

**Our Journey**  
**...Continues on Purpose**

**May 21, 2017**

9:30/11:00

**Songs – “Who is Like Our God”**

**“Good, Good Father”**

**Behind the Scenes at NHCC Video**

Well thanks Rick. Good morning everyone. Today we continue in our series Our Journey... and today we'll be taking a look at how our journey can continue on purpose.

Last week, we saw several folks take the step of faith in baptism. Some of those folks had been following Jesus for a while and had never been baptized but some were taking that first step. That first step of faith in Jesus.

That first step that says, I believe that Jesus

died to pay the penalty for all my sins, past, present and future and for that reason, I'm going to be baptized as a sign of my decision to follow Him and make Him the Lord and Leader of my life.

And to those who made that decision, I want to say welcome to the family. Welcome to the journey. And it is a journey not a destination.

In Philippians Chapter 3, we read

*But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. (Phil 3:12)*

*I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. (Phil 3:14)*

Paul challenges us to press on, to continue the journey set before us. The journey of

becoming more and more like Jesus.

And I've been thinking a lot lately about that concept...about what it means to press on, to continue our faith journey on purpose. Actually, I've been relearning that in the last couple months.

You see back in February, God used a visit with my youngest aunt to show me some things I needed to deal with in my life, on my journey of faith, some things that were hindering me.

(-pic of aunt Lisa)

My aunt Lisa (Lee) lives in Dallas and other than a couple other cousins, the rest of our large 90-plus family members live in St. Louis so getting time with her is often tricky, so I cherish these occasional visits to KC.

Especially since, from the time I was a little girl, I always looked up to my aunt Lisa; we were close in age-she was 6.5 years older than me. I so wanted to be her when I grew up. I always thought she was beautiful, fun and charismatic (and she still is).

So anyway, back to this visit. We were discussing AA. Over five years ago (5.6 years ago to be exact), she walked in to her first AA meeting and began her journey of sobriety. Through her journey we've had talked about it from time to time including this time.

We sat out on my deck talking about AA and how it works, how the 12 steps invite you to address your stinkin thinking and your character defects and how the journey requires you to keep on keeping on.

As she shared about her journey, I asked what was it that led her to her first AA

meeting. She shared about coming to terms with realizing that “normal” people didn’t use alcohol the way she did. She talked about her “stinking thinking”. Thinking that allowed her to stay in a pattern of excessive drinking and dismissing it in one way or another.

And as she shared, I kept feeling this nudge, this small voice convicting me about my relationship with sweet treats.

Now, I have far too often dismissed it as having my grandfather’s sweet tooth and no big deal but as I listened to her talk I thought about my excessive sweet habit. I thought about my desire to hide it (yes hide it...get a sweet treat and hide the evidence), my desire to avoid giving it up (people would talk about sugar fasts—how they were abstaining from sugar—and I would stick my fingers in my ears...lalalalala not listening), my desperate need to have it when I am sad, lonely, tired,

mad, feeling bad. Oh candy, chocolate, ice cream, pie, cake, cookies, how do I love thee let me count the ways!

Needless to say, I was beginning to get an inkling that I was going to need to do something about it...about this addiction to sweets. We'll get back to that later.

As we continued to talk, I asked her in her personal opinion what was it that caused people to "fall off the wagon" and go back to drinking and leave AA.

She thought about it and said, they stop going to meetings because they think they got the program down and so they no longer feel the need to go. She also said people who didn't fully examine all their character defects and admit them were at risk in her mind because they are still blaming someone or something else for their addiction instead of owning it

for themselves. Basically they aren't fully engaging with the 12 steps. I couldn't help but think how true that is in our spiritual faith as well.

As we talked more, she talked about how important it was for her to keep her focus "on the beam," to not give up her meetings, to continue to work the steps to address her character defects.

She talked about how she knew what those defects were and when she (or someone else) would see them sneaking back in, she knew she needed to address them.

How? By attending meetings, talking with her sponsor, doing service work and helping the people she sponsors.

In AA, you are encouraged to do what's been done for you. When you have reached a

certain point in your program, you are invited to help others on their journey toward sobriety.

Just out of curiosity, I asked my aunt...how many meetings do you attend to keep you on the beam, as she calls it. She said when you first start...90 meetings in 90 days (which she did) plus weekly meetings with her sponsor and daily calls with her sponsor.

She is now attend meetings at least 3 x a week plus meeting with her sponsor and the gal she sponsors. She said she knows that's what it takes for her to stay on the beam.

WOW...talk about commitment. Talk about continuing on a journey on purpose. She has laser sharp focus because she knows what it takes to keep from going back to where she was, the place where this all began. And she knows, if she goes back it will be so much



worse than it was before... so she is committed to her weekly meetings and working through the 12 steps again and again, addressing those thought patterns that hinder her and try to pull her back to her “old life.”

I found myself thinking, what would happen if Christians were that intentional about their spiritual life? What if I was that focused on my spiritual journey. What if I took my spirituality as seriously as she takes her sobriety? What if I acted like she does... like my life depended on it?

Her commitment to her sobriety... it's intentional, on purpose and continual.

And it reminded me of what we read in Hebrews 12:1

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by*

*such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. Hebrews 12:1 (NLT)*

Lisa is on a daily, moment by moment basis, stripping off every weight that slows her down (that attempts to pull her back to her addiction) and she is running with endurance the race God has set before her.

And as I looked at her journey, I was reminded that like most things in life you are either moving towards something or away from it.

Without intentional choices, everything devolves. Without physical activity, our bodies lose tone, gain fat, etc. Without community, our relationships become distant

and open to miscommunication and an inability to believe the best.

We have to work out, make time for one another. No one gets fit, or healthy, or sober *accidentally*.

And the same is true of our spiritual journey, see none of us become like Jesus accidentally. We become like Jesus on purpose.

We become like Him when we intentionally, on purpose, align our lives with Him, ask him to remove the thoughts, behaviors and habits that weigh us down and engage in habits that help us to connect with Him and allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

See we all like to think well as long as I'm not walking/moving away, I'm ok but that's just simply not true. When my daughter Maya was a little girl, we went to Table Rock Lake

for a family vacation. We rented a pontoon boat for the day and as we got to a spot for the kids to go swimming, we put on Maya's life vest and before we could even blink she had jumped off the boat and into the lake. She was not swimming just floating there and within a minute was already floating further and further from us. By the time Price could get off his shoes and jump in after her, she was 20 yards from the boat and that was without swimming... just floating there.

If you are not intentionally moving toward Jesus, you are like my daughter was... drifting away and much like drifting in the water, eventually you look around and you aren't even sure how you got where you are.

You see...there are only three options on your spiritual journey... you are either moving towards God, drifting away from Him OR intentionally turning away from Him. We

never just stay right where we are.

So how would you know which of those would best fit you?

## **Moving toward God**

Well if you are actively moving toward God, you (and others) will see the fruits of the spirit at work and growing in you.

Galatians 5 says...

*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)*

Are you growing in love and joy, peace and patience?

If you or others, see these things growing in

you, you are probably in a season of moving toward God.

### **Drifting away from God**

But if you are finding yourself being critical, fearful, prideful, short tempered, gossipy, judgmental, harsh tongued among other things, you are drifting away.

You might feel blah, generally irritable, adrift or stuck.

You may find your old sin patterns are rearing their head and if left unattended, soon your life doesn't look much different than before you started following Jesus.

If you are drifting, you aren't willingly walking away from God but you aren't intentionally moving forward either. When you are adrift, it might take a while to even recognize it.

## **Moving away from God**

If you are moving away from God, it is an intentional choice.

You have reached a point where you no longer wish to be in relationship with God and you are turning away from Him and walking away.

So what keeps us from actively moving towards God? What causes us to drift or walk away?

For our time, I'd like to suggest there are six main reasons why we drift or walk away. And by the way, I realize that I've been talking in context of a relationship with Jesus and continuing on purpose in a faith journey with Him. If that's not you (if you're not sure you believe in this Jesus stuff yet), I still think you might find some of this helpful in other areas

of your life where you need to continue on purpose.

Ok... so I'm sure there are more but these are the ones I see most often in myself and in those around me.

### **1. We get disinterested**

- Following Jesus is work. You have to keep on keeping on. You have to say no to some things so you can say yes to habits that grow your relationship and your faith.
- And I think we just grow weary and think eh, it's just too much work.
- There's other things I'd rather do with my Sunday mornings, my time, my talent, my treasure.

### **2. We get disconnected**

- We live in a very busy culture. We have a



lot of other commitments: work, school, kid/grandkid activities.

- It's easy to feel like you are always on the go so if you do have a small break in the flurry you want to just chill.
- Our busyness causes to disconnect from the habits that help us actively move toward Jesus.

### **3. We get distracted by others**

- We get focused on what other people are doing or not doing.
- We get distracted by all the ways they aren't measuring up to what we think they ought to do/be.

### **4. We get deceived**

- We are unable or unwilling to see our character defects.
- We can't see how our sin is having an effect on us or those around us.
- We are certain that Jesus' main plan for

our life is for us to be happy, at whatever cost.

## **5. We get disoriented**

- We are struggling emotionally or physically with our health
- We suffer a loss, trauma, or tragedy

## **6. We get disillusioned**

- We think we (or others) are good and therefore because we are good we deserve better
- We start to think our relationship with God is quid pro quo. We go to church, pray, tithe, do good and therefore God owes us what we want

Have you ever recognized any of those in your life?

I have. Often. And recently.

Actually on an almost daily basis I have to struggle to overcome at least one of those. I have to choose on purpose to push through, to press on.

And if I don't address them, before long, I'm drifting away from God.

So let's assume, we don't want to drift away. That like the challenge in Hebrews, we want to press on and finish the race set before us.

How would that happen?

I believe it involves us doing three key things.

### **Fix our eyes on Jesus**

We are called to be and look like Jesus. We must fix our eyes upon Him and who HE is.

How might one fix their eyes on Jesus? Well I

think a good place to start is to read the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), to read the words and deeds of Jesus.

## **Remain in Him**

John 15:5 says

*"Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.  
John 15:5 NLT*

We are called to remain in Him. Through prayer and time alone with God, we are able to stay connected with Him and see where he wants to work in us to make us more like Him.

## **Follow Him**

As we fix our eyes on Him and remain in

Him, we are better able to follow Him. Jesus didn't intend for us to just "know" who he was and watch what he did, his invitation was for us to follow him. He invites us to be set free from the weight that hinders us. He invites us to follow him, be transformed and be a light in this dark and hurting world.

Might sound easy, but it isn't or we'd all be doing it. It takes laser sharp focus, intentionality. It takes course correction.

You can go to church and "know" what you should do but that doesn't mean you are being transformed. Just because you KNOW doesn't mean you are moving toward Jesus.

We see that throughout the Gospels as Jesus confronts the Pharisees. Again and again, he calls them out because they KNOW all the seemingly right religious stuff but they aren't allowing those things to transform them from

the inside out. They go through the motions but their hearts are far from Him.

If you want to continue your journey on purpose, if you want to become more and more like Jesus, if you want to have the fruits of the spirit evident and at work in your life... you will have to fix your eyes on Jesus, remain in Him and Follow Him.

We are invited on a journey of transformation.

As I was thinking about how to explain this, I thought...you know maybe it would help to share a couple situations in my own life where this has played out.

When I first decided to follow Jesus, the first thing I needed to do was to get around other followers on a regular and consistent basis. I had gotten out of the habit of my youth and

so I made a commitment to attend church every week...not so I could get spiritual brownie points but because I needed it to stay moving forward.

After about five years of following Jesus, I was now regularly attending services, involved in a small group, giving and serving but I was struggling.

On a regular basis, I felt like my insides were not matching my outsides. I was becoming more and more like the Pharisee. I was doing all the “right” things but my life was riddled with doubt, fear, jealousy, anxiety. I felt empty, hollow, fake. What was I supposed to do? I had given my life to Jesus but what everyone else seemed to have (the ability to hear his voice, the ability to see real life change), well that just didn’t seem to be happening in my life like it was in theirs. So I sought out a mentor (my aunt has a sponsor...

I got a mentor... the point is someone who has what I wanted who had been on this journey longer than me) and through a year-plus process with this mentor, I learned several things that truly helped me move much further on my journey of faith.

In this time, I learned several key lessons and developed several habits that I have continued to this day like:

- Just because you hear a voice doesn't mean it's from God. If it sounds like shame and condemnation and makes you want to hide, it's not God...conviction yes, condemnation no.
- I learned that transformation takes TRUTH, GRACE and TIME.
- I was challenged and encouraged to build the habit of not only reading the Bible but journaling out the verses and



then praying and asking the Lord what he would want to say to me about them. That was a huge discipline that took me almost a year to develop and allowed me to really begin to hear God's still small voice.

- I also learned the importance of having another follower of Jesus who you trusted enough to confess all your character defects to who could help remind you you are forgiven and that God wants so much more for you, he wants you to be set free.

Those habits and lessons I learned are ones I come back to again and again and they help me check where I am and whether or not I'm drifting.

Which brings me back to that story about the sweets and my aunt. The last situation I want

to share with you is one that is still playing out.

For quite some time now, I have had a sense that the Lord wanted me to address my physical health but honestly this has continued to be an area of failure in my life. I'm not exaggerating when I say that I have tried so many times and so many things, to develop discipline and self control in the area of my physical health.

And every time I'd fail I'd heap more guilt and shame on myself, I'd try to behave and I just couldn't seem to do it. The pull inside me felt too great. I was always too busy, too stressed, too overwhelmed to do anything.

And then I had that visit with my aunt, as I listened to her and thought about her laser sharp focus and commitment, I felt like I was finally ready to admit that I had an issue...

well technically I have MANY issues.

I realized that I always had an excuse, some reason why I couldn't exercise, couldn't possibly give up sweet treats... I mean there was a birthday coming up, some celebration. It would be too hard, I just couldn't do it. I just wasn't as disciplined as those around me. I was just destined to fight a lack of self control in my life but that's ok because spiritually I'm ok right?

Wrong... as I looked back over my journal for the past couple years, it was evident how much my inability to stay the course in my physical health was having a negative effect on me. My journal was filled with... I'm sorrys and a lot of language about failure and guilt.

I had no idea how much it was sucking me down, distracting me. See because I couldn't do it "right" and because I hated myself for

my inability to do this, I was getting caught in a vicious cycle...I'm terrible so I work harder to make myself feel better about myself. I feel stressed so I eat junk to feel better. I feel worse because I'm so undisciplined so I go overfunction and make everyone like me so I will like myself.

And so after my aunt left, I made two commitments...I would start reading through the Serenity Bible daily meditations focused on the 12s steps that our Hurts, Habits and Hangups group here at NHCC (a 12 step recovery small group) was working through. And OH MY GOSH...the Lord was speaking, encouraging and challenging me left and right...frankly I could fill up 6 weeks of messages just telling you about all the stuff I'm learning and relearning through reading this. So many lessons about the Good News that I have learned before but needed to be reminded of.

And in addition, to reading the meditations, I committed to working out every day. It was my husband who suggested I say every day, and it helped because you know what even when I didn't hit every day, I was still going more than I ever had.

And you know what something crazy started happening, after two months, I was noticing my mind changing, a habit was beginning to form. I know some people say it takes 21 days to build a habit but others I've read say 66 or even 90....I agree with them! It's taking way longer than 21 days but it is happening.

And then on May 1, I finally did it...something I had never done. I made a commitment to have NO sweet treats (no cookies, candies, ice cream, pies, cakes, soda) for a month. I'm 20 days in and I have stayed the course...but last week I almost got derailed.

The stress of a lot of plates spinning (getting busy) and the fact that I weighed myself on Wednesday and had not only lost any weight but have actually gained 1/2 a pound, it made me realize these are the patterns that have shut me down before.

So I had to ask myself...was I doing all this just to lose weight or was I doing it because I believe it was good for me, because I believe over time that God would transform me...and He is...maybe not physically but spiritually.

He is changing my mind. He has called me remain in Him, and to follow him.

And I'm not foolish enough to think, I've arrived. I will have to continue this journey on purpose, not just this current physical journey but the journey of becoming more and more like Jesus.

And we are all on a journey and so in the time we have left, I want to invite you to discern where you might be on your journey, what might be hindering you, what might be the next step Jesus wants you to take?

Maybe Jesus is inviting you to make a commitment to gather with His followers every Sunday (where ever that might be), maybe to continue to build your prayer habit (like using the prayer experiment), or maybe he's challenging you to take a class to learn how to hear from him, to get your finances in order or to begin a recovery program.

I'm not sure what it is Jesus is calling you to do but I know this...we aren't called to just believe in Jesus and stop. We are called to press on, to persevere, to keep pursuing becoming more and more like Him...what is that next step he's inviting you to?

I'm going to pray for you and then the band is going to come and sing a song and I want to invite you to just be quiet and listen to the words and then when they are done singing, they will play some instrumental music and some slides will appear to help you process through.

**Let's pray**

***BAND-Welcome Home***

**(Moving Toward Or Away?)**

**PAUSE for ~15 second**

**(Disinterested, etc)**

**PAUSE for ~30 seconds**

**(what is your next step?)**

**PAUSE for ~30 seconds**

Transition



As we close out our time this morning, we are going to take communion as a reminder to fix our eyes on Jesus, to remain in Him and to follow Him, throwing off every weight that hinders us. Less of us and more of Him.

If that's where you are at, I invite you to take communion. As the band sings this next song, just make your way to a communion station and take a piece of the bread, dip it in the juice and eat it and then return to your seat for one last song of prayer and worship together.

**BAND-Empty Me (Communion)**

**BAND-Lord I Need You**

Closing Comments.

*Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole*

*spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. 1 Thes. 5:23*

Prayer Experiment Share next Sunday  
Visit Class Rally...but get kiddos first  
Offering at door