

There's an old story that's been told over and over again by poets, novelists, and playwrights. It's the story about a brilliant man named Dr. John Faustus. He was devoted to a life of learning. He studied law, medicine, and theology, but the more he learned, the more frustrated he became, because every field he studied eventually reminded him of the same uncomfortable truth—he was limited.

No matter how deeply he studied law, he still served something greater than himself called justice. No matter how much medicine he learned, there were bodies that he could not heal, and no matter how much theology he mastered, he found himself stuck as a creature rather than creator. Faustus hated limitations. He didn't want to live with the limits of being human, and his thirst for more was insatiable: more knowledge, experience, power, and control.

So as the old legend goes, Faustus turned to magic to hopefully shortcut the limitations. Eventually, he made a bargain with the devil in which he said, "Give me 24 years to be godlike, without limitations, in control of my own existence, possessing the power to bend life towards my own purposes, and I'll give you my soul. The devil obliged, and Faustus enjoyed these 24 years, but the catch was that it would destroy him.

At first, the bargain seemed to promise limitless possibility. With limitations removed, Faustus, though, had no direction in life. Over time, he would squander the abilities. Rather than attending to ultimate wisdom as he imagined, he immersed himself in more entertainment and spectacle and status and all the trivial pleasures that you could imagine. Yet, throughout those 24 years, there was something nagging in Faustus, something that made him wonder about his discontent. He was warned, frightened, and given opportunities to turn back, but he continually postponed them in hope of just one more experience.

Eventually, the time runs out, and so does the possibility of any altruistic heroism. At the end of 24 years, it did what the bargain dealt. It destroyed him. For generations, people have told this simple story as a warning of one of the oldest temptations of the human heart, the insatiability of more. We live in a Faustian world, where the story feels less like ancient legend and a bit more like a timeless warning even for our day.

Most of us, if we sat long enough with that, could resonate with Faustus. We have this restless desire within us for more time, more money, more achievement, more experience, more

information, more options, and more control. There's something in the human heart that continually longs for more. If we could just achieve more, then we'd finally rest. Have you ever bought into that myth, that if we just had a few more hours in the day, we would probably use them to rest? You wouldn't. Neither would I. We would fill it with more work or more experience.

Currently, we're in the middle of a six-week vision series in which we're returning, as we do every single year, to rallying the troops back around to what it means for us to be a community. Last week we opened this series talking about who we are becoming, that this idea of you becoming a person is part and parcel to your relationship with Christ. Christ is forming within each one of us a particular person. I encourage you to go back and listen to that sermon if you missed it, because we laid some foundation there that is really important.

For the past four years, as a church, we have been working out what we call a rule of life, a set of practices to encounter the presence of God, to open our lives up to the work of the Holy Spirit. And those practices anchor around two distinct goals of every follower of Jesus—presence and participation. We want to cultivate a life that is in regular and constant presence with God in all the ordinariness of our life as well as the going to church and the scripture studying moments; every part of our lives being submitted to the very presence of God active within us and around us.

Secondly, participation. We believe that the work God is on about in the world is the very work that we have been invited into. So we become a transformed people who then partner with God to transform the world around us. Now, we begin a look at the first of the four practices—attentiveness. This is how we defined this practice:

We practice attentiveness to God in contrast to a world of distraction and hurry, and we do so by cultivating habits of silence, solitude, and Sabbath.

We live in a Faustian world. For Faustus, the magic led him towards that limitless fantasy, and although it is an ancient story, it seems that the magic we pursue, just like Faustus pursued, is a little more connected, a little closer than we would imagine. In fact, I'd suggest it might be right on your lap or in your front right pocket right now.

We have access in ways we never could have imagined. Technology, the phone, and all of that have brought the world

to our fingertips. It's what Andy Crouch would define as an alchemy, a magic, this ability to extend beyond our limitations. Every limitation that we can face is now challenged by the accessibility of something like the internet in your pocket.

Don't know something or can't remember a trivial fact? Well, we could just ask ChatGPT. Bored standing in line at the grocery store? Entertainment is just an endless scroll away. Lonely? Well, let's return to Chat. It seems like a voice that we could find some solace in. Hungry? Well, any restaurant within driving distance can be ushered to your front door. Need to purchase toilet paper? It's there within a few hours. We live in a life where limitations can be transcended as if they're nothing. We live in an area that desires to throw off every limitation. And all of it points to a limitless magic.

Is our struggle any different than that of Faustus so many years ago? More access has brought more anxiety and tension. It's ushered us down what Jesus called the broad road, which seems to lead to death, rather than the narrow road. The technology is new, but the restless soul is not. Technology did not create the Faustian impulses within us. It brought extraordinary power into the hands of you and me, who are already restless souls.

Nearly 400 years ago, the mathematician and theologian Blaise Pascal wrote: "I have discovered that all unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber." Why? Because when the noise stops that has trained our bodies and our minds to just constantly be on, we're forced to finally confront the restlessness within us. We then turn to what Pascal calls diversions, or maybe we would call devices, more noise, more stirring, more whatever it is that fits your fancy.

And in all of that turning, our lives speed up to a type of pace in which we're rushing from one thing to the next, jumping on the treadmill of hurry and distraction. Every awkward silence can be filled. Every moment of boredom can be escaped. Every difficult emotion can just be distracted away. Every empty space can immediately become noise. The technology is new, but the restlessness of the soul is not.

Richard Foster, in his increasingly classic book, *Celebration of Discipline*, opens with this quote. He capitalizes "Adversary" because he's referencing the devil. "In contemporary society, our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry, and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in muchness and manyness, he will rest satisfied." That was written in the '80s, by the way.

"Muchness and manyness," seems like a pretty good description of the chaos of our world. And it seems to add to this tension that we experience. One of the more famous quotes floating around the internet right now comes from Dallas Willard when he was asked, "What's the greatest enemy in the spiritual life?" He responded, "Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day."

Isn't that interesting? I don't know if that's what I would have had answered.

I don't think I would've been able to make the connection between hurry, noise, and distraction, and the fragmenting of my soul. But the more I sit with it, the more I realize he was right, because the uncomfortable reality that we've talked about before is that you become like what you give your attention to. If you constantly give your attention to the limitless pursuit of the Faustian myth, then you actually become insatiable. When you allow the temporary to try to fill the eternal in your soul, that is a math equation that never works out.

Eternity has been placed in our hearts, the writer of Ecclesiastes would say, and therefore, it would behoove us to find something equally as big and strong as eternity. Well, that is God, and God is who satisfies you at your deepest level. When we step into the practice of attentiveness, the goal is that we don't try to transcend limitations but actually embrace them and begin to step into them so our lives can be more open to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Slowly over time, our inner lives become a contradiction to the world around us. That's the invitation of attentiveness. Slowing down, creating room, enough for the quiet whisper of God to begin to speak to our inner being.

We will be in Psalm 131 today. The Psalms are the prayer book of the Bible. One Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, divides the Psalms into three categories: psalms of orientation, psalms of disorientation, and then psalms of reorientation. And Psalm 131 is a psalm of orientation, meaning it is a psalm we can meditate on to orient our lives in a proper posture towards God. So let's pick up in Psalm 131 verse one.

"My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me" (Psalm 131:1). Remember that the biblical image of the heart is much more than the seat of emotion. In the modern world, we think of the heart, and we equate it with emotion. But in the biblical imagination, before they understood something like consciousness or a brain, they would link the two of those. So when the Bible speaks of the heart, it is speaking of emotion, but it's also speaking of consciousness—what we would call the brain, your thought life, your inner character and being.

So the Psalm opens with David, this warrior for God, saying that his heart is not proud. Pride is the thing beneath the thing of every sin in your life. At least that's how C.S. Lewis would describe it. If you trace every sin in your life down to its bedrock, what you find is pride, because pride is the world bent inward.

It's elevating yourself above all other things, and therefore, it turns and curves the world towards the self. Now, I don't have to do much convincing to tell you that we live in a proud age, where pride, might, and strength parade around as virtues, but they're

nothing more than narcissism run amok. Without qualification, we endorse and promote an ambition gone wild. Look out for number one. Just do you, whatever it is that you need to do. It's the centering of the self.

But this Psalm begins with, "My heart is not proud. My eyes are not haughty." Then it gets a little more practical. It says, "I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me." I love that because it seems to cut against the grain of the Faustian myth we talked about. To not think of great matters is an embrace of limitation. It's the recognition that there are, in fact, things too wonderful for each of us, too wonderful for us to understand. It goes well against the grain of our particular moment to say that to be human is to be limited.

But at least here in the Psalm, he begins by saying limitations are actually the path to contentment. By the very nature of being human, we are limited. We're limited by our age, health, gender, time, abilities, and a litany of other ways. Limitations, however, although we want to transgress them, may just be the grace of God. Because history attests over and over, when we try to live limitlessly, we ultimately burn out and become overextended. It conflicts with the very nature that we have. It's to give yourself over to muchness and manyness.

Embracing limitations, although not a sexy idea in our age, is, in fact, the art of being human because you have a beginning and an end. You have a limitation, and our culture rewards and encourages the attempt to transgress those. A better way to look at it is what my predecessor, Mark Mitchell, would call a sanctified ambition. I like that phrase. It's sanctified in the way that we don't try to extend beyond what we can, but we reserve something about ourselves to submit it to the lordship of Jesus.

But let's keep going, verse 2, "*But I have calmed and quieted myself; I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content*" (v. 2). Some translations change the myself there to my soul. "I have calmed and quieted my soul." Don't you just come alive a little bit at that phrase, calmed and quieted my soul? Don't you just long for that? I mean, there's something in the incessant hurry of this fall season. The start of school, in which you're rushing into these new routines, overextended with all these different commitments, and there's something when you read those words that just seems to resonate like a tuning fork deep in your bones. I have calmed and quieted my soul.

At some point, being Christian is just coming to understand the terms of creation and living within them. It requires our ability to take our eyes off ourselves and move them onto God. But the question, of course, is how? How do we arrive at something like a calm and quiet soul? Well, let's look back at the metaphor the psalmist gave. It's an odd one at first, but let's unpack it. Look again at the second half of verse 2,

"I am like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child I am content." Now, as any mother would tell you, for an infant, every need is a crisis. I mean, think of the image. When an infant feels hungry, they don't just quietly knock on the door, "Mother, could I have some food?" No, for the infant, it doesn't ask for a snack. They hurl themselves into a frenzy, kicking and screaming into a full-blown meltdown, because they're hungry.

A hungry infant is always in crisis mode. They demand milk and demand it until the need is satisfied. But do you remember what happens once that need is satisfied? Peace just floods the baby. They calm, they settle in, they may nestle their head against their mother's chest, whatever it is, and they all of a sudden experience this rush, this flood of calm, at least for about an hour. Because the next need arises, and once they feel that need, they hurl themselves into a frenzied chaos monster again.

It's the whole crisis mode over and over, and the cycle just repeats itself. It's what's so exhausting about parenting an infant, every need is a crisis, and peace is, therefore, nothing more than the temporary satisfaction of their most urgently felt need. That's where peace comes from for the little one. And most of us, if we're honest, read this and bring this posture into our spiritual life.

It's a stage where most of us don't mature beyond. We bring our needs to God, and maybe don't throw a tantrum, but that's the thing that pulls us, and we ask, "God, where are you?" Those are not bad prayers. In fact, we should bring all of our needs to God, but notice the metaphor. It's not an infant; it's a weaned child. Well, that's different, isn't it? Because a weaned child is a different thing.

A weaned child is someone who, by definition, has grown accustomed to food other than the mother's milk. A weaned child still gets hungry, but they have learned to trust their mother as the provider rather than to descend into crisis mode and demand that the need be met immediately. In other words, the weaned child finds peace not in the provision the mother provides, but in the presence of the mother.

A weaned child is one who is content in the arms of the mother, even as the needs come. A weaned child is something different than the infant before it's weaned. They grow beyond the crisis mode mentality in which they just erupt into chaos every time any need comes. A weaned child is content.

Like a weaned child with its mother, I am content. The weaned child is actually a step towards maturity. It's a step towards growth. It's a step towards recognizing that I am safe in the presence of God even when my needs aren't yet met. A weaned child is the direction we want every single infant to move towards.

But for many of us, me included, we get in these moments with the Lord and assume our spiritual life with God is this oscillation between crisis mode and recovery and circumstantial peace. If

it's met, then I feel fine or, if not, "God, where are you? Couldn't you just answer this?" And yet there's something in the weaned child that trusts God beyond the circumstances. Listen to the way one commentator, Artur Weiser, puts it. It's a bit of a long quote, but it's worth it. He wrote:

[The follower of Jesus allows their soul] to rest on God's heart and find its happiness in intimate communion with him, not like an infant crying loudly for his mother's breast, but like a weaned child that quietly rests by his mother's side, happy in being with her. Here his heart has found rest; he knows himself to be safe with God and to be sheltered in the love of his Heavenly Father. No desire now comes between him and his God; for he is sure that God knows what he needs before he asks him. And just as the child gradually breaks off the habit of regarding his mother only as a means of satisfying his own desires and learns to love her for her own sake, so the worshipper, after a struggle, has reached an attitude of mind in which he desires God for himself and not as a means of fulfillment of his own wishes. His life's center of gravity has shifted. He now rests no longer in himself but in God. This gives him his balance of mind, and it also gives him sufficient strength to subordinate his own wishes to the will of God. Weiser

The psalm offers a picture of maturity of the follower of Jesus. It's the weaned child. It's a wonderful image of maturity and growth, but don't leave the metaphor too quickly. As any mother will attest to you, or as you have even experienced, the process of weaning a child is painful. It is not a simple switch to flip, because when a baby is weaned, the only process through it is to be denied what they want by the very person that they're crying out for and who they are supposed to learn to trust.

A baby is weaned by kicking and screaming, and the mother looking at them right in the face and not giving them what they want. It is a painful process of learning to trust that the parent, the mother, the father, whoever it is, knows what the child needs before they ask.

The image of Psalm 131 is beautiful, but it reminds us that growth and maturity in Christ is always uncomfortable, and it often feels like chaos, because we're in the middle of the storm; we're in the middle of the pursuit of more to try to satiate the need that's at our core, and yet God seems to be doing nothing. But it's only in that chaos that we learn to wait for God, who will never leave us or forsake us, even if our felt needs seem to be screaming louder than the reality of God's presence.

Attentiveness to God requires the practice of waiting, and we don't like to wait. We live in an instant culture. We live in an instant life, more time and quicker waiting, more acquisition, and on and on. That's the myth that our world is built on. But trusting God is always on the other side of waiting. So how do

we get there? How do we become this weaned child? There are two things. What we need is a decision and a practice.

Decision

The first step, a decision. The decision is to trust. The child that's learning to be weaned, at some point, has to trust that the parent understands their needs more than themselves. The decision that we need is to release the illusion of control that we cling so tightly to, and release the world, our fate, our success, and everything in it into the hands of God and say, "Lord, I trust that you are leading me in the path that you want me to go."

It is to release that control and the desire for outcomes, so that we learn to rest in the presence of God. It's the weaned child just fixing their attentiveness on the parent, knowing that at some point, they will give them what they need. The path of a weaned child is not a flippant disregard for the parent, but a fixed attentiveness on the movement and leadership of the parent.

Waiting is always longer than you want it to be. Let me tell you, if you want to learn how bad you are at waiting, write a sermon on waiting. I generally finish my sermons on Fridays, and I'm also on pickup duty for my girls. So, I went to pick up my oldest at High School, and there was something after school that neither of us knew about. So she texted me and said, "Dad, I need to go do this thing." I'm thinking it's five or ten minutes. However, an hour goes by, and I'm sitting there thinking, "I've got a deadline. I have to finish my sermon. Hurry up. I need to preach about waiting."

It was in that moment, I kid you not, that I began to remember maybe the Lord's just laughing at me as I fall into a chaos monster, slashing and whipping around. "God, can't you just know what I'm doing and what I need?"

The discipline of attentiveness means withdrawing from the felt needs of our souls and experiencing the gentle but slower and deeper work of God. Pastor and writer Tyler Staton, who was a big influence on this sermon, wrote, "The deepest work is often the slowest work." If God is going to do a deep work in you, it will, in fact, be slow. Yes, there are times when God breaks in and does the miraculous, and it's okay to pray for those things, but at the same time, overwhelmingly, God's transformation is slower and deeper than we tend to be comfortable with.

Practice

The decision we must make is to trust. But we also need to practice, and the practice is what we've been talking about, attentiveness. The decision to trust is the entrance into the practice of attentiveness because until you come to the place of a ruthless, honest trust in God, it's hard to wait in attentiveness. So the decision to trust gives way again to the practice of attentiveness.

For the weaned child, this is the parent resisting the urge to satisfy the need right away, and meal after meal, need after need, they slowly begin to practice and grow in their attentiveness.

Fundamentally, this attentiveness to God, this sitting in the waiting, is the first and most fundamental part of following Jesus. One of my all-time favorite quotes by Dallas Willard is what he says:

The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds...This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in this, practicing the presence of God, is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our practicing, we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits—not the law of gravity—and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north, no matter how the compass is moved. If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the polestar of our inward being. Willard

When we are quiet and waiting, we often get very uncomfortable because our minds begin to race. But Willard's wisdom is saying, of course it does. That's what your mind has been trained to do in every other part of your life. If you try to be quiet and find your mind just racing with things, that doesn't mean you're bad at waiting in the attentiveness to God. It means you're human.

But it isn't the law of gravity. You can change those habits. You become like what you give your attention to. If God becomes the very focal point, the polestar of your imagination, your mind will slowly, over time, continually pull back to God like the needle of a compass. You can grow in attentiveness just like a weaned child. Being overwhelmed in silence and solitude does not mean that you're bad at silence and solitude; it means you're human.

For the past five years or so, I've taken a three-night silent retreat. I head out to a monastery down on the cliffs north of Cambria and leave my phone in the car. I take a Bible, a journal, and I usually allow myself one book. For those three nights, I sit in the quiet, not speaking to anyone, with the exception of a few set times twice during the day when I go pray with monks, which sounds holier than it is, but it's pretty cool. After five years of this practice of going down to this pilgrimage every single year, I've come to learn a few things about myself.

I'm really bad at silence. I'll never forget the first trip I took. I went down there, and I unpacked my bag in the little room that I had. I decided to go for a short walk and try to orient myself, and I got back in the room and said a welcome prayer to God. I began to journal a little bit, and it was a beautifully rich time, and then I come to stillness again. I'm thinking I've at least knocked out six hours. Like for sure, that's what I've knocked out. I look at my watch, and I kid you not, it'd been forty-five minutes. And I've got nothing until Wednesday and this fear just flooded me. What I've learned doing that for five years is it's often the same exact

experience every year. Silence doesn't always get easier. You may just grow a little more familiar with the aches.

This week I went back and looked at my journal from that early trip, and I wanted to read an excerpt of it. It says,

I didn't realize how deafening silence is until it is all that I have. Every pen stroke, dish clank, foot-step, furniture creak, all of it so stunningly loud. It's almost aggressively loud. But beneath the external noise is a far greater noise, my internal noise. I was shocked at how quickly the fear and the feelings of loneliness swept in. The reality of not having anything until Wednesday is startlingly concerning. I hold to my distractions and coping mechanisms much more than I realized.

We turn to these diversions to fill the ache because often when we come to the quiet, all that we've been suppressing rises to the surface, and that's uncomfortable to deal with. But that is, in fact, exactly what silence is supposed to do. When we settle into attentiveness to God, we hold all of that pain, loneliness, hurt, and ache that we've been carrying, and attentive not to ourselves any longer, we hold it before the loving eyes and gaze of God.

What we find in the midst of that is that God still loves us. And in fact, in some way it becomes a healing posture in which we no longer have to hold those things alone. Silence and attentiveness are a furnace that burns away the facades that we hide behind. But silence is also the place where our awareness of God bursts into our lives in unexpected ways.

You know, there's one verse we haven't talked about in Psalm 131 yet, and that's verse 3. It ends almost oddly. It turns from this image of the weaned child, and it says this: *"Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore"* (v. 3). As you wait, by definition, hope is longing for that which doesn't currently exist. It's in waiting that you surface all of these aches and pains and say, "God, could you do something with that?"

Like a weaned child, the posture isn't demanding; it's learning to rest in the presence of God. It's saying, "Lord, the flesh is weak, but the soul is willing. God, could you take this and turn it into something? Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a new spirit within me. Return to me the joy of my salvation."

The hope that God gives us is like a ferment to the soul. It's like yeast working its way slowly over time. You can't rush the process of rising bread. You just have to let it happen. Hope is injected into the follower of Jesus who waits on the Lord. It's hope and waiting that give us strength because we allow the deeper work of God to ferment in our souls. Hope works in the life of a disciple when we fix our attentiveness on God. We remove our eyes from the day in and day out where we don't see anything happening. Eventually, however, it gives way to a life that we no longer recognize because hope is doing its work deep down in our core.

What does it look like for you to take a step towards attentiveness? I hesitate to tell some of the stories and patterns that are in my life because they're unique to my life. I'm privileged to be able to take retreats like the one I described. That may not be a reality for you, and that's totally fine. But what would it look like if tomorrow you carve out a little time to make coffee and just sit in the silence for just three minutes? Don't overthink it. Imagine the eyes of God looking at you with love, and just sit in that reality, and then allow that to become a daily posture, somewhere where you carve out time to just create an attentiveness to God.

Maybe it's something like Sabbath, and it's a weekly practice in which you put away work and distractions, and intentionally say, "Lord, I want to give you this space," or whatever that may look like. You stop, rest, delight, and worship. We have all sorts of resources to help you navigate this at cpc.org/rule.

In Sue Monk Kidd's memoir, *When the Heart Waits*, she details this crisis point in her life as a follower of Jesus. She was a wife and a working mom and was right in the thick of the chaos of midlife. Her kids had grown old enough that they carried enough independence, so that her independence started to come back. In that newfound independence and time, she began to reach for some of the elements of her life that she had set aside during the toddler years.

She had explored work and hobbies and passions that she had to set aside in the demands of parenting. But she was also confronted with more within herself that she had deferred while her kids were young. There was resentment lying beneath the surface in her marriage. There was a loss of the sense of self, and along with that loss, there seemed to be a disconnect with God as the grind of midlife just carried on. In the midst of all of that, she decided to travel to Saint Meinrad Archabbey, a monastery in her home state of Indiana.

In an attempt to slow down and sort some of this out, she found herself attempting to slide into the contemplative pace of life at the monastery. But like my experience, she was interrupted by the inner chaos of her distracted soul. In the second chapter of her book, she describes this scene in which she's sitting there by a pond, and she can't bring herself to do nothing, so her mind is just stirring.

She walks back to her room, and as she's walking back, she sees a monk sitting peacefully under a tree, seemingly undisturbed or undistracted by anything. Later in the day, she went over to discuss that with the monk, and she says this: "I saw you today sitting beneath the tree, just sitting there so still. How is it that you can wait so patiently in the moment? I can't seem to get used

to the idea of doing nothing." She writes that at that moment the monk breaks out into a wonderful small grin.

"Well, there's your problem right there, young lady. You've bought into the cultural myth that when you're waiting, you're doing nothing." She writes, "Then he placed his hands on my shoulders and looked into my eyes, and with grace and gentleness said, "I hope you'll hear what I'm about to tell you. I hope you'll hear it all the way down to your toes. When you're waiting, you're not doing nothing. You're doing the most important something there is. You're allowing your soul to grow up. If you can't be still and wait, you can't become what God created you to be."

The work of God is deep, and it's slow, but I have calmed and quieted myself, the psalmist would say. I am like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child, I am content. May it be so in us.

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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