

Thanks band, that was great! Good evening/morning, I'm Dustyn Vanzant the student pastor here at Heritage. I'm so excited to open the Bible with you today. But first I have a game called Katy Perry or Leviticus... Just kidding I didn't bring a game with me today. That would be cool though wouldn't it.

Monday morning kicks off our Kingdom Seekers VBS (**SLIDE**). We've got hundreds of kids signed up to take part in our adventure through the week. Thank you so much for your generous donations, and stepping up to help out through the week. God is going to do something fantastic this year and I'm excited to be a part of it. Amy Houston and the VBS team have done a tremendous job pulling this together over the last couple weeks. Just a reminder after service today we have our training meeting, and decoration set up. So after the 11am service head up to room 210 where you'll be given all the instructions you need for the week.

This weekend also kicks off one of the best times on the Heritage church calendar. Family month is finally here! (**SLIDE**) We've tried to create an experience that you and your family don't want to miss. We feel it's critically important for our kids to experience worship and teaching with their families. To see mom and dad singing and raising their hands during the music. To see other adults, and college students and high school students singing together and opening the Bible. To see and hear a message that connects, and then have conversations in the car on the way home about the things you learned together.

For all of that to work out, we've also tried to make the month as kid friendly as possible, without sacrificing what we do in the service. So we continue to have the special kid program and crayons. And new his year, we've created some experiences for the whole family to enjoy after services each week, we hope you linger and make a new friend this month. This week we have snow cones out in the grassy area. Next week we have bounce houses and then the

last two weeks we have face painting and balloon animals. This is the perfect month to invite that family down the street, or a coworker, or anyone else in your life and have them check out Heritage. This summer is going to be a blast and we want everyone to be a part of it.

Now before we go further, I also know that for many of us in the room, family month has a moment of dread isn't it. For some of us, its one month where we lose our hour of adult time, and the kids take over. Distract us. And sometimes embarrass us. Where the churchy facade we usually like to bring doesn't cover up the don't-make-me-come-over-there-side of real life. You know that family circus you run in the privacy of your own home. We get it. We encourage you, let your kids be freer than usual, it'll be ok. We won't judge you. We'll give grace to the distraction.

Have you ever been in those situations as a family, where you're going along living life and something happens and you realize everyone is watching? Or worse, nothing out of the ordinary happens, and yet it seems like everyone is now watching and you're not sure why... Come on, be honest, who has had that experience, I'm not the only one. It's weird right? Like, why is everyone looking at us? And then you see your child drinking from the dog's bowl.

There are moments in life where our family feels like a circus doesn't it. Like we're just here for the entertainment of others. It's sometimes embarrassing, like yeah, I live with these people... But then there are moments when you glimpse other people's family circuses and think, hey we're not doing too bad.

This month our focus is on four issues within families that make it feel like we're living in a three ring circus. We'll be walking together through Escape, Anxiety, Truth and Trust over the month of July. I kick off today with escape, then my wife, Robin, will share next week on anxiety. Scott Mylin is sharing the third week on Truth and the final week of July, Lead Pastor Andy

Sieberhagan is tag team speaking with the middle school director Maggie Hite to discuss trust. We believe all of these topics are going to apply to everyone regardless if your family is young old, big or small, really crazy or slightly less crazy but let's be honest, we all have a little crazy in us right?

Let me ask you, how do you deal with the craziness of your family? Maybe some of you fight right? Oh man, When the whole family comes together, you know it's going down! Maybe you're the kind that just gets embarrassed by the crazy in your family. Like, Oh that guy, no he's not my dad. I don't know who he is. He's kind of like an Uber driver for the family... Maybe you're sitting there and have no idea what I'm talking about, there is no one in your family that's crazy. Just as a general rule, if you're not sure who the crazy one is in your family is... then it's probably you.

But more often, it's that crazy that leads us to escape from life? We don't want to deal with the crazy in our life so we find something else to do. I can't deal with this right now, so I'm going to hide. So we hide in our bedroom. We immerse ourselves in a hobby. We work in the garage. We go to our safe space. Or we stare at a screen for hours.

Now family craziness isn't the only reason we escape. Escape comes in many forms, and the reasons for that escape are just as varied. Sometimes we escape because we're bored, can't find anything to do so I play around on our phone. Sometimes escape looks like our hobbies beginning to consume us and we spend all of our time and resources following the hobby. And sometimes we feel our life is meaningless so we search for something that excites us, a second life. Here's a couple of our students sharing about what they do for escape.

VIDEO: Students sharing Screen Time

Any adults wanting to show everyone their screen time on their phone? Yeah, I thought so. Thank you to those brave students, who had that asked of them at the last minute and in a way that they couldn't say no to me...

Now I imagine there are a lot of people in the room who escape from life through technology. Some of your kids haven't seen your actual face for days. They think moms face is just a pink case with an Apple logo - alright maybe not that. Escaping through technology looks different for many of us. For some it's binge watching one show on a streaming service for the seventh time (don't judge us, The Office is the greatest show ever created). Some have immersed yourself into a video game and didn't realize the sun came up an hour ago. Others of you find yourself on that website that you know you're not supposed to be on - the one that is going to bring you trouble... Or maybe, it's those of us who are constantly searching through the lives of our friends and followers, jealous of their fun life experiences. Technology has become our life-raft away from the pains, frustrations and dullness of life.

I also imagine there are a number of people in the room who would say their first inclination isn't to escape away to technology... but I'm guessing you use something else to escape. Maybe you escape by building things out of wood, or working on a car in the garage. Maybe you collect something like coins, comics or baseball cards. Maybe you leave the house for long periods of time hunting, running, shopping or playing sports. Or maybe you have immersed yourself in the written word of others, and are constantly in a novel or book. And there are others of us where we've taken on a bad habit, an addiction that is hard to shake that provided escape, but now we can't escape it.

Here's the thing, at some level, we all escape from life. **God created escape for us (SLIDE)** to step out of what's going on around us. It's one of our coping mechanisms. Stepping outside of a situation and clearing our mind is perfectly healthy. To move away from our current reality, from the emotional

and mental pain, and from difficult issues in life. The problem comes in when escape consumes us and we either never step back in to real life, or it becomes our only means to cope with our problems.

We never think it's going to get that far. I mean no one thinks, 'I'm going to buy my kid this Nintendo and I really hope she's going to spend every waking hour on this thing. I mean I just hope I'll have to tear it from her fingers.'

I had a friend in middle school and I used to spend the night at his house. His dad had taken the garage and made it into a room in the house - maybe you've seen that before. He made it into a Man cave. In this man-cave he had a massive collection of baseball cards. He had WWII memorabilia and intricate models everywhere. He had guns and knives on the walls and a few animal pelts for the world to see. At the time as a middle school boy walking through, it was awesome. But looking back, I cringe a bit. My friend's dad slept in a lazy boy chair, in this room. He came home, went to his room, until the next shift. His wife would watch tv in the living room and sleep in the bedroom. I don't mean to judge them or their relationship, but they were so far apart.

I don't think anyone goes into marriage or starting a family thinking, I'm really hoping that within the first couple years we can drift apart and spend time in separate rooms. I hope she gets really distracted from me and I hope he finds other things to do. No we go in thinking it's going to be incredible, a wedded bliss with a perfect family. But over time, families drift apart and get sucked into distracted presence rather than a thrilling life together.

Is your family having a thrilling life together? (SLIDE) Or are you in your separate rooms, distracted from each other, trying to avoid each other, until someone graduates, divorces or moves out?

These issues aren't anything new. I mean, the industrial revolution, economic prosperity and technology have certainly contributed to further separating us from each other. This separation is destroying the very fabric of our society, and we're getting worse because of it. Escape is leading to false and fake relationships and we're losing the skills to build real relationships.

Escape is causing an **epidemic of loneliness (SLIDE)**. Recently the insurance company Cigna did a study on 20,000 people across the United States and 47% of those that responded said they often felt alone or left out. Even worse, just over 14% said there is no one who knows them well. Another study done by the Brigham Young University found that loneliness shortens a person's life by 15 years, or about the same impact as being obese or smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Loneliness is literally killing us.

Escape has entered into the church at large as well. We've discussed the nones and dones (**The Nones and the Dones - SLIDE**) before in here. The Nones are those people who have no affiliation with the church whatsoever. And the dones are those that have completely walked away from church and often times God as well. What we're finding is that people would rather escape from the church than identify and work through issues. I don't like feeling guilty so I'm out. I don't like the drama so I'm not going back. I can't stand the hypocrisy so I'm done.

Look these issues aren't new. People have been struggling with each other for centuries. Yes technology has made escaping from reality easier, but the Bible clearly points us back together when we stray away. Paul wrote the book of Hebrews to the Jewish population in Asia Minor. Overall it does a great job of explaining how the Old Testaments points to Jesus Christ, and encourages Hebrew believers to take action about the messiah. Read with me as we start in chapter 10 verse 23 of Hebrews:

10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (SLIDE)

Paul in the beginning of chapter ten had just explained the sacrifice that Jesus had made, and now he is encouraging the Hebrew church to persevere. To endure for Christ. Asking someone to endure generally means it's going to be hard. Following Jesus is messy. People are crazy, annoying and hypocritical. But our love for Christ should compel us to engage not to disengage and fade away.

Notice the word "unswervingly". Some translations say "Hold Fast" or "Cling to". Following Jesus is going to have lots of moments where you are going to want to be pulled away. To swerve and get off the road. Paul is encouraging us to remain focused. It's easy to get distracted, to look away, to swerve into another direction. But we've got to be diligent. Hold on tight to what's important

One of the greatest Jedi masters of all time said, "**Your focus determines your reality**" - Qui Gon Jinn (SLIDE). When we swerve away and disengage, our focus shifts to something else. So often students come to me feeling like God has abandoned them, like they don't hear from Him on a daily basis, and they've lost all hope in what they've professed. And when I start talking to them, I can almost diagnose the problem every time with a few questions. How's your prayer life? What have you been reading in your Bible? How have you put into practice what you've been learning? Three questions. If you have shifted your focus away from God then your reality has changed as well. It gets much harder to hear and sense God without focused time with him.

When Paul wrote this, he saw followers of Jesus struggling to stay together in the heat of persecution. Everyone around them said following Jesus was pointless. It was a dead end. They should swerve away unless they to fall

victim too. Paul knew how important it was for them and us to stay focused. Using this focus, Paul moves them toward taking action. Paul continues in verse 24 of chapter ten.

10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, (SLIDE)

I love how Paul uses the word “Spur “ here. To spur others to commit acts of love and good deeds to the world around them. In the ESV translation it says “Stir up”. I’ve been stirred up before. Just after a touchdown at a Buckeye game, I get pretty stirred up. Front row of a 21 Pilots concert, I get stirred up. When I get enough points for free pizza at Papa Johns, I get stirred up! What stirs you up?

What I often don’t get stirred up about is love and good deeds. I like to help people. I think it’s important to help people. I think I’m called to help people. I like to love people when they’re over there, but.... There’s a big difference between my reaction to a Buckeye score and my ability to love someone well. If we’re being honest here, that doesn’t excite me. It only occasionally motives me.

I think that’s what Paul is getting at here when he wrote this. We need to be spurred on. We need others to stir this up inside because we’re not on our own. One of the main reasons the we gather together on a Sunday morning is to spur each other on for the rest of the week. To excite us to love and good deeds. It’s not doing easy showing love or easy doing good deeds in the world around us. These are often times the hard things, the things I don’t want to do.

And they don’t get any easier when I escape and disengage from church, family, or life. The life of escape makes it difficult to not only spur other

people on toward love and good deeds, but also for me to engage in love and good deeds with those around me. There's not a lot of love to share in a video game. Sure I can taunt someone with the Orange Julius dance in Fortnite, and they may laugh behind the game control on the other side - but that's not a good deed accomplished for the day - right? Finding myself consistently alone in my room or immersed in my hobby doesn't allow me the convenience of doing a good deed for someone else.

Which brings Paul to the last thought today, Hebrews chapter 10 verse 25 says,

10:25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (SLIDE)

So check this out, there is a group of people in Paul's time, that have chosen to stop meeting with the rest of the followers of Christ. Maybe he called them the "dones"? Paul encourages them, don't give up. Don't give up on meeting with other believers. Maybe you've tried a Life Group and it didn't work out - Don't give up. Maybe you've been bouncing between churches and haven't found your place - Don't give up. Maybe you've tried to connect in youth group and found the same drama you deal with on a daily basis at school - don't give up. Don't give in to the habit of escaping, of swerving away from what God has called you to.

And when those around you become discouraged and stop coming, go find them and encourage them to come back. Look around our building, there are people missing in our seats today. Yeah maybe its summer and they're on vacation. But are you sure that's all it is? What if we got really good at noticing each other and engaging each other when we're missing. A church that sees me, wants me, and encourages me is a church that loves me. We

can't just shrug it off when those in our church body become disengaged, Christ has authorized all of us to go after our brother and sisters who are disengaging and bring them back.

In our world today, technology and social media have conditioned us to escape from difficult interactions. On social media, someone says something I don't like or don't agree with, I can unfriend, unfollow, and hide their posts. It takes me all of two seconds and I can escape without consequence, all of their drama and world views. But in the real world, that attitude is a problem. We are created for relationships. Relationships are forged through adversity. We become better friends, better people, when we work through issues together. If I unfriend you without ever telling you why, neither one are going to grow from that interaction. I can't learn about my annoying habits. I can't apologize for how I made you feel. And we can't find out that we actually care about each other in the way Christ compels us to. So Paul saying, don't give up meeting together... well that's one of the things that's holding this whole thing together.

If I could sum up these three verses for you today, it would be this:

Be focused

Spur love

Meet together (SLIDE)

Resolution:

We need each other. Do the hard work - invest in real relationships that spur each other on. Set boundaries for what you escape into and purposefully engage the people God has put in your life.

Connecting to people without dealing with emotional baggage that comes with it. There is a difference in interacting and relating and having a conversation and over coming trials together

This is true of church of family, and life in general, but when you are Numb to the brokenness, you are numb to the beauty too.