I want you to go back with me for a second...go back to the first time you were asked to give a presentation in public (not on zoom…), be it at work, here at church, maybe in a class, scouts, wherever. How did you feel? What feelings did you experience? Were you nervous, anxious, sweaty palms? Or were you excited? You felt that adrenaline rush, you were in your element….what is your level of...comfort or discomfort in that scenario? So first off, I’ll apologize for just going all in right out of the gate. Public speaking is the #1 fear/phobia out there, and so I’m sure some of you felt uncomfortable...you definitely aren’t alone.

In this series we have been talking about these ‘carrots’ that we spend our time chasing...at the same time they distract us from actually becoming closer to God and, more severely, fill a void that should be filled by God.

David talked to us about fame then Andy talked about perfection, wealth & possessions, and this past Sunday we talked about seeking approval. If you missed any of those, I STRONGLY encourage you to go back and take a look at them!

Anyway, have you noticed how obsessed we have become with ‘living our best life?’ A quick google (emphasis on quick) search of how to live your best life returned 7 MILLION results. Now...I’m sure a savvy person could get potential duplicates down to under what...maybe 5 million, but still...we are a culture obsessed with living our best life. Don’t even get me started on social media, but just for fun we did a quick search of Instagram, and we found this guy who is a perfect example….

**\*Start showing pictures of Sarah & I (stream is split screen)\***

* Hawaii
* New York
* Alps
* Lunar Surface
* Lunar surface with guest

I think the most embarrassing thing about those photos is that I’m wearing the exact same tie in all of them. But seriously, when we look at what living our best life means...it means putting our best foot forward ALL...THE...TIME. We want people to think we are happy, that we are not struggling, that everything is perfect (or close to it). That through this best life we are living in a constant state of comfort.

When we attempt to idealize this so-called ‘best life’ we are not leaving enough room for God. You might being going well I have plenty of room for God but I like these other things too (in each of the sermons in this series, the statement ’if I just had a little bit more’ gets repeated over and over again), but when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was He told us to ‘love the Lord our God with ALL our heart, soul, mind & spirit.’ What does that mean...well...not all of those 7 million returned results mentions God and when you turn to something/one other than God for comfort, without getting to the conclusion too soon, it is INCREDIBLY dangerous! Essentially this is idolatry...

Look with me at 1 John chapter 2 verse 15….before we get there….who was John...not that John needs my justification for why he’s important, but John was one of the 3 closest disciples to Jesus.

He was there for the raising of Jairus’ daughter, he was there for the transfiguration, he was with Jesus in Gethsemane right before he was arrested, and he was there at the cross after the crucifixion. He saw some stuff...John experienced some stuff...John was one of the closest disciples to Jesus...5 of the canonized books of the Bible are attributed to him. John was one of the first call disciples. John left a comfortable situation (good job, family support, etc.)So when John talks (writes)....we probably should listen.

**1 John 2:15 says: *‘Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.’***

This is pretty well counter to what we are hearing in today’s culture. In today’s world we are hearing you don’t need to struggle. ‘Let me make this easy for you.’ In John’s first letter he uses the phrase ‘the world’ 17 times. What does this actually mean? I’m not asking you to not care for certain aspects of the world, but what I am saying is that we should not replace our reliance on God to provide us comfort with worldly things. Systems of this world do not need God. It doesn’t matter where we have been in life….we have all, at some point, tried to put ease before struggle.

In moderation this might not totally be a bad thing...but it’s a slippery slope. It’s amazing how quickly we drift to lazy and easy...Here's an example of the risk…

Guys - when you first meet a girl and are trying to impress her...we do cute things for them right? Get them flowers, write them poems, dress up for dates, ask questions about ‘the bachelor or the bachelorette’...After getting to know them it’s sometimes a struggle to just put on pants right before it’s time to go, let alone shower, shave, and put on deodorant….and the eye rolling when they talk about tv show drama becomes super obvious...

And ladies don’t think you are getting out of this scott free….a lot of time is spent on hair/makeup, picking out the perfect outfit that you know...accents all the right attributes. You ask them about sports or whatever hunting or DIY tv show they are interested in. Make them feel like they are funny. When you get comfortable the frequency with which leg shaving happens broadens, make-up becomes optional, you remind them it’s the 3rd time that evening they’ve told that joke (or just go straight to the punch line) and watching the Hallmark channel only happens during the ‘big game.’

Let’s bring this into our lives as Christians...Often when we start out, we do everything in our power to ‘impress’ God. We are doing devotions every day, come to church every week, we even get here early, we are serving on 5 different committees, we are singing in the choir, put that little fish sticker on the back of our car, flaunt our *What Would Jesus Do* wristband ‘look at me I’m A CHRISTIAN!’ Then we sort of get...comfortable…?

And why wouldn’t we? I mean, week in and week out we read or hear:

Romans 5, *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ [Jesus] died for us.*

Or John 3:16, *‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’*

Philippians 4, 1 Peter 5, both books to the Corinthians, Deuteronomy, certain passages in Isaiah or the Psalms...we drink in all this good news and then we get...complacent….we start to just ‘show up.’ We come and do our time on Sunday morning and then we leave and then we do it again the next Sunday and the Sunday after that, and the Sunday after that until we are like that hamster wheel that was on the screen at the beginning of the sermon….we don’t feel like we need to put in the effort. Pretty soon the Bible is just another book on the shelf….

Now friends (I hope that’s a term I’ve earned the ability to use at this point?)...I’ve only been here two weeks. But this church does not appear willing to settle in comfort. Your pastors and leaders will not let you get comfortable. Since I started consistently following the life of this church in January, you continue to push boundaries...not with bad theology or crazy interpretations of the Bible, not with gimmicks...but with real relationships and the real word of God! This is clearly a church who cares about saving souls. I have to share this story...Pastor Andy has asked me to lead the men’s Bible study on Wednesday night and allowed me to pick any book of the Bible I wanted for us to look at. I know what you all are thinking! Of course, I picked Titus. Paul’s letter to Titus. The first chapter of Titus is instruction to clergy. So, I opened up the first session with what do you look for in a pastor. I’m in seminary, my goal is to learn...but Pastor Andy was in the room. It’s always loaded when you do something like that and some folks shy away...these guys didn’t, but it wasn’t a bashing session and in fact what was encouraging to me is the care that this congregation has for its leaders. The continual pushing of them to be better and the appreciation for their desires to get better. Wow...what a gift!

I do want, this morning to warn you, however, against this **counterfeit comfort**. I’m not insinuating that you are, but let’s not get complacent. It feels good, don’t get me wrong...it feels like the real thing. But in fact...it has no real value….I know that God loves me, but I’m not feeling like I should be & then we start to pursue the things of the world. Two things this counterfeit comfort actually brings to light…

The first is that it **reveals spiritual emptiness**.

**1 John 2:15-17, ‘*Do not love the world nor the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him.’***

If we try to fill ourselves up with stuff of the world, we may feel full, but in reality...we are empty...

I have a friend at school who used to be a drug addict. He talks about how it got to a point where he no longer got the experience that he desired from a non-lethal dose. The drugs filled a void in his life that made him feel like he didn’t have to worry. The problem became (and this is why it is counterfeit) that more and more and more and more was needed to alleviate the worry. He openly admits that this was filling a void that only God could actually satisfy. The process of seeking comfort in that manner actually became a discomfort in the long run. The craving for more hurt his family, friends and himself.

The Bible should fill you! The 66 books of the Bible should be enough.

Turn with me to **2 Cor 5:14-15…’*For Christ’s love compels us...that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.’***

Yall this is not an outward chase but an inward push...you cannot achieve this genuine Christ-comfort through the ‘fix’ you get from worldly things….

The second characteristic of this counterfeit comfort is that it ‘**eliminates our need for faith**.’ Think about those that acted on faith alone...Able made an offering to God...and was killed. Noah had never seen rain, yet he built the ark anyway….Sarah believed she would have a child at her advanced age...Moses was fully aware of his speech impediment yet listened to God. None of these people had smartphones, or TVs or Google...they had to rely on faith...they had faith that God would show up and do the impossible.

Think with me for a second...what part of your life are you helpless without God intervening? You got it? I had like 7 things come to mind right off the bat. Now...remember, ‘***and without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.****’* {Hebrews 11:6} You cannot get away from faith...you shouldn’t even be trying. God doesn’t like it when you don’t trust that He will do what He says He is going to do!

I had a cushy job before I left for seminary. I watched college kids play sports...and got paid to do it. I had the best seat in the house for football games, basketball games, hockey games, volleyball games and got paid to be there! Heck I was a big shot in my church: volunteer youth leader, church council member, stewardship committee co-chair, co-chair of a capital campaign, praise band drummer, all around ‘big-shot.’ I was...comfortable...but something wasn’t right. The Bible...became just a book on the shelf. And I am ashamed of that.

Why would you chase something fake, or counterfeit, that in the end is no benefit to us, when we have been given the ability to experience authentic comfort? Authentic comfort comes from a deeper relationship with God. I know you are sitting there wondering how to do we achieve this authentic comfort? We need to align ourselves with scripture...we need to fill the void with scripture.

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul writes, ‘***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.****’* {2 Cor. 1:3-5}

When we use God’s word as the way in which we define what our world should look like, 2 things happen:

1. **You chase after a deeper relationship with God.**

When we talk about comfort in this context, I’m not talking about settling in on the sofa for the evening or the mattress you sleep on. We are talking about putting your mind at ease. Paul was challenged by God to be more and be better. This is something that hits home for me too. I was doing a lot of things...a lot of things in the church. But God was still pushing me to be better. I remember hearing a sermon on Isaiah, specifically Isaiah 6:8 coupled with the song, ‘Here I am, Lord.’ It was at that moment that I decided to stop trying to maintain the comfort level that I was fostering and take the leap of faith and trust that God would bring me out of it ok. So...here I am.

Now I’m not encouraging you to quit your jobs and spend thousands of dollars going back to school. For each of us it could be something different. Maybe you attend a Sunday school class, or you get involved in a small group. Maybe you just commit to reading a single Bible passage every night before bed. Maybe it is being a leader in the church. I’m here to challenge you to think outside the box. Think/pray about what that means...this is a conversation between you and God...but know that you do not have to do this alone!

The best {ideal} life exists family (are we close enough now to call ourselves that?)...just not here. God wants you to have the best life! Just because you are not experiencing it here or are going through a rough patch...don’t seek out the instant comfort that can be provided in this world. Remember back a couple of weeks ago Pastor Andy asked us to think about, what would it take to have enough money? What’s your number? Albeit rhetorical by thinking that you are looking for a temporary fix…God provides everything you need to get you through, but never makes the promise that it will be easy or comfortable.

The second thing you are able to do when you let God’s word define your life is:

1. You are now **able to embrace divine discomfort.**

In James we are told, ‘***Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing****.’* (1:2)

We are going to encounter tests in our lives. I don’t know about you, but I am not a test taker. I’m more of a paper writer...the anxiety I get over taking tests is well...yikes...but there are definitely some things I can tell you now, that I could not have told you before.

Pain produces the stuff we should want whereas comfort kills us from the inside out. Again, God doesn’t promise that life will be easy all the time. To illustrate this, I want to talk to you about two of my favorite things in life…

1. Krispy Kreme Donuts
2. Squats

Krispy Kreme donuts are delicious...there are cars (including mine) circling the parking lot waiting on that neon red ‘hot now’ sign to come on to get that free donut & even if it's not on...you’re buying them anyway because they are just so delicious! No pain involved though...just loving the goodness. But...man that cholesterol and high blood pressure...that’ll kill you from the inside out…

The other thing is squats. When you put weight on your back and squat down...it hurts! Even if you do them with good technique...they can still hurt. But the good they do definitely outweigh the ‘hurt.’

Now think about the difference...donuts = yummy and make you feel good in the moment...squats = painful and uncomfortable in the moment. Which long term benefit do you want?

Pain, challenge, hurt all have the potential to produce the best things. (You could add Romans 8:28 here) God even says that He will work for good in all things. Not that all things are good but that he can work for good in all things, even our pain and problems. In the GROW class this past spring we watched a video clip from a comedian named Michael Jr. Michael Jr was behind his class in terms of reading skills. It was super uncomfortable for him being a kid who couldn’t read as well as the others. He talks openly during his show about how he was able to find a way to overcome that and how it has shaped not only the comedy that he does, but also the philanthropic side of his shows as well. We all have something you can think of that at the time seemed like a shortcoming, but in the long run turned out to be a way in which God was using you to advance his kingdom? Perhaps you have something going on in your life right now that is making you uncomfortable...you are desperately seeking a way to alleviate that discomfort! I’m here to tell you today that you do not need to fret. God will bring you out on the other side and will make evident to you the ways in which you are being used in the kingdom. Be patient and trust God!

The most valuable things in life have come as the result of God’s presence in the midst of pain. Just as we have said in the past sermons in this series...comfort is not something you want to avoid. Comfort is ok...the question you need to be asking yourself is…’what is the source of my comfort?’

**Next Steps**

What things are causing you anxiety because you don’t feel comfortable? What do you seek when you are not feeling comfortable? What earthly things comfort you? Have you sought scripture to help reassure you that God is using you in some amazing way?

**Review 1 John 2:15 -** In what ways has pursuing comfort in the world pulled away from God?

**Review 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 -** Where does authentic comfort come from for you? In what ways can you invite God to help you achieve this comfort and be in better communion with Him.

**Review James 1:2 -** Embrace divine discomfort. God does not promise us that our lives will not be free of discomfort. Recognize that even in our pain and discomfort, God is using us for the advancement of His kingdom.

Suggestions for seeking comfort through prayer:

* Ask God to reveal through the scriptures what His purpose for you is.
* Identify scripture that provides you comfort. Highlight, underline, print them out and put them on your fridge.
* Write the word ‘Pray’ on sticky notes and put them on random book pages, in your car, in your desk drawers, in/on your Bible. Remind yourself who the true comforter is and ask God for comfort when you are uncomfortable.

\*If you are uncomfortable searching through the scriptures, unsure where to start, or need help discerning what scripture to use, contact a pastor!