

Title: Beyond Church Attendance: The Necessity of True Transformation

Sermon Summary: This sermon addresses a critical epidemic in modern Christianity—the dangerous assumption that merely attending church is sufficient for salvation. Using the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3, the pastor challenges believers to examine whether they are experiencing genuine spiritual transformation or simply making behavioral modifications. The message emphasizes that God is not impressed by religious activity, church attendance, or outward appearances, but rather seeks authentic heart transformation. The sermon warns against "eisegetical" preaching that manipulates scripture to support pre-determined ideas rather than allowing scripture to transform lives. Through powerful illustrations about spiritual development, the pastor calls believers to move beyond surface-level Christianity to a genuine born-again experience that produces lasting change. The message concludes with a sobering reminder that God knows the difference between followers and disciples, and that true salvation requires complete surrender rather than merely asking "how much can I get away with?"

Key Points:

- Church attendance does not equal salvation; many people go to church without church being in them
- There is a critical difference between followers and disciples—Jesus knows which you are
- Growing in attendance does not necessarily mean growing in disciples
- Nicodemus represents religious people who have information but lack transformation
- God is not offended by honest prayers; He values authenticity over polished religious language
- Eisegetical preaching (starting with an idea and finding scripture to support it) is dangerous and misleading
- Spiritual development should progress over time; continued stumbling indicates impeded growth
- True love for God asks "What makes You happy?" rather than "What can I do before You get angry?"
- The Pharisees elevated their traditions to the level of God's Word, creating thousands of man-made rules
- God sometimes breaks our legs (allows controlled pain) to prevent us from wandering into greater danger
- When you stop following the recipe (God's instructions), you can't blame God for the results
- Genuine transformation changes your questions from "What can I get away with?" to "How can I please You?"

Scripture Reference:

- John 3:1-8 (primary focus on verses 3-7: "You must be born again")
- John 2:23-25 (Jesus knowing what was in people's hearts)
- The Book of Job (referenced regarding authentic prayer)
- The Ten Commandments and Torah laws (referenced in discussion of Pharisees)

Stories:

- The illustration of a child learning to walk, with parents creating a safe environment for falling while learning
- The child repeatedly knocking items off the table at a restaurant, testing boundaries
- The pastor's daughter (Kendall) learning to walk as a toddler, celebrating steps rather than falls
- The story of Elder Fryer being called a "unicycle" to demonstrate eisegetical reasoning (manipulating definitions)
- The pastor's wife making salty chocolate cake by using a tablespoon instead of a teaspoon of baking soda, illustrating consequences of not following instructions correctly
- The friend Charles eating the salty cake politely while the pastor's brother Aaron bluntly stated it was salty
- Walking through the mall with his wife despite personal inconvenience, demonstrating love through sacrifice
- The kindergarten memory of the pastor's brother kissing him on the cheek, causing embarrassment
- The shepherd breaking the leg of a wandering sheep to protect it from greater danger (predators)
- Jonathan McReynolds' illustration of two types of roller coaster riders—those who stay composed versus those who throw their hands up and enjoy the ride
- The comparison of helping someone repeatedly pick up dropped items until concluding they want it on the floor