

Series Title

Sermon Title

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Scripture: Assorted

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Everybody loves a good party. Great food, fun locations, being together with friends and family, having music and games and laughter. I believe that you and I were created to celebrate. If you don't believe me, just look at God's chosen people, the Israelites, as we kind of look at their history and look even at their calendar. Their calendar even today is filled with holidays and feasts of celebration and remembrance for God's goodness.

I even asked the question, "Where was Jesus's first miracle?" Do you remember? It was at a wedding. It was at a wedding party. What was heaven described as in the book of Revelation? Heaven is described as the marriage of the Lamb. There is singing. There is celebration. There is noise.

I'm often reminded of Jesus' words in John 10:10 when he says, "I have come that you may have life, and you may have it in all its fullness." You see, I believe that God has given you and I a plan on how to live the best life possible. And I go by his plan because I believe He created it all. And if He created me and the world around me, then it only makes natural sense that I would believe He knows what is best for my life.

And so over the last few weeks, we have been discussing these habits or disciplines. Some people would call them even rhythms of life that help us live the best life possible. We have been in this series called Train to Win. These habits, these things that we incorporate into our lives are ways for us to take our next step closer to Jesus and to experience the fullness of life that God has prepared for us.

It's important to know if you're new today or watching on the computer or listening on the radio that this list of habits or disciplines is not simply a list of to-dos or to don'ts. It is a list that has been given to us out of love so that we can enjoy life in the best way possible. It truly is a list of celebration. This is our last week in this series as we kind of cover these final three disciplines, and we have a lot to cover.

So I'm going to pray and we're just going to jump right in. All right? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do come before you and pray that we would have receptive hearts to hear from your spirit. As we talk about this idea of habits or disciplines, things that we can instill into our lives that will bring celebration and joy. Father, may we be obedient.

May we, as a church body, bring glory and honor to you, and may you be pleased with us. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. Now, if you were with us last week, we talked about three disciplines that I thought were very difficult, very hard disciplines, especially hard to preach, hard to talk about. One of them was confession, this idea of confessing our sins to each other, and nobody really enjoys talking about that, right?

I would say that this week, the three that we end on are probably the most fun. They're the most exciting. These are corporate disciplines, things that we do together, not just by ourselves, but things that we can do as a body of Christ. And so the first one we're going to talk about today is worship. And worship, by its very definition, is your response and my response to the actions of a loving Father. When we worship, it's a response.

We are responding because of God's goodness in our lives. Scripture tells us that worship takes place in the Spirit, that we worship the Father in Spirit. Therefore, there exist many forms of worship. The Bible doesn't give

us one clear example of what worship is, and that's what you have to do. There's not only one true form, but instead, you and I are given freedom in the ways that we worship.

We are free in Christ to use whatever form will enhance our worship. And so as you look at Scripture, we have many examples of how people worshiped their heavenly Father. And if Jesus is truly our Lord, then worship must be a priority in our lives. It only makes sense that this would be one of our habits or one of our disciplines. Jesus, responding to a question, "Which is the greatest commandment?"

Which is the greatest commandment of all?" And Mark 12:30 says, "That we are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." This is a great definition of worship. When we gather together, we are called to worship our Father with all of our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength. It incorporates every part of our being. Jesus then would go on to say, "The second commandment.

The second greatest commandment is like the first. Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." If you remember the habit of service that flows out of our worship, serving others is a response. It naturally flows out of our worship to our Father. And so when we gather to worship, when we get together, you and I should be preparing our hearts in holy expectation to hear from God.

You should know that your worship, your corporate worship, should begin before you enter the building on Sunday morning. When we are getting ready to gather for worship, you and I should be preparing our hearts and our minds and our bodies to hear from God in holy expectation. You and I should not be surprised when we leave after a corporate time of worship that we actually heard from God.

It should be at the exception when we leave and we say, "Man, I don't know that I actually heard from God today. That should be the exception, not the reality." This is a corporate discipline because it's not something that we just do alone. Now, of course, we worship alone, but we also worship together as a group. It's something we are called to do. There's something different about worshiping with a group.

We are called to community to be together, not just a relationship with the Father between us, but we have a relationship with our community as well. And so, of course, this calls for unity because we may not all agree on the best form of worship. Many of you should have said amen to that, but you didn't. It's difficult for churches to agree a collective body. I think about when I was a youth pastor, and we'd be driving down the road, doing some teen event, and I would say, "Hey, where do you guys want to stop to eat?" And guess what?

There were 500 responses, and nobody agreed with each other, right? It happens in your own family. "Hey, what do you guys want to do today?" And every kid's got a different response. What do you think happens when you gather a group of 800 people and say, "Hey, how do you want to worship today?" You get 800 responses. And so because of our desire for unity, we have to agree that our desire for corporate worship supersedes our preferences. We talk about that often at Fairview.

If Jesus is the focus of our worship and the leader of our worship, we should expect to see miracles in our worship. Now, I have to be honest with you all today. As I was working through this in my own heart and in my own mind, I need God to expand my faith in this area. Now, of course, I grew up in the church and going to church and reading the Bible.

And of course, I went to Bible College and I studied the Scriptures. And I personally believe with every part of my being that I serve a God who does miracles. I believe that I serve a God that works outside of the normal structure of how we see things function in our world with the creation. I believe all of those things. But if I were honest with you, when I have people come into my office or come to the church or come to the altar and they say, "Pastor, I need you to pray for such and such.

I need a miracle." There are plenty of times that I'm praying for that miracle to happen, but in my mind, I'm creating some kind of out for God. And I say, "God, if it's your will, would you please heal this person?" And I can

tell you after I've been working through this that I believe as a congregation, you and I need to pray in power for more miracles. I believe that we just need to be bold going before our Heavenly Father.

And if somebody needs a miracle, if we want something to happen, that we just pray for it to happen knowing that God is a God of miracles. He still does them today, just like He did in the past. As we think about this idea of worship, it should include our mind and our heart. It should include our emotions and our body.

Sometimes people will come to me and say, "Pastor, what is the appropriate form of worship?" Like, "How am I supposed to look while I'm worshipping?" Because I grew up in this church and I went to that church. And of course, there's different styles of worship. And I simply will tell them, "It's okay if when you worship, you want to kneel. It's okay if you want to lie prostrate while you're worshipping, if you want to stand, if you want to lift your hands. Be careful, everybody. I tell them, "If you want to dance during worship, that's fine.

If you want to clap, if you want your eyes to be opened or closed, it doesn't matter. The only inappropriate way to worship is sitting still looking dour. That's it. Worship is a celebration. It is thanking God for who He is. If you're sitting there with an angry look on your face, that's a wrong way to worship. But outside of that, there is no wrong way to worship. God calls us for wholehearted worship.

Of course, a worship service that we gather together for on Sundays can include songs and testimonies. Certainly, the reading of God's Word and the expounding upon God's Word. It can include dramas, stories, prayer time. There are many ways for us to worship because worship is a lifestyle. It's not just a service. It's not just something we do on Sunday morning. We can worship collectively together throughout the week, and God certainly deserves our praise.

Let's move on to the next corporate discipline. I will tell you that this one for us is probably the strangest one, maybe one that we don't think about often. It actually can be the most difficult discipline to practice. And without this next discipline in a corporate sense, I can share with you as I study the history of the church that if the church does not practice this discipline that we're going to talk about, the enemy has a heyday in the church causing division and heartache.

I'll also tell you that this next discipline is another one that has been abused in the church and by the church through history. And so there are many skeptical people who are fearful to practice it. The discipline that I'm talking about is the discipline of guidance. What does it mean to pursue being guided by God?

It's this idea of us as a community collectively hearing from the Lord to move forward, to wait for His direction, to wait for His leading, to recognize that we are allowing God to lead this body. You see, as Jesus was addressing the disciples in Matthew chapter 18, he was talking about this idea of disciplining a believer, somebody that has sinned against the community or against others.

And he says this in Matthew chapter 18, starting in verse 19, he says to his disciples, "Again, truly, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them." It's amazing, really, if you think about what God is telling His disciples and He's telling us, He's saying, "Listen, there is an assurance, I promise you, that when people genuinely gather together in the name of Jesus, we can discern the will of God." This should be comforting for us.

Jesus is saying, "Listen, if you honestly are gathering together in my name, pursuing the direction of God's will and where God wants this body to go, you can discern the will of God." We still believe this today as God's people, and so we seek His direction and His leading. Let me share with you how this specific body of believers tries to live this out, this idea of seeking the direction, the guidance of God.

As a church, we have established a system of checks and balances to make sure that when we are trying to hear from the Lord on the direction for the church, manipulation and control cannot happen by any one person. You have all heard stories. Sometimes it's difficult being a pastor, and all of these stories come out of things that

have happened, and a pastor leading a church in the wrong direction or abusing his power or whatever else, or somebody in the church, not even the pastor, abusing power or their kind of clout in the church.

And so at Fairview, we've tried to make a system of checks and balances so no one person can kind of go off in the wrong direction. So here at Fairview, we have what we call an elder team and a leadership team. This is a group of individuals that are approved people that we would say honor God with their lives. Of course, we have the definition of an elder in the New Testament. There's some overlap on the teams of elders and leadership.

And these groups come together, they pray, and they seek the direction of God for our church, along with the staff of the church. And so we have this system of checks and balances so that no major decision in the church is made in isolation. No one person can make a decision for the church. Now, of course, you need to know. I'm not saying we're perfect. We don't have it perfect.

It's not a perfect solution, but we're doing our best to practice this discipline of guidance, of being guided by the Lord. Now, some people would look at that model and say, "Pastor, I still don't think you have it right.

I believe that all members of the congregation should be involved in every decision, that every person should have an equal right or an equal vote like a democracy, and it's wrong to have leaders that are kind of making directions for the church." One person has said of this, "I think that there is danger in swinging the pendulum fully this way as well, for it is possible that there are hard-hearted and stiff-necked people to hinder spirit-inspired leaders." I'm going to read that statement again.

It is possible in the church for hard-hearted and stiff-necked people to hinder spirit-inspired leaders. I have certainly seen that happen. Richard Foster says it another way.

He says this, "We must never be seduced by Western democratic ideals into believing that every person must have an equal say about every trivial matter in the community's life." What he's basically saying and what is true is there's nothing inappropriate about having leaders that are put in positions to make decisions as long as there's checks and balances. Of course, we see that in Scripture. We see that in the New Testament.

We see that in the early church, that people were put into these positions because their character had been approved of and they're known to be people that follow God. And so they said, "Okay. Collectively, we want you to help lead the church so that we can get things done." One obvious point, though, before we move on, the Spirit will never lead in opposition to the written word that he inspired.

Let me just tell you that if we're ever in a meeting amongst elders or leaders and we're gathered and someone makes a suggestion that is contrary to scripture, somebody will be there to point out and say, "No, no, that's wrong. We're not doing that." And I would expect you, as your pastor, if I ever say anything from this stage or in a meeting or even in a one-on-one conversation, if I ever, ever tell you that I feel God is leading us in a direction that is contrary to His written Word, I would expect you to tell me, "Pastor, you're wrong." That's part of the checks and balances that we have that exist here so that we can hold each other accountable.

Now, let me also tell you something else. When there are a group of devoted followers of Jesus, I believe that another confirmation that you are being led by the Spirit in that direction is when there is cohesion in that group. I don't believe that the Spirit will cause division amongst the leaders. It doesn't mean there won't be disagreements. Okay, I got to make a statement there. It doesn't mean we won't disagree, but he won't cause division.

We will move forward saying, "I'm not 100% sure, but we're not contrary to scripture, so we're going to move in that direction." But there are checks and balances as we try to be led by the Spirit. Some of the most difficult meetings I have ever had have been when you have two people in the meeting both saying they're being led by the Spirit and they have opposite ideas, right? So we sit and we wait. We say, "Okay.

We're going to wait until we have clarity." That's what it means to be guided by the Spirit. Let's get on to the last discipline. It is my favorite one. It is the discipline of celebration. Richard Foster says that celebration is at the

heart of the way of Christ. Scripture says that Jesus came to set the captives free. He came to bring life by conquering sin, death, hell, and the grave.

Jesus came so that you and I could be freed from anxiety and worry so that we could experience true joy that only comes through him. Celebration is central to all the spiritual disciplines we have discussed. And as I shared with you, most of this comes from my working through of this book, *The Celebration of Disciplines*. And now maybe that title makes a little more sense because celebration is involved in every part of these disciplines.

For without joy and without celebration, every single one of these disciplines simply becomes a list of rules that we perform out of obligation, and that is not what they are intended to be. Joy is found in obedience. True joy in this world and in this life is found in obedience. It is not found in singing a certain song. It is not found in getting your way in your workplace or your home.

That is not what brings joy. Joy in this world is not found in the accumulation of wealth. Joy is the result of living out these spiritual disciplines because God has created for those to be a part of our life. And when we live them out, we can experience true joy.

Paul says in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice." You and I are to be worry-free as we go through our life because we trust God in all situations. Let me quickly follow that up by saying this does not mean we don't have problems. It simply means we can look beyond our problems to our Savior. Problems are going to come. You're going to have worries.

You're going to have seasons of doubt. That makes you human. That's okay. But when we have this discipline of celebration, we are able to look beyond those to our Savior. Let me give you some benefits of celebration. First, when we practice this discipline of celebration, it saves us from taking ourselves too seriously. You all have people in your life, probably a family member, that just takes life too seriously. You just want to say, "Do you ever smile?"

You know Do you ever have fun? Do you ever laugh?" I remember as I think about this idea of celebration and not taking yourself too seriously, I love that my ministry started as being a youth pastor. Because when you're a youth pastor, you learn to laugh, you learn to have fun, you learn to celebrate and enjoy life, and you just do crazy things. I remember when we transitioned from being the youth pastor to being the lead pastor at the church, my wife would say to me, "Do you remember those times when we would have fun?" And I say, "Yeah, I remember those times."

I don't know what happened. I feel like when we transitioned from being the youth pastor to the lead pastor, I just got old really fast. The youth kept me young. And I need to be reminded of this. Don't take life too seriously. Don't take yourself too seriously. Learn to celebrate. The second benefit of celebration is that it's an effective antidote to sadness. I know that in our world today, we are very aware of mental disease and things that people struggle with.

And sadness and depression and anxiety is something that is very real. It needs to be dealt with. I can tell you in my own seasons of anxiety, the only time that I felt joy during those seasons of high anxiety was on Sunday morning when I was worshiping with you all. There is something that happens when you are celebrating with other believers that just changes your demeanor. This discipline of learning to celebrate with others, to worship with others is an effective antidote to sadness.

The third benefit of celebration is that it gives us perspective. It's hard to complain about not having something when you're celebrating and thanking God for the things he's given you. It is our human nature to notice the things that we don't have and forget the things we do have. It's our human nature. And so when we celebrate, when we are offering times of gratitude and thanks, we are remembering the things that we do have.

It gives us perspective. One of the final benefits of celebration, this is not everything, but the final one we want to talk about is that it frees us from a judgmental spirit. When we gather together and we celebrate together, and we laugh together, and we have fun together, we naturally offer each other more grace and mercy. We

overlook things. We don't have that critical judgmental spirit. Of course, celebration can take place through singing and dancing and shouting.

It's not required. Those are examples. Another great way to celebrate is through laughter. Learn to poke fun at yourself. Enjoy some wholesome jokes. Make family events into times of celebration and Thanksgiving. Take advantage of natural times of celebration like holidays, birthdays, things that are already in your calendar, learn to have fun.

Being somebody that is a very task-driven, list-driven person, I often need to be reminded of this. It's hard to even confess that. I have to be reminded to have fun sometimes. Celebration gives us the strength to do all the other disciplines when you do them as a celebration. If you've stayed connected over the last four weeks, whether you were here in person or watching or even listening on the radio, I know that this has been a lot to take in.

I've said it's like drinking out of a fire hose, right? I understand that. It's a lot. In four weeks, we've covered so much. But here's my prayer. My prayer is that the Spirit has touched you in some way over the last four weeks. I pray that as you listen to me explain these disciplines, that one of them maybe got you a little excited. You thought to yourself, "Pastor, I've never thought about that as a discipline in my life before. I never even thought of doing that to grow in my relationship with Jesus.

I can't wait to try it." Maybe you've heard of the discipline before, but when you heard about it, you just weren't at a stage in life where you were ready for that. And so maybe now you're saying, "Okay, Pastor, I can't wait to give that a try." Maybe you even practiced one of these disciplines before, but for whatever reason, life kind of took you away from that and you say, "I'm ready to get back. I remember the joy that that brought in my life." Every one of these habits can help you take your next step toward Jesus.

I don't encourage you to do them all at the same time. You need to be reminded that these habits cannot be forced. I don't want you to do them out of obligation. You do these habits out of love. You say, "God, I want to grow closer to you." And so let me try these things to take my next step towards you. Remember, our relationship with Jesus is a process. We're all at different spots. And so I encourage you, have fun.

Try something new and see how it goes. Give it more than a week. Try it more than once. It might not go well the first time. You can just laugh about it, right? Be like, "Man, I really messed that up and try it again. Maybe you can do it with somebody else and share about your experiences. I've shared with you before. That is always a good thing to do." I want to conclude our series and today's message by reading the conclusion at the end of Richard Foster's book, *The Celebration of Disciplines*.

He says this, "We have come to the end of this study, but only to the beginning of our journey. We have seen how meditation heightens our spiritual sensitivity, which in turn leads us to prayer." Very soon, we discover that prayer involves fasting as an accompanying means. Informed by these three disciplines, we can effectively move into study, which gives us discernment about ourselves and about the world in which we live.

Through simplicity, we live with others in integrity. Solitude allows us to be genuinely present with people when we are there. Through submission, we live with others without manipulation, and through service, we are a blessing to them. Confession frees us from ourselves and releases us to worship. Worship opens the door to guidance.

And all disciplines freely exercised bring forth the doxology of celebration. The classical disciplines of the spiritual life beckon us to the Himalayas of the Spirit. And so now we stand at the timber line, awed by the snowy peaks that are before us. We step out in confidence with our guide who has blazed the trail and conquered the highest summit.

And so we look forward to growing in our relationship with God. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, may we not look at these disciplines or habits as an obligation? May it not become a checklist of how holy we are or how good we are before you. It's very clear that we cannot earn our salvation.

We cannot earn your love or your grace. But Lord, as we take these next steps, may we be drawn closer to You. May You fill our hearts and our lives with Your Spirit. When we proclaim You as Lord with our mouths, may we truly mean it with our hearts. And so we continue to worship and praise You in celebration.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.