to go? And the answer way, "Yes."

b) By the way, in my physical therapy I've been working a bit on basketball. The first time they had me shoot a free throw was a riot.

c) What stands out for the Bulls practice facility? Nothing. It's the same game. It's obvious they shoot a lot of baskets and do a lot of layups.

d) I went to a Bears practice a few years ago when Lovie was still coaching. I don't know what I expected, but one of the big take-aways was, this is just like 7<sup>th</sup> grade, only with nicer equipment and players who are a lot of bigger, faster and more talented. Practice consists of warming up, a series of drills and then you run some plays.

F. We do not graduate from these five: WCGSS. Ignore them at your peril.

1. In one sense spiritual growth is mysterious, but in another it's not. We know what to do from Scripture and from 2,000 years of people trying.

G. By the way, if you are 3 plus on the spectrum, I'd point you to some other things:

1. You should be reading different books.

2. You should be spending more time in prayer

3. And there are other practices, like silence and solitude and Scripture memory that will help.

H. But I do think these five are pretty comprehensive – and none of them can be ignored.

VII. Today I want to add a few thoughts. I want to frame this differently.

A. Rather than talk about what we can do. Let's look at what God uses to help us grow. According to the Bible there are four catalytic agents. Four guides, resources, directional arrows that help us grow.

B. Number One: The Holy Spirit

1. When we step over the line, the Spirit of God comes to live inside of us. Invades us. He is strong and will ultimately prevail. He will bring about the changes that need to happen. Our will will be conformed to His. He will change our heart and that is a huge win. But here's the deal: He is shy and doesn't force his way. We need to yield.

2. If you want your heart changed, you need the Holy Spirit to change it. We cannot simply decide to be better. Our will is too weak. And you know that, because you've tried.



3. We need help to change our heart. We need to yield to the Spirit of God. And this is why I like the prayer I've shared with you many times. It's in the notes for today's sermon. [Go online and you will always find the manuscript of the sermon, with more information than I preached.](#) The prayer goes like this:

a) Good morning, heavenly Father; good morning, Lord Jesus; good morning, Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, I worship you as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Lord Jesus, I worship you, Savior and Lord of the world. Holy Spirit, I worship you, Sanctifier of the people of God. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more. Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons in one God, have mercy upon me. Amen.

4. And by the way, while I am talking about the Holy Spirit and prayer, here is another prayer you should know:

a) Every time we sin – as we will! As soon as you realize it – stop and pray, “Father, forgive me for my anger, lust, greed, envy” – whatever. “Thank you that you have. Holy Spirit, fill and empower me to do the right thing.”

b) If you have crossed over the line, God lives within you. The Holy Spirit lives inside of you. But if you want control, He will not fight you for it. We have freedom. So we have to keep yielding our life.

5. The first agent of change is God Himself – the Holy Spirit.

C. The Second Change Agent is the Bible

1. In Hebrews 4 we are told that:

a) The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

2. The Bible will mold us if we let it.

3. In John 17 Jesus prays, “Father, sanctify them” – there is the root of our word “sanctification.” What Jesus is praying is, “help them get better, sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”
4. The Bible is not just a book it is “the Book.” Read it and you will be changed.
5. If you memorize parts of it – what some refer to as “hiding it in your heart” – it will always be there to help you.

D. Number Three: Other people

1. As I have said over and over and over. As you read in Book Four – we need others in our lives. Christianity is not a solo sport. We cannot do it on our own.
2. And the people closest to us will be the ones who act like sandpaper rounding off the rough edges.<sup>3</sup>
3. In Proverbs 27:17 we read, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” So one person helps another get better.
4. *This is not a fun process. I write about this at some length in Book Four, *Friends for the Broken*,” which is not out today because our graphics person ended up in the hospital, but the first three chapters are available online, and it will be here next weekend.*
5. God uses others in a variety of ways to help us grow.

VIII. Finally, number four. The fourth thing God uses to grow us: Trials. Hardships. Losses. Pain. Suffering

- A. We can be transformed by our troubles. They can make us better.
  1. Again, “can be” is the key. I feel like a broken record, but, not everyone who grows older grows wiser. We can waste trials. We can learn nothing. Or, if we do this right, we can leverage them and grow because of them.
  2. As Peter says in I Peter, we can be like gold that is melted down, where the impurities are scrapped away and what is left is of greater value.
- B. God can use bad things to good ends. There are a number of passages here:

1. In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul talks about how his struggles have worked for the good of others, and then he shifts and reminds us that our present struggles can yield an eternal reward. Later, 2 Cor. 4:16, Paul says:

a) Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2. These and other passages suggest that our problems have a purpose – that we can be transformed by our troubles. God can use bad for good.

3. Some people think when you become a Christian you should have no problems. But that's is not what Jesus promised. In fact, He said, "In the world you will have trouble." And Peter adds, "Don't be surprised when you have troubles."

a) This is a broken world. This is not heaven. Lots of people expect heaven on earth.

b) The Bible tells us that sin has broken everything. Nothing works as designed: not the weather or the economy. Not our body or our heart.

4. But God is able to use bad for good if we let him. In God's hands trials are a great tool to make us better – more like Jesus.

5. This is not to say that everything that happens to you is good. Or that God has caused it.

a) There is more here than I am going to unpack this morning, but theologians make a distinction between God's sovereign will and his moral will. He allows things He doesn't approve of. He could prevent them – and one day He will – but at this point He does not.<sup>4</sup>

6. As I tried to explain in last week's reading, we do not get answers to why God allows things to happen, but we get great assurance. He is there. He sent his son. He is not insulated from the problems of this world. He entered it, suffered and died to make a way back for us. The Bible says "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit."

7. We do not get an answer to the question of why evil exists. But what we do get is a savior who is not immune from the pain. A God who sent His son into this broken world to offer us hope and a way forward.

- C. And we see that God can redeem our trials.
1. God could have kept Joseph out of jail. He could have kept Daniel out of the lion's den. He could have kept Paul from being shipwrecked. He could have kept me from having a stroke. But he didn't.
  2. Look, the Father could have kept his Son off the cross. But he didn't. Why? Because God had a greater plan.
- D. God's is able to use everything in your life for good.
1. Somehow, in ways that scramble our mind, God can use everything about you and everything that happens to you for good.
  2. In Romans 8:28 we read:
    - a) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
  3. This doesn't say that everything that happens is good, but that God can use bad for good. God can use all of your mistakes, all of my sins, all of our hurts. There is nothing that God cannot use for good in your life. He took the worst thing that ever happened, the death of his Son, and used it for good. And out of the worst sin came the salvation of the world.
  4. By the way, Romans 8:28 is not a promise for everybody. It is a promise for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.
    - a) If you want to opt out, God will allow you to go it alone.
    - b) In that case, the bad doesn't necessarily work for good.
    - c) But if I have stepped over the line, if I'm trying to fulfill his purpose, God says I will work even the bad things for good in your life and I will fit it in according to my purpose.
- E. You might think of it this way. Aspects of your life on their own can be bad and unpleasant. But when you let God work them together then God brings good out of it. Think about a cake.
1. If you eat the ingredients on their own: flour, oil, salt they are bad. The only one good is the sugar.
  2. But when they are baked together they are good. If you are impatient and eat the ingredients before they are baked together it's not good. But once they are all together – Walla, a cake.

- IX. Let's go back to the main point.
- A. God is committed to making you more like Jesus.
  - B. There are a variety of catalytic agents that help us move in that direction
    - 1. The Holy Spirit
    - 2. The Bible
    - 3. Other people
    - 4. Trials, pain, suffering, trouble.
  - C. If you think this last one sounds bad, your right. Trials are not fun.
    - 1. We often get exactly what we do not want in order to grow.
      - a) When we pray for patience we likely get situations that make us anxious, but those are the very things that will help us gain patience.
  - D. The path ahead is not always easy, but the view is worth the climb. Spiritual maturity is its own reward. Life is better when we move towards five.
- X. So what do we do? How do we survive the path?
- A. Remember that God's plan for you is good and it will come to pass. He will prevail on your behalf. He who began a good work in you will complete it.<sup>5</sup> And though the things you are going through are not always easy, they are worth it. The pain is temporary, but the reward is eternal.<sup>6</sup>
  - B. Press On. Soldier on. Hang in there. Keep on keeping on. God will not take us someplace we cannot handle. It may feel that way. It will not always make sense. But it will turn.
- XI. And the last thing I'll mention today, let God shape us through moments like the one we are coming to as we approach this table.
- A. Communion is a sacred event.

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<sup>1</sup> I remember nearly thirty years ago being invited to meet with the administrator for Student Life. This was the group campus ministries reported to, and given their tendency to sponsor things like "Outdoor Intercourse Day, the relationship was strained. They kept restricting us because we didn't take neutral positions on issues – which they thought they did and we argued were impossible. To suggest that Jesus was God was not neutral, nor was it neutral to suggest that sex was sacred and that you'd be wise to avoid participating in outdoor intercourse day. I had a series

of frustrating conversations with various administrators trying to get them to see that their advocacy for neutrality was not neutral – it was a specific worldview. In fact, it was one that would not work.

<sup>2</sup> We do not become gods, but God wants us to become like him.

<sup>3</sup> As I make clear in book four, I am mostly thinking of the ways people can help us see ourselves – our sins – and consequently raise our game. But there is another aspect of this as well. In 2 Corinthians 4:8 Paul writes, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body – and then in verse 15 he says – All this is for your benefit.” In some way Paul is saying that the suffering he (and others) endured was for their gain. Note: later in this same section Paul will stress that our present troubles – which in light of eternity are quite small and brief – our present troubles are producing for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever.

<sup>4</sup> There are several different ways to speak about God’s will. The first (and the broadest) is his sovereign (or hidden) will. By this we mean that He ordains everything that comes to pass: He is never not in control; His will can never be frustrated. Nothing has happened to you that He has not at least allowed. A second way we talk about God’s will is His moral will, which is revealed through The Law. For example, it is the will of God that: we do not steal; that we love our enemies and that we repent for sin. This aspect of His will is revealed in his Word as well as written on our conscience. We can break God’s moral will, however we have no right to do so and when we do it is sin. God allows us to sin but does not approve of it. In light of these two distinctions, we can talk about God allowing something bad to happen – i.e., it is part of his Sovereign will – even though it is not part of his moral will. To be more specific, we could talk about something horrible, such as the death of a child, as being part of God’s will and not part of God’s will. Rick Warren alludes to this in talking about the death of his own son. He writes, “I had a woman ask me one time, where was God when my son died? And I understood that question because I have had a son that died. Here was my answer: God was there, the same place he was when his Son died.”

<sup>5</sup> Rick Warren writes: God told Jeremiah, “The plans I have for you are for good and hope and a future.” Joseph was sold into slavery by his older brothers who were jealous of him. He was taken to Egypt as a slave. When he got to Egypt he was falsely accused of raping a woman. He is thrown in jail. The first forty years of Joseph’s life were bad. Bad, bad, bad. But you know the rest of the story. He was exactly where God wanted him to be. As a result he was raised up eventually to be the second leader in Egypt. And because he was in that position he saved Egypt and Israel from starving. Later Joseph confronted his brothers who had sold him as a slave. His brothers were afraid that he would kill them. But in Genesis 50:20 Joseph said this to his brothers, “You meant to harm me. You meant it for bad. But God meant it for good. And he brought me to this place today.”

<sup>6</sup> We should also rejoice in all things. Not for all things. In 1 Thess. 5:18 we are told, “In everything give thanks.” This does not mean that we have to be thankful for everything. We do not have to be thankful for bad things. When my Dad died a few months ago I wasn’t thankful for that. I wasn’t thankful for a stroke. God doesn’t expect you to be grateful for the pain in your life. We do not give thanks for pain, we give thanks in pain. We give thanks to God for other things. We are reminding ourselves who God is and that He loves us and what is coming our way.