

UNLEARNING THE LIES OF THE WORLD TO FOLLOW JESUS

Discipled

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KEEP BECOMING



INTRODUCTION

At the center of this book is a simple tension: **everyone is being disciplined by something**. Jesus invites us into a life formed by the Spirit, while the world constantly forms us in the opposite direction. The enemy does not need you to reject Jesus outright if he can simply shape what you love, how you think, and how you react.

The world disciplines you into selfishness, while Jesus forms you into love. The world trains you to chase happiness through circumstances, while the Spirit forms deep joy. The world normalizes anxiety, while the Spirit produces peace. The world cultivates hurry and impatience, while the Spirit forms patience. The world rewards harshness and competition, while the Spirit produces kindness. The world defines goodness as moral image management, while the Spirit produces sacrificial action. The world teaches comfort and safety, while the Spirit forms courageous faithfulness. The world celebrates outrage and dominance, while the Spirit produces gentleness. The world tells you to follow every impulse, while the Spirit forms self-control.

One path leads to a life that looks successful on the outside but feels restless, reactive, and constantly pulled by impulses. The other leads to a life that increasingly looks like Jesus.

The enemy wants to form you into someone easily offended, easily distracted, easily discouraged, easily controlled by comfort, fear, approval, and desire. But the Spirit forms a person who is steady, resilient, sacrificial, courageous, and free.

The world forms consumers. Jesus forms disciples. The world forms people who ask, “What do I want?” The Spirit forms people who ask, “What does love require?” The world forms people who are mastered by their impulses. The Spirit forms people who have mastery over their impulses. Every day you are becoming someone. The question is not whether you are being disciplined. The question is who is discipling you.

Just as Jesus intends to form disciples who change the world, the enemy works to form disciples who reinforce it. Scripture teaches that the enemy is real and has influence to “sway the whole world” (1 John 5:19). His goal is not merely to influence what you do, but to shape who you become. His strategy is to quietly form reverse disciples who build a kingdom centered on self instead of the Creator.

But the good news is this: his strategy is not complex once you learn to recognize it. It is held together by nine lies that shape how people think, live, and pursue fulfillment. Lies that promise freedom but quietly produce bondage. Lies that promise happiness but quietly produce emptiness. Lies that promise control but quietly produce anxiety.

Once these lies are exposed, they begin to lose their power. What once felt normal begins to feel hollow. What once felt confusing begins to become clear. What once felt necessary begins to lose its grip.

As these lies are uncovered, something else begins to happen. God’s way becomes more compelling, more freeing, and more life-giving than you may have ever realized. You begin to see that His commands are not restrictive; they are protective. His design is not limiting; it is liberating. His truth is not meant to control you; it is meant to transform you.

If you are willing to examine what has been shaping you, to question what the world has taught you, and to allow truth to reform how you think and live, you will not just believe differently. You will become different.

Stronger.

Calmer.

Clearer.

More grounded.

More courageous.

More free.

Because the life God forms in a person does not merely help them survive the world. It empowers them to change it.

UNDISCIPLING**Love****THE RELIGION OF SELF**

Years ago, I had a neighbor in my apartment complex who fascinated me. We were about the same age, but our lives could not have looked more different. I was married with a newborn baby at home. He was single, with a brand new BMW 5 Series parked outside his apartment. I was in the early stages of planting a church. He was in the early stages of building a career as a medical professional. From the outside, it looked like we were living two completely different lives, and in many ways we were. But we got along great. We would run into each other around the complex and end up talking for long stretches about life.

One night we sat outside long after the sun had gone down. The conversation drifted from casual talk into deeper questions about success, meaning, and purpose. He carried a certain bravado, the kind of confidence that comes from someone whose life appears to be going exactly the way he planned. But as the conversation went on, that confidence began to crack.

He finally admitted, “The job, the car, the girls... it’s not what I thought it would be.” He paused before continuing, “But I’m not sure which God to believe.”

Then he looked at me and asked, “What do you think?”

I could tell he expected me to explain Christianity or argue about which religion was right, but instead I asked him a question. “Why do you love your car so much?”

He smiled immediately. "Because it's cool."

"Or is it because it makes you look cool?"

He laughed. "Maybe both."

I asked another question. "Why do you always have a different girl at your apartment every week?"

He shrugged. "Because they're hot."

"Or is it because they make you feel good about yourself?"

This time he didn't answer as quickly.

So I kept going. "Why do you spend so much money on these crazy vacations and trips?"

He leaned back. "Because I work hard. I deserve it."

"Or is it because you want everyone on Instagram to see the life you're living?"

He sat quietly for a moment.

Then I said something that changed the entire direction of the conversation. "I don't think your problem is that you haven't chosen a religion."

He looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"I think you're actually very religious."

Now he looked even more confused. "How?"

"Look at your life. Your car exists to bring attention to you. Your relationships revolve around what makes you feel good about yourself. Your vacations are about showing the world the life you're living. Everything in your life is designed to bring glory to one person."

He stared at me. "Who?"

"You."

I let that sit for a moment. "You haven't rejected religion. You've just made yourself the god. Your life exists to worship you."

Life, for him, revolved around one central figure: himself. His happiness, his image, his pleasure, his success. And the truth is, his worldview is not unusual. In fact, it is the dominant worldview of our culture. Most people today do not think of themselves as religious at all, but if you look closely, millions of people are practicing a very powerful religion: the religion of self. In this belief system, your feelings are the highest authority, your happiness is the highest good, self-expression is the highest virtue, and the goal of life is to build a life that revolves around you.

The world has been discipling us into this religion for years and calling it love. It insists that loving yourself is the highest form of the abundant life, that fulfillment is found by turning inward, prioritizing your preferences, protecting your peace, and arranging your life around your own happiness. Follow your heart. Live your truth. Do what feels right for you. Put yourself first. These ideas sound empowering, but often what we call self-love is simply pride wearing softer language. It is the elevation of self to the center of everything. But when Jesus began calling people to follow Him, His message sounded radically different. He did not invite people to build their lives around themselves. He invited them to surrender themselves.

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24)

In other words, the first step of following Jesus is stepping off the throne of your own life. Jesus did not come to help you worship yourself more effectively. He came to free you from the exhausting burden of making yourself the center of the universe. Because the truth is, when life is all about you, everything becomes fragile. Every inconvenience feels personal. Every disagreement feels threatening. Every unmet expectation feels like loss. But when Christ becomes the center, love is no longer something you demand from the world. It becomes something you freely give.

That night our conversation became very quiet. My friend began to realize something he had never considered before. He had spent his whole life chasing success, pleasure, and admiration, but all of it revolved around one person: himself.

He looked up at me and said, “I think you’re right.”

Right there in the parking lot of our apartment complex, I explained the Gospel to him. I told him that Jesus did not come merely to improve our lives. He came to rescue us from sin and restore us to the God we were created to worship. I told him that following Jesus means stepping down from the throne of your own life, admitting that you are not the center of the universe, and surrendering your life to the one true God.

That night he prayed with me. Right there outside our apartments, he confessed his sin, repented of directing all of his love toward himself, and surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. He no longer wanted to sit at

the center of everything. He no longer wanted to be his own god. It was a quiet moment. No crowd, no stage, no music, just two guys sitting outside an apartment complex while one of them chose to turn his love back toward the One who gave it to him in the first place.

And that moment illustrates something many people never realize: the greatest obstacle to following Jesus is not ignorance. It is the religion of self. The world has been discipling us into this religion for years, teaching us that life is about us, our happiness, our dreams, our identity, and our fulfillment. But Jesus offers something entirely different. He calls us to step off the throne of our own lives and follow Him. Because only when we stop trying to be our own god can we finally become the people God created us to be.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT VS THE FRUIT OF THE WORLD.

Right after that conversation, I began to see something more clearly. My friend's struggle was not just personal. It was cultural. It was spiritual. The enemy does not usually try to remove truth outright. He distorts it. He twists what God designed for good and redirects it toward the self.

Scripture tells us what the Spirit is trying to form in us:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Galatians 5:22–23)

But if the Spirit produces fruit, the enemy produces counterfeits. He does not eliminate love. He redefines love. The Spirit forms love directed toward God and others. The world twists love into obsession with self.

Instead of loving God with all your heart, the message becomes love yourself first. Instead of loving your neighbor as yourself, the message becomes prioritize yourself above all else. Instead of love being measured by sacrifice, love is measured by self-expression and personal happiness.

The first fruit has been reversed. What God designed to move outward has been turned inward. And once love is distorted, everything else begins to distort with it. Joy becomes the pursuit of circumstances. Peace becomes the avoidance of discomfort. Patience becomes unnecessary. Kindness becomes transactional. Self-control becomes self-indulgence.

These nine lies are not random. Each one is a distortion of something

the Spirit wants to produce in you. Each one is a counterfeit version of the fruit of the Spirit. Each one is part of a quiet strategy to form people into what could be called reverse disciples.

Jesus disciples people into freedom. The enemy disciples people into self-centeredness. Jesus forms people who reflect His character. The enemy forms people who reflect the values of the world.

These lies are not just bad ideas. They are part of a formation process shaping what people love, how they think, and who they become. That is why we must be undisciplined.

Because whatever forms you... eventually defines you.

LIE #1

LIFE IS ABOUT YOU.

From childhood, we are trained to believe the purpose of life is personal happiness. Follow your heart. Chase your dreams. Do what fulfills you. Protect your peace. Cut out anyone who does not support your truth. Curate your life. Build your brand. Live your best life now. If aliens landed and studied our culture, they would probably conclude that the highest moral good is personal comfort.

We arrange our lives around what we want to experience, what we want to feel, and how we want to be perceived. Even the language we use reveals what sits at the center of our thinking. We say things like, “I just need to do what makes me happy.” “I need to find myself.” “I need to live my truth.” “I need to protect my energy.” None of those phrases existed a few generations ago, yet now they sound completely normal. Somewhere along the way, the self became sacred.

We have built an entire belief system where the highest purpose in life is personal fulfillment. The problem is that when life revolves around you, everything becomes fragile. Your peace depends on circumstances. Your identity depends on approval. Your happiness depends on things going your way. Living for yourself sounds freeing, but it is actually exhausting. You constantly have to protect your image, defend your preferences, and maintain your lifestyle. We have become so accustomed to life revolving around us that the smallest discomfort feels unbearable. But Jesus presents a completely different starting point. Jesus did not say, “Find yourself.” He said, “Deny yourself.” That is not

exactly the slogan most companies are printing on coffee mugs.

A life centered on the self is incredibly unstable because the self makes a terrible god. We change constantly. Our feelings fluctuate. Our desires contradict each other. Our sense of identity shifts with circumstances. If your life is built on you, then your life is built on something that keeps moving.

TRUTH

LIFE IS ABOUT GOD, AND THAT IS WHAT MAKES LIFE MEANINGFUL FOR YOU.

When life revolves around God, you are finally free from the pressure of making everything about yourself. Your worth is no longer based on your performance. Your identity is no longer based on your image. Your peace is no longer dependent on everything going your way. Ironically, when life stops being about you, life actually becomes better for you. You become less anxious because everything does not hinge on your success. You become less offended because everything is not a threat to your ego. You become more courageous because your identity is secure. You become more joyful because your hope is not tied to circumstances.

The second version of this lie shows up in a slightly different form.

LIE #2

YOU MUST PRIORITIZE YOURSELF ABOVE ALL ELSE.

We hear this language constantly. Put yourself first. You do you. Cut out anyone who does not serve your growth. Protect your peace at all costs. Some of that language sounds wise until you realize that if everyone lives this way, relationships become nearly impossible.

Imagine a marriage where both people are fully committed to putting themselves first. Imagine a friendship where both people are fully committed to protecting their own happiness. Imagine a church where everyone shows up asking, “What do I get out of this?” You do not need a theology degree to predict how that story ends. Isolation. Loneliness. Shallow relationships. Fragile commitment.

The more a culture worships the self, the harder it becomes to build anything that requires sacrifice. Relationships weaken. Commitment fades. Community becomes optional.

Jesus teaches something radically different. Jesus says the greatest life is not found in prioritizing yourself, but in giving yourself away. “Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”

TRUTH

YOUR LIFE GROWS WHEN YOU GIVE IT AWAY FOR SOMETHING BIGGER THAN YOU.

The people who live only for themselves rarely become deeply joyful. But the people who pour themselves into loving God and serving others often experience a depth of meaning that cannot be manufactured. You were not designed to be the center of your life. You were designed to be part of something bigger than your preferences. When your life becomes about loving God and loving others, your life begins to carry weight, purpose, and significance.

The third version of this lie shows up in how we define success and happiness.

LIE #3

YOUR LIFE SHOULD REVOLVE AROUND YOUR HAPPINESS.

We assume that if something makes us uncomfortable, it must be wrong. If something is hard, we assume we should avoid it. If something requires sacrifice, we assume it must not be God’s will. But almost everything meaningful in life requires discomfort. Marriage requires sacrifice. Parenting requires sacrifice. Friendship requires sacrifice. Growth requires sacrifice. Following Jesus definitely requires sacrifice.

If happiness is your highest goal, you will avoid the very things that produce the deepest joy. A life built on comfort becomes small very quickly. You end up organizing your entire life around avoiding inconvenience, which ironically creates a fragile life that cannot handle adversity.

TRUTH

REAL JOY IS FOUND IN PURPOSE, NOT COMFORT.

Jesus did not promise His followers comfort. He promised them life. A life of meaning. A life of transformation. A life that produces fruit that lasts. When your life is connected to God's purposes, even sacrifice becomes meaningful. Even difficulty becomes formative. Even hardship can produce growth.

When life revolves around you, even good experiences start to feel empty because they are too small to satisfy what your soul was created for. You were not designed merely to experience life. You were designed to participate in God's redemption of the world.

The first lie says life is about you. Jesus shows us that life is about becoming the kind of person through whom God can love others. And strangely, that is where life becomes most alive.

You stop asking, "How can I get the most out of this moment?"

You start asking, "God, what do you want to do through me in this moment?"

That is where purpose begins. Not when you finally get everything you want, but when your life finally becomes about something bigger than you.

DISCUSSION

Questions

1

1. Where do you most see the belief “life is about me” shaping your expectations, frustrations, or decisions?
2. Which of the three lies do you personally feel most disciplined by right now?
 - Life is about you
 - You must prioritize yourself above all else
 - Your happiness should be your highest goal
3. In what ways does a self-centered life promise freedom but actually create pressure, insecurity, or disappointment?
4. How would your relationships change if your primary question shifted from “What do I want?” to “What does love require?”
5. What is one area of your life where God may be inviting you to step off the throne and trust Him with control?

CHALLENGE

Where this week will you intentionally choose inconvenience, sacrifice, or humility so that someone else can experience love, and how will that decision help dethrone self as the center of your life?

UNDISCIPLING**Joy****THE HAPPINESS TRAP**

When Maria and I bought our first house in California, the only honest way to describe it is with the word miracle. Even now, I still struggle to explain how unlikely it was. The economy was shaky. The housing market was uncertain. On paper, there was absolutely no reason a young church planter with a newborn baby should have been buying a home in California. But through a series of events that I can only describe as the provision of God, the door opened. It was one of those moments where you look at your life and think, Only God could have done this.

There are several unbelievable twists in that story, but that is a story for another time. The important thing is that we moved in, and I was incredibly excited. For a young family that had been scraping by and trusting God every step of the way, this house felt like a miracle. Naturally, I wanted to show it off, so I invited my sister and her family over for dinner. As they were arriving, I was in the living room doing what every responsible man does before guests come over: mounting the television on the wall. Because apparently a TV mounted on the wall communicates maturity, stability, and emotional readiness for home ownership.

While tightening the mount, my tool slipped out of my hand. It fell straight down and chipped the glass on the entertainment center underneath it. Not a tiny scratch. A very noticeable chip. The kind that catches the light just enough to remind you forever that you are not nearly as handy as you thought you were. Immediately, I was furious

with myself. I started muttering under my breath and pacing around the room like I had just ruined the entire house. In my mind, I had gone from “Look at this amazing home God gave us” to “Everything is destroyed” in about five seconds.

My sister walked in and watched the meltdown unfold. She paused for a moment and then asked a question that felt like it came straight from the Holy Spirit. “Are you always this hard on yourself?” The question stopped me cold. And the more I thought about it, the more ridiculous the situation became. Here I was standing inside a house that God had miraculously provided for our family, a house that by every logical measure we should not have been able to afford, a house that was a clear example of God’s grace and provision. And I was acting like the world had ended because of a chipped piece of glass.

I had completely lost perspective. Instead of gratitude, I chose frustration. Instead of joy, I chose irritation. Instead of remembering God’s grace, I was obsessing over a tiny flaw in a piece of furniture that would eventually end up on Craigslist anyway. That moment revealed something about the way many of us live. My emotional state had been completely tied to the circumstances of the moment. The house was perfect, so I felt happy. The glass chipped, and suddenly everything felt ruined. Nothing about my life had actually changed, but my happiness had, because happiness rises and falls with circumstances. When things go the way we want, we feel great. When they don’t, our mood collapses.

This is exactly how the world disciplines us to live. Our culture is obsessed with the pursuit of happiness. From childhood we are told that the purpose of life is to chase the experiences, relationships, and achievements that will make us happy. If something makes you happy, pursue it. If something makes you unhappy, avoid it. If something interrupts your happiness, remove it. We evaluate decisions based on one simple question: Will this make me happy? If the answer is yes, we assume it must be right. If the answer is no, we assume something must be wrong.

But when the apostle Paul describes the life produced by the Spirit of God, he does not say the Spirit produces happiness. He says the Spirit produces joy. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy...” (Galatians 5:22)

Joy is something entirely different. Happiness is connected to circumstances. Joy is connected to grace. Happiness comes from what

happens to you. Joy comes from what Christ has already done for you. Happiness depends on things going your way. Joy comes from knowing your life is held by God even when things are not going your way.

This is why the Bible can say things that sound strange to the modern world. “Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds.” (James 1:2)

That statement makes no sense if happiness is the goal of life. Trials do not produce happiness. Trials interrupt happiness. But James is not talking about happiness. He is talking about joy. Joy comes from knowing that the most important thing about your life has already been secured through the cross. Joy comes from remembering that your identity is not fragile because it is rooted in Christ. Joy comes from realizing that even when circumstances change, God has not.

The world teaches us to chase happiness. The gospel gives us something better. Joy. Happiness is something you try to achieve. Joy is something you receive. Happiness constantly asks, Are things going my way? Joy asks, Is God still good? Happiness disappears when life becomes difficult. Joy can exist even in difficulty.

Just like we saw with love in the previous chapter, the world offers its own version of joy. It promises the same outcome, but the path it offers can never actually deliver what it promises. The world says joy comes from the right experiences. The gospel says joy comes from the right foundation. The world says joy comes from achieving more. The gospel says joy comes from receiving grace. The world says joy comes from controlling your circumstances. The gospel says joy comes from trusting God in every circumstance.

The enemy does not try to eliminate joy. He replaces it with happiness, because happiness keeps you chasing something circumstances can never consistently deliver. Always upgrading. Always searching. Always adjusting. Always believing the next thing will finally make you feel complete. But joy is not found in the next thing. Joy is found in the finished work of Jesus.

And once you begin to understand that, something changes inside of you. Your circumstances still matter, but they no longer define you. Your joy is no longer fragile. It is anchored. To understand the joy the Spirit produces, we first have to unlearn three lies the world has been teaching us about happiness.

LIE #1

JOY COMES FROM CIRCUMSTANCES

Our culture teaches us that joy is basically a mood that shows up when life cooperates. When things go well, we feel good. When things go badly, we spiral. When traffic is light, the kids are behaving, your phone battery is above 20 percent, and nobody sends you a confusing text that just says “k,” suddenly life feels meaningful. But the moment something small goes wrong, everything feels wrong. One awkward conversation can replay in your mind for a week. One unexpected expense can convince you the entire universe is against you. One inconvenience can turn a good day into a dramatic internal monologue.

We laugh, but most of us are more emotionally fragile than we want to admit. We are basically one delayed flight away from questioning everything we believe about God. The problem with tying your joy to circumstances is that circumstances are wildly unreliable. Life does not stay stable long enough to build your identity on it. People disappoint you. Plans change. Technology stops working at the worst possible moment. The coffee order is wrong. The meeting runs long. The weather refuses to cooperate with your expectations.

If your joy depends on everything going right, your joy will constantly feel like it is being held hostage. Scripture describes joy very differently: “Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds.” (James 1:2)

That verse sounds almost offensive at first. Consider it joy when life is difficult? That is not how happiness works. Happiness says, “Consider it joy when the trial is over and everything is finally going your way.” But James says joy can exist in the middle of difficulty because Christian joy is not rooted in circumstances. It is rooted in God’s character. God is still good when the situation is not. God is still present when the outcome is uncertain. God is still working when nothing seems to be working.

TRUTH

JOY COMES FROM KNOWING GOD IS STEADY EVEN WHEN LIFE IS NOT.

When I was a kid, my best friend Justin and I did everything together. We grew up in the same world, with the same expectations about what a good life was supposed to look like. We assumed happiness meant comfort, opportunity, and the freedom to build whatever kind of life we wanted. If you had asked me back then which one of us was most likely to end up living in the jungle, I would not have picked Justin. But God had other plans.

Justin and his wife felt called to move to Papua New Guinea with their three young kids to start a church among a people group that had never heard the gospel. Not only had they never heard the gospel, they did not even have the Bible in their dialect of Tok Pisin. If they were going to know Jesus, someone would have to go, learn the language, build relationships, and translate Scripture so the story of Christ could finally be heard in words they understood. So they went.

They moved into the jungle and began building a life from the ground up, literally. They built their own house. They lived far from family, far from friends, far from everything familiar. Basic comforts we take for granted did not exist there. Trips to a hospital were not a quick drive across town. They were long, exhausting walks through difficult terrain. Justin got malaria more than a dozen times. Imagine being violently sick, miles from medical care, knowing the only way to get help is to start walking.

They lived there for fifteen years. Fifteen years of heat, bugs, sickness, isolation, language barriers, and constant dependence on God. Fifteen years of translating Scripture word by word so that a tribe could finally hear the gospel in their own language. Fifteen years of pouring their lives out so that people who had never even heard the name of Jesus could know Him.

At one point during those years, Justin and his family came back to visit our church. We were so excited to see them. We especially wanted to bless their kids. We thought, These kids have been living in the jungle for years. Let's show them a good time. We wanted them to experience everything we assume produces happiness. We took them to

Disneyland. We planned fun activities. We wanted to spoil them a little. We expected them to be overwhelmed with excitement. But they were not.

They were kind. They were grateful. They smiled. But they did not seem amazed. They did not seem captivated by all the things we thought would thrill them. They did not seem unhappy, just not impressed. I remember thinking, Shouldn't this feel incredible to them?

Later I asked Justin why the kids did not seem over the moon to be back in the United States, surrounded by comfort, entertainment, and everything most people assume produces joy. Justin told me something I have never forgotten. He said, "They miss their tribe. They miss the jungle. They feel like they have purpose there. They know why we are there. They can see how God is using our family."

Then he told me that when they are in the United States, the kids notice how much of life revolves around things that do not really matter. They see the materialism. They see the constant pursuit of more. They see how much energy is spent chasing comfort. They see how people can have so much and still seem restless. He said sometimes the kids actually feel sad when they see it.

Think about that. Kids who grew up without many of the things we assume are necessary for happiness felt more alive in the jungle than they did at Disneyland. They had fewer comforts, but more joy. Fewer conveniences, but more clarity. Fewer options, but more purpose. They had discovered something many people spend their entire lives missing.

LIE #2

JOY COMES FROM ACHIEVING THE LIFE YOU IMAGINED.

We are disciplined to believe that joy is waiting somewhere out in the future. If we can just reach the right level of comfort, the right level of income, the right lifestyle, the right experiences, then we will finally feel satisfied. We imagine joy is found in upgrading our circumstances. Better house. Better vacations. Better opportunities. Better experiences. Better options. The lie says, If your life looks impressive enough, it will feel fulfilling enough. The lie says joy is something you achieve. The lie says joy is waiting on the other side of success.

But Justin's kids had already learned something many adults never

realize. Comfort does not automatically produce joy. Entertainment does not automatically produce meaning. Convenience does not automatically produce peace. You can have Disneyland and still feel empty. You can have endless options and still feel restless. You can have comfort and still feel like something is missing. Because joy was never meant to come from constructing the perfect version of your life.

TRUTH

JOY COMES FROM RECEIVING THE LIFE CHRIST ALREADY SECURED.

Justin's family did not move to the jungle because it was comfortable. They went because they believed God had called them. In that calling, they experienced something deeper than comfort could ever provide. They experienced purpose. They saw people hear about Jesus for the very first time. They saw Scripture come alive in a language that had never held those words before. They saw lives change. They saw the kingdom of God advance in a place where His name had not yet been known.

They had hardship, but they also had joy because they could see God at work. Their joy did not come from having the life most people would choose. Their joy came from living the life God gave them. The world says joy comes from achieving the life you imagined. Jesus shows that joy comes from receiving the life He secured.

When joy is tied to circumstances, it disappears the moment circumstances change. But when joy is rooted in Christ, it remains steady even when life is difficult. Justin battled malaria over a dozen times, but he had peace. They lived far from modern comforts, but they had purpose. They sacrificed convenience, but they experienced meaning. They had less comfort, but more Christ. And more Christ always leads to more joy.

The lie says joy is found in building a life centered on yourself. The truth says joy is found in surrendering your life to God. Justin's kids were not unimpressed with Disneyland because they were ungrateful. They were simply not dependent on it for their happiness. They had already discovered something better. They had seen that joy is not found in the life you achieve. Joy is found in the life Christ gives.

LIE #3

JOY COMES FROM AVOIDING PAIN

A third lie the world disciples us into believing is that the goal of life is maximum comfort. If something feels hard, stressful, or uncomfortable, something must be wrong. We instinctively try to eliminate inconvenience as quickly as possible. Faster internet. Faster shipping. Faster results. Faster emotional recovery. We want transformation to feel like ordering something online. Click once, track progress, arrive fully formed in two business days.

But the life of Jesus reveals a completely different pattern. The deepest joy in the Christian life often grows in the middle of difficulty. The cross stands as the clearest example. The greatest act of love in human history came through suffering. Not because suffering itself is good, but because God often does his deepest work in places we would normally avoid.

Throughout Scripture we see the same pattern. Paul writes about rejoicing from prison. Early Christians sing while facing persecution. Believers throughout history testify that some of their deepest experiences of God happened in seasons they would never choose but would never trade. The world says discomfort is interruption. The Spirit uses discomfort for formation.

TRUTH

JOY GROWS WHEN WE TRUST GOD IN THE MIDDLE OF DIFFICULTY.

Comfort can make life easier. Only Christ can make life deeper. Jesus reveals the source of true joy on the night before the cross: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:11)

Think about the timing. Jesus talks about joy only hours before betrayal, arrest, injustice, torture, and crucifixion. He does not promise comfortable circumstances. He promises his joy. The joy that comes from knowing the Father. The joy that comes from living with purpose. The joy that comes from trusting that even when life feels out of control, God is not.

The world disciples us to believe joy comes from managing

everything, optimizing everything, and controlling everything. We quietly assume peace will come when life is finally predictable. When the finances are secure. When the relationships are stable. When the future is clear. When nothing interrupts our plans. But control is a terrible savior. The more control we think we have, the more pressure we feel to keep everything from falling apart.

That is the UNdisciplined life. Always managing. Always adjusting. Always trying to hold everything together. We live like emotional project managers, constantly monitoring outcomes, trying to prevent disruption to our sense of stability. But control is an illusion. Life is too complex, people are too unpredictable, and the future is too unknown for any of us to actually control the outcomes we care about most.

Jesus shows us a completely different way to live. Hebrews describes the mindset that carried Jesus through the worst suffering imaginable: “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame...” (Hebrews 12:2)

That statement is astonishing. The cross was not comfortable. It was not convenient. It was brutal, humiliating, and physically excruciating. And yet Scripture says Jesus endured it because of joy. Not happiness. Joy. Which means joy is not the absence of difficulty. Joy is the presence of purpose.

Jesus did not endure the cross because the circumstances felt good. He endured the cross because he trusted the Father’s plan. He knew redemption was coming. He knew resurrection was coming. He knew millions of lives would be transformed. He knew the suffering was not the end of the story. The world says joy comes from controlling your life. Jesus shows us joy comes from surrendering your life to God’s purposes.

The world says joy comes from controlling your life. Jesus shows us joy comes from surrendering your life to God’s purposes. **The world offers happiness that depends on our ability to control everything. Jesus offers joy that remains when we finally realize we were never in control to begin with.** One produces anxiety. The other produces endurance. One collapses when life gets hard. The other carries you through the cross. That is not fragile happiness. That is Spirit-formed joy.

DISCUSSION

Questions

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1. Which of the three lies have most shaped the way you think about joy: circumstances, achievement, or comfort? Where do you see that influence showing up in your daily decisions?
2. When life does not go the way you planned, what is your default reaction? What does that reveal about where you have been looking for happiness instead of joy?
3. How does understanding that joy is rooted in God's character, not your circumstances change the way you view current challenges or frustrations in your life?
4. Hebrews 12:2 says Jesus endured the cross "for the joy set before him." What does that teach us about the relationship between purpose and joy? Where might God be inviting you to trust him even when something feels difficult?
5. Where might the world be quietly discipling you into believing that control leads to peace? What would it look like to surrender that area to God and trust that his purposes are better than your ability to manage outcomes?

CHALLENGE

What is one situation in your life right now where you have been postponing joy until circumstances improve, and how can you intentionally choose joy this week by trusting God's purpose even before the situation changes?

UNDISCIPLING**Peace****THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL**

Before I became a pastor, I worked in marketing and advertising. I loved my career. I enjoyed helping businesses grow and watching ideas turn into real results. the thing I loved most was working on commission.

The harder I worked, the more clients I closed. The more clients I closed, the more money I made. It felt like a perfect system. If I just worked hard enough, I could control my financial future.

At least that's what I thought. Then one year the headaches started. Not normal headaches. The kind that shut your whole life down. They became so intense that I began taking days off work just to lie in a dark room and try to recover. The slightest movement would send shocks through my head.

Eventually I went to the doctor. After some tests he told me something I wasn't expecting. I needed surgery. Emergency sinus surgery to relieve the pressure that was causing the headaches.

The good news was that the surgery worked. The bad news was that all my commissions stopped for months. And commissions are funny like that. They stop instantly. But the bills never do.

Before long I had saddled our young family with credit card debt, medical bills, and financial pressure that seemed to grow every month. A lack of financial discipline combined with an unexpected surgery had put us in a hole we couldn't easily climb out of. Everything suddenly felt out of control.

For weeks there was a low-grade tension in our home that never seemed to go away. Every purchase became stressful. Every financial decision carried anxiety. What used to be a joy-filled home slowly became filled with worry about the future. Maria and I started fighting more than usual. Money has a way of doing that.

One night it all came to a head. Maria was sitting on the floor with a calculator and a notepad. Bills were spread out across the living room floor in front of her. I was leaning against the doorway with a bandage still covering my nose and face from surgery.

She kept running the numbers. Over and over. Finally she looked up at me. With worry written across her face she said something I will never forget. “We’re not going to make it.”

At least she said we. She didn’t blame me, though I knew much of the responsibility fell on my shoulders as the head of our home. So we started throwing out ideas. Extreme ideas. Moving in with family. Bankruptcy. Borrowing more money. Every option sounded worse than the last.

Then the worst idea came up. “We could stop tithing for a while.”

If you’re unfamiliar with tithing, it’s the biblical practice of giving the first ten percent of your income back to God. For us it had always been a way of saying, “God, everything we have belongs to you.”

Even in our financial struggles we had never missed it. It was always the first check we wrote each month. But suddenly, in the middle of our fear, the idea came out of our mouths. And to be honest, it sounded logical. Ten percent redirected toward our debt every month would eventually solve the problem. But the moment we said it out loud something became clear to me. This wasn’t just a financial decision. It was a spiritual one.

In that moment a passage of Scripture came rushing to mind. In Book of Proverbs 3:5 the Bible says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

Most people know that verse. What many people forget is that the verses right before it talk about honoring God with the first portion of what you have and trusting him to provide.

Suddenly everything came into focus. Stopping our giving would have been the clearest signal possible that we were choosing control over trust. Maria and I looked at each other. And by the grace of God

we did something that probably sounded crazy. We repented for even considering it. Then we made a radical decision. Instead of stopping our tithe, we doubled it. Twenty percent instead of ten.

I remember saying to Maria, “I got us into this mess, but God can get us out. We’re going to do this his way.” That Sunday I wrote a check for twice our normal tithe. As I write this, I realize some people will think that sounds reckless or irresponsible. Some might assume a pastor pressured us to do it.

But no pastor told us to do that. And I’m not telling you to do it. I’m simply telling you that when you hear from God and obey him, there is no peace like it.

The moment we prayed and made that decision something changed in our home. The anxiety lifted. The fighting stopped. We slept better. The tension that had been hanging over our house for weeks suddenly disappeared. Our circumstances hadn’t changed yet. But our trust had.

And then something amazing started to happen. God began providing. Not in one dramatic moment, but through a series of unexpected ways we couldn’t have predicted.

One day Maria was looking at our spreadsheet. She stared at the numbers for a while and then said something I’ll never forget. “I’m looking at this and I can’t explain it... but God is moving.” Within one year the debt was gone. The credit cards. The medical bills. Even a surprise tax bill from the IRS that we didn’t know about. All of it. But the greatest miracle wasn’t the finances. It was the peace. Because that season taught us something the world rarely understands. Peace does not come from controlling your circumstances. Peace comes from trusting the God who already holds them.

That season in our lives exposed something I had never really noticed before. The reason we were so anxious was not just because we had financial problems. It was because we believed something about peace that simply was not true. The world had disciplined us to believe that peace comes from control. If the numbers make sense, you feel calm. If the future looks predictable, you relax. If the plan is secure, you feel safe. But the moment something moves outside your control, peace disappears. That is exactly what had happened to us.

For years I believed that if I worked hard enough, earned enough, and planned carefully enough, I could control our financial future. When the

surgery hit and the commissions stopped, that illusion collapsed. And when control collapsed, anxiety rushed in to take its place. The world teaches us several lies about peace that keep us trapped in this cycle.

LIE #1

PEACE COMES FROM CONTROLLING YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

We believe that if we can just organize life well enough, peace will finally arrive. Control the finances, control the schedule, control the future, control the outcomes. But the deeper we go into life, the more obvious something becomes. Control is an illusion. You cannot control the economy. You cannot control your health. You cannot control unexpected events. You cannot even control how other people behave. Yet many people spend their entire lives trying to control things that were never meant to be in their hands. The result is constant tension and anxiety. Because when peace depends on control, peace will always be fragile.

TRUTH

PEACE COMES FROM TRUSTING GOD, NOT CONTROLLING OUTCOMES.

Real peace is not found in finally getting everything under control. Real peace is found in surrendering control to the One who already has it. Peace does not come from knowing what will happen. Peace comes from knowing who God is. Jesus said in John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." The world offers peace that depends on circumstances going well. Jesus offers peace that remains even when circumstances fall apart.

Isaiah 26:3 says God keeps in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast because they trust in Him. Control creates pressure. Trust creates rest. Control says everything depends on me. Trust says everything ultimately depends on God. Peace is not the result of perfect circumstances. Peace is the result of confident surrender.

LIE #2

PEACE COMES FROM ELIMINATING PROBLEMS.

Our culture constantly tells us that peace will arrive once the problems disappear. Once the debt is gone. Once the relationship improves. Once the job situation stabilizes. Once life finally settles down. But life rarely settles down for very long. Problems come and go. New challenges appear. Unexpected seasons arrive. If peace only exists when problems disappear, then peace will always be temporary. We end up living in a constant state of “almost.” Almost peaceful once this situation changes. Almost calm once that stress goes away. But as soon as one problem leaves, another takes its place. If peace depends on a problem-free life, peace will always be fragile. Jesus offered something very different. In John 14:27 He said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.” Notice what He does not say. He does not say, “I will remove all your problems so you can finally relax.” He says, “I give you my peace.” The peace Jesus offers is not the absence of trouble. It is the presence of God in the middle of it. We often think peace will come once we can predict the future. If we knew the job would work out, the finances would stabilize, the kids would be okay, and life would go according to plan, then we could finally relax. But God rarely gives us that level of certainty. Instead, He invites us to trust Him one day at a time. That is why Jesus speaks directly about anxiety in Matthew 6 when He says, “Do not worry about your life.” Worry is what happens when we try to carry responsibilities that belong to God. Peace begins when we release that burden.

TRUTH

PEACE COMES FROM GOD’S PRESENCE, NOT A PROBLEM-FREE LIFE.

Biblical peace is not fragile because it is not dependent on circumstances. It is rooted in relationship. God does not promise a life without challenges, but He repeatedly promises that we will not face them alone. His presence produces stability even when life feels unstable. Philippians 4:7 describes “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding.”

That means this peace does not always make sense from the outside. It is possible to have peace while facing uncertainty, difficulty, or unanswered questions because this peace is anchored in something deeper than circumstances. Problems do not have to disappear for peace to appear. Storms can rage while the heart remains steady. Uncertainty can exist while trust remains strong. Jesus slept in the middle of a storm because His peace did not come from calm seas but from confidence in the Father. The disciples panicked because they believed peace required the storm to stop, but Jesus showed that peace can exist even before the storm changes. God's goal is not to create a problem-free life. God's goal is to form a deeply rooted life that is not easily shaken. When peace depends on circumstances, every problem feels like a threat. When peace depends on God's presence, problems become places where trust grows stronger. Peace is not found in the absence of problems. Peace is found in the presence of God.

LIE #3

PEACE COMES FROM BEING A CONTROL FREAK.

If we are honest, a lot of us are just highly spiritualized control freaks. We say things like, "I'm just being wise," or "I'm just trying to be a good steward," but underneath it we are trying to control outcomes so we can feel secure. That was me when Maria and I stepped out to plant the church. Newborn. Limited income. Savings going into the mission. Everything in me wanted guarantees. I wanted to know how it would all work before we obeyed.

Control freak spirituality says, "I trust God... as long as I still get to manage the results."

But the more you try to control, the more anxious you become, because deep down you know you are holding things you were never meant to hold. The future. Provision. Outcomes. Control promises peace, but it produces pressure.

TRUTH

PEACE COMES FROM BEING A SURRENDER FREAK.

God did not just teach us surrender through big decisions. He trained us in it through something small, consistent, and uncomfortable at times... giving. Tithing became one of the primary ways God rewired how we thought about money and control.

Every time we chose to give when it did not feel convenient, we were practicing trust. Every time we released a portion of what we had, we were reminding our hearts that we were not the source, God was. Tithing forced us to confront the illusion of control. It exposed how tightly we wanted to hold onto security and how much we believed peace came from having enough.

Giving felt backwards. Especially in a season where finances were tight. Everything in you wants to hold tighter when resources feel limited. But God invites you to open your hands when it feels the most unnatural. Not because He needs your money, but because He is forming your trust.

Tithing is not just about generosity. It is about surrender. It is a regular, practical way of saying, "God, I trust You more than I trust what I can see. I trust You with my provision. I trust You with my future." And over time, something began to shift in us. We stopped seeing money as our security and started seeing God as our provider. We stopped measuring peace by what was in our account and started measuring it by who we were trusting. We still planned. We still budgeted. But we no longer believed peace depended on perfect numbers.

Giving trained us to trust. Not once. Not occasionally. But consistently. And what we discovered was this: peace did not come when everything finally made sense financially. Peace came when we trusted God even when it did not make sense. Tithing created a rhythm of surrender in our lives. It kept reminding us that we are not in control, and that is actually a good thing. Because control creates pressure, but surrender creates peace.

Eventually, God provided in ways we could not have planned. But the real transformation was not just external provision. It was internal freedom. We were no longer controlled by fear. We were no longer gripping tightly. We were steady.

Tithing did not just change our finances. It changed our faith. Because peace is not found in having enough. Peace is found in trusting the One who is more than enough.

DISCUSSION

Questions

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1. What is one area of your life that you are currently trying to control that may be robbing you of peace?
2. Which of the six areas mentioned in this chapter do you struggle with the most: the future, other people, reputation, outcomes, comfort, or safety?
3. Why do you think the world constantly pushes us toward control instead of trust?
4. How might your life look different if you truly surrendered one of these areas to God?

CHALLENGE

This week, identify one area where you have been trying to maintain control. Bring it before God in prayer and intentionally surrender it to him. Instead of asking, "How can I control this situation?" begin asking, "How can I trust God with this today?"

UNDISCIPLING *Patience*

THE IDOL OF PRODUCTIVITY

Sometimes I think about the moment when Peter pulled out a sword and tried to cut a man's head off. I know the Bible says he cut off the guy's ear, but let's be honest. Nobody aims for an ear. Peter was not attempting delicate ear surgery in the middle of the night. He was trying to decapitate someone. He swung, missed, and caught an ear on the way by.

For a long time I thought this moment showed Peter's bravery. The disciples are surrounded. Soldiers are coming to arrest Jesus. Peter jumps into action. At first glance it looks heroic, the loyal disciple defending his teacher. But when you slow down and pay attention to the details, the moment actually reveals something very different.

The passage tells us in Gospel of John 18:10–11 that “Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’”

Notice something important in that scene. Peter was not attacking a Roman soldier in armor. He struck the high priest's servant. In other words, he swung a sword at a guy who probably showed up carrying scrolls, books, or temple supplies. This was not some elite warrior charging into battle. It was more like swinging at the church intern. Peter's action was not strategic. It was reactionary. It was the instinct

many of us have when things feel out of control. Do something. Act now. Fix it. Fight it. Solve it. Take control of the situation before it gets worse. Peter was not being patient. He was panicking. And Jesus immediately stops him. “Put your sword away.”

Then Jesus says something even more revealing. “Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” In that moment Jesus understood exactly what was happening. He knew the Father’s plan, even though it involved suffering and waiting. Peter was trying to seize control of the situation when the moment actually required trust. Peter reacted. Jesus waited.

And in that moment the real courage belonged to Jesus, not Peter. Because sometimes the bravest thing you can do is not act. Sometimes the bravest thing you can do is trust God’s timing instead of forcing your own. Waiting on God instead of reacting in fear is called patience. And patience is something our world is quickly losing. Peter’s reaction may seem extreme, but if we are honest, it is not that different from the way most of us live. Peter panicked because things were not unfolding according to his expectations. The moment felt uncertain, so he did something. Draw the sword. Swing fast. Fix the situation. Force the outcome. It was impulsive. It was emotional. It was immediate. In other words, it was productive. Or at least, it looked productive.

Our world disciples us to believe that constant activity is always better than stillness. Movement feels like progress. Action feels like control. Doing something feels more responsible than waiting on God. We have quietly turned productivity into a measure of faithfulness. If we are busy, we assume we are doing well. If we are slowing down, we assume we are falling behind. We idolize output. We glorify hustle. We celebrate urgency. We feel guilty when we are not making progress, fixing problems, optimizing systems, or improving results. The pressure to produce never turns off. We check our phones before our feet hit the floor. We measure our days by what we accomplished. We feel restless when nothing is moving forward. Entire industries exist to eliminate waiting. We send messages instantly. We stream entertainment immediately. We order products with one click and expect them to arrive the next day. Everything around us trains us to believe that faster is always better. When something takes too long, frustration rises almost immediately.

But while the modern world runs on speed, the kingdom of God

does not. God is not in a hurry. He forms people slowly. This is where the world begins to disciple us in ways that directly oppose the work of the Spirit. Without even realizing it, we begin to believe that productivity is proof of purpose. That visible results are proof of faithfulness. That constant movement is proof that God is working. But Peter was moving quickly in the garden, and Jesus was standing still. Peter looked productive. Jesus was being faithful. And sometimes those are not the same thing.

LIE #1

IF IT ISN'T HAPPENING FAST, SOMETHING IS WRONG.

We live in a world addicted to speed. Fast internet. Fast shipping. Fast results. Fast success stories. If something takes too long, we assume something is broken. We expect progress to happen quickly, and when it does not, we start to question everything. If our career does not take off fast enough, we assume we made the wrong decision. If our spiritual growth feels slow, we assume we are failing. If prayers are not answered quickly, we quietly wonder if God is even listening.

The world discipled us to believe that faster always means better. Quick results feel like success. Delays feel like problems. Waiting feels like losing. But this mindset slowly trains us to measure God's faithfulness by how quickly He moves, instead of by how deeply He is working.

Peter fell into this trap in the garden. When the soldiers arrived to arrest Jesus, Peter assumed immediate action was required. Waiting felt wrong. Stillness felt weak. Trust felt passive. So he reached for his sword. In Peter's mind, doing something felt strong. But Jesus revealed something deeper. Reaction is not always strength. Sometimes reaction is fear disguised as courage.

Peter acted quickly because he felt powerless. Jesus remained steady because He trusted the Father.

The world tells us that strength is proven by how fast we move, how much we accomplish, and how quickly we solve problems. But the kingdom of God forms strength differently. Strength is formed when we trust God enough to wait. Strength is formed when we refuse to force outcomes that belong in God's hands. Strength is formed when we remain faithful even when progress feels slow.

Sometimes what feels like delay is actually development. Sometimes what feels like stagnation is actually strengthening. Sometimes what feels unproductive is actually preparation. The strongest faith is not always the fastest faith. It is the deepest faith.

TRUTH

GOD DEVELOPS US DEEPLY, NOT QUICKLY.

The Bible consistently shows that God is not in a hurry, but He is always at work. God rarely forms people instantly. He forms them intentionally. Spiritual maturity is not microwaved. Character is not downloaded overnight. Faith is not formed in comfort or speed, but through trust over time.

James 1:4 says, “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” Notice the language. Perseverance has work to do. Waiting is not wasted time. Delay is not empty space. God uses seasons of waiting to strengthen what could not be strengthened any other way.

God formed Abraham over decades. He formed Joseph through betrayal and prison. He formed David in fields and caves before he ever sat on a throne. He formed the disciples slowly, often through confusion and correction. Even Jesus spent thirty years in preparation before three years of public ministry.

God is not obsessed with speed. He is committed to depth. Quick growth often produces shallow roots. Deep growth produces lasting strength. What the world calls slow, God often calls strong. Waiting requires trust. Waiting requires surrender. Waiting requires believing that God is working even when we cannot see immediate results. And that kind of trust forms something stable inside of us.

Peter thought swinging the sword would demonstrate strength. But true strength would have been trusting the Father’s plan in that moment. Waiting would have required more courage than reacting. Trust would have produced more strength than force.

The world trains us to believe something is wrong when progress feels slow. But in the kingdom of God, slow is often the speed of formation. Because God is not just trying to get you somewhere. He is preparing you for where you are going.

LIE #2

GOD'S TIMING ALWAYS FEELS RIGHT.

When Maria and I felt called to move to the San Fernando Valley to plant a church, we knew it would require sacrifice. Church planting is not something you ease into casually. It requires faith, risk, and a willingness to let go of stability in order to follow God's calling. We downsized our life. We simplified our lifestyle. We put our finances, our savings, and everything we had into starting the church. At the same time, we had a newborn baby. Anyone who has ever had a newborn knows how vulnerable that season feels. Sleep is limited. Emotions are heightened. Responsibility feels heavy. And we needed a place to live.

The problem was, we could not afford much. We had chosen to invest our resources into the church, trusting that God would provide what we needed, but as the weeks passed, the pressure began to build. Rent in the San Fernando Valley is not exactly known for being encouraging. Every option we looked at felt just out of reach. Every conversation reminded us how tight things were financially. We believed God would come through, but waiting has a way of testing what you really believe.

Days turned into weeks. Weeks turned into months. We kept praying. "God, you called us here. God, you led us here. God, we are trusting you." But nothing seemed to be opening. Waiting exposes what is really happening inside of you. Questions begin to surface. Did we miss something? Did we misunderstand God? Are we being irresponsible? Should we have played it safer? We knew God had called us, but the timeline felt uncomfortable.

Then, finally, we got a call. An apartment building across the street from the university was looking for managers. They wanted us to live there. That meant a rent-free home. Suddenly, everything changed. Not only did we have a place to live, but our financial situation shifted in a way that allowed Maria to stay home with our newborn. The very thing we had been praying for came together in a way better than anything we could have planned on our own. But it did not happen immediately. It happened through waiting.

At the time, the waiting felt stressful. Looking back, the waiting was purposeful. God was not late. He was precise. If everything had come together instantly, we might have assumed we made it happen. Instead,

we knew God had provided. The lie says waiting is wasted time, but the truth is that waiting is often where God is doing work we cannot yet see.

TRUTH

GOD'S TIME FEELS LIKE CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Difficult seasons slow us down and expose what is really happening inside our hearts. Trials remove the illusion that we are in control and force us to depend on God. James 1:4 says that “patience matures and completes us” God is often doing two things at the same time. He is arranging circumstances, and He is shaping people. We usually focus on the circumstances, but God focuses on the character.

Waiting stretches our trust. Waiting reveals what we are relying on. Waiting shows us how quickly we try to take control when we feel uncertain. We want fast answers, but God often produces deep formation. Pressure produces endurance. Endurance produces patience. Patience produces maturity. Trials are not simply obstacles. They are tools. God uses seasons of uncertainty to build stability inside of us. He uses delay to develop trust. He uses difficulty to deepen dependence. He uses waiting to prepare us for what we asked Him to provide.

Sometimes the blessing arrives at the exact moment our character is ready to carry it. Waiting is not evidence that God has forgotten you. Waiting is often evidence that God is forming you. Nothing about that season was wasted. God provided exactly what we needed at exactly the right time, and He used the waiting to shape us into people who would trust Him more deeply than before. Waiting is not wasted time. Waiting is where God often does His best work.

LIE #3

IF GOD LOVED YOU, HE WOULD MOVE FASTER.

This is the lie many people feel but rarely say out loud. When prayers take longer than we hoped, when healing does not come quickly, when doors stay closed, or when life moves slower than we expected, a quiet question creeps into our hearts: *If God really cared about me, wouldn't*

He move faster than this? We measure God's love by the speed of His response. Quick answers feel like favor. Delays feel like distance. Silence feels like absence. Because we live in a world that eliminates waiting wherever possible, we assume slower must mean worse. But Scripture reveals something different. God is never rushed, never late, and never careless with time. The delay is not evidence of His absence. The delay is often evidence of His formation. We assume God's primary goal is to change our situation quickly, but God's primary goal is often to change us deeply.

TRUTH

GOD DEVELOPS PATIENCE BY PLANTING US DEEPLY.

The strongest trees on earth take the longest to grow. Redwood and oak trees grow slowly, but their strength comes from depth. Their roots spread deep and wide, anchoring them so securely that they can withstand storms that would uproot smaller trees. Because they grow slowly, they can carry tremendous weight. Height is supported by depth, and strength is supported by time. God often works the same way in our lives. Psalm 1 says the person who delights in God is “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.” Notice the imagery. The person who trusts God is not described as fast-growing, but as deeply planted. Stability comes before fruitfulness. Roots come before results.

Patience is what allows roots to grow. When God slows us down, He is not abandoning us. He is planting us. When progress feels hidden, growth is often happening underground. Roots develop in places no one sees, but the deeper the roots grow, the more weight the tree can carry when fruit finally comes. We often want visible growth first, but God often focuses on invisible strength. We want speed, but God develops stability. We want immediate results, but God produces lasting resilience.

God frequently uses people to grow these roots. Relationships require patience. People misunderstand us, frustrate us, disappoint us, and do not change as quickly as we would prefer. Yet these moments stretch our roots deeper. They expose our expectations and teach us to extend grace. Second Peter 3:9 reminds us that “The Lord is patient with

you.” God does not rush transformation. He forms something durable and strong.

This is what Peter did not understand in the garden. Peter thought the moment required action. Jesus knew the moment required trust. Peter reached for a sword. Jesus surrendered to the Father. Peter assumed urgency meant obedience, but Jesus showed that obedience sometimes means waiting. Sometimes the most faithful thing you can do is stay planted. A planted life does not panic when growth feels slow. A planted life trusts that roots are forming even when fruit is not yet visible.

God is not growing weeds. He is growing oaks. Oak trees take decades to mature, but once fully grown, they can withstand immense pressure because their roots reach deep into the ground. What takes the longest often becomes the strongest. Patience is not weakness. Patience is depth. Jesus was never frantic or controlled by urgency. He moved with steady confidence because He trusted the Father’s timing. He knew when to act and when to wait, and He never confused urgency with obedience.

Over time, as we surrender our timeline to God, something changes in us. We become less reactive and more steady, less anxious and more grounded. Our roots grow deeper, and our lives become more stable. We become people who can carry greater responsibility and greater fruit without collapsing under the weight. The deepest roots produce the strongest lives. God plants before He promotes. He roots before He raises. When we allow Him to develop patience in us, we become like the tree in Psalm 1, planted by streams of water, steady in every season, able to carry the weight of the life God calls us to live. Strong enough to stand, deep enough to last, patient enough to trust His timing.

DISCUSSION

Questions

4

1. Where in your life do you feel the strongest pressure for things to happen quickly?
2. Which of the three lies about patience do you struggle with the most?
3. Can you think of a season in your life when God used waiting to shape your character?
4. How might trusting God's timing change the way you approach your current circumstances?

CHALLENGE

This week, identify one area of your life where you feel impatient with God's timing. Instead of trying to force progress, bring that situation before God in prayer each day. Ask him to help you trust his process and give you the patience to let his work finish its work in you.

UNDISCIPLING Kindness

THE COMPARISON TRAP

As I approached forty years old, I realized it was time to choose a midlife crisis. I carefully reviewed the options. I could spend ten thousand dollars on a road bike and ride around the valley dressed like a highlighter, or I could start competing in Brazilian jiu-jitsu against other grown men. I chose jiu-jitsu. It just felt like the more dignified option. I had grown up competing in karate tournaments and later trained in MMA for a season, but eventually you reach a point in life where getting punched in the face stops sounding adventurous and starts sounding unnecessary. Jiu-jitsu felt like the perfect compromise. Grappling, technique, strategy. No striking. How intense could it really be?

Apparently very intense.

So I started training again and, in a moment of confidence that can only be described as misplaced, I signed up for a tournament within my first month. After one of my matches, I sat on the side of the mat watching the guy who had just beaten me. His family was there cheering for him. His teammates were congratulating him. He was smiling, relieved, proud of the work he had put in. It was a good moment for him. And I realized something uncomfortable. I wasn't happy for him. Not really.

I shook his hand. I told him good match. I even nodded respectfully like a mature adult who definitely has everything together emotionally. But inside, I was replaying the match. Thinking about what I should have done differently. Thinking about how close it felt. Thinking about how I could have won. Thinking about what I needed to improve.

In about thirty seconds, his victory quietly became about me. Nothing about that man's win was personal, but comparison made it feel personal. Instead of seeing him as a person, I was measuring myself against him.

Comparison has a way of doing that. It quietly turns people into mirrors. Instead of appreciating who they are, we evaluate what they mean about us. Their success starts to feel like our failure. Their progress starts to feel like we are falling behind. And kindness struggles to survive in an environment like that.

Here is the part that surprised me. I was nice to him. Very nice. But nice and kind are not the same thing. Nice is external. Kindness is internal. Nice shakes hands. Kindness celebrates. Nice says the right words. Kindness actually means them. Nice smiles. Kindness feels joy for someone else's joy. Nice is polite. Kindness is sincere. Nice knows what to do socially. Kindness actually wants good for another person. That day, I was nice... but I was not fully kind.

Because kindness does not just behave well. Kindness desires good for others. Kindness celebrates when someone else succeeds. Kindness is secure enough that someone else's win does not feel like your loss. Comparison makes that very difficult. Comparison turns life into a scoreboard. And when everything becomes a scoreboard, every person becomes either someone you are ahead of or someone you are behind. That is not how love works.

Comparison is often the front door to envy. It begins subtly. You notice what someone else has. You notice what someone else accomplished. You notice how someone else is perceived. At first it feels harmless. But the longer comparison lingers, the more it begins shaping how you see that person. Instead of celebrating them, you evaluate them. Instead of loving them, you measure yourself against them. Instead of thanking God for their blessing, you begin wondering why you do not have the same.

Comparison creates the conditions where envy grows. Scripture speaks very directly about envy because envy quietly corrodes the soul. Proverbs 14:30 says, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." That is strong language. Envy does not just affect our mood. It eats away at our peace. It distorts how we see others. It turns blessings into threats. It turns relationships into competitions.

James 3:16 says, "Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there

you find disorder and every evil practice.” Envy creates internal chaos because it constantly tells you that you are behind, overlooked, or missing out. It makes other people feel like obstacles instead of people to love. And it is very difficult to be kind to people you feel in competition with. Envy quietly hopes someone else fails so you can feel better about where you stand. Kindness hopes they do just as well as you, maybe even better.

The world disciplines us into comparison early. Grades, popularity, income, achievements, followers, status. We are constantly told to evaluate where we rank. But the Spirit forms something very different in us. Kindness grows when our identity is no longer based on outperforming others, but on being loved by God. When you know who you are in Christ, someone else’s success does not threaten you.

It reminds you that God is generous. Nice behavior can be performed without transformation. Anyone can learn to say the right words. Anyone can learn to appear supportive. Anyone can learn to clap when everyone else is clapping. But kindness is evidence that something deeper is changing. Kindness is when your heart no longer needs to compete for worth. Kindness is when someone else’s win does not feel like your loss. Kindness is when you are genuinely glad that good things are happening to other people. Nice is good manners. Kindness is spiritual formation. Nice can be faked. Kindness is fruit. The Spirit produces a kind of kindness that comparison cannot produce.

LIE #1

OTHER PEOPLE ARE YOUR COMPETITION.

This is one of the quiet ways the world disciplines us. From a young age we are trained to measure ourselves against everyone around us. School ranks students. Companies rank employees. Social media ranks popularity. Someone is always ahead and someone is always behind.

Eventually life starts to feel like a scoreboard. Who makes more money? Who has the better career? Who has the nicer house? Who has the bigger platform? And now we have an entire digital ecosystem designed to amplify this comparison. You can open your phone at any moment and see someone your age who is richer, fitter, happier, and apparently living their best life in perfect lighting.

Instagram has turned comparison into a sport. People set up cameras in the gym so they can film themselves working out at exactly the right angle. Someone is doing deadlifts in cinematic lighting like they are filming a Nike commercial. Another person is recording a motivational speech to their followers between sets. And somewhere in the background a guy is pretending he didn't notice the camera while flexing in the mirror for the third take. Suddenly everyone is performing their life. And if you are not careful, you begin measuring your life against their highlight reel.

Comparison slowly reshapes how we see people. Instead of neighbors, they become rivals. Instead of celebrating their success, we feel threatened by it. Their promotion feels like our loss. Their success feels like our failure. Even something as simple as a social media post can trigger the quiet question, Why isn't my life like that?

This is why comparison quietly poisons relationships. It turns friends into competitors and coworkers into opponents. Even in ministry it can creep in. Churches compare attendance. Pastors compare influence. Leaders compare results. The world disciplines us to believe that the goal of life is to win. But Jesus never taught his followers to compete with each other.

TRUTH

IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, OTHER PEOPLE ARE NOT RIVALS. THEY ARE NEIGHBORS.

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, his answer was simple: love God and love your neighbor. He did not say outperform your neighbor. He did not say defeat your neighbor. He said love your neighbor.

In Gospel of Luke 10:36–37, after telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asked, “Which of these was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The answer was obvious. The one who showed mercy. In the kingdom of God, people are not obstacles to your success. They are opportunities to show love. The Spirit begins to reshape the way we see others. Instead of measuring ourselves against them, we begin to care for them. Instead of trying to win at their expense, we begin to serve them. Kindness begins when competition ends.

LIE #2

ONLY HELP PEOPLE WHO HELP YOU.

Once the world teaches us to see life as competition, it quietly adds another rule. Only invest in relationships that benefit you. Help the people who can help you. Network with the people who can open doors. Be generous with the people who can advance your career, expand your influence, or improve your reputation. In other words, kindness becomes a strategy.

We do favors because they might be returned. We give attention to people who increase our status. We are warm toward people who are useful. But when someone has nothing to offer us, we suddenly become very busy. This way of living can feel normal because it is so common. It is the social currency of the world. People are evaluated by what they can do for you.

But Jesus completely dismantles that mindset. In Gospel of Luke 6:32–35 Jesus says, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them... But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.” That teaching flips the logic of the world upside down.

TRUTH

KINDNESS MOVES TOWARD PEOPLE WHO CANNOT REPAY YOU.

In the kingdom of God, kindness is not transactional. It is not a strategy for gaining advantage. It is the natural overflow of a heart that has experienced God’s grace. Anyone can be kind to people who benefit them. Spirit-formed kindness moves toward people who have nothing to offer in return. It notices the overlooked. It serves the struggling. It blesses people who cannot improve your status or return the favor.

In fact, some of the most Christlike moments in your life will happen when you show kindness to someone who cannot repay you. Because that is exactly how God treated us. None of us had anything to offer God. We could not repay him. We could not earn his favor. Yet he moved toward us in grace. Kindness grows in us when we begin to treat people the way God has treated us.

LIE #3

KINDNESS IS WEAKNESS.

Our culture often celebrates aggression, dominance, and winning. Strength is measured by who can assert themselves the most forcefully. Kindness can look soft by comparison.

But Scripture reveals something very different. God's kindness is not weakness. It is power directed toward mercy. In Epistle to the Romans 2:4 we are told that it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance. Think about that for a moment. God could overpower humanity with force. Instead, he changes hearts through kindness.

TRUTH

KINDNESS IS STRENGTH UNDER CONTROL.

Kindness requires humility. It requires restraint. It requires the ability to absorb offense without immediately retaliating. It requires courage to choose grace when pride demands revenge. Anyone can respond with anger. Anyone can defend their ego. But it takes spiritual strength to respond with kindness. That is why kindness is one of the clearest reflections of Christ in a person's life.

Jesus did not treat people as competitors. He did not measure people by what they could offer him. He moved toward the broken, the overlooked, the sinful, and the rejected with compassion. And when the Spirit begins to reshape our hearts, we begin to do the same.

A kind person moves through the world differently. They celebrate the success of others. They look for opportunities to serve. They lift people up instead of tearing them down. In a world obsessed with winning, kindness becomes revolutionary. Because when the Spirit forms kindness in us, we stop trying to win at life. And we start learning how to love.

I know that for a lot of personalities, especially men, kindness can feel like weakness. But it is actually the opposite. Kindness is strength under control. It is the quiet confidence of someone who no longer needs to prove themselves by tearing others down.

I did not fully understand that when I first started competing in jiu

jiitsu. The truth is, I still compete today. I still train hard. I still want to win. In fact, a small part of me still lives by the wisdom of Ricky Bobby's dad in Talladega Nights: "If you're not first, you're last." But competition has changed for me. What once exposed my pride has now become a strength that opens the door to kindness.

You would never believe the number of friends I have made at these tournaments. I have prayed with competitors before matches, even people in my own bracket. I find myself rooting for them and sharing my secrets. Some of my biggest rivals have become my greatest friends. When I lose, I see it differently now. Instead of getting bitter, I realize they just exposed something I need to work on. They helped reveal a hole in my jiu jitsu game.

One day after a tournament my wife said something that made me laugh. She looked at me and said, "You've become a great loser." That is not usually the compliment athletes are hoping for. Nobody grows up dreaming about being known as an excellent loser. But I knew exactly what she meant. Losing no longer controlled my attitude. It no longer exposed the same pride or insecurity it once did. I could lose and learn from it instead of losing and immediately searching for excuses. Competition was no longer robbing me of Christlikeness by stealing my kindness. And that is when I realized something surprising. Even a jiu jitsu tournament can become a place where the fruit of the Spirit begins to grow.

That realization really summarizes this entire chapter. The world disciples us to see life as a competition against other people. It teaches us to constantly compare ourselves and measure our worth by how we rank against others. It trains us to help people who help us and to treat kindness as weakness.

But the Spirit forms something very different in us. The Spirit teaches us that other people are not our rivals. They are our neighbors. When pride loosens its grip on our hearts, kindness begins to grow. When we no longer feel the need to prove ourselves, we are finally free to celebrate others, encourage others, and serve others. In a world obsessed with winning, kindness becomes quietly revolutionary.

DISCUSSION

Questions

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1. In what areas of your life do you find yourself comparing yourself to others the most?
2. Which of the lies about kindness have you seen shaping the way our culture treats people?
3. How does pride make it harder for us to treat others with kindness?
4. Can you think of a moment when someone treated you with kindness when they had nothing to gain from it?
5. What is one practical way you could show kindness to someone this week who might normally feel like a competitor or rival?

CHALLENGE

Who is one person you are tempted to compare yourself to, compete with, or quietly resent, and what is one intentional act of kindness you can show them this week that shifts your heart from comparison to compassion?

UNDISCIPLING Goodness

THE PERFORMANCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

A while back someone left a review of our church online. It was mostly positive. They said they appreciated the message, loved the community, and believed lives were being changed. But then they explained why they could no longer bring their kids. The problem was the people smoking on the sidewalk outside the church.

Apparently that was a deal breaker. Now, if you didn't know the story behind that little group on the sidewalk, I suppose it could look a little rough. But what that reviewer didn't realize is that those people are not just random smokers hanging around a church entrance. That unofficial smoking section is filled with people in recovery from life alter addictions. Every week vans pull up from sober living homes all over the city. Men and women who are trying to rebuild their lives step out of those vans and walk into church. Many of them are learning how to follow Jesus one day at a time. Many of them are fighting battles that most people will never fully understand. Some of them are clean for the first time in years. Some are still figuring it out. Some of them are discovering hope after years of chaos. And yes, some of them are standing on the sidewalk smoking cigarettes.

The irony of that review was hard to miss. Someone looked at a group of people in the middle of a redemption story and saw a moral problem instead of a miracle. They saw cigarette smoke, but they missed the redemption.

Moments like that reveal something about how many of us think about goodness. For a lot of Christians, goodness is mostly about staying clean. Stay away from the wrong influences. Stay away from messy people. Stay away from anything that might stain your reputation. But the Bible describes goodness very differently. In James 1:27 we are told, “Pure and faultless religion is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Notice the order. The first sign of goodness is not avoiding messy people. The first sign of goodness is moving toward people who need help. Goodness is not just what you stay away from. Goodness is what you move toward.

Which raises an uncomfortable question. Is it possible that many of us need to be undisciplined from what we think goodness is?

This is not a new problem. Jesus ran head-first into this problem with the most religious people in Israel. The Pharisees were not the villains of their culture. They were the moral heroes. They memorized Scripture. They prayed constantly. They fasted. They tithed. They built their entire lives around avoiding sin. If you were looking for the “good people” in that society, they were the obvious candidates.

And yet Jesus was constantly clashing with them. Not because they cared about holiness, but because they had slowly turned goodness into **the performance of righteousness**. Their version of goodness looked impressive on the outside, but it had become disconnected from love. It had become more about appearing holy than actually helping people. More about protecting their image than restoring what was broken.

At one point Jesus exposed just how distorted it had become. He walks into a synagogue and sees a man with a shriveled hand. Everyone in the room senses the tension immediately. The Pharisees are watching closely. Not because they care about the man. They are watching to see if Jesus will heal him on the Sabbath so they can accuse him of breaking their interpretation of the law.

Think about that scene. A man who has lived for years with a disabled hand is standing in the middle of the room. In that culture, a physical disability like that was not just inconvenient, it was devastating. Most work at the time required manual labor. Farming, building, fishing, crafting, carrying. A damaged hand could mean the difference between providing for your family or depending on others to survive. Many

people in that day believed physical deformities were signs of judgment or curse, which meant this man likely carried not only physical limitation, but social shame.

And the most religious people in the room are less concerned about the suffering of the man than they are about protecting the appearance of their righteousness. They had become so committed to the performance of righteousness that they were willing to ignore an opportunity to actually do good.

Their definition of goodness prioritized rule-keeping over restoration. They knew how to look righteous in public. They knew how to follow the rules. They knew how to maintain moral credibility. But when confronted with a real human need right in front of them, their version of goodness kept them frozen in place.

Jesus looks around at them and asks a question that cuts straight through the whole situation. Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil? To save life or to destroy it? No one answers. The room goes silent.

Then the Gospel tells us something fascinating. Jesus looks around at them in anger, deeply grieved at the hardness of their hearts. Their version of goodness had become so twisted that helping a suffering man felt like breaking the rules. So Jesus heals the man anyway.

Over and over again Jesus exposed the same problem. The most religious people in the culture had become experts at avoiding sin while failing to actually do good. They had mastered moral appearance, but they had missed mercy. They knew how to keep rules. They knew how to protect their reputation. They knew how to look righteous in public. But when it came to stepping into the messy, inconvenient work of helping people, they often stood at a distance. And if we are honest, the same thing still happens today.

Many Christians have quietly adopted the same definition of goodness that drove Jesus crazy in the first place. Goodness becomes a strategy for staying clean. Avoid the wrong things. Keep your image polished. Make sure no one ever sees you doing anything questionable. Protect the brand. Protect the reputation. Protect the appearance of holiness.

So we become experts at what we don't do. We don't swear. We don't watch rated R movies. We don't smoke cigarettes. We avoid worldly places. And if we have tattoos, there is a Bible verse next to it. We

curate a version of Christianity that looks polished, respectable, and morally tidy. And because we have carefully avoided the obvious sins, we quietly assume we must be good people. But avoiding sin is not the same thing as doing good.

Meanwhile real opportunities to actually do good are happening all around us and we step right over them. The struggling single mom in our church needs help, but we are too busy protecting our schedule. The lonely person sitting by themselves after service could use a conversation, but we slip out the door to beat the parking lot traffic. The neighbor going through a divorce is clearly drowning, but we wave politely and keep walking the dog. The homeless man outside the grocery store asks for help and we suddenly become experts in explaining why giving money would “enable bad behavior.” The teenager growing up without a father in our community desperately needs someone to invest in his life, but mentoring him would require time, patience, and emotional energy. There are people in addiction recovery trying to rebuild their lives one day at a time, but walking with someone through that kind of struggle feels messy and unpredictable. So we pray that someone else will step in.

We say we care about widows and orphans, but we rarely rearrange our lives to actually help one. We say we care about the poor, but most of our lives remain structured around our own comfort and convenience.

But at least we didn’t swear. At least we didn’t watch the wrong movie. At least we didn’t go to the wrong place. At least we kept our reputation clean.

And somehow we convince ourselves that this is what goodness looks like. This is exactly the kind of goodness Jesus relentlessly challenged. Because it looks moral, but it accomplishes almost nothing. It protects our image while leaving broken people exactly where they are. It allows us to feel righteous without ever stepping into the kind of messy situations where real goodness actually happens.

Jesus had no patience for that kind of religion. He did not spend his life protecting his reputation. He spent his life moving toward broken people. He touched lepers. He ate with sinners. He defended the outcast. He stepped into places respectable religious people avoided. Because goodness is not proven by how carefully you avoid sinners. Goodness is proven by whether you are willing to step into the mess

and love them. “True religion is to care for widows and orphans in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (James 1:27)

Both matter. But the order matters. First move toward the broken. Then guard your heart. Real goodness keeps your heart clean while your hands are busy helping people.

The Bible’s idea of goodness is far more disruptive than simple moral restraint. Because goodness in Scripture is not passive. It is active. It moves. It intervenes. It restores. It steps into broken situations and changes outcomes. Goodness is not simply about what you avoid. It is about what you build. And that exposes several lies the world has disciplined us to believe.

LIE #1

GOODNESS LIVES IN THE HEART AND REMAINS MOSTLY INVISIBLE.

The world has disciplined us to believe that goodness is primarily internal. We say things like, “They have a good heart,” as if sincerity alone proves goodness. As long as someone means well, we assume they must be good. Goodness becomes something private, something felt, something hidden safely inside intention. As long as we are not actively hurting anyone, we conclude we must be doing fine. But Jesus describes goodness very differently.

In Matthew 25, when Jesus speaks about the final judgment, the dividing line is not based on what people believed about themselves, or even what they avoided. It is based on what they did.

“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

The evidence of goodness was visible. It could be seen. It could be felt. It could be experienced by the people who were helped. No one could see their hearts, but everyone could see their actions. Because real goodness cannot stay hidden.

TRUTH

GOODNESS IS REVEALED BY WHAT IT RESTORES IN PUBLIC.

The Spirit forms people whose goodness does not remain theoretical. It becomes tangible. It shows up in meals provided, doors opened, burdens lifted, and people cared for. Goodness feeds the hungry. Goodness welcomes the outsider. Goodness notices the overlooked. Goodness moves toward need even when it is inconvenient. Goodness is not proven by intention, but by impact.

LIE #2

GOODNESS KEEPS THE PEACE.

Many people assume goodness means avoiding tension. A good person is agreeable, easygoing, and non-confrontational. They do not rock the boat. They do not challenge what is uncomfortable. They keep things pleasant. They keep things smooth. But Jesus never called us to be peacekeepers. He called us to be peacemakers. In Matthew 5:9 Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”

Peacekeepers avoid conflict in order to maintain comfort. Peacemakers are willing to step into conflict in order to restore what is broken. Peacekeepers protect the appearance of harmony. Peacemakers pursue actual healing. Real peace is not the absence of tension. Real peace is the presence of justice, restoration, and alignment with what is right. Sometimes tension is required before peace can exist.

TRUTH

GOODNESS FIGHTS FOR PEACE.

One of the clearest pictures of this comes when Jesus enters the temple courts and sees what is happening to ordinary people trying to worship God. The temple was supposed to be a place of prayer, repentance, and restoration. Instead, it had become a marketplace built on exploitation. People traveling long distances were required to purchase approved sacrificial animals, but the prices were inflated far beyond what was fair. Currency had to be exchanged into temple-approved coins, and the

exchange rates were intentionally excessive. Those who were already poor were being squeezed even further. Families who came hoping to find forgiveness were instead finding barriers. What was meant to remove obstacles between people and God had become a system that profited from their desperation.

So Jesus made a whip and did something about it. This was deliberate courage. He took the time to braid the cords together, fully aware of what he was about to confront. He knew this would create conflict. He knew it would challenge powerful people. He knew it would cost him. And he did it anyway. He drove out the money changers. He overturned the tables. Coins scattered across the floor. The system that had normalized injustice was suddenly interrupted. Comfort was disrupted. Power was challenged. Exploitation was exposed.

Goodness refuses to pretend everything is fine when people are being harmed. Goodness is willing to create tension if that tension leads to healing. Sometimes goodness is quiet. Sometimes goodness is gentle. Sometimes goodness makes a whip..

LIE #3

GOODNESS IS A RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS.

We have reduced goodness to small, spontaneous gestures. Hold the door. Pay for the coffee behind you. Leave a generous tip. Post an encouraging comment. None of these are wrong, but they are incomplete. When goodness is defined this way, it becomes occasional. Optional. Something we practice when we feel inspired.

Goodness becomes a mood instead of a mindset. It becomes reactive instead of intentional. Or something we sprinkle into our lives without ever allowing it to shape our lives. Random acts of kindness can make a moment better, but they rarely make a person better. They do not require commitment. They do not require inconvenience. They do not require relationship. They cost little, demand little, and therefore change little. It is easy to be kind in passing. It is much harder to be good in relationship.

Because real goodness shows up repeatedly. Real goodness follows through. Real goodness remembers names, notices needs, carries burdens, and stays present when things become complicated. Anyone can

perform a random act. But sustained goodness requires reordered priorities, time, emotional energy. It requires choosing people again and again, long after the moment of inspiration has passed. Biblical goodness is not usually random at all.

TRUTH

GOODNESS REORDERS OUR LIVES SO OTHERS ARE NOT LAST.

Jesus described a life where love reshapes priority. Again and again, he taught that in the kingdom of God the order is reversed. “The first will be last, and the last will be first.” That is not poetic language. It is a new way of living. It is a life where people are no longer interruptions to our agenda. They become the reason for it.

One of the clearest modern pictures of this kind of goodness is Mother Teresa. She did not simply show occasional kindness. She reordered her entire life around people the world had already pushed aside. In the streets of Calcutta, she cared for those suffering from leprosy, a disease that left many disfigured, rejected, and completely isolated. Lepers were often abandoned by family, avoided in public, and treated as if they were no longer fully human. Many were left to die alone.

She moved toward them. She touched skin others refused to touch. She cleaned wounds others would not look at. She wrapped bandages around infections that carried stigma and fear. She sat beside people whose presence made others uncomfortable. She restored dignity to people who had been treated as invisible.

This was not convenient compassion. This was costly love. She did not fit goodness into spare time. She built her days around the needs of the suffering. She did not give what was left over. She gave what was first. Her schedule, her energy, her attention were shaped by the conviction that the forgotten matter to God. She did not simply perform acts of kindness. She became a person of goodness. Goodness is a life where love decides the order.

DISCUSSION

Questions

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1. When you think about being a “good Christian,” do you instinctively think about avoiding sin or actively helping people? What does that reveal about how you have been disciplined?
2. Where in your life are you protecting your comfort, schedule, or reputation instead of stepping into someone else’s need?
3. Who are the widows and orphans in your world right now, the people who are vulnerable, overlooked, or struggling, that God may be putting in front of you?
4. If someone examined your calendar and your bank statement, would they see evidence of goodness that is actively helping people, or mostly a life organized around your own comfort?

CHALLENGE

James says pure religion is caring for widows and orphans in their distress. That means real goodness always has a face attached to it.

This week identify the widow or orphan you have been neglecting. Not in theory. A real person. It might be the single parent who is overwhelmed. The teenager who has no father figure. The person battling addiction who needs someone to walk with them. The lonely neighbor. The struggling family at church. The person everyone else quietly avoids. Ask yourself honestly, who is the person God has placed in front of me that I have been stepping over?

Then do something concrete. Call them. Help them. Show up. Invest time. Rearrange your schedule. Goodness is not proven by how clean your life looks. It is proven by whether you are willing to love the people God has placed in your path.

UNDISCIPLING Faithfulness

THE FEAR OF RISK

Before we ever had a church building, before we had services, before anything existed that resembled an organized church, our church was our apartment. It was me, my wife, and seven friends sitting in our living room every Sunday night. None of them were church people. Most had never seriously followed Jesus before. They were simply friends whose lives had begun changing as they encountered the gospel. We read through the Gospels together. We talked about what Jesus taught. We prayed. We asked questions. Over time, most of them were baptized.

One couple had just made a huge step of faith. They had been living together for years, but after deciding to follow Jesus, they chose to get married and put God first in their relationship. Real change was happening in that little living room. But after a while, something strange started happening. The adventure was fading. We were learning a lot. We were reading the Bible. We were having meaningful conversations. But the more we read about the early church, the more obvious it became that our lives looked nothing like what we were reading.

One night we were studying the book of Acts when the same guy who had recently been baptized leaned forward, pointed at the Bible in his lap, and said something that stopped the whole room. “When are we going to start doing this stuff?” Then he looked around and added, “This is getting boring.”

If you were designing a maturity test for starting ministry, this

group probably would not have passed it. I was already a pastor, but these guys were brand new believers. They did not have Bible college degrees. They did not know systematic theology. Most of them were still figuring out the basics of following Jesus. But they understood one thing. Jesus did not call His followers to sit in circles reading about loving people. He called them to go do it.

So we made a decision that night. Normally we met every Sunday night in our apartment. But from that point forward, the last Sunday of every month we would do something different. We found a laundromat in a rough neighborhood near a large apartment complex. And we decided that once a month we would show up with pockets full of quarters and offer to pay for anyone's laundry who lived there. Instead of just reading about the book of Acts, we were going to try living it.

Were these guys ready for that? Probably not. Were we confident? Definitely not. The whole idea felt risky in more ways than one. Socially risky. Walking up to strangers and starting conversations about faith felt uncomfortable. Emotionally risky. What if no one showed up? What if people rejected us? What if it was awkward? Financially risky. We did not know how many people would come or how much it would cost. Spiritually risky. What if we offered to pray for someone and did not know what to say? Reputationally risky. What if this whole thing just felt strange and ineffective?

It would have been far easier to stay in the apartment discussing theology than to step into an environment we could not control. But that is exactly where faith begins.

The first night came and everyone showed up with bags of quarters. The week before, we had gone door to door handing out simple flyers that said "Free Laundry Night." Still, none of us knew if anyone would actually come. Everyone was nervous. Normally we sat facing inward in a comfortable circle with our Bibles open. Now we were standing in a laundromat, stepping into conversations with people we had never met, offering to pay for their laundry, wondering if anyone would think this was strange.

The whole thing felt awkward from the start. But then something amazing happened. People started showing up. Before long the machines were humming. Baskets were being carried back and forth. Conversations were happening everywhere. Our little group of brand

new Christians suddenly found themselves doing exactly what the body of Christ is meant to do. People were talking with strangers. Helping carry laundry baskets. Listening to stories. Praying with people. Making friends.

The laundromat filled up. The night was uncomfortable, uncertain, and somehow completely beautiful at the same time. At the end of the night, I was walking to my car when a man and his wife approached me. They introduced themselves as the managers of the apartment complex next door and thanked us for what we had done. Then the man said something that caught me completely off guard. “Would you do a Bible study in our apartment?” Then he added, almost apologetically, “We’re not Christians... but would you do that for us?”

If we had stayed in our apartment reading the book of Acts, that never would have happened. But the moment we risked obedience, God opened doors we never could have planned. We ended up starting three Bible studies in that apartment complex. Nine months later, on Easter Sunday when our church officially launched, that apartment manager, his wife, and their kids were baptized.

And that little idea never stopped. For more than fifteen years we have continued offering free laundry across multiple locations. All because one new believer asked a simple question: “When are we going to start doing this stuff?” That is the difference between playing it safe and playing it “faith.” If it doesn’t require risk, maybe it’s not really faith at all.

This is made frighteningly clear in Matthew 25 in the parable of the bags of silver. Jesus tells a story about a master who entrusts his servants with resources before leaving on a journey. One servant receives five bags of silver. Another receives two. Another receives one. The first two servants go immediately and put the money to work. They double what they were given.

We often read that story without realizing how shocking that level of return would have sounded to Jesus’ original audience. Doubling your investment required significant risk. There were no insured markets. No guaranteed returns. No diversified portfolios. To double money in that culture meant bold action. It meant exposure to loss. It meant stepping into uncertainty. It required risk.

The third servant, however, chooses a different path. He buries the

silver. No risk. No uncertainty. No possibility of loss. He protects what was given to him so nothing can go wrong. When the master returns, the servant explains his reasoning: “I was afraid... so I went out and hid your gold in the ground.” His decision was motivated by fear of risk. He assumed faithfulness meant preservation. But the master responds with surprising clarity. “You should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.” In other words, you should have risked something.

The servant thought he was being responsible. The master calls him unfaithful. Because in the kingdom of God, faithfulness is not measured by how well you protect what you were given. It is measured by whether you trusted God enough to use it. Faithfulness is not safe. It is courageous obedience.

And this is where many of us need to be undisciplined. Because the world has disciplined us to believe that minimizing risk is wisdom. Protect your comfort. Protect your routine. Protect your reputation. Protect your time. Protect your energy. Build a life where nothing unpredictable happens and call it maturity. But the kingdom of God has never moved forward through people who played it safe. It has always moved forward through people who trusted God enough to risk obedience.

Looking back on that decision not to play it safe with our Bible study, we had no idea how significant that small risk would become. At the time, it did not feel strategic. It felt awkward. We were simply choosing to trade one comfortable night in our living room for one uncomfortable night in a laundromat. We did not know where it would lead. We did not know what God would do. We just knew we did not want to keep talking about the book of Acts without trying to live it. But that original commitment to risk changed the trajectory of our church.

LIE #1

FAITHFULNESS MEANS DOING THE SAME THING EVEN IF NOTHING IS HAPPENING.

Many people quietly assume faithfulness means staying consistent no matter what the outcome is. Just keep doing the same thing. Keep the routine. Keep the program. Keep the structure. Even when nothing is changing, nothing is growing, and nothing is producing life, we tell

ourselves that staying the same must be a sign of maturity.

We confuse repetition with obedience. We confuse stability with faithfulness. We confuse longevity with fruit. It feels spiritual to say, “I’m just being faithful,” when in reality we may simply be being comfortable. We keep leading the same group, having the same conversations, maintaining the same patterns, all while ignoring the obvious lack of transformation around us. We keep doing what we have always done, not because God is leading us, but because change would require risk. But Scripture never presents faithfulness as passive maintenance.

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Sometimes the most unfaithful thing we can do is continue doing something God has already called us to move beyond.

TRUTH

FAITHFULNESS PRODUCES FRUIT.

Jesus repeatedly teaches that fruit is the evidence of a life aligned with God. In John 15, He says, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” Fruit is not presented as a bonus outcome for a few exceptional believers. Fruit is the natural result of abiding in Christ. Where the Spirit is truly forming a life, growth follows.

Fruit is not always immediate, or dramatic, or easy. In Matthew 25, the master does not evaluate the servants based on how carefully they preserved what they were given. He evaluates what they produced with it. The servants who invested what was entrusted to them were called faithful because their lives multiplied what the master had given.

The servant who buried his talent was not rebuked for rebellion. He was rebuked for fruitlessness. He avoided risk. He was afraid to fail. And he was punished.

Many people assume God is most pleased when nothing goes wrong. But Jesus teaches that God is most glorified when something grows. Faithfulness is not stubbornly repeating the same actions regardless of outcome, it is remaining aligned with the purposes of God until His life begins to multiply through us. Fruit looks like people being discipled. Love increasing. Courage developing. Generosity expanding. Sin losing its grip. Hope returning. Communities being changed. The

character of Christ becoming visible in real lives.

Fruit is evidence that the life of God is flowing. God is not looking for people who simply maintain activity. He is forming people whose lives multiply His life in the world.

LIE #2

FAITHFULNESS MEANS LIVING A BALANCED LIFE.

The world constantly tells us the goal is balance. Work-life balance. Spiritual balance. Family balance. Personal balance. The assumption is that maturity means learning how to keep everything in the air at the same time. Manage your responsibilities carefully. Distribute your energy evenly. Make sure nothing demands too much from you. Keep everything steady, controlled, and sustainable. We are taught to treat life like a juggling act.

But whenever you watch someone juggle, you will notice something important. The objects they are juggling are almost always the same weight. Whether it is balls, clubs, or rings, the reason the juggler can keep everything moving is because each item requires roughly the same amount of effort. The rhythm only works when the weight is consistent.

Life does not work that way. Not everything in life carries the same weight. Some responsibilities are heavier than others. Some priorities carry eternal significance. Some things matter more than others. Trying to treat every part of life as equally important is not wisdom. It is distortion.

Because the moment life throws you something heavier, the juggling act begins to fall apart. If everything in your life is balanced equally, when a truly weighty responsibility enters the picture, you will not simply drop the new item. Most likely, you will drop everything. That is the problem with trying to build a balanced life. Balance assumes everything deserves equal priority.

Jesus teaches the opposite. He never said, "Treat everything as equally important." He said, "Seek first the kingdom of God." First means something carries more weight. First means something receives more attention. First means something determines the direction of everything else. Sometimes you can afford to drop something in life. You can drop certain opportunities. You can drop certain preferences. You

can drop certain comforts. But you can never afford to drop the priorities God has given you.

TRUTH

FAITHFULNESS DISRUPTS BALANCE WITH CLEAR PRIORITIES.

Jesus never taught His followers to live balanced lives. He taught them to live prioritized lives. When He says, “Seek first the kingdom of God,” He is not offering time management advice. He is giving a framework for how life is meant to be ordered. When the kingdom is first, everything else finds its proper place.

Your relationship with God is not one priority among many. It is the center that gives meaning to everything else. Family matters deeply. Work matters deeply. Rest matters deeply. But none of those things carry the same eternal weight as the kingdom of God.

Faithfulness acknowledges that reality. Faithfulness recognizes that life cannot be lived as a juggling act where everything receives equal attention. Faithfulness asks a different question. Not, “How do I keep everything balanced?” but, “What has God called me to hold onto no matter what?” Because when life becomes chaotic, priorities determine what remains. Scripture makes it clear what must remain. Seek first the kingdom. When that priority is clear, decisions become clearer. Distractions become easier to identify. Competing demands lose their power to control you. Faithfulness is not about keeping everything in the air. Faithfulness is about holding onto what matters most.

LIE #3

WE WILL ONLY BE JUDGED FOR BEING UNFAITHFUL.

Many people assume that the only evaluation God will make of our lives is whether we avoided obvious sin. We quietly believe that as long as we did not walk away from God, did not deny Him, and did not fall into blatant disobedience, we have essentially passed the test. Faithfulness becomes defined by what we did not do wrong. We imagine standing before God and simply being relieved that we were not unfaithful. But Scripture presents a much fuller picture of accountability. God is not

only paying attention to rebellion. He is also paying attention to stewardship. He is not only evaluating what we avoided. He is evaluating what we produced.

In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, the servant who buried his talent was not condemned for immorality. He was not rebuked for scandal. He was judged for inactivity. His mistake was not rebellion but refusal to risk. He preserved what was given to him, but he did not multiply it. He played it safe. He protected what he had instead of investing it. And the master's response is startling. The issue was not simply unfaithfulness in the obvious sense. The issue was the absence of fruit.

We often comfort ourselves by thinking, "At least I did not lose what God gave me." But Jesus' teaching makes it clear that preservation is not the goal. Multiplication is.

TRUTH

WE WILL BE JUDGED AND REWARDED FOR FAITHFULNESS.

Scripture consistently teaches that God rewards faithfulness, not merely the avoidance of failure. The first two servants in Matthew 25 are commended with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." They are not praised simply because they avoided mistakes. They are praised because they produced increase. Their faithfulness was expressed through action, courage, initiative, and risk. They stepped into uncertainty trusting that the master valued growth.

Faithfulness is not passive. It is productive. It does not simply guard what has been entrusted to us. It invests it. It stretches it. It multiplies it. God is not only looking for people who refuse to fall away. He is looking for people who will step forward. People who will steward opportunities, relationships, influence, resources, and spiritual gifts in ways that expand His kingdom.

We are not only accountable for what we did wrong. We are accountable for what we did not do at all. Faithfulness is not simply about avoiding sin. Faithfulness is about multiplying what God has placed in our hands so that when we stand before Him, we do not merely say, "I kept it safe," but, "I used it for Your glory."

DISCUSSION

Questions

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1. Which lie about faithfulness challenged you the most, and why do you think that belief has been easy for you to accept?
2. Where in your life have you been “playing it safe” instead of stepping out in faith? What feels risky about trusting God in that area?
3. Jesus teaches that faithfulness produces fruit, not just consistency. What kind of fruit do you think God is currently inviting you to cultivate?
4. What is one area of your life where you have been trying to keep everything “balanced” instead of clearly prioritizing what matters most to God?
5. If you fully believed that God rewards faithfulness, not just the avoidance of failure, what would you start doing differently this year?

CHALLENGE

What is one specific step of obedience you know God has already put on your heart that you have been delaying because it feels uncomfortable, uncertain, or risky? What would it look like to take that step this week?

UNDISCIPLING Gentleness

THE WEAKNESS MYTH

Earlier in this book we talked about the moment Peter tried to cut a man's head off and accidentally settled for his ear. We already established that nobody aims for an ear. Peter was swinging for the head and missed. The Bible records the result politely, but the reality must have been chaos. It was the middle of the night. Torches were flickering. Soldiers and temple guards surrounded Jesus. The disciples were panicking. A man was screaming. And if you have ever seen a head wound, you know they bleed heavily. In a matter of seconds that scene was about to turn into a violent brawl. One sword swing becomes another. Someone retaliates. The crowd surges. Before long people are seriously injured or dead. That is exactly where that moment was headed.

But Jesus stopped it. In Luke 22:51, Jesus says something astonishing in the middle of the chaos, "Put your sword away." Then He does something even more astonishing. He heals the man. Which means someone had to find the ear. Picture the moment for a second. Everyone standing around with torches while someone is searching the ground for a human ear in the dark. The man who lost it is holding the side of his head while blood is everywhere. And then Jesus takes the ear and restores it. Just like that, the violence stops. The shouting stops. The panic stops. The swords stop. What was seconds away from becoming a bloodbath suddenly becomes a miracle. Gentleness is not weakness. It is strength that has nothing to prove.

And that moment reveals something extraordinary about Jesus. This is what the Bible calls gentleness. Not weakness. Not passivity. Not softness. Power under control. When Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23, the word translated gentleness is the Greek word *prautēs*. It is a fascinating word because it does not mean timid or fragile. In the ancient world it was often used to describe a powerful animal that had been trained and brought under control. Think of a wild stallion that has the strength to throw its rider but chooses to respond to the reins. The strength did not disappear. The power is still there. It has simply been directed. That is *prautēs*. Strength restrained. Power disciplined. Authority controlled. In other words, gentleness is not the absence of power. It is the mastery of it.

Power proves itself by restraint. That is exactly what we see in Jesus in that moment in the garden. He was the most powerful person standing there. He could have allowed the disciples to fight. He could have crushed the crowd instantly. He could have ended the entire confrontation in seconds. And He even says so. In Matthew 26:53, Jesus tells Peter, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” That statement would have stunned anyone listening. A Roman legion was roughly 6,000 soldiers. Twelve legions would have been more than 70,000 warriors. And these would not be ordinary soldiers. These would be angels. In the Old Testament a single angel wiped out 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. One angel. Jesus says He could call down more than seventy thousand of them. In other words, the most powerful military force imaginable was one prayer away. That is not weakness. That is overwhelming power. But Jesus chooses restraint. While Peter reached for a sword, Jesus reached for an ear. One escalated the conflict. The other redeemed it.

The world assumes the strongest person in the room is the one who wins the fight. The kingdom of God reveals something very different. The strongest person in the room is the one who has the power to destroy someone and chooses not to. That kind of strength is rare in our world because the world disciples us in the exact opposite direction. The world teaches us that strength means domination. Win the argument. Crush the opponent. Humiliate the other side. Get even. Clap back. Assert your power. Make sure everyone knows you cannot be

pushed around. The world calls the loudest voice strong. The kingdom calls the most controlled voice strong.

But the Spirit forms something very different in the life of a follower of Jesus. The Spirit forms people who have the strength to respond with restraint. People who can win the argument but choose not to humiliate someone. People who can retaliate but choose mercy. People who have the power to escalate a situation but instead bring peace. Anyone can overpower. Anyone can withdraw. Few people know how to restore.

Gentleness is not cowardice. Cowardice avoids conflict because it fears people. Gentleness engages conflict with courage because it fears God. Cowardice stays silent to protect comfort. Gentleness speaks truth to protect people. Cowardice is controlled by the fear of losing approval. Gentleness is controlled by the desire to honor Christ. Gentleness is not the absence of courage. It is courage that refuses to become cruel. Cowardice protects comfort. Gentleness protects people.

You see this all throughout the life of Jesus. He confronted oppressive religious leaders who controlled the entire spiritual system of His nation. These were powerful men with influence, authority, reputation, and the ability to ruin someone's life with a single accusation. And Jesus did not avoid them. He challenged them publicly. In Matthew 23 He stands in front of the crowds and calls them out directly, exposing their corruption, their pride, their manipulation of the people, and the way they twisted religion to serve their own power. These were not gentle words. But notice something important. Jesus never attacked weak people. He never crushed broken people. He never humiliated the sinner who was trying to find God. The woman caught in adultery finds mercy. The tax collectors find friendship. The lepers find healing. The outcasts find dignity. But the powerful men who were exploiting people in the name of religion, Jesus confronted without hesitation. That is gentleness. Gentleness is not the absence of strength. It is strength directed by love and truth. Winning the argument is easy. Winning the person takes gentleness.

Jesus had the courage to confront corruption, but He never used His power to crush people who were already broken. He spoke hard truth to the proud and deep compassion to the humble. That kind of strength is rare because the world teaches us to do the opposite. The world tells us to attack the weak and flatter the powerful. The world tells us to

dominate conversations, prove our superiority, and humiliate anyone who disagrees with us. The world teaches us that if someone challenges you, you should escalate the conflict until you win. But Jesus shows us something completely different. The strongest person in the room is not the one who causes the most damage. The strongest person in the room is the one who has the power to destroy someone and chooses restraint instead. The strongest person is the one who can speak truth without hatred, confront evil without becoming cruel, and carry real authority without needing to dominate others.

Harsh people wound. Passive people watch. Gentle people heal. That kind of strength only grows in a life shaped by the Spirit. Which means if we are going to grow into the kind of people Jesus calls us to be, we are going to have to be undisciplined from the world's version of strength. Because the world has trained us to believe several lies about gentleness.

LIE #1

GENTLENESS IS WEAKNESS.

In John 8, a woman caught in adultery is dragged into the temple courts and thrown at the feet of Jesus. The religious leaders announce to the crowd that she was caught in the act. Then they remind Jesus that the Law of Moses commands that such a woman be stoned. You can feel the tension in the scene. A crowd is forming. Stones are already in people's hands. The woman is humiliated and terrified. The religious leaders are watching closely because this is not really about justice. They are setting a trap for Jesus. If He tells the crowd to stone her, His reputation for mercy collapses. If He refuses, they can accuse Him of ignoring the law. Either way, they think they have Him cornered.

But Jesus does something unexpected. He kneels down and begins writing in the dirt. The crowd presses Him for an answer. Finally He stands and says, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone." Then He kneels down again and keeps writing. One by one the stones begin to drop. The older men leave first. Then the younger ones. Eventually the entire crowd disappears until Jesus and the woman are the only ones left standing there.

Then Jesus looks at her and says, "Neither do I condemn you. Go

now and leave your life of sin.”

Jesus had the authority to condemn her. He had the wisdom to dismantle the trap. He had the power to publicly expose the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. But He chose restraint. He defended the vulnerable without destroying the guilty. He upheld truth without crushing the person standing in front of Him. Anyone can throw a stone. It takes strength to drop it.

Gentleness is not pretending sin does not matter. Jesus clearly tells the woman to leave her life of sin. Truth is still spoken. Standards are still upheld. But dignity is preserved. Hope is extended. Restoration is made possible. Truth without gentleness becomes cruelty. Gentleness without truth becomes compromise. Spirit-formed gentleness carries both.

TRUTH

GENTLENESS IS STRENGTH UNDER CONTROL.

The world defines strength as dominance. Win the argument. Get the last word. Prove you are right. Make sure no one thinks they can challenge you. Power is often loud, forceful, and intimidating. But the Kingdom of God reveals a different kind of strength. Gentleness is not the absence of power. It is power brought under control. It is strength guided by love rather than ego. It is authority that does not need to crush people in order to prove itself.

Jesus describes His own heart this way in Matthew 11:29: “I am gentle and humble in heart.” The One who spoke creation into existence calls Himself gentle. The One who calmed storms, confronted hypocrisy, and carried the authority of heaven demonstrated strength without harshness. Jesus was never passive. He spoke truth clearly. He corrected error. He challenged religious pride. Yet His strength was always used to restore, not destroy.

Gentleness is not avoiding hard conversations. It is having them without hostility. It is not pretending everything is fine. It is addressing what is wrong while preserving dignity. The Greek word often translated gentleness is *prautēs*. It was used to describe strength that has been trained and brought under control. The power is still fully present, but it is directed rather than reckless.

Gentleness means your emotions do not control you. Your strength

does not intimidate others. Your words do not need to wound in order to be heard. You can speak truth without anger. You can correct without contempt. You can disagree without dishonor. You can lead without overpowering.

Gentleness flows from security in God. When your identity is rooted in Christ, you do not need to defend yourself aggressively or dominate every interaction. Insecure people escalate. Secure people remain steady. Insecure people need to win arguments. Secure people care about winning people. Jesus, the strongest man who ever lived, described His own heart as gentle. Which leads to the second lie.

LIE #2

IF YOU DON'T DEFEND YOURSELF, PEOPLE WILL WALK ALL OVER YOU.

This lie runs deep in our culture. We are told that if someone insults you, you have to respond. If someone challenges you, you have to win the argument. If someone disrespects you, you have to put them in their place. Never let someone get the last word. Never let someone think they beat you. Never let someone walk away thinking you lost.

So people live like every conversation is a cage match. Every disagreement becomes a debate. Every criticism becomes a war. Every comment online becomes a battlefield where everyone is trying to prove how smart, how right, and how superior they are. But what we call standing our ground is often just pride looking for a microphone.

When you look at Jesus, you see a completely different kind of strength. Jesus was insulted constantly. His motives were questioned. His character was attacked. People accused Him of being demon-possessed. Religious leaders publicly slandered Him. Crowds mocked Him. And many times He simply refused to defend Himself.

During His trial, false accusations were thrown at Him while He stood silent. Soldiers beat Him. They spit on Him. They mocked Him with a crown of thorns. And the One who had the power to summon legions of angels did not retaliate. That is not weakness. That is terrifying strength. The strongest person in the room is not the one who wins every argument. The strongest person in the room is the one who no longer needs to. Insecurity demands the last word. Security knows

when silence is stronger.

Gentleness does not mean you never speak. It means you do not speak from the need to prove yourself. When your identity is secure in Christ, you are no longer fighting for approval in every conversation. You are no longer protecting your ego as if your value depends on winning. You are no longer threatened by disagreement. You can absorb an insult without exploding. You can hear criticism without becoming defensive. You can walk away from an argument that would have consumed the rest of the evening. Cowardice hides. Pride attacks. Gentleness stands steady. People who need to prove their strength rarely possess it. People who truly possess strength rarely need to prove it.

TRUTH

GOD IS YOUR DEFENDER, SO YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE.

One of the deepest fears behind defensiveness is the belief that if you do not stand up for yourself, no one will. We assume that silence means losing. We assume that letting something go means weakness. We assume that if we do not fight for our reputation, it will be taken from us.

But Scripture repeatedly shows that God Himself takes responsibility for defending His people. Isaiah 54:17 says, “No weapon formed against you shall prosper.” Exodus 14:14 says, “The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.” Romans 12:19 says, “Do not take revenge... for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

When you trust God as your defender, you are freed from the exhausting need to defend yourself in every situation. Not every accusation requires a response. Not every misunderstanding requires correction. Not every insult deserves your attention. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can say is nothing at all.

Jesus demonstrated this strength repeatedly. He answered sincere questions, but He often refused to engage with accusations rooted in pride. He did not chase every critic. He did not correct every false statement. He did not interrupt every insult. He was not controlled by the opinions of others.

Gentleness gives you the freedom to choose your battles wisely. It allows you to respond instead of react. It allows you to speak when it is helpful and remain silent when it is not. It allows you to prioritize

relationship over ego. It allows you to care more about truth than about appearing right.

When your identity is secure in Christ, disagreement does not threaten you. Criticism does not define you. Misunderstanding does not destabilize you. You do not need to control every narrative. God is fully capable of handling your reputation.

Strength is not found in constant self-defense. Strength is found in quiet confidence that God sees, God knows, and God vindicates. You can be misunderstood and remain at peace. You can be criticized and remain steady. You can be overlooked and remain secure. Gentleness is not weakness. It is confidence that does not panic when challenged. You do not have to win every argument to walk in authority. When God is your defender, you are free to live without the burden of constantly defending yourself. Which leads to the third lie.

LIE #3

GENTLENESS IS COWARDICE.

We have already established that gentleness does not mean you are weak. Only strong people can restrain themselves enough to be gentle. The same is true about courage. Gentleness is not cowardice. Only brave people can trust God to handle something when they clearly have the ability to handle it in their own strength. Capable people choose gentleness. Incapable people are simply helpless.

Many people assume that if someone is gentle, it must mean they are passive. Quiet must mean insecure. Calm must mean intimidated. But often the opposite is true.

The person who is calm is the one who is most in control. The person who is measured is the one who is most confident. The person who is gentle is often the one who is most dangerous, because they have power but do not need to display it. Cowardice runs from tension, pride escalates tension, but gentleness walks into tension with peace. Jesus was never passive, but He was always gentle. When Peter tried to stop Jesus from going to the cross, Jesus confronted him directly. When religious leaders distorted Scripture and burdened people with man-made rules, Jesus publicly rebuked them. When He entered the temple and saw exploitation, He overturned tables and drove out corruption.

Gentleness does not remove courage, it purifies courage.

Cowardice stays silent to avoid discomfort. Gentleness speaks because love refuses to let destruction continue. Cowardice watches people harm themselves and says nothing. Gentleness cares enough to intervene. Cowardice prioritizes personal comfort, gentleness prioritizes what is right. It takes courage to remain calm when others are escalating. It takes courage to tell the truth without becoming harsh. It takes courage to set boundaries without bitterness. It takes courage to stand firm without becoming hard. Gentleness is not the absence of bravery. Gentleness is disciplined bravery.

TRUTH

GENTLENESS IS COURAGE THAT TRUSTS GOD.

Gentleness requires confidence that God is in control. It requires trusting that obedience matters more than winning. It requires believing that God can defend, vindicate, and establish you better than self-promotion ever could. Only courageous people can surrender their right to prove themselves. Only courageous people can choose patience when they have the power to dominate. Only courageous people can respond with peace when they could easily overpower.

Galatians 6:1 instructs believers to restore someone caught in sin with a spirit of gentleness. Restoration requires courage because it requires stepping into uncomfortable situations and caring enough to help someone change rather than simply judging from a distance. Anyone can criticize, but few people are willing to restore.

Jesus, the bravest man who ever lived, was also the gentlest. He faced rejection without retaliation. He endured injustice without hatred. He spoke truth without fear. He loved people who crucified Him. That is not cowardice. That is courage surrendered to God.

Gentleness is not the absence of bravery. Gentleness is bravery that trusts God to handle what we no longer need to control.

DISCUSSION

Questions

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1. Where in your life are you most tempted to prove your strength instead of practice restraint? What would gentleness look like in that situation?
2. Which is harder for you personally: speaking truth with gentleness, or trusting God enough not to defend yourself? Why?
3. Think about a recent conflict or disagreement. Did you respond more like Peter with the sword or like Jesus with the healing touch? What would a gentle response have looked like?
4. In what situations do you confuse gentleness with weakness or cowardice? How does Jesus' example challenge that assumption?
5. What would change in your relationships if your primary goal was not to win the argument, but to win the person?

UNDISCIPLING Self-Control

THE MYTH OF FREEDOM

A few years ago I had a bad mountain biking accident and spent four days in the hospital. When they finally sent me home, I still couldn't move around much, so they wheeled an actual hospital bed into my bedroom. That bed became my world for a while. With nowhere to go and not much I could do, I had a lot of time to kill. That's when I discovered TikTok.

At first the videos were random. But after a few days something strange started happening. The app began learning me. Suddenly my feed became this bizarre but strangely perfect blend of content. Jiu-jitsu clips. Short preaching clips. Leadership insights. Funny church humor. Then right in the middle of it all would be a video of some guy restoring a rusty wrench from 1872 with dramatic music playing in the background. Then a power washing video where someone cleans a filthy driveway and somehow it feels deeply satisfying. Then something ridiculous that made me laugh out loud. It was this strange mix of meaningful things and completely meaningless things. And it worked.

The algorithm had me figured out. I could open the app to watch one video and suddenly time would disappear. Ten minutes would turn into thirty before I even realized what had happened. There were even moments when the TikTok app itself would try to stop me and tell me to take a break. Imagine that. The very app designed to keep me scrolling was now politely suggesting I step away. But I would just look at the screen and say something like, "Listen, I'm on painkillers with three

fractures in my hip, broken ribs, and a snapped collarbone. Leave me alone.” Then I’d keep scrolling.

Eventually something clicked for me. The problem was not that TikTok was bad. The problem was that it was too good. The algorithm had become incredibly skilled at feeding my impulses. It knew exactly what would keep me watching. If I paused on something for a few seconds, the next five videos would look just like it. The app had essentially learned how my brain worked and then built a feed designed to keep me there as long as possible. And that’s when I realized something uncomfortable. If something that small had that much control over my attention, I had a bigger problem than social media. My impulses were running the show. If I couldn’t control something small, it was controlling me.

So eventually I deleted the app. Not because every video was evil. Not because social media itself is sinful. I deleted it because I realized something important. Our culture constantly tells us to follow your heart. Trust your instincts. Listen to your feelings. Do what feels right. In other words, be free. But if you actually try living that way long enough, you eventually discover something surprising. Your impulses do not lead to freedom. They lead to dependence. They promise satisfaction but quietly create patterns you cannot easily escape. They promise relief but slowly shape habits that begin to control you.

The myth of freedom says real freedom means doing whatever you want. But the person who cannot say no to themselves is not free. They are simply obedient to whatever desire happens to be loudest in the moment. Real freedom is not the absence of restraint. Real freedom is the presence of self-control. Which exposes the first lie.

LIE #1

BOUNDARIES ARE FOR THE WEAK

A lot of people think boundaries are a sign of weakness. Strong people, we imagine, should be able to handle anything. No limits. No restrictions. No guardrails. Just raw discipline and iron willpower. I used to think that way too.

Years ago we bought a trampoline for our kids. The big kind with the circular frame and the tall poles where you can attach one of those

safety nets around the edge. When I was putting it together, I remember looking at that net and thinking it was unnecessary. Growing up we didn't have safety nets on trampolines. You just jumped and hoped for the best. A little danger was part of the fun. So I made a very confident dad decision. I didn't install the net.

To be fair, the kids had a blast and no one got hurt. Everything worked out fine. Then we moved to a new house. When I set the trampoline up again, my wife convinced me to install the net this time. I still thought it was unnecessary, but I figured I would give it a try.

And the moment that net went up, everything changed. Suddenly they were bouncing off the sides. Running across the trampoline. Launching themselves into flips they had never attempted before. They were diving, spinning, crashing into the net, laughing, and doing things that would have given the old no-net version of me a mild heart attack. They had way more fun. Why? Because the boundary created freedom.

Without the net they had to stay in the middle to stay safe. But once the boundary was in place, they could use the entire trampoline without fear of flying off the edge. That is exactly how boundaries work in life. The world tells you that boundaries restrict your freedom. The truth is they protect it. The lie says strong people should not need limits. But every healthy life has guardrails. Athletes have training disciplines. Financially wise people have spending limits. Healthy marriages have relational boundaries. People who want to grow spiritually establish habits that protect their attention and their time.

TRUTH

BOUNDARIES DO NOT WEAKEN YOUR LIFE. THEY STRENGTHEN WHAT MATTERS MOST.

Every meaningful freedom in life is protected by a boundary. The freedom of financial peace is protected by the boundary of a budget. The freedom of physical health is protected by the boundary of disciplined habits. The freedom of a strong marriage is protected by the boundary of exclusivity. The freedom of a clear conscience is protected by the boundary of integrity. The freedom of spiritual intimacy with God is protected by the boundary of time set apart for Him.

We tend to think boundaries shrink our lives, but the opposite is

true. Boundaries concentrate our energy on what actually matters. Without them, everything competes for our attention and very little actually grows.

A married person who establishes emotional boundaries with co-workers is not restricting their life. They are protecting intimacy at home. A leader who sets limits on their schedule is not missing opportunities. They are preserving clarity so they can say yes to the right ones. A person who limits screen time is not becoming disconnected. They are becoming more present in real relationships. A family that chooses to live below their means is not depriving themselves. They are purchasing peace.

The absence of boundaries does not create freedom. It creates vulnerability. Without financial boundaries, spending quietly becomes stress. Without relational boundaries, small compromises slowly become betrayal. Without time boundaries, urgency crowds out calling. Without moral boundaries, short-term pleasure often produces long-term regret.

Most people do not lose their freedom all at once. They lose it gradually, decision by decision, moment by moment, without realizing the direction they are heading. One more drink becomes a dependency. One more late night becomes chronic exhaustion. One more compromise becomes a pattern. One more distraction becomes a lifestyle. No one plans to drift. Drift happens when there are no guardrails.

Boundaries are not about restriction. They are about direction. They keep your life moving toward what you actually want instead of what feels easiest in the moment. Boundaries do not shrink your life. They protect the life you actually want.

LIE #2

FREEDOM MEANS DOING WHATEVER YOU WANT

Once people reject boundaries, the next lie usually follows right behind it. Freedom means doing whatever you want. No limits. No restraint. No one telling you what to do. Just follow your impulses and enjoy life.

That idea sounds exciting for about five minutes. But if you look closely at people who live this way, something strange becomes obvious. They rarely look free. They are controlled by their appetites. Controlled by food. Controlled by alcohol. Controlled by pornography. Controlled

by anger. Controlled by approval. Controlled by comfort. Controlled by distraction.

The person who cannot say no to themselves is not free. They are owned by their impulses. Jesus said this plainly in John 8:34, “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” That is the part modern culture tries very hard not to say out loud.

The world promises freedom through indulgence. Do what you want. Chase what you feel. Follow every impulse. But indulgence does not produce freedom. It produces slavery. Every appetite grows when it is fed. Every impulse becomes stronger when it is obeyed. Over time the things that once felt like choices start feeling like necessities.

The drink becomes a habit. The scrolling becomes a compulsion. The anger becomes a reflex. The pleasure becomes an addiction. And suddenly the person who thought they were free discovers they cannot stop.

Scripture speaks directly to this illusion. In 1 Corinthians 6:12 Paul writes, “I have the right to do anything,” you say, but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything,” you say, but I will not be mastered by anything. That is real freedom.

TRUTH

SELF-CONTROL DOES NOT LIMIT FREEDOM. IT PROTECTS IT FROM BEING STOLEN BY IMPULSE.

People who accomplish meaningful things almost always live with clear limits. They guard their time. They guard their habits. They guard their relationships. They guard their focus. Not because they are weak, but because they understand something powerful. Your future is shaped by what you allow into your life.

A river without banks does not become more powerful. It becomes a swamp. The banks do not restrict the river. They give it direction. They allow the water to build strength and move somewhere meaningful. The same is true for your life. When your time has no boundaries, distraction takes over. When your money has no boundaries, spending controls you. When your attention has no boundaries, your mind becomes scattered. When your relationships have no boundaries, unhealthy dynamics creep in.

The person who refuses boundaries eventually becomes controlled by whatever impulse is loudest in the moment. And that is the myth of freedom.

LIE #3

WORDS ARE JUST WORDS.

Our culture treats speech like it has no real weight. “I didn’t mean it.” “I was just joking.” “I was just venting.” “That’s just how I talk.” Words are often treated like momentary reactions instead of meaningful forces. We speak quickly, post quickly, react quickly, and assume everything will simply move on. But words rarely disappear as easily as we think they do.

A sarcastic comment can linger in someone’s mind for years. A harsh statement spoken in anger can quietly reshape a marriage. A careless label spoken over a child can become part of how they see themselves for decades. Words do not simply pass through the air. They land somewhere. They take root somewhere. They shape something.

The lie that words are harmless allows impulse to take control. When we believe our speech has no lasting effect, we feel free to react without restraint. We interrupt. We exaggerate. We criticize. We gossip. We lash out. The mouth becomes the quickest outlet for whatever emotion rises in the moment. But when impulse controls our words, impulse is controlling us.

A person who must always respond is not free. A person who cannot stay silent is not free. A person who constantly needs the last word is not free. They are being mastered by the need to react. The myth of freedom tells us expression equals freedom, but many people are simply being ruled by whatever they feel in the moment.

TRUTH

THE POWER OF LIFE AND DEATH IS IN THE TONGUE.

Scripture does not treat words as small things. Proverbs 18:21 says the tongue carries the power of life and death. That is not poetic exaggeration. It is spiritual reality. Words can crush confidence or awaken

courage. Words can fracture trust or begin healing it. Words can stir faith or reinforce fear. Every time we speak, we participate in either building something or tearing something down.

Most people underestimate how deeply words shape identity. A child repeatedly told they are a disappointment often grows into an adult who believes it. A spouse constantly criticized eventually begins to withdraw. A friend who is consistently encouraged begins to believe they can step into more. Words do not just describe reality. They often help create it. What is spoken repeatedly becomes believed deeply.

Self-control in speech is not about becoming silent. It is about becoming intentional. People formed by the Spirit recognize that their words carry influence. They speak encouragement when someone feels weak. They speak truth when someone is drifting. They speak hope when someone feels stuck. They do not use words carelessly because they understand that words are never neutral.

Spiritual disciplines like fasting train this kind of freedom. Fasting reminds your body that it is not in charge. Your cravings do not control you. Your impulses are not your authority. Over time, that same strength begins to shape your speech. You do not feel the need to express every opinion. You do not feel the need to win every argument. You do not feel the need to react to every offense.

The lie says words are just words. Scripture says words carry life and death. Freedom is not saying everything you think. Freedom is having the strength to speak words that give life. When the Spirit forms self-control in a person, their mouth no longer spreads fire without thinking. It becomes a source of life.

DISCUSSION

Questions

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1. Where in your life do you most feel the tension between what is permissible and what is actually beneficial? What does that reveal about what may be mastering you?
2. Which impulse is hardest for you to resist right now: comfort, distraction, approval, control, expression, or something else? How is that impulse shaping your decisions?
3. Think about your words this past week. Did they mostly bring life or create damage? What patterns do you notice in the way you speak when you are stressed, tired, or frustrated?
4. How does our culture's definition of freedom differ from the kind of freedom described in this chapter? Where have you personally believed the myth that freedom means doing whatever you feel?
5. What is one practical way you could begin practicing self-control this week (for example: fasting from food, social media, negative speech, defensiveness, or constant distraction)? How might that practice help break the power of impulse in your life?

CHALLENGE

What is one impulse that has been quietly gaining influence in your life, and what specific boundary will you put in place this week to ensure that impulse does not master you?

CONCLUSION

Keep Becoming

“They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.”

— *John 17:16*

Jesus said His followers would be in the world, but not of the world. We live here, work here, raise families here, and build our lives here, but we are no longer meant to be shaped by the same lies that shape everything around us.

The nine lies in this book are not the only lies the world has disciplined us to believe, but they are some of the most common. The world has trained us to put self first, to chase happiness as the highest goal, to try to control everything so we can feel secure, to measure our value by productivity, to compare ourselves constantly, to perform in order to appear good, to avoid risk so we never fail, to confuse gentleness with weakness, and to call indulgence freedom.

But a true disciple of Jesus begins to recognize those lies quickly. What once sounded normal begins to sound empty. What once felt compelling begins to lose its pull. You begin to see clearly what is forming you and where it is leading you.

You are becoming a person whose love is not centered on self, but reflects the sacrificial love of Jesus. A person whose joy is not fragile because it is not dependent on circumstances. A person who experiences peace without needing to control everything. A person who is not rushed or driven by the constant pressure to produce, but is learning to

trust God's timing. A person who is free from constant comparison and able to celebrate others without feeling threatened. A person whose goodness is real, not performed for approval, but formed from the inside out. A person who remains faithful even when it is costly. A person whose gentleness is not weakness, but strength under control. A person who is not mastered by impulse, but walks in real freedom.

This is the life the Spirit is forming in you.

The world may not always understand this kind of life, because it is shaped by different values. But that is not something to fear. It is something to expect. When you are no longer being disciplined by the same lies, you will no longer look exactly the same.

You will look like Jesus.