

I want to tell you a story about a time I got in trouble. Big trouble. I was in 8th grade, my best friend was spending the night at my house, and I got the idea that we should sneak out. I even recruited my 17-year-old stepbrother to join us. We waited for my dad and stepmom to go to bed, locked my bedroom door, took out the screen, and crossed the threshold into wickedness and disobedience. And what did we do on this nefarious expedition? We walked around my neighborhood. We didn't go boozing or stealing or vandalizing. We walked. The maybe only suspect thing we did was walk by the house of a girl named Holly. I may have been sweet on her and we walked by her house just in case she happened to be standing outside in the dark at 1:00 AM hoping someone would walk by. OK. Maybe that was a bit creepy.

After a couple hours we decided to make our way home and, by this time, a fog had rolled in, so visibility was limited. As we turned the corner and neared my house, I saw a light on and called the others' attention to it. That's when I heard the most terrifying sound in the history of my life. Through the fog came the voice of my father saying, "Keep coming." We were busted. You see, my other brother had come home and woke up the parents to ask where we were. So we proceeded forward and the first thing I saw was the whites of my dad's giant, eyes cutting through the fog. And there were two things coming out of my dad: wrath and vengeance. He was angry and I was going to pay for it. He told me to get in the house and tried to walk next to me as I did, but I took this very circuitous route because I messed up and I didn't want to be anywhere near him.

How do you think Jesus responds when we mess up? What pours out of his heart when we sin? Anger, impatience, contempt? Where is the safest place to be when we mess up? Far away, like I tried to be? Or somewhere else? You see, from the beginning, we have questioned the heart and intentions of God when we mess up and the results have been disastrous. Since Adam and Eve first ate of the forbidden fruit, realized their error, and hid from God, our instinct/reflex in those moments is to do the same thing; hide, run, put distance between us. That may be because we grew up that way with an angry parent, it may be that we know enough of the Old Testament to know God is pretty angry at times, or it may be because we misunderstand who we are in Christ and question his heart for us in the moments we rebel. And so we back up from God and carry a weight on ourselves that we simply cannot bear.

So this morning we continue in our series called *Come to Me* to understand the invitation Jesus extends to all of us. Last week we looked at the substance of the invitation in that Jesus offers to take our burden and carry it for us while he gives us a new burden that is easy and light. This week, though, we look at his heart because, if we don't trust that, we'll stay far away. Jesus doesn't want that for us.

[Matthew 11:28-30] ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

There is only one place in the Gospels where Jesus speaks of his heart, and it's right here. In Scripture, the heart is more than the place of emotions. The heart is the whole of a person, the core of who they are. It is the answer to the question "What gets you up in the morning?" When Jesus gets an opportunity to tell us what that is for him, he says his heart is gentle and lowly.

The word translated gentle shows up four times in the New Testament, twice as gentle, twice as meek. Gentleness/meekness is not weakness. It can be defined as power under control. It's the bent of a heart greatly concerned for others. It is not harsh, condemning, reactionary, exasperated. It is caring, considerate, and mild. You could say Jesus is telling us he's a soft place to land. That doesn't take away from him being holy, righteous, and just. He is the righteous judge, his anger towards sin is justified, he would be completely justified to pour out his wrath on us, and for those who do not come to him, that is what they will experience. But for those that do, they will find a gentle Savior.

Lowly is often translated "humble". That's not the virtue of humility, it's the condition of being beaten down by this world and this life, and the Gospels show us that's Jesus's story. But through it he becomes relatable, approachable, and sympathetic. He knows our pain and joins us in it. It's the opposite of that famous quote improperly attributed to Marie Antionette. When told that the French could not afford to eat bread, her response was "Let them eat cake." That's not lowliness. That's detachment, an inability to relate, and arrogance. And while Jesus is our exalted Lord and Savior, he also took on flesh and subjected himself to all this world has to offer. His lowliness is our blessing. So that is his heart. How does his heart manifest towards us then?

[Matthew 9:35-36] ³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus is fulfilling his mission of proclaiming the Kingdom and everywhere he goes he sees person after person troubled and beaten down. They were subjected to the futility of this broken world and consequences of sin, and they were carrying that burden on their own. His response? Compassion. Matthew uses the word *splanchnizomai* (splank-NEEZ-o-my) closely associated with bowels. It's a gut-level response full of compassion, pity, and sympathy. In our vernacular to say, "His heart went out to them."

Compassion says, "That hurts to see, and I don't want that for anyone." It's why mercy organizations show you suffering to get you to give because your heart goes out to that suffering. And they're really unfair when they use Sarah McLaughlin's voice and dogs in cages. Seen that one? Very effective. I've given that organization \$7.5 million!

How do you think Jesus sees you in your state? Repulsed? Too many of us think Jesus sees us suffering in a mess of our own making and thinks "Serves you right." or "Can't you figure it out?" Or we think Jesus coldly gives us two choices. Come to me and get grace or don't come to me and get judgment. Pick one. It makes no difference to me. But that's not true. **We worship a Savior whose heart breaks for our brokenness.** Remember what I said last week: Jesus loves you, and Jesus hates sin, and he will do everything in his power to separate you from that sin. When he looks at us, he sees what sin has wrought, his heart goes out to us, and he moves towards us to make it right. So then how does he respond when we sin?

[Hebrews 4:15] ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

I want to tell you something that I'm not sure if it's supposed to make us feel good or you feel bad. Jesus is never surprised when you sin. First, he knows our weakness, flesh, inability to resist in our own power (and that's part of his compassion for us. "They don't stand a chance.") Second, he has experienced it all himself. Any temptation you and I face, he's already faced. He knows what it means to be tempted to indulge his flesh or make much of himself or function for the praise of man. He had plenty of reason to be unkind, unfaithful, or uninterested. So we're told he has sympathy for us, co-suffering because **he has walked in our shoes**.

There's one big difference though. He never gave into it. At every turn he had the option to go against the will of the Father, choose his own path, but he didn't. For us, though, we are weak, and we fail. And because he's perfect and because we fail, we too often start to believe that in our imperfection Jesus grows weary of us. Sure, he's forgiven us, but with every failure he grows impatient, disappointed, frustrated, disdainful. That he says, "You did it again?" We question his heart for us.

Personally, I will sin, feel the guilt and shame, perceive distance, and am pretty sure that if I approached the Lord in that moment, he'd say something like "You treat me like that yet you want to come under my good graces? Please go." What about you? What is your response when you feel the weight of your sin.

I was reminded this week of the most gentle thing my dad ever said. One of my brothers made a lot of bad choices in his life that came back on the family and added weight, burden, heartache. And one day as my dad was yet again ready to engage, I told him it was time to put up boundaries, etc. And my dad looked at me and said "I know, Kurt. But he's still my son." Whether he intended to or not, my dad showed me the heart of Jesus that day.

If you are a follower of Jesus, you belong to him forever, no matter how bad you mess up. He is gentle and lowly in heart, and when he sees you struggling with sin, his heart doesn't reject you, it goes out to you. If that's true, what should we do when we sin?

[Hebrews 4:16] ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The only hope we have is to go with confidence to the throne of grace. Confidence in what? The heart of Jesus. When we come to him, we will find a Savior eager to help because he knows exactly what you are going through. He has been through it all, and he won, so he is the perfect one to help us in our struggle. His mercy forgives us, and his grace reminds us who we are in him and empowers and guides us to defeat sin in our lives. **He gives both freely and abundantly.** So when you sneak out of the house, go to him. When pride and lust and anger and gluttony and selfishness show up, go to him. When you keep giving in to that one temptation again and again, go to him. He will never tire because he loves you and is for you. So Jesus's heart is compassionate towards us, pours out mercy and grace when we fall short. The last thing Jesus' heart does is train us to defeat sin in our lives.

[Hebrews 12:5-11] ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Discipline is a tough word for some because it conjures up the past of harsh punishment. But discipline and disciple come from the same word and, in this passage, we are referred to as sons and daughters of God. **Permanently.** And what does a good God do for his children? Lovingly trains them. Discipline is providential challenge and suffering that causes us to turn to the Lord in dependence. The result is holiness and righteousness. And what is that? The ongoing eradication of sin in our lives and the formation of our character to look more like his.

We can resist discipline or question the heart of Jesus because we receive it as punishment. But discipline and punishment are not the same. Ask any parent in here and they’ll tell you they’ve doled out both. Punishment satisfies the justice of the punisher, but if you are a believer, God’s justice was satisfied on the cross where your sins were nailed and paid in full. God still hates the sin in your life, but he is no longer angry at you or holds it against you. He does, though, discipline you. It may be to allow natural consequences of your sin to come to bear. Speed/ticket, sleep around/disease or lack of intimacy, arrogance/no friends. Or he may allow difficulty in your life to grab your attention and cause you to come to him. God wants to use something like a pandemic to train us. The more that happens, the more we turn to him, and the more sin is removed from your life. Our gentle and lowly Savior gently corrects you because he loves you and knows the holy life is the best life. Trust his heart and let him do his work.

This summer I read *Gentle and Lowly*, a wonderful book I recommend to all, and one that helped me put this series together. In it, the author quotes a whole lot of Puritans. Now, I haven’t done a lot of reading of the Puritans, but that is going to change, because they know the heart of Jesus, and when you know the heart of Jesus, it changes everything.

“That which keeps men off is, that they know not Christ’s mind and heart...The truth is, he is more glad of us that we can be of him... Have you a mind? He that came down from heaven, as himself says in the text, to die for you, will meet you more than halfway. Q therefore come in unto him. If you knew his heart, you would.” -Thomas Goodwin

You don’t have to wait. Go in whatever condition you’re in. The more jacked up you are, the more his compassion pours out to you, his grace and mercy are available to you, and the more he wants to show you a better way. He is gentle and lowly, and he is inviting you to come to him.