

Gold, Silver & Bronze

Your Next Step

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Exodus 18:13-23, Acts 6:1-7

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We're going to start today by doing some math, but I don't want you to panic. I'll do the math, all right? You guys can double-check me if I'm not correct. But at Fairview Missionary Church, we have about 800 people that would call Fairview home. Now, the number might be larger than that, but on any given Sunday, those that are here and joining us online, we have about 800 individuals. And the number probably is larger than that because on average, the normal person attends their home church one out of every three Sundays now.

So let's just say 800. We just chose that number. And let's say that of those 800 people, every single one of us has three people that we are extremely close to, whether it's friends or family, but people that if something happened to them, it would greatly impact our lives. So that is 800 times 4 because myself plus my three people. That's 3,200 people that are at least loosely connected to Fairview because they're connected either you or the people that are closely connected to you.

Now, let's imagine that each one of those individuals has one life-altering event a year. Something that happens in their life that drastically and dramatically changes the direction of their life or someone they care about. That would mean that there would be 3,200 of those life-altering events a year that are impacting either you guys or people that are closely related to you guys. Now, what is a life-altering event?

Let me just give you some examples. Of course, the death of a loved one would be a life-altering event. Someone that's really close to you passes away or a death of somebody in our congregation. A diagnosis. Somebody goes to the doctor and the doctor tells them you have cancer or something else that's got to be taken care of. These life-altering events can always be good things, too. It could be a wedding. It could be the birth of a child. It could be a surgery. Something that needs to happen. And so you have to have a surgery.

It could be a rebellious teenager or maybe even a grown adult child that has walked away from the Lord and you want counseling through that. It's possible that one of these life-altering events could be a marriage that's on the brink of divorce, bankruptcy, broken relationships. All of these things are life-altering events, maybe the loss of a job. So we currently at Fairview Missionary Church have two pastors on staff that are licensed in the missionary church, and we have another three that are in the process of being licensed.

So that's five pastors. So if there are 3,200 events every year, life-altering events every year, and a pastor is there to try to walk through that with somebody, that means that every single day, every pastor, seven days a week, 365 days a year, is dealing with two of those life-altering events in the life of somebody that he cares about in the congregation, or it's happening to one of those people that they care about.

Now, that would be if life spreads everything out evenly, which, of course, we know it doesn't, right? Things don't happen in that order. And so it's possible that in one week, there might be 125 of those life-altering

events. And the next week, there's only 30. And of course, we're presuming that these life-altering events only take one day to work through, which, of course, we all know is not true. So why do I share this with you?

First, I need you to know as a congregation that as a staff, we do our best to walk through these seasons of joy and seasons of sorrow. But if we are your only source of peace, personal relationship, and strength during this time, we will let you down. You just need to know that. If we are your only source of strength or peace or comfort in one of these seasons that you are going through a life-altering event, we will let you down.

We cannot possibly be everything to everyone, no matter how much we love you and how much we care for you. We truly wish we could. The second thing you need to know is that this is why we think it's so important and why I take time every year to talk about the importance of finding community within this body of believers, with other believers.

Here at Fairview Missionary Church, we believe our vision statement, our mission statement, is helping people take their next step toward Jesus. Whatever that step is, it might be your first step. It might be your hundredth of step. One of the things that we have observed in our own personal lives as we try to decide how can we reach that goal of helping people take their next step toward Jesus, we looked at our own lives and recognized that God consistently uses specific things in our lives to draw us closer to Him.

We've examined our own spiritual journeys as well as others around us, and we've found that there are three common threads that were the most useful things in our lives to help us take our next step toward Jesus. Now, please understand these are not the only three. These are not the whole way, the only way that God draws us closer to Him. But again, as we had conversations, as we looked back in our own lives, these were the three that came up most often as things and habits that we could establish that would help us grow in our relationship with Him.

The first one is attending a worship service. Now I'm preaching to the choir because you guys are here, you're watching online. It's being a part of a worship service, gathering with like-minded individuals where we can praise God together. We can open His Word together and study. That's number one. Number two, the second thing that you can do is joining a life group, some type of group of individuals that are like-minded that you can do life with. You can experience life with.

When you have a difficult situation, you can call them. You can get together with them. You can ask for prayer. The third thing is serving, and we'll talk about that next week. Now, I know that if you've been here for a couple of years, you probably say, "Joel, I can do this message better than you can," right? You've heard it every year. Every year, I talk about this, and you might say, "I don't want to hear about it again. Can we move on to something else?" Let me tell you why I think you need to hear it again.

I believe that these spiritual disciplines are equal to trying to lose weight. Let me tell you why. We know what we're supposed to do to lose weight. We know that we're supposed to eat healthy. We know we're supposed to exercise. We know we're supposed to drink a lot of water, and we know we're supposed to get enough sleep. And I forgot that I was preaching on this today, and so I had ice cream last night before I went to bed. My wife can attest. It was a small bowl, though. I tried to just do a small bowl. We know what it takes, right?

Glad you didn't look up at her. It was a small bowl. It was small. You know what it takes to lose weight. You know what you're supposed to do. Knowing is not the problem, but the discipline is the problem. It's the ability to be pushed and to do that, to make sure that we are accomplishing it. And so it's because of that that people actually pay money to a personal trainer. They're paying that person to tell them something they already know, but that person is accountable to them. And so they motivate them.

They push them. And so this morning, I want you to see me as your spiritual trainer, right? I am here to push you, to tell you what you already know, but as you work towards your spiritual health, I want to remind you. I want to motivate you. I call these three things, attending a worship service, joining a life group, and serving kind of gold, silver, and bronze. These are the top three things that you can do.

I truly believe that if you are entering into a season of life where you're about to experience one of these life-altering events without the top two disciplines of attending a worship service and being a part of life group, it is possible, and I have watched it that that season of life will shipwreck you. It will crush you. You are not sure that you will even make it through. It is common in those moments to blame the church.

Can I suggest it was never the church's responsibility to be everything to all people at all times? And by the church, I mean the church staff, the leaders, those that are trying to love others. You see, as a part of the family, we are all the family. We all have a role to play. We are here to help each other, to walk with each other through the difficulties of life.

This becomes more evident in your life when you do enter a difficult season. You see, the problem is when we come to a worship service and life is great, and we're celebrating, and things are going wonderful, we don't think we need anybody else. And so we say, "I don't need to join a life group. That would be awkward. I have to you know get to know people. I don't really like," you know stuff like that. I don't want to do it when life is good. But then when war and persecution and difficult season comes, we remember, "Oh, yeah, we're supposed to do life together." I want to share with you two stories, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.

This is not my idea. I didn't come up with this. This is not what I think church should be. This is what Scripture says church is supposed to be. And so I want to share one from the Old Testament and the New Testament in case you say, "Ah, that was the Old Testament. That doesn't matter." Okay? So you're going to get one from both. So if you have your Bibles, I encourage you to open up to Exodus chapter 18. Genesis, Exodus, second book of the Bible. Exodus chapter 18 will begin in verse 13, but let me pray before we read that. Exodus 18. Heavenly Father, we come before you today.

And I know that even in this congregation, people that are watching online, listening on the radio, I know that there are people that are in one of these seasons right now, life-altering. They've just recently lost a loved one. They've heard about a disease or a sickness that they have that can be life-threatening.

There's broken relationships, hurting marriages, adult children that have walked away from the faith, burdens that we carry, and we were not meant to carry them alone. And so I pray that we would be encouraged to listen to your Word and to support each other. I ask this in Jesus ' name, amen. So in Exodus chapter 18, we're going to start in verse 13 just to catch you up to where we're at.

Moses has just led the Israelites out of Egypt, out of their bondage there. And he's now wandering through the wilderness with them, trying to lead them to the promised land. And so they're in a good place. They're in a positive mindset. And in chapter 18, Moses ' father-in-law, Jethro, his wife, Zipporah, and their two sons are ready to meet them in the wilderness because they weren't there when Moses led the people out. And so they are now ready to catch up with them and to get on with life.

It's a large group of people that Moses is trying to lead in the wilderness. Most theologians, most historians have kind of settled on the number of 1 million to 2 million people. This is a large group of people. Now, for me, it is truly hard to comprehend. I can't imagine how difficult it would be leading that many people because I struggle with three kids in the back of my minivan on an eight-hour drive to Tennessee. All right? You guys know.

Imagine how many times Moses heard, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" For 40 years, 2 million people wandering in the wilderness. Imagine they couldn't agree on where to stop to eat, and I needed to

go to the bathroom, and I need to do this, and I need to do that. Can you imagine all of the fighting that was going on? But Moses is leading this nomadic group of people through the wilderness. Jethro, his father-in-law, and his wife show up with his two sons, and Moses is able to share with them what God has done in leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

And so they take time to praise God and to celebrate God for what He has done. And then we come to verse 13 where we read. The next day, after they celebrate God, Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning all the way until evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, Jethro said, "What is this you are doing for the people?

Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning until evening?" Jethro immediately recognizes his first day being there how unhealthy it is for Moses to be the one that is hearing all of the cases, all of the fights, all of the ways that they're not getting along from the Israelite people. This was not sustainable. Moses would go every day to sit in the judge's seat from morning until evening.

Essentially, we are finding out that Moses was Judge Judy before it was cool to be Judge Judy, right? He was hearing all of the squabbles and the fights that were going on, and he was trying to solve their problems. We go on in verse 15. Moses answered his father-in-law, Jethro, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will, it's a good thing. The people are trying to follow God.

So whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and I inform them of God's decrees and his instructions." Moses is just doing what he feels is good. This is what God has called me to do. He is settling disputes according to God's law. Again, I can't imagine doing this from morning till evening how tiring it would be, hearing these people arguing against each other, just thinking, "Can we just get along?

Can we just stop fighting?" Which is why Jethro says what he says next, verse 17. Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you. You cannot handle it alone. The burden to care for all the people was never meant to rest on the leaders' shoulders alone.

It was never meant to be that way. It's not healthy. It's not physically possible. And it's just going to make everybody involved frustrated. They're just going to be frustrated. Why will they be frustrated? Well, the people who are trying to get help are going to be frustrated because it's possible that they stand in line all day for Moses to hear their case, and they never get to stand before Moses. And so they got to go the next day and you know wait for him. And even when they do get time in front of Moses, they just feel like a number or they just feel like a case.

He doesn't really care for them. And so they're frustrated because they're not getting the time that is needed. And Moses is frustrated because he is every day trying to catch up, and he can never catch up. And people are disappointed with him. And he truly loves and cares for the people. But he can't get to all the cases. It's just not a physical possibility. There's not enough hours in the day. And so this situation turns into a lose-lose situation. He's trying to do everything that he can do, but it's only frustrating himself and everybody else.

So Jethro says, "It's not good." We go on to verse 19. "Listen now to me," Jethro says, "and I will give you some advice. And may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to Him. Teach them His decrees and instructions and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave." Continue to teach them, Moses. Don't just keep all this information in your head.

Teach it to the people so that they know what God's instructions are. Direct them, guide them, love them, lead them, but you can't be the only one to do this. Look at this, verse 21. So instead, I want you to select

capable men from all the people, men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain, and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Break them up into groups.

Some larger and work your way down. Different levels of responsibility. Verse 22, "Have these men serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you." The simple cases, they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter because they will share it with you. If you do this and God sow commands, you will be able to stand the strain and all these people will go home satisfied instead of frustrated.

Select capable individuals that can help carry the burden of the people. Share the responsibility with others. Break these communities into smaller sections and parts so they can care for and encourage one another. And by doing this, everybody will be better off. You will be less busy. You can handle the difficult cases. The people will be happier because they will get the help and support they need when they need it.

Other people, the added benefit, these other people will be able to use their gifts to serve the community. And so it will go from a lose-lose to a win-win. And so this is what we are trying to do with our life groups and with our small groups, our Sunday school classes, and encouraging you to find one, to be in a group, to create one if there isn't one that exists. And some of you are saying, "Pastor, are you saying you're Moses?" No, I'm not even close to Moses. Let's just write off the Old Testament. That's fine. Let's go to the New Testament, all right?

If you want to, you can turn with me to the book of Acts. Acts chapter 6. Of course, in Acts 6, we're in the early church. Jesus has been crucified. He's been raised back to life. He's poured His Spirit upon the disciples. And now they're beginning to try to figure out what does life look like? What is church supposed to look like? As we gather with other believers, what are we supposed to do? What structures should be in place? How are the dynamics supposed to work? Where is the best place for the leaders to put their time?

And so they're trying to figure all this out. And of course, as the church is growing, they experience a problem. And here's the problem in Acts 6:1. Luke tells us that in those days, the number of disciples was increasing. That's a good problem, right? The church is growing. It's growing at a large rate. But because it was growing, problems arise. Here's the problem that happened to them. The Hellenistic Jews among them were complaining against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

Now, you might say, "Pastor, what's a Hellenistic Jew? What's a Hebraic Jew?" Well, at this time, as the church is growing, the church is mostly made up of Jewish people, not Gentile believers like you and I would be. And these Jewish people are gathering together and they're joining in community. But there's two different types of Jewish people by nationality. You have those Jews that were born and raised in Israel. Those would be the Hebraic Jews. And then you have those Jews by nationality that were born anywhere else outside of the land of Israel.

They were the Hellenistic Jews. And so they were raised in a different country with different cultures and different things that were important to them. Yes, they were still Jewish, but they didn't have all of the culture of the Hebraic Jews. And so these two groups of people didn't really get along. It was two cultures trying to come together. And just like in our world today, that doesn't always work. It's hard. You have to make compromises. You have to talk through things. And so these two groups are arguing against each other because you know our widows are being overlooked.

You're showing favoritism. You're showing advantage to other people. And so this is the problem that is taking place. One of the things that we recognize is that as the church grows, new issues develop that require a change in organizational structure. I'll say that again because this is just the practical nuts and

bolts of church. As the church grows, the new issues are going to develop that require a change in organizational structure.

It's just not proper or good or right for us to do things how they have always been done. So how are the disciples going to handle this change? We go to verse 2. So the 12 gathered all the disciples together and they said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables. Not because waiting on tables is less important, but it's just not what we have been called to do. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

There's a qualification for these people, and we will turn this responsibility over to them, and we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. They come to the conclusion, "Choose some people. We want these people to be full of wisdom and full of the Spirit so that they can take some of the responsibility off of our shoulders because it's not possible for the leaders to do everything and for everybody in the church." And they shouldn't. We all have different gifts. We all have different abilities.

We all have different ways that God has created us. That's why the apostle Paul says we are the body of Christ. We're all different parts, and every part is important. And what is the result of them sharing those responsibilities? Coming to this conclusion, let's find some people. We need to make sure that we do what God has called us to do, which is the ministry of Word and prayer. What happens when they're all doing what God has created and called them to do?

Luke tells us in verse 7, "So the Word of God spread and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests even became obedient to the faith. When they were all doing what they were supposed to be doing, when they were sharing the load, sharing the responsibility, the church continued to grow. So what is the conclusion? You and I need to connect with each other. There are people who need you. There are people who need you when they're going through their difficult season of life.

And there will be a time when you need them. It might not be today or this week or this month or even this year, but you will have a time in your life that you will need others just to make it through because life can beat us up. Don't wait until that moment to try to develop those relationships. Don't wait until that season to then say, "Oh, yeah, it's important because it'll probably be too late." Join a life group now. Join a Sunday school.

Get connected with other believers. Make those connections now because there's probably somebody that needs you as they are in a season of grief and in a season of pain. I again remind you, if you rely on the church staff during this season, I can tell you we will do our best, but understand we will probably let you down. We cannot provide what everyone needs all the time.

It's not healthy for us to try to do that. It's just going to lead to frustration. Frustration on your part and frustration on our part because we are better with you. I truly trust and believe that God will use the worship service. He will use the life groups to help you take your next step towards Him. And so there's two questions that I want to ask you as we close. Question number one, who have you walked with lately through a life-altering event?

Is there somebody in your life that you love and care about deeply so much that when they experience a life-altering event, you wanted to be there to walk through it with them. To provide whatever you could, you don't have the answers. Maybe it's just sitting there with them in their grief and in their loss. Who have you walked with lately? The second question, if you had a life-altering event happen today, who would you call?

If something happens today, you get a phone call after church, something has happened to someone you care about and you love, who would you call? If you don't have anybody, you need to find those people. If you can't confidently answer these two questions, I cannot implore you enough to take the right step

today. We were meant to go through life together. We never know when we're going to receive that phone call. We never know when we're going to go to the doctors for just a checkup, and we're going to get news that we never thought we would receive.

Just this last Tuesday, I received a phone call at 9 o'clock at night that my dad was in the emergency room because he had four blood clots in his legs and two that had gone to his lungs. He was just here last Sunday. So it was one of those shocking phone calls. I immediately packed up my stuff and drove up to Bay City where I'm from and spent the night there. And I thought that I had written my life group to pray for me. I thought that my wife had done that.

I was in the hospital scrolling through our life group feed that we have, and I need to apologize to my life group. I didn't do that. I had read something that I thought my wife did, but she didn't. But I still felt better because I thought they were praying for me. I felt their presence with me even though they didn't even know what was going on. They were the first people I thought of. Really, after I got up there, I thought, "Man, I need the life group to know what's going on." And so that next morning, I got up. And again, I thought I had seen that my wife had done that. But if she hadn't, that's the first people that I was going to reach out to to say, "Hey, I need your prayer." My dad had surgery.

He's fine. He's okay. He's recovering now. But those were the first people that I reached out to because those are the people that I care about. I know they care about me. And so we've kind of gone through life together over the last two, three years. Who would you call? Who would you text in those moments? Some of us have family that we love, and we get along with, and everything is great. And so that's awesome. You can text your family, call family. But some of us come from dysfunctional homes.

Some of us come from homes where we don't have family that we can do that with. You have to find family and believers to go through life with. Find a group of people. If you can't find one, start one. We will walk with you through that. Brenda Sturry is the one that helps with our life group ministry. I encourage you to email her if you're not part of a group and you want to be. Maybe you're part of a group that you don't want to be a part of.

You can also email her. We can try to work that out because we know that's true too. Let me close in prayer. Again, I know there's people that are in a season of grief and loss right now, Father. And so I pray that You would comfort them. Give them peace. Hopefully, they do have individuals around them that are loving them, walking through this season with them. And if they don't, Father, they can contact the church.

They can contact us. We will do everything we can to love them and walk with them through this season. There's even going to be people up front today that if they just want to receive prayer for something, anything, they can certainly receive that prayer. They can share their story with somebody. I hope that they feel comfortable to do that. We know that you promise that you are with us. You walk with us in good times and bad times, and we feel that, and we appreciate that.

But Father, we also know that there is something special and needed about a physical presence of somebody there with us. And that's what You have called us to do. And so may we do that well. We ask this in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.