

Vocation: Contribution: The Inner Journey

We are starting a habit series as part of a larger initiative that, for the past four years, we've been pursuing, where we have reorganized our community around a shared rule of life, a set of practices and habits that say, "This is how we feel called to follow Jesus in this moment."

Bono, U2 frontman, wrote a memoir, published in 2022, called *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story*. In it, he records this quote from earlier when he was much younger. He wrote, "I can't change the world, but I can change the world in me." Young Bono had a vision implanted within him to go about his work and career, but as a young twenty-something, he was looking across the landscape of the world and recognized the various tensions that were lying before him, the problems in the world that at this point felt overwhelming. So Bono narrowed his focus to changing the world within him.

As the years passed from this particular quote, Bono's tone eventually changed. Whatever you think of Bono the rockstar, he did attempt to change the world and made some ground in various ways. You may not agree with him, but he has tried to lay his stake in the world, whether it was from debt cancellations for some of the poorest nations, giving medications for millions dying of aids, or his international influence of meeting with heads of states, popes, and presidents, the outer work of Bono's life, by any honest assessment, left some mark on the world.

Over 30 years later, Bono reflected in his memoir on that quote that he gave in 1982. He wrote, "I can change the world, but I can't change the world in me." It's the older Bono, a little bit wiser, maybe more mature, who comes to the realization that the external work, in many ways, was the easier task rather than the internal work of transforming his inner world. The older Bono looked back and saw that he had done the outer work. He had done all of the campaigns, concerts, negotiations, and legislation. But he looks back and realizes, "I don't know if I have, in fact, changed."

Years later, David Brooks, the author and journalist, wrote in his 2019 book, *The Second Mountain: The Quest For a Moral Life*, in which he charts a similar path of maturity, or what he calls the moral life. He frames the moral life with the metaphor of two mountains. The first mountain for Brooks is very similar to young Bono.

For Brooks, the first mountain is akin to the first half of a life. It's the ambition in which we drive towards a career or a path in life. During this first mountain, we often set out with certain life tasks in front of us. We establish our identity. We separate from our parents. We cultivate our talents. We build a secure ego. We try to make the world something we can inhabit. In the words of Bono, "We change the world." Those years spent climbing the first mountain, according to Brooks, are centered more around the task of consumption. It asks questions like, "What can

I achieve in the world?" "What can I get out of the world?" "How do I measure up?"

At this stage, we tend to think that whatever the world says about us is who we are. The goals of the first mountain are the normal goals our culture uses to measure our success: to be well thought of, to get invited into the right social circles, and to experience personal happiness. It's the normal stuff. A nice home, a nice family, nice vacations, good food, good friends, and on and on. But what often happens is when we climb that first mountain, we arrive at the top only to realize that it's more unsatisfying than we thought. It's Bono saying, "I can't change the world, but I can change it within me." Years later, having changed the world, he realized it left something still hollow in him.

It was Thomas Merton who once wrote, "People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall." It's at this point, when we ascend that first mountain, that something typically happens: a midlife crisis, the death of a loved one, or some intrusion in our life that launches us off that first mountain. And we came to this valley, where we realized there was a second mountain waiting all along.

For Brooks, the second mountain is what I'll call a life of contribution. It moves from consumption to now contribution. The second mountain is when we wake up to the reality that there's a hollowness in all of the external work we do. Not that it's bad; the second mountain is not an indictment of the first, but rather it properly locates all that work we once did and found that it is not the place to find meaning.

It's at this point that we realize that the first mountain wasn't really the mountain that life was after. There's another bigger mountain. There's a mountain that we are called to climb, that second mountain, which is not the opposite of the first, but to climb the second one means that we journey more inward. We begin to realize the world within us, which seems so complicated and, for Bono, almost impossible to change.

If the first mountain of life is about the self and its quest to consume the world for our own benefit, the second mountain is about emptying the self, finding our unique contributions, the ways we've been equipped and called by God to pour our life out in partnership with him. If the first mountain is about acquisition, the second mountain is about contribution. The second mountain is about conquering the selfish, immature interior world, giving our lives away for the sake of others.

You don't climb the second mountain the way you climb to the first mountain. The first mountain you can climb up and conquer on your own, but the second mountain is more about allowing it to conquer you. It's a yielding. It's about a surrendering of the self. For many of us, we don't go on that second mountain journey.

Often, we get to the top of that first mountain, find its hollowness, and just assume maybe there's something higher on that mountain, another promotion, another climb, another whatever it is that will then satisfy the deep ache within us. Many of us refuse to do the second work because the second mountain is about yielding, giving up that power and authority over our lives, which is a harrowing journey.

It is one that rejects the myth that meaning is found with accomplishment and accumulation. There is a greater life from my reading of the New Testament. My understanding of happiness, as taught by Jesus, is that it is less about the circumstances that shape our lives. They are still important. They impact us. Rather, happiness and joy are more the product of communion with Jesus and the cultivation of the inward character. We walk through whatever life brings us, aware of the presence of God, which is contrary to the world we live in. We live in a first mountain culture that preaches that this is the purpose of life. Yet Jesus calls us to this second mountain.

We are in this series about the Habit of Contribution, which we define as partnering with God in the renewal of all things through the continual integration of our inner and outer lives. That is quite a wordy definition. We're going to start to pick it apart piece by piece. What I want to talk about now is the inner journey. Because we often go through our lives like Bono, doing all the exterior work but giving little thought to how our inner work reshapes the whole of our lives.

As we follow Jesus, the task is to integrate the inner and the outer self, not divide and separate, but to realize that a life of contribution flows from a transformed character. The beginning work we do is to submit to the lordship of Jesus and allow him to transform our inner selves so that all we do in the external world flows from a renewed being.

Let's talk about this inner journey, this second mountain, if you will. We will start in Ephesians 3, jumping right into the middle of a text that's in motion, so we have to understand what's happening here. Paul is writing this profound letter in which the first three chapters are theologically dense, just majestic soaring words about what it means to find our identity in Christ.

Then we arrive at verse 16, which is the hinge on which this whole thing shifts. In the second half of this letter, Paul works out the implications of all that high-fluent theology he did for the first three chapters. He now grounds it in things like what it means to live in a family and to live and forgive one another. He brings it all into the practical, and we're going to explore his path to that, which is this hinge text that speaks about the inward journey. Let's pick up in Ephesians 3:16. Paul says,

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:16-19

First, notice that Paul's request for strength concerns an external reality he wants to put at the center of what he calls our inner being. Paul is speaking about these glorious riches. Something out there is what strengthens us in our core, and he says that we need power through the Spirit to even begin this journey. That's where it all begins, tapping into this Spirit of God.

In chapter 1:19, Paul links the Spirit referenced here, which is the Holy Spirit, as the very same Spirit that resurrected Jesus. It's this profound reality that he says, the Spirit that resides in each one of us when we come to faith in Jesus is the same Spirit that awoke the dead body of Jesus, and he marched right out of that tomb. He said this power is available to you and me. It's available for us to go on this inward journey to receive these glorious riches, so we may be strengthened in our inner being.

What does Paul mean by inner being? This concept in the New Testament refers to the spiritual, moral core of who we are. What it is talking about is the inner core of who you are, the part of you that can't quite be measured, all that something beyond the five senses. There's something that makes you, who you are, that you can't quite articulate, but it's at your core, at your essence. Paul says that this inner being is where the transformation and the renewal begin through the work of the Holy Spirit. He says that out of these glorious riches, he strengthens us with power through the Spirit in our inner being.

Then in verse 17, he gives the purpose as to why, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. The corollary of this inner being for Paul is the idea of the heart. But think beyond just the seed of emotions. It is that place, but maybe in the colloquial way, we think of the heart as that essence. He says that the whole purpose for which we need strength by the Spirit is to allow Christ to reside at the very center of our being, right at the core. It reminds me of Proverbs 4:23, one of my all-time favorite verses. The wisdom writer says, *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."*

So you notice that in the biblical imagination, whatever this inner being is, this is where your life comes from. It's where it emerges. Often, whatever we have in that inner being comes out in the way we live. That's why this inner journey is so central, and where we need the renewal of the inner being because the very Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the grave can reside there. Or on the other side, that first mountain can place within us the self, which can become the center focal point for all of the light. What may dwell in the core of your being may not be something like the Spirit of God, but your own ambition and desire.

What Paul is talking about is that the renewal that needs to take place may not actually change the external world or the work you do, but it will change the place from which it comes. That's important. It may change the external work you do. It will likely mess up all your habits and reshape the way you spend your daily lives, but it may also give you a different perspective, in which the work you do that may look very similar stems from an alternative place. Paul says that you need that strength to have Christ reside, to dwell within, which is the idea of making his home in you. I love that imagery. The wisdom literature

would say, "Above all else, guard your heart, because it's from there that all of life flows.

Then I love verse 19 in Ephesians 3 because Paul gets caught up in his own preacher hyperbole. And he's like, all of this is so that you can know how wide, long, high, and deep is the love of Christ. He says how big the love of Christ is. He wants you to know that which is unknowable. He wants you to know that which surpasses knowledge.

It's fascinating because Paul's pushing us beyond our intellectual ascent to the love of God, saying that this is one way to know something, but you also know beyond the intellect. He wants you to experience the love of God in such a way that you know it beyond what you can know. You can find out a whole lot about your spouse, roommate, or significant other, whatever it is, but there's a different kind of knowing when you've experienced life with them. That is what Paul is pushing towards.

You can study and learn a lot about God, but have you known God? Have you lived and walked with God? Have you experienced the day-in and day-out realities of the God of love, whose dwelling is at your core? That's where all of this is going. The inner journey is first and foremost about coming awake to the very love of God, right where you are. That's the inner journey. In a short sentence, can we allow the love of God to dwell in our hearts in such a way that it becomes hard to articulate? You can talk about God, but have you experienced the love of God?

I would argue that for many of us, if you're like me and grew up in the church, you don't need another Bible study on the love of God, although that's not a bad thing. But what you likely need is the experiential reality of God's love in your life. That will often happen through things like Bible study, community, and sitting around tables with people who know you well. All of that is good and healthy, but often we mistake information for transformation.

I have been in school longer than any human should ever go to school. I know a lot of things about God, and those have done very little to transform my inner being, because what I need to do is take that head knowledge and begin to experience the love of God. That often looks like me waking up early and then sitting in my green chair. One of the things I've been trying to do more regularly is just watch this beautiful view of the sun rising. Often, it means the Bible is in my lap. Sometimes I dive into the Psalms, and it's this beautiful connection with God. Other times, I go to the Psalms, and I don't know exactly what I'm reading, but I'm sitting in the presence of God and watching the sunrise one more time. I'm reminded that his mercies are new every day.

Often, the renewal of our hearts, the core of our being, is just being willing and able to sit in the presence of God and be loved by the God of love. He says that this is how you begin this renewing journey. This may feel impossible, like Bono, who says that he can't change the world in himself, which is why Paul goes on to say,

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

See, it is the work of God within us that does more than we could ever imagine, anything more than we could actually measure. Then he shifts to chapter 4. And it seems like an interesting shift in the sermon because Paul now goes from the high-fluent theology down to the ground. We won't go through all of the following chapters but look at the beginning of chapter 4.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-3

Notice how Paul connects the idea of calling to how you live. He goes from that calling to having Christ dwell in our hearts richly. That's the call, of course, that overflows into more of a vocational call, like the thing that we spend the majority of our time doing. That's where we're going with this series, the outer work, if you will, which may or may not be your job, meaning you may or may not pull a W2 from the thing that you're called to do.

I know many people who pour their lives out and never receive a paycheck for the things they do. Whether that's raising a family, volunteer work, or whatever it is. An immense and beautiful calling, our world often doesn't value enough, yet it is your calling. The thing in which you pour your life out for, stems from the place where Christ dwells in your inner being.

Paul, in Ephesians 4, says, "I urge you to live a life worthy of that calling." Let's take a look at that in reverse order. I want to name some things around the calling. Then I want to talk about what he means by living a life worthy of it. So the Greek word for 'calling' is *Klésis*, and it refers to what he meant by the Christ dwelling within us. But in this context, it also refers to God's divine invitation or summons to individuals and groups. Here, he's speaking to the group to fulfill a specific purpose and mission. It's the renewal of all things. That's where this is going. We get to partner with God in bringing about his purposes in the universe.

This divine calling is given to every one of us in some form or another, and this concept is deeply rooted in scripture. It's both the general call to all believers and the specific call. You have been called to something. You have been called to a particular way of living, something in which God has planted in you that you can uniquely step into, where you partner with his work in the world.

That is the calling that you've received, to allow Christ to dwell in you richly and then also to pour that life back out. In the language we use around here, you are called to be a transformed person, transforming the Peninsula around us. Paul says that calling is so high and so mighty that you must live a life worthy of that. Let's talk about that word worthy. In Greek, it is the word *axiós*. It means appropriately, or godly, or recognized as fitting. We tend to take this word; at least my mind, directly to scales. I have to live in such a way that it balances the call I have, but that's not quite what Paul's getting at.

This idea of living a life worthy is saying that this high call that you have necessitates a living that Christ would renew our inner being so that we step into the calling. There are ways you can go about the work that may look exactly like what you do if you didn't follow Jesus. But Paul's saying it comes from a different posture, a different place. He says, rather you step into this transformative work. You go on the inner journey, that second mountain where your work may look the same, but it comes from a renewed center. One that is not primarily and fundamentally about how we consume part of the world, but from the place of how we contribute to the world around us.

He says that our life will need to be worthy of that. Our work flows from our transformed character. Or what I said at the beginning, a life of contribution flows from a transformed character. Now, this pings in my mind a little bit of a different text that I want to go to in Thessalonians, where Paul's writing a different letter. He talks a bit about what this life that is living worthy of the call would look like. In 1 Thessalonians 4, you'll notice similar language because Paul's talking about some similar topics.

Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

This is another of my all-time favorite verses. I love that contrast. "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life." We live in a noisy world, don't we? I live a noisy life, whether that's literal noise, like someone who gets up in front of people like you every week and talks for far too long, or whether that's the digital footprint I leave, or the inputs that I receive from entertainment, we live a noisy life, and often the church contributes to that noise. We live in such a way, usually from a good place, where we want to partner with God, but we simply add to the noise and the chaos. But I love this perspective of Paul's to make it our ambition to lead a quiet life.

Now, the ancient world in the first century was not a simple time to be a Christian. It was complicated. It had its own set of issues and struggles, just like it does today. So when we read something like this, don't think that Paul is detached from the realities of our own lives. Like, how could we live a quiet life? But Paul, speaking to that church facing different but maybe similar issues, is saying, "Make it your ambition."

The word ambition, that's a good Bay Area word, isn't it? One of the things I love about this area is its drive and energy to bring about change in the world. It's a beautiful spirit right at the core of it, but this ambition is a bit different. One lexicon talked about it as a holy ambition. I heard Mark Mitchell once talk about sanctified ambition. Yeah, not the idea of dismissing your ambition, but taking it and submitting it to the way

of Jesus, not dismissing it. But here, Paul says, make it your ambition. It reminds me of the words in Proverbs. "Above all else, guard your heart."

Do you hear the strenuous type of language that's in here? To be ambitious is to pursue something. Paul is not eliminating the idea of ambition, but he's redirecting it, and he wrote that rather than adding to the noise of our world, make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.

Notice that quiet does not mean passive. He immediately follows that up by saying, "Mind your own business." He's speaking particularly of an actual work vocation, not in the colloquial sense that we understand the term. He says, you should mind your own business and work with your hands. There's something you've been called to do to put your hand to the mill, to grind, to work, but do it with a quiet ambition. Quiet ambition necessitates a different inner being. I don't know if you can have a holy, quiet ambition and be centered on yourself and what you can consume.

A quiet life recognizes that you have an important part in this world, but it is a part, not the whole. It's to see yourself humbly and recognize that your place in this world is finite. God has placed you where he has for sure, but it's a quiet living in which we contribute to the overall story of God. We begin to realize we're extras in the movie, not the main character. That is God. We like to think of ourselves as the main character, but the story is about God. The inner journey requires that we do some of that work of laying our lives down to lead that quiet life.

But look at verse 12. It says, "*so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*" Paul connects this idea of a quiet life with creating influence in the social circles around him. He says that as we do this work, as we go about working with our hands, with a holy sanctified ambition to lead that quiet life, do so in such a way that people see our ordinary life. Not just our Sunday worship at church life, not our doing the devotions in the morning life—do all of that too—but also your daily, ordinary life. The way you go about the work is from a heart that's been transformed by the Holy Spirit. Recognizing my life is not for me to consume, but to contribute. That fosters something in us, which gains the respect of outsiders.

You realize that Christians should be the absolute best employees. Your bosses should love having you work for them because you recognize that you are not called to lord your authority over others, but you come knowing there's a bigger story going on. So we lay our lives down. I really believe this quiet life can, in fact, create in us a way in which we bear witness to the kingdom of God in ways words never could. This idea of your daily life, this walking, the phrase literally means to walk, becoming meaningful. Our normal way is honorable, it's respectful, it points to the very fruit of the Spirit that's developing within us.

It reminds me of what the missionary Lesslie Newbigin once said, "Live in the kingdom of God in such a way that it provokes questions for which the gospel is the only answer." What does it look like for you to go about the work in your workplace, in the ordinary rhythms with people who can watch your daily life? The only answer to explain why you're so loving, caring, and forgiving, while at the same time, ambitious,

hardworking, and doing the tasks you do is simply the gospel because we submit our lives to this. Jesus recognizes our work as part of a much larger story in which God is renewing all things.

It's at this point that I can't help but think of Paul's other teaching in Galatians around the fruit of the Spirit, where if we are living by the power of the Spirit, Paul in Galatians 5 says to keep step with the Spirit so that the fruit of the Spirit grows in us. What you have to recognize is that if you're a tree, you don't just force the fruit out of you. What you do is simply, as the tree connects to the source of its food and water, connect to the Spirit, then the fruit comes. That's keeping in step with the Spirit.

Paul says that our work in the inner journey is creating a life in which we are open to the transformative work of the Spirit, and over time, decades, a lifetime of living in communion with the Spirit, things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control all begin to emerge from a life in which that power of the Spirit dwelling within us is creating a new way to live.

In Ephesians, Paul is showing us the architecture of the inner life, of allowing Christ to dwell within our core. And in Thessalonians, Paul is showing what it looks like on the ground. He's saying the outer life and the way you live flows from the inner life. Dallas Willard once said that the main thing God gets out of our lives is not the achievements we accomplish; it's the person we become. That's what God gets most out of your life.

That isn't to diminish the things that we do and achieve. Often, those are meaningful things, but we mistake the first mountain for the second. The main thing God gets out of your life is not what you achieve, not the title you accomplish, but who you become. It's the person you are, which, for the record, is the only thing you will take with you into eternity, and is the person you become. Your LinkedIn profile will not travel into the kingdom of heaven. Your accomplishments, although important, will not carry into eternity; however, the character you cultivate, the person you become, will. You will live with God eternally with a life shaped by his own Spirit.

How do we begin this journey? As a general rule, we become a more loving presence to the extent that we experience love. One of the fundamental tasks of this is learning to just be loved by God. It seems so basic and simple, yet we often get caught in the divide between knowing about God and knowing God.

So the fundamental task is to be loved into more loving people. That's what Paul is saying in Ephesians when he says it's to have Christ dwell in our hearts richly. To go on the inner journey is to create a life structure in which we find ways to let Christ dwell in us. If you're like me, you have a lot of different things that can dwell within you, but the task of the follower of Jesus is to be rooted and established in love—God is love. So we have to find a way to be formed so we can live our ordinary lives connected to the Spirit, as Brother Lawrence called it, "Practicing the presence of God."

This continual connection of sitting in the presence of God while also filling out POAs or returning emails or leading board meetings, whatever it is, that is how we live in such a way that we can exist and recognize the kingdom of God in the presence of Jesus, as sure as this table is in front of you. How do we live in that way?

It is to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. Or you can say the inner journey is learning to dwell in the transformative love of God. It's that simple, which is why I'm about to spend a little bit more time talking about the obstacles than how to do it, because it's actually quite simple.

When we pray, it's communion with God in the ordinary aspects of our lives. I don't know if that's setting an alarm that goes off at noon, just to remind you of the presence of God. That's a beautiful way to practice the presence of God. I don't know if it's reworking your brain to where every time that Slack message dings on your computer, it triggers you to God's presence, and you have to respond to that. You realize if you cannot take God into your work life, you're excluding him from a minimum of 40 hours a week. We have to find a way to walk with God into those places, to integrate the outer and inner life. They are not two different things. So let's talk about three obstacles to this inner journey.

Distraction

The first thing we've talked a lot about is distraction. We live in an age where it has never been easier to outsource your consciousness, to get caught up and just outsource it to the Netflix queue, social media, a LinkedIn project, or overwork, whatever it is. It has never been easier to outsource our consciousness, where one triviality leads to another that leads to another, and all of a sudden, if you're like me, you look down and wonder where that last hour went. It went to like some reels that probably didn't do much for you.

It has never been easier to distract ourselves. Neil Postman wrote a prophetic book back in the 80s called *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He wrote about the advent of television and its impact, particularly on religion and politics, and he talks about how it has never been easier to distract yourself from any deep thinking. We can give ourselves to the oblivion of Hulu, Netflix, or social media. We can throw ourselves into workaholic and the pursuit of wealth or fame or whatever it is. Whatever it happens to be for us, that distraction will detour our lives to where we never go on this inner journey because our minds are too consumed with things.

Ronald Rolheiser, a writer I quoted last week as well, writes this in his book, *Sacred Fire*, "We are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion." He writes that the simple act of distraction so often tricks us into slowly giving away our attentiveness. What's so insidious about it is that it often happens beneath the surface, and we don't even realize how far we've drifted.

Fragmentation

The first obstacle is distraction. The second is similar and called fragmentation. It's to create this divide between our outer and inner life. It's to speak about our lives in a very modern American Western way. We often talk of our lives as having a spiritual life, a professional life,

a personal life, a sex life, and a social life, all of these different kinds of lives.

But you realize that is a very brand-new way of thinking in the history of the universe. If you were to talk like that to an ancient Hebrew, they would be confused. In the Hebrew language, in ancient biblical Hebrew, there was no word for spiritual. They had a word for spirit. That's the word, *ruach*, but not the adjective spiritual, because in the ancient imagination, all of life was spiritual. Every single part of it. How you spend your time, make your money, contribute to society, your family structure, your weekend plans, what you eat for lunch, where you shop, who you hang out with, what you do with your body, both your understanding of sexuality and work, and all of that, everything you do that is your spiritual life.

However, we often fragment things in such a way that we sequester God to our spiritual life, and we then, maybe unintentionally, keep him out of the rest of our lives. You know who was good at fragmentation, the Pharisees. They had a way of living an internal spirituality in which they held up all of the right rules and did all the right things but had fragmented God from transforming their inner being. Jesus' rebuke for the Pharisees was whitewashed tombs.

You clean the outside of the cup, but you never touch the inside. He said that the inside was full of dead men's bones, and even more so to fragment God away from the very essence of your life. It is exhausting to try to be a Christian and not allow God to transform your inner being. Because you're constantly putting up a front, playing a game. It becomes impossible. Fragmentation is one of these issues that we face in our world. It's very, very common for us.

Avoidance

The third obstacle is avoidance. Often, when we look from that first mountain onto the second, and we feel like we want to allow God into the inner journey, we often look in there. And what's inside our being is that we find a lot of things we don't want to spend time looking at. We find the ugliness of who we are. We find the wounds that we've suppressed, the pain points that we just distract away from because they are too painful. I would actually say more than distraction and more than fragmentation, our biggest obstacle to the inner journey is avoidance.

Can you trust Jesus and a small subset of community, who can be the proxy of God's love in your life, with whom to be fully known and truly loved? That's a scary place to be, but you are a loving person to the extent that you are loved. This means if you open the innermost part of who you are, all the ugliness and the wounds that you've carried, and yet you find love, I don't know if there's something more liberating. Because you no longer have to hide yourself. You no longer have to tuck it away, but to be fully known and truly loved, is what Tim Keller says is

you experiencing what your heart most longs for. It's what it's searching for. It's why you dive into all these other things.

The biggest human temptation is to settle for too little. It's not to go too far, but to stop too soon. It's to find a version of your life that's manageable and comfortable and never venture into the deeper waters where real formation happens. The biggest temptation you face is the avoidance of saying; I can look the part long enough. I'll let God touch these parts of my life. But I won't actually let him into my core, my inner being.

Paul says, "Don't you ever forget if you're scared to go there, that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave is walking with you." To him who can do immeasurably more than all we can ever ask or imagine, to him be the glory as Jesus will march right into that. What you will find in there is the God of love, who, the whole time, has been looking at you with love. It's flowing towards you, and that love becomes transformative. That's the inner journey. It's the invitation before every one of us. It's a hard, long journey, but it is the invitation.

So, what would it look like for you to take that step towards that inner journey? What does it look like this week? I pray the Spirit has deposited something in you for that.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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