



TIME OF GRACE®

How to Deal With Yourself

Study Notes

Summary

The hardest person to deal with this year will not be your neighbor, your father, your ex, or your annoying coworker. It will be you. You, due to your sinful nature, will be more difficult, moody, grumpy, unpredictable, complicated, and rebellious than perhaps anyone else in your life. So how do you deal with yourself? By fixing your eyes on Jesus. Deny yourself, pick up the cross of ignoring yourself, and follow Jesus. That is how you find the life that is truly life.

- **Mark 8:34,35:** ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”
- Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Points to Ponder

1. Read Hebrews 13:7,8 and consider why Jesus wants every Christian to be part of a spiritual community with organized leadership.
2. Benjamin Franklin once said that one of the hardest things in life is to know thyself. Why would that be? How does doing life together with other Christians help you follow Jesus faithfully?
3. Begin this year with Pastor Mike’s challenge to pray the Lord’s Prayer each day. To start off strong, mark this new habit in your calendar or on a sticky note on your bathroom mirror.

4. As you consider your goals for the upcoming year, take some time to pray and ask God about how you could become a more generous giver. Then, take a bold next step, trusting that God always cares for his children.

5. Share this message with a friend who might be searching for a better “life” in the year to come.

Homework for Next Week

Read Proverbs 14:7; 13:20; 2:4; and 18:24.

Time of Grace Ministry
How to Deal with Yourself
Mark 8:34,35
January 7, 2024

Pastor Mike Novotny

This year is not heaven. All right, put down your pens and your phones for just a second. I need you to put your right hand in the air like this, and make about an inch with your two fingers. Everyone got it? Good. Now I need you to grab about an inch of your thigh, and I need you to pinch it as hard as you can. Go! Did that hurt? All right, you are not in heaven. Okay, I proved it.

So, I hope that this year is a better year, a more predictable year, an easier year for you and your family - your health, your friendships, your business. But I do know this, that stuff is still going to happen this year. Today we are kicking off a brand-new series where we are going to try to do just that. We are going to prepare ourselves, not for the best moments - you probably do not need help with that - but for the harder moments of the upcoming year.

And so, in future weeks, we are going to talk about things like how do you deal with people? You know, the people at your school, the people in your family, the people at the place where you work. There are people you like, people that kind of annoy you. There are difficult people and people that hurt you. People are still going to be part of this upcoming year, so how do you plan to deal with them?

Or, anxiety - we are going to talk about that in two weeks. For those of you who kind of get caught up in your own head, right? That one "what if" question, or the worry, or what if it all falls apart? It is like a one-loop roller coaster, right? It just goes around, and around, and around. It kind of swirls your stomach, keeps you up at night. How are you going to deal with that?

Or shame, because we are not in heaven yet, and this is still earth, and we are still people. All of us are going to sin, probably a whole bunch of times in the upcoming year, and a few of those sins that we commit will feel very shameful. And by shameful, I mean they are going to be the kind of sins that you are going to be super afraid to confess. You will wonder if you still belong in a church like this, if you can bring up something like that to a person like me, or if a person who struggles with something like those things could have a place in the family of God. So, when that temptation comes and we fall into that sin, how are we going to deal with that? And we are going to talk about grief and we are going to talk about death. We are going to talk about temptation and we are going to talk about apathy and losing our motivation for seeking God.

I hope the things that you learn in the weeks to come you do not have to use. I hope you hit your goals and the resolutions go off without a hitch, but just in case this year is like all of the other years, just in case this year looks a little bit more like 2020 than any of us would want, you and I are going to learn how to deal.

So, today we are going to start in the most important place. We are going to start, not with grief and not with shame, not with anxiety and not with "those people." We are going to start with...with you. Because there is one thing that the next 365 days have in common - you. The good days, the bad days, the predictable days and the crazy train days, all of the ups and the downs - unless you die in mid-July, you are going to be there. And so, today, Jesus himself wants to teach you how to deal with yourself, how to get out of your own head. How, with all of the ups and downs, all of your strengths and weaknesses, all of the complicating details of your own life story - how do you handle that and end up in a place with more God, with more grace, with more power, and with more blessing?

And if you are not very familiar with the Bible, Jesus actually gave a very simple, succinct, short, and memorable answer to that question, how do you deal with you? It is a thing that he said right after he got into an argument with his friend, Peter. Have you ever heard that story before? One day, Jesus was explaining to his closest friends, the apostles, about the road he was about to walk. He said, "Guys, we are going to Jerusalem, and when we get there, I am going to be betrayed, I am going to be arrested, I am going to be beaten, and mocked, and tortured. I am going to die on a cross, and on the third day, I am going to rise from the dead." And when Jesus' friend Peter heard that, he said, "No. Uh-uh, Jesus." I think the quote in the Bible is, "Never, Lord. I am never going to walk down that path and I will never let that path happen to you, either. I will fight. I will defend you. We are not going down that road."

And Jesus turned and he clapped back fast, and he said, "Peter, enough. Peter, you are thinking like a man. You are thinking about what is easy right now, what is convenient right now. You are not thinking about the path that leads to the most blessing. you are thinking about the path that is the most convenient to walk in this moment." And Jesus said, "But I am not thinking about that. I am thinking about you, and forgiveness, and salvation, and reconnection with God. And so, no, I am not going to walk that path with you, and no, I am not going to let you stop me from walking that path. Peter, you need to deny that thought, take up the cross, and follow me."

And I think that when Jesus said that, a really important idea popped into his head. He realized in that moment that what he had just said to Peter was not just for Peter. He realized that that was not just for the twelve apostles, that is something that he wanted every last person on earth to hear. And so, Jesus stopped his speech, and as we are about to see, he gathered as many possible people as he could and he spoke some epic words about how to deal with yourself. In fact, Jesus thought these words were so important, he had them inspired and put down in the Holy Scriptures, so that you and I could hear them today.

So, if you want to know how to deal with you in the upcoming year, listen to these incredibly important words from Mark 8. "Then Jesus called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow me." The air that you and I breathe in modern America is anti-Christ. Because Jesus Christ did not say, "Be true to you." He said, "I will tell you how to deal with you. You must deny yourself."

Now, let me push pause real fast and ask, what exactly is Jesus saying? I mean, is Jesus saying that everything that you feel, and think, and want, and desire, and believe is inherently bad? And the answer to that question is no. The Bible says that when you were created in your mother's womb, God gave you a conscience. And a conscience can be twisted, and darkened, and you know, be off in its calibration. But for a lot of us, our conscience functions in some pretty powerful and pretty accurate ways.

So, if you are in a relationship, or you have kids and you want your kids to love each other, and you want your relationship to be filled with selflessness, and you desire love and respect, Jesus is not saying, "Deny that! Don't be yourself because your conscience is working correctly." Here is what Jesus is saying, that in this life there are going to be some times, and there's probably going to be a lot of times, when just like Peter and Jesus in that conversation, the path that Jesus is on and the path that you would like to be on, are not the same path. There is going to be a whole bunch of times when what you kind of think and what your friends are doing does not line up with the path that Jesus taught in this book.

And what Jesus is saying in this text is that if you want to be his disciple, you have to be his disciple. He says, "If you want to follow me, and you are not following me, then you have to deny yourself and follow me." Jesus is essentially saying that "I have no plans to come to this earth and be your follower, but if you want to follow me, I would like that, but there are going to be times, a lot of times, when you have to deny what you think, change your mind, and agree with what I think."

Now, let me give you a couple of examples of what this might look like. Let us talk about the people in your life. I bet that when it comes to the people in your life - your mom, your dad, your neighbor to your left and to your right, the guy you work with in accounting and the woman who works in HR, this classmate or that one - I bet, in your brain, maybe sometimes, there are kind of two categories of people. There are the people that you kind of like and you choose to love, and there are the people that you kind of do not, and so, you choose not to. Right? There are those folks who, really deep in your heart, you think, "Listen, they do not deserve my time. They do not deserve my attention after what they said, after the way they behave, the way they carry themselves, the way that they hurt me. Uh-uh, I am done. They do not deserve it and no one would blame me."

But Jesus wants you to know he is not on that path. Jesus is on the path of crazy, undeserved, unconditional love. God loves the world, and so, Jesus said, "Love people. Love the people you like, love the people you do not." "Pray for your enemies," Jesus said. Do not return insult with insult, snark with snark, gossip with gossip. "Bless people who do not deserve it," Jesus said, "and if you don't think that and you want to be my disciple, you have to deny what you think and agree with what I think."

Or, how about this example? How about when we decide to rejoice at the end of a day? I think a bunch of you here today are a lot like me, that you feel really good at the end of a day when you were really productive. If I could show you my little journal here and the breakdown from week to week - you know, from day to day, I set these little boxes of what I am going to do. You

know, when I leave work and all of these boxes are checked, my expression is like...but if none of the boxes are checked, I am like... Right? Because a good day is a productive day, a day when I do not feel behind, or overwhelmed, or stressed, or like I have to get to work early because there is so much to be done. That is the path I often get on. I am going to rejoice in the days when I get stuff done. But do any of you know that Jesus does not walk that path? Jesus would quote the Old Testament and say, "No, this is a day that God has made. Let us - let us rejoice and be glad in it." Jesus would say to me, "So, Mike, you, with your tiny, little human brain, you came up with a list of eight things you needed to do, and God had four of them that he wanted done. And you did everything that God wanted you to do, and now you are mad about it?" Jesus would say, "No, walk with me, where you serve God, and love people, and do your best, and whether your list gets done or not does not matter. The good works that God had in store for you to do, that is what matters." And Jesus would say to a type-A guy like me, "Mike, you must deny yourself, take up the cross, and follow me."

One last example. How about forgiving yourself? You know, all of us mess up stuff in life. We make choices that we regret. But sometimes, we do things that come, I think, with enough consequences that we find it almost impossible to forgive ourselves. We feel like, you know, it just would not be right to truly believe that I am loved in this moment, that I am totally forgiven, that God's face is shining upon me. What I did was dumb, it was stupid, it hurt people. I could not walk around today with my head up as a forgiven child of God. And do you know what Jesus would say to that? "I ain't walking that road. No, no, no, I gave my life on the cross, not so that guilt and shame would get the last word about you, but instead so that you could wake up every day and know that God's mercy is fresh, and beautiful, and personal with every single breath that you take." And so, if you are alive and breathing, Jesus would say, "Praise the Lord, you are forgiven. Pick your head up, child of God. Stop dragging your feet. Stop thinking that you know about forgiveness better than I do. I am God, and it is finished. You are forgiven." Do you see how it works? In a thousand different ways, from type-A people to those who beat themselves up for the past, Jesus says, "If you do not agree with me, and you want to be my disciple, you must deny you, and follow me."

And I wish I had time to give you a thousand other examples. Nothing really matters more for the Christian faith than for a person to say, "Maybe I do not know best." Right before the end of the calendar year, I was working on one of the biggest projects on my plate. I was getting ready to write a brand-new book. And I was preparing and I was working. I had invested weeks of time and energy. I think I checked. I had 200 pages of just notes - not the book, just notes and research. And I was so jacked up, I wrote a sample chapter and a book proposal that I was ready to ship off to the publisher, but before I did, I sent it to a couple of trusted colleagues for some candid feedback. I sent the e-mail, I went home, and I was all joy. I was telling my wife, "I cannot wait! I cannot wait to sit down and write this book. It is going to be so good! I am so excited! It is going to be good for me, good for us. I hope it is good for the church and for the kingdom."

But then, the next day, I got back to work and my trusted colleagues had replied to my e-mail, and their response was... "Eh." I had e-mailed, "Hey, be honest with me. Does this intrigue you to want to read the rest of the book?" And one guy said, "Not really - period." And I would love

to tell you I said, "Thanks for the feedback," but I found myself on a very different road that day. This has not happened a lot to me in life and I do not know if I should tell you, but I kind of lost it. I stared at my computer screen for like, thirty minutes. I wrote furiously three replies to the people who had given me feedback, and thankfully, deleted them before I sent them. And emotionally, I was in such a terrible spot. I remember I went home at 1:00 in the afternoon and ended my workday right in the middle. And I wished if I had a time machine, I could go back right to that moment when the reply ended up in my inbox, and I wish I could have said, "Mike, you must deny yourself, because there is a great path that you could walk right now. There is this path that Jesus is on, where Jesus says, "You did your best. You threw out an idea and good feedback is going to make it better." "The wounds of a friend can be trusted," the Bible says, and you can trust what those guys said to you. And you do not have to pout, and you do not have to cry, you do not have to stare at the screen - because your joy and your happiness is not in writing books, it is in being loved by God."

As you think about the path that you are on right now and the path that Jesus is walking. Are there any times that maybe you need to look yourself in the mirror and say, "No, I know that is what you think and I know that is how you feel? I know it is very natural for you to, blank. But you must deny you and follow him?" If that scares you, that is okay. Jesus said it is like taking up a cross and saying no to our hearts sometimes feels like death. But when we walk that path, we find the life that is truly life.

That is why Jesus said this next in Mark 8. He said, "For" - here is his explanation. "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it." He says if you give up being true to yourself, you will save your life and you will go through every day for the rest of your life with God at your side. I honestly do not know of anything better that I could possibly say to you. The difficult part of being a Christian is that Jesus gets to be the King, and the Lord, and get the last word, but the beautiful part about being a Christian is that every day, you get to live with God. The good days and the bad days, you are not alone in the kingdom of God because there is a King, and he is God. You get to go through the highs and the lows, the tragedies and the celebrations, with a Father who knows you and who loves you, who is not ashamed to be with you, who uses all of his compassion to take care of you. And you get to walk with Jesus, the Savior who went to a cross, who gave up his own life, who walked the narrow road of pain so that you could be forgiven and adored by a Father in heaven.

And every single day, like your good, moral days and the days you fall on your face, you get up and there is Jesus, and there is more grace and there is more love. And you get to walk every day with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who says, "Yes, you can. You can forgive. I am going to get you through this. No, anxiety is not going to get the last word over you. Yes, I know this is difficult, but I am going to keep you strong." That is the road that I want to be on! I have no clue what is coming this upcoming year, but if I am walking a path with the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit at my side, I am going to be okay. And friend, so will you. So, lose that old life, embrace this new one, and throughout this year, I want you to ask just one question - does Jesus agree with me? I wish I could have asked that question as I am sitting at my computer. "Mike, does Jesus agree with me? Is Jesus throwing an emotional tantrum right now? No? Okay, then you

must deny yourself and follow him." You cannot forgive yourself? I get it. Does Jesus agree with that? No. "Does Jesus agree with me?" is the simple question to teach you how to deal with you.

So, let me show you one picture. I love how my favorite Christian artist depicted this verse. He said, "To be a Christian is like crawling up on a cross and dying to the things of this world." You see the bones, and the death, and the money, and the fame down below. We have to die to all of that because Jesus could care less. But in climbing up on that cross as a Christian, what we find is life. That is actually what the Greek word at the top of the picture means, "Zoe" means life. And it might be hard to see from where you are sitting, but faintly, in the back of this picture, those little white lines that you see, that is actually the outline of Jesus. And there he is, right alongside every person on a cross, holding up their arms so they have the strength and the motivation to deny themselves and to follow him. "Die to yourself," he would say, "and you will find a life that you cannot lose, a life with God."

So, to help you do that, let me give you 365 days' worth of homework. Woo-hoo! All right, it is a big ask. Here is what I want you to do. I want you, for the next year, every day to pray, "The Lord's Prayer." All right, if you are not familiar with, "The Lord's Prayer," here are the words. Remember, this is a classic prayer that Jesus taught, and it is a reminder of who we are. We are the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. It is a bold prayer that says, God, forgive me for everything. Do not lead me into that temptation of following the path that is natural. Deliver me from that kind of evil thinking. But really what I see in this prayer, especially at the beginning, at the end, is again, and again, and again, and again, is a desire to agree with Jesus. Does Jesus agree with me? If you pray that prayer, he always will. Let us pray.

Now, Father, you know how hard this is for us. There is a good reason why the world tells us to be ourselves, because that is easy for the world. It is easy for me. It is in our very nature to do what is convenient in the moment, because sacrifice is not our favorite pastime. So, God, we need your perspective to see beyond today. You have taught many of us that the pain of this moment is worth it if there is pleasure to follow.

Jesus, help us to believe that about you, that when you challenge us and command us to change, when you tell us to deny ourselves and take up a cross, there is no doubt it will be painful, but on the other side is you, and your Father, and his Spirit. Help us to believe that that is the greatest thing in all of the universe, and that whatever it costs us to get, we will give up because you are worth it.

Holy Spirit, please be with us in the year to come. All of us would love this year to be a better year, a more hopeful year, and a more predictable year. With you, we are going to be ready to deal with it, but we pray that you would pour out blessings on these people - spiritual, physical, relational, and financial. May your name be hallowed among us, God, as your will is done among us, too. We pray all of these things, Jesus, in your beautiful, powerful, and saving name. And all God's people said, Amen.