

Life: A Hero's Story / Unit 2: The Rescued Life

3: Life with God Alone / October 20, 2019

Key Texts: Psalm 46.10; Luke 3.21-22; Luke 4.42; Mark 1.35; Luke 5.16; Luke 6.12; Luke 9.18; Luke 11.1; Luke 22.42; Luke 23.34; Matthew 6.6; Isaiah 26.4

Key Words: Atheists, Practical atheists, With God, For God, Spiritual, Prayer, Listening, Absurd, Obedient, Discipline, Quiet, Busyness, Noise, YouVersion, Verse of the Day

Summary: Following Jesus isn't just about believing in God and waiting for heaven; nor even just about doing life FOR God; it's about doing life WITH God right now. The discipline of a daily quiet time with God is extremely hard, but well worth it. Today we launch a 30 day "Verse of the Day" challenge.

Video clips starting slowly, building rapidly (pink noise / busy ants timelapse)

- ***Video Clip:*** That's Monday. Busyness and noise, then sleep.
- ***Video Clip:*** That's Tuesday. More busyness, more noise. Then sleep.
- ***Video Clip:*** That's Wednesday. People to see, things to do. Even when we're quiet, it's not really quiet. Too quiet is uncomfortable, isn't it?
- ***Video Clip:*** Thursday. Packing in as much as we can. We don't want to miss anything. Busyness and noise.
- ***Video Clip:*** Friday. And when we realize it's just more of the same, we add volume ... we increase the busyness, and the noise.

It's easy to overwhelm the still, small voice of God, isn't it? Because God usually whispers. You really don't want God to raise his voice! We live in a world, we live in a way designed to overwhelm the still, small voice of God, don't we? In fact, did you know we have an enemy who does not want us to hear the voice of God? I'm serious. He doesn't want you to listen to God! And if you look around, you have to admit, the notion of an enemy, dragging people away from God is not all that far-fetched. We have an enemy who has incredible power over this world ... for now ... and he does not want you close to God. ... We'll leave that for now.

Now, I'm going to be talking specifically to two kinds of people this morning. These two kinds of people will include all of you guys who are not Jesus followers yet, and most of us who are. You see, I think most of us Jesus followers mess this one up too.

Here's type 1: Atheists, and practical atheists. People who don't believe in God, and people who say they believe in God, but who live like they don't. Which, I think, describes ... most who call themselves Christians. We say we believe in God, but for the most part we pretty much ignore him, except maybe for an hour or so on Sunday mornings. It's certainly not a 24/7 deal, right?

You see, I think the relationship between most Christians and God is kind of like that of a bad marriage. Some of you guys have been in a bad marriage, so you will know exactly what I'm talking about. The rest of you have either seen them, or you can imagine it. Two people living in the same house, but not really doing life together. Days without talking. Perhaps when words are spoken, they are courteous enough, but not intimate. Two people with separate dreams - clashing dreams, often. Separate goals, separate values. He calls her his wife, she calls him her husband, but those are just words, aren't they? Isn't that how so many "Christians" do life with God? Like a bad marriage? No real communication, no shared dreams, shared goals, shared values ... no real ... relationship?

And then there are us type 2s (because, I'm a type 2) ... We type 2 people believe in God, sometimes fiercely, but we aren't very comfortable spending time with him. We bust our tails FOR him ... sometimes, but we don't work very hard at being WITH him ... usually. Brief spurts, perhaps. I am very comfortable working "FOR" God, I am quite passionate about working "FOR" God. But, to be perfectly honest, I'm not very good at being "WITH" him. Most of the time we are ... distant.

Now, bottom line, both types don't get it. We don't get it! It's not what we were made for. It's not satisfying ... for God, or for us. This is weird, listen: God doesn't just want you to believe in him; he wants to do life WITH you. He wants to do life WITH every one of us! God doesn't just want you to believe that Jesus is his Son, and that Jesus paid for your sins on that cross, and then he bested death itself, which gives you a path to heaven. No: Almighty God, our Creator God, wants to do life with you right here, right now. What we're doing here this morning is not about getting you to believe some stuff, or follow some rules, or else you'll burn. God - God Almighty - your Creator, actually wants a relationship with you. I'm serious! As absurd as that sounds. And a healthy relationship requires - it requires spending time with, and doing things with, a doing life WITH ... God.

Like I said, I am very comfortable believing in God, and working for God ... way more comfortable than being with God, doing life with God ... every single day. But ... the best days I have ever spent are not those days I have done something good for my God; the best days I have ever spent are those that I have actually been in his presence, and felt his touch. Listen: God doesn't need me! He doesn't need my mind, my words, my energy! He doesn't need anything I can do FOR him ... anything more than you need anything your 3 year-old grandchildren can do for you. But for some crazy reason, God flat out enjoys working through me, and, more than that, spending time WITH me, go figure. I don't know why! Sometimes I don't like spending time with me! But there have been moments ... not too often, but moments ... when his presence, and his touch have blown me away. You?

Now, if you are a Jesus follower, this next piece is a no brainer. But even if you are not, you might still not push back. Here it is: We believe Jesus was the most "spiritual" person ever. Would you buy that? Jesus set the bar for the perfect "spiritual" life ... and still Jesus craved quiet time with God. One of the smarter philosopher, paleontologist, geologist, theologians of the last century - a guy named Pierre Teilhard de Chardin - said it like this. He said, "We are not (none of us are) human beings having a spiritual experience. We are (we are) spiritual beings having a human experience." Do you buy that? I do. You are not just an animal, you are a spiritual being. Of all the creatures on this earth we are the only ones with the capacity for a spiritual relationship with our Creator. That's part of what it means to be created in God's image. Well, the most spiritual man ever craved time with God. And if Jesus needed it, I do too! And you do too!

I want to race through the Gospel of Luke and touch down on those places where Jesus looked for ways to spend some quiet time with God.

- (Luke 3.21-22) Right at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus went to John the Baptist to get baptized. Why Jesus wanted to get baptized, I don't know. If there was ever anyone who didn't need baptism, it was Jesus. Maybe he did it as an example for us; maybe he did it as a way to identify with us; whatever. But Luke says, "One day when the crowds were being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. (How cool!) As he was praying" ... as he was praying, as Jesus, the Son of God, was praying ... because if God isn't in the water with you, the water is just getting you wet ... "As he was praying the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove." Listen, as God, Jesus doesn't need to pray. As a man, he needed it just like we do. You need to talk to God. You need to listen to God.

- (Luke 4.42) Next chapter: Jesus is healing all these people, he's casting out demons. And, Luke says, "Early the next morning Jesus went out to an isolated place. The crowds searched everywhere for him, and when they finally found him, they begged him not to leave them." Why was Jesus looking for an isolated place? Well, he wasn't out for an early morning run; he wasn't looking for a time and place for some "me time," or to catch up on his Facebook and Instagram. Mark tells us he went there to pray. (Mark 1.35) Listen: the most spiritual man ever craved quiet time with God. And if Jesus needed it, chances are I do too, and you do too..
- (Luke 5.16) Next chapter, Luke puts it like this. He says, "Jesus often (often) withdrew to the wilderness for prayer." Often: it was a commonplace, a habit, his normal. And, I suspect, God means it to be our "normal," as creatures created in the image of God, created to do life with God.
- (Luke 6.12) Next chapter, Jesus is doing it again. Of course he is! It was his norm. Now the Jewish leaders are after him, they are plotting to take him down. Jesus isn't running, he going right back into the thick of it. But, Luke says, "One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night." All night! This personal time with God is a big deal for Jesus. This isn't one of those 10 words or less prayers that tend to be my normal. The world is getting hostile, and he's got some important work to do, so Jesus craves some time with God. Have you ever been there, felt that? I have! I suspect all of you have been in really tough spots, but maybe not all of you recognized that what you were really needing was some time with your God.
- By chapter 9 (v 18) Luke's story of Jesus is starting to turn, he starts heading for the cross. But right before he heads towards Jerusalem Jesus takes his disciples along for one of his "quiet times" with God. Luke says, "One day, Jesus left the crowds to pray alone. Only his disciples were with him." He wanted them to watch ... he wanted them to learn. He wants us to watch ... and learn. And that's when he started asking them, "Have you figured out who I really am?" do you get it yet?" I suspect he wants to ask you the same. And I guess, as they watched Jesus pray, the disciples began to get it. He was showing them, not just how to do life FOR God, but how to do life WITH God.
- Two chapters later Luke says, "Once Jesus was in a certain place praying. As he finished, one of his disciples came to him and said, "Lord, teach us to pray." (Luke 11.1) "We need to learn to do that. We need some of that, too. We want to do it like you do, Jesus." Smart guys! So, Jesus taught ... us ... how to pray ... "Our Father in heaven, holy be your name

...” And they listened, and they learned, and they passed it on; we still pray that prayer.

- And then, right before he is arrested, and beaten, and flogged, and crucified, Jesus prays those amazing prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Father, not my will, but yours be done.” (Luke 22.42) Have you ever prayed that prayer? You need to!
- And the next day, on the cross, Jesus prays: “Father forgive them, because they don’t have a clue!” (Luke 23.34) And then he prays, “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.” (Luke 23.46) Because, we really are spiritual beings, having a human experience, aren’t we? These bodies are very temporary; our spirits are not.

Guys, we weren’t created just to believe in God. That’s not enough; that won’t satisfy; that won’t lead you to a life well lived. We were created to do life WITH God - not just FOR him, but to do life WITH God. Which means, we give attention to the spiritual side of us, as well as to the physical. Guys if we spent half as much time taking care of our spiritual side as we do obsessing over our bodies, I think life would get way richer, way better, don’t you?

But ... it’s going to be hard. How many of you guys have ever tried to diet? ... Now, how many of you guys have ever quit a diet? Me too. I go on two or three diets every year. In fact, I started one last January, the wussiest diet I could concoct. And it went quite well for 2 months ... I think. Oh well! How many of you guys have started an exercise program? ... Maybe you bought a membership at a gym, or bought some gadget from an infomercial that would finally give you that beach body? How many of you have quit an exercise program? ... Yeah, me too. Bunches of them. It takes discipline, doesn’t it? More than most of us are willing put in.

Well, spiritual fitness is even harder. It takes discipline too. How many of you guys have ever started some Bible reading program, or started setting aside some daily quiet time with God? ... And how many of you guys have quit? ... Yeah, me too. It takes work, it takes discipline, because the forces working against you are even more powerful than whatever nonsense causes us to quit a diet, or the gym. But it’s so worth it to keep trying!

Here’s why it’s so hard. You see, usually ... usually ... God is very, very quiet, and very, very gentle ... for now. Because God won’t force himself on us, yet. He wants us to choose him. He wants us to choose to follow him. He wants us to choose to do life with him. So usually God whispers ... which is all we can handle without being blown away by him. God whispers, and he lets us drown

him out. And we are so busy, and we are so noisy ... and our world is so busy, and our world is so noisy ... that it is very difficult ... usually ... to hear God. That's why he says: Be still, be quiet, hush ... and know that I am God. (Psalm 46.10) Hush now! Stop talking! Stop texting, stop tweeting, stop surfing, stop playing ... and know that he is God. We are so noisy, and so busy. Who wants to be still, and know he is God? So, we live these stupid lives!

One great Christian teacher named Henri Nouwen tells us that the word "absurd" is from the Latin, "surdus," which means, "deaf." A life that is deaf to God is absurd. We were made to do life WITH God. Of all the creatures on this earth we were made to do life WITH God. So, to be deaf to him is ... literally ... absurd! And, Nouwen says, the word "obedience" can be traced back to the Latin word "audire," which means, "listening." To be obedient you have to listen. And then Nouwen connects the two. He says, your life doesn't have to be absurd! You don't have to do life deaf to God. He created you to listen, to be with him, to do life with him ... an obedient life. Because that's when life comes alive!

But ... listening to God requires some solitude. And some of you guys flat out hate solitude. And listening to God requires some quiet. And some of you guys can't stand the quiet. And listening to God requires that you stop talking, sometimes. And that's hard for some of you guys. And, horror of horrors, listening to God requires shutting off your phone sometimes; and quitting work on your to do list sometimes; and shutting off your TV, or your computer sometimes, so you can give God your undivided attention. That's weird, isn't. Seems like a waste of time, doesn't it - to stop doing, and to start listening ... to God?

Antonin Scalia died 3 years ago. He was one of the judges on our Supreme Court, one of the smartest and most powerful men in our country. One time he invited one of his clerks to church. His clerk said, "I can't, I'm too busy." And Scalia told him, "Well, I'll tell the creator of the universe that you were too busy to see him." Yeah right! Maybe the first thing you need to do is to beg God for some forgiveness for blowing him off, and for some help in getting your priorities straight.

Now ... here's why it's hard, to quiet with God. Here's why you're going to push back. You see, getting still in God's presence will be both hard, and painful. We're used to the noise. We're comforted by the noise and the busyness. I've got things to do - important things to do. I can't just stop, and waste time ... on God ... right? So, when you try to get quiet with God, all these things will

flood in to distract you. You'll start thinking about things you have to do today. You'll start thinking about lunch, or dinner. You'll start noticing that it's kind of cold, or kind of hot. You'll get distracted by some noise, or some smell. You'll drift and daydream. One early Christian writer says the first stage of getting quiet with God is kind of like shutting the door, for the first time. And all those people who are accustomed to barging in and chattering start pounding on your door, demanding entry, wondering why they are not allowed in. And they only quiet when they understand they are not welcome to interrupt your time with God. Jesus says, "When you pray, (WHEN you pray) go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. Literally, shut the door, silence your phone, turn off the computer, the TV. That's hard, isn't it?

And then, if you can shut out the busyness and the noise, it will get even harder. Because there are things inside you you don't like dealing with. Your anxieties, your fears, your bad memories, your fights, your anger, your unholy desires, your shame, your guilt. You see, we drown all that stuff out with the busyness and the noise. But in the quiet, they can well up inside. But only then can God heal them, only then can he heal you.

So, if you really want to get quiet with God, you'll have to shut out the outer noises, and you'll have to confront the inner noises. And Satan is going to do whatever he can to make it hard for you. He's going to use the busyness and the noise to keep you from God. And he's going to use the anxiety, and the fear, and the shame, and the guilt to keep you from God. He's going to do whatever he can to keep you and God apart. Guys, don't let him win. Don't let him win! You were made different. You were created in the image of God, to do life with God. You are a spiritual creature. You've got to feed that side of you.

So, let's get real practical. How are we going to get it done? It is maybe the important habit you will ever learn, and it will be hard. How are we going to get it done? Maybe you are already there. Maybe you already have regular quiet times with God, and you wouldn't miss them for the world. Then this part isn't for you, maybe. But for the rest of us, I want to challenge you - all of you - all of us to a 30 day challenge. Try this for 30 days and see if it doesn't make your life better. 30 days, basically, till Thanksgiving. I want to challenge you to spend two minutes - two minutes -- with God every day in a very specific way.

(switch to iPhone feed)

There's a great app out there called the YouVersion. We recommend it from time to time. You can download it from your app store. If you don't already have it, that's part of the challenge. Please, download the YouVersion onto your phone or tablet. It's amazing, and it's free. You can read the Bible on your phone in any language you can think of. I can read the Bible on my phone in over 60 different English translations. How cool is that?

And once it's on your phone, you'll have the Bible with you wherever you are. And if you need to find something in the Bible, there's a search tool. Let me show you ...

And if you want to try a Bible reading plan, maybe based on something you are going through ... there are hundreds. Let me show you ... (faith)

There are videos: Videos of the Bible story, teaching videos about the Bible, and about how to do life with God. Let me show you ... (scroll)

But what I really challenge you to do is to sign up for the "Verse of the Day." Every day you'll get an email with the "Verse of the Day." You can click on the link in the email, and it will take you over to the YouVersion Bible app. Or just open the app, and open the verse of the day. You can press a button and compare the verse in different translations ... of your choice. You can press another button and read the verse in its context.

Here's the challenge: One verse a day for the next 30 days. And one prayer a day based on that verse. (Repeat) That's all. It should take you no more than 2 minutes. Two minutes a day, devoted exclusively to God. Now I'm going to warn you: some verse will jump off the page for you; some won't. That's okay. The most important thing is not that they jump off the page; the most important thing is that you are spending time with your God ... talking, and listening.

(Switch Back to Computer Feed)

Now guys, there's way more you can do. The goal is to do life WITH God every day. The goal is to become aware of his presence every day. The goal is to talk to him, and to listen to him every day. Not just Sunday mornings for an hour or two, but every day. It'll make a difference, guys ... a huge difference.

- Maybe some of you guys spend time with God through the music you listen to. That's cool. But it's not enough.

- For me, often it's at daybreak, and at sunset. We have the most amazing sunrises and sunsets at our place ... you can see the whole sky. For me that's not just a, "Holy cow, that's gorgeous." For me those are "Wow God," moments. They remind me of his presence, and his goodness.
- James Driver is our growth minister. Sometimes James spends time with God when he goes to Kroger. He actually prays, "God, give me the opportunity to touch someone with grace here at Kroger today." And he's got stories!
- Some Jesus followers journal: they journal their prayers, and when they sense God's answers, and just whatever is going on in their life with God.
- Others go on these spiritual retreats. It's hard for me to really get still with God, so sometimes I have to set apart a half-day, or even several days just to disconnect from the busyness and the noise, and reconnect with my God. In fact, James Driver, our growth minister will be leading a half day spiritual retreat in a couple weeks here at CapCity. Some of you guys might find it really rich. Give it a shot!

But, whatever else you do already, I really want you to take seriously this 30 day challenge, because one of the non-negotiable keys to a life WITH God is getting still, and knowing that he is God. Listening to him every day - which is what the verse of the day is all about ... listening. And talking to him every day. And this 30 day challenge will help you do both. Read a verse, just one verse. Think about it. Think about what it meant back then, and what it means now, to you - how it applies to you. And talk to God about it. Just ask him to help you live out wherever that verse is challenging you. Two minutes a day: one to read and ponder, one to pray. And see what a difference it will make as you spend time with God every day.

It won't be easy. We're pretty wussy, and our enemy is not. But our God is way stronger; and he can help you win. If you get started and it's hard, talk to him about it. If you get started and you miss a day or two. Just start again. He is so gracious! You see, life WITH God isn't just about Sundays; it's, literally, making God part of your life every day! We have such an amazing God!
... ..

Now, what we're going to do next is a little weird, and it may make some of you a little uncomfortable. We're going to try it! We're going to practice. I'm going to put yesterday's verse of the day on screen, and then we're going to give you two minutes of quiet. Minute 1: just read the verse and think about it. What does it mean - what did it mean back then, and how can you take that

meaning and live it out? That's minute 1. Minute 2: talk to God about something in that verse. Just you and God. Ready ...?

Verse of the Day on screen: Isaiah 26.4. Followed by 2 minutes of quiet. Close with Prayer together, and then invitation to the Lord's Table.

Lord's Supper thoughts:

- Not the LS that makes like holy
- It's a life with God outside this table that makes this thing holy
- You've spent time with your God, now, taste his grace