

In the mid '90s I fell in love with the music of a band called The Who. A couple of years ago, I was given a wonderful opportunity to attend their concert by Chris Milazzo, husband of Kids Ministry Kelly Milazzo. He found out I was a Who fan, had an extra ticket, and invited me to go along with him and a couple of his buddies. I couldn't have said "yes" fast enough.

The plan was to meet at his house and leave from there. After I arrived, it didn't take very long for me to realize I was way out of my element. While standing in a room full of books, Chris asked me what number Who concert this was for me. The implication was that he was expecting a number greater than one, and this was reinforced by him handing me multiple books off the shelf that turned out to be commemorative photo albums of all the concerts tours he had attended. So I somewhat sheepishly said "Actually, this is my first."

After everyone arrived, we got in the car to go and along the way, one of Chris's friends announced, "Guys, I heard they are going to play a song they've never played in a concert before." The excitement and anticipation was palpable, and they spent the next ten minutes taking guesses as to what song it might be and eliminating several because they remembered a concert where it had been played before. I added very little to this portion of the conversation.

We got to AAC, found our seats, and the concert began with a stirring rendition of Baba O'Reilly. I knew this one, and it is one of my favorites. As the concert continued, you could tell the guys I was with were growing in anticipation of this surprise song, and one even turned to the other at some point and passionately asked "What is it going to be?!?!" And then, a couple minutes later, the first four notes of their next song played, and all the guys turned to each other, yelled "No wayyyyyyyyy!!!!!!", and high-fived. I had never heard the song before in my life.

In that moment, it became clear. I was really a fan only of their greatest hits. But for these other guys, The Who was at the center of their music lives. They were followers. While driving home that night, I realized this is the contrast we see so often in the church when it comes to Jesus.

For far too many of us, and likely all of us at certain times, Jesus is someone we dabble in, interested in his greatest hits, but not regularly living with him at the center of our lives. It may be that some of us are just not that interested in that, while others may not know how. All of it, though, comes at a great cost to fulfilling the life God has for us.

This morning, as we continue our series called *Becoming*, where we are looking at what happens when we answer the call of Jesus, what he makes us become, we are going to look at two groups of people who are around Jesus. One group is full of fans, interested in Jesus' greatest hits, but not much beyond that. The others, though, are followers who will answer his call. When they do, they'll show us that **Jesus makes us become consistent in pursuing a God-centered life**. Like The Who was for the guys I was with, we too can put God at the center of our lives. And if we have any desire to be a disciple of Jesus, this is where it has to start. My challenge to you this morning is to determine which group you most closely resemble and to weigh the costs and benefits of living that way.

[Mark 3:7-12] ⁷ Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea ⁸ and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and

from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. ⁹ And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, ¹⁰ for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. ¹¹ And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, “You are the Son of God.” ¹² And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

Jesus’ ministry had begun, it included miraculous healings, and word had gotten around. Mark tells us the crowd heard what he was doing and came to him. Remember that motivation as we get to the disciples in a few verses. This crowd is not interested in Jesus’ mission or his presence. They are self-centered, focused on their own agenda and how they can benefit from Jesus. They want the power of his miracles instead of the teaching it confirms, his teaching of “**The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel**”. They were greatest hits fans, not devoted followers. And you know what Jesus’ response was? To withdraw, and ultimately to get a boat ready to get out of there and away from the crowd. He was about the business of the Kingdom, and he perceived their motivation was different than his.

It’s like if you’ve ever talked to someone who appeared really interested in you but you quickly recognized they are really only concerned with how you can benefit them. We, at times, keep Jesus “out there”. We may have originally come to him in faith to be saved, and we come to him in times of need, but we remain at the center of our lives and see how we can fit Jesus into our agenda instead of seeing how we fit into his. **We pursue the benefits of faith while avoiding the costs of following, and we miss out on so much.** But there is a different way, a way to live that puts Jesus where he belongs...at the center of our lives.

[Mark 3:13-20] ¹³ And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. ²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat.

Growing up, my mom would always use the same method to get my brothers and me to come home. She has a superhuman whistle. It can cut through gale-force winds and carries three miles in all directions. And if you were a Pressler boy, it was impossible to ignore, though we never wanted to ignore it. First, it was distinctive. Only mom had that whistle, and we recognized it as being unique. Second, it was authoritative. Mom was boss, and when she called, you better come. But we were happy to because, lastly, it was invitational. You see, mom really only used it when it was time to eat dinner...and generational evidence shows you don’t have to work very hard to get Pressler boys to come eat. Family meals were important to us growing up, so we knew that, if we answered her call, goodness was to follow. And it’s the same way with Jesus.

These disciples recognized Jesus' call as distinctive. It was like nothing else they had ever heard. It was authoritative. They may not have recognized it completely yet, but it was the voice of God they were hearing. But it was also invitational. There was goodness to follow if they answered it. And they did. I want to spend the rest of our time looking at the three ways they answered the call and pursued a God-centered life and consider how we can do the same.

We put God first when we live in our new identity.

Mark tells us that Jesus "appointed" the twelve. These are the twelve disciples we see with him throughout his ministry. But the word Mark uses that gets translated as "appoint" actually means "to make", and it's the same verb found in Mark 1:17 when Jesus says, "I will make you fishers of men." The process of making has begun, and that means individually and collectively, they are becoming something new and allowing Jesus to give them a new identity. That puts him at the center of their lives because there is nothing more central than he who tells you who you are.

It's the same for us. Jesus' calls us to come to him, let him make us, believe what he has to say about us, and then live in that new identity. The challenge is that we are often at risk of putting our identity in other things. You know the list: job, family, resources, reputation, our past. But all of these are unstable and fleeting. I can put my identity in being a pastor, but if numbers are down or I don't get enough compliments on my sermon or I fail in my leadership, my identity is in play. We also run the risk of believing we are the one who needs to make ourselves and the identity that comes with it. If it's up to me to make myself or define who I am, I am no longer dependent upon God's grace, and that puts me at the center of my life instead of God. If you base your identity on anything other than what God says, or on anything other than what God does, you build your life on shaky ground. That instability ultimately leaves us questioning our relationship with God and compromises our ability to live out what God is sending us to do.

But look who Jesus calls to himself: those he desires. If the call of Jesus is upon your life, it means he desires you to be with him...and that changes everything. Let me say that again, and let it sink it for the first time, or afresh. The God of the universe, the Creator of all things, the Savior of mankind, has called you to himself because he desires to be with you. And the beauty of the Gospel is that he's accomplished everything needed to make it all possible. You don't have to clean yourself up first. That's his job, and because he's done that through a cross and empty tomb, your identity is one who is desired as is, along with being one who is called friend, beloved, adopted child, forgiven, accepted, loved, redeemed, washed clean, secure, righteous. All of these are what Jesus says about you, and when you let him tell you who you are and live your life out of that identity, you put him at the center of your life. But to hear what he says he's making you, you must first come to him when he calls.

We put God first when we live with a new priority.

The disciples came to Jesus immediately. While the crowd came to him because they heard what he was doing, the disciples came to him because they heard his calling them to himself. They were living with a new priority, a new authority, and that was Jesus. When he called, they answered.

You and I have that same decision to make. Jesus is calling, and he asks us to live with him at the center of our lives, to make him our priority, and to order every other aspect of our life in alignment with his call. **The Savior of our souls also wants to be Lord of our lives.**

I heard Tim Keller reference a way to think about this from a talk he heard in 1977 by Barbara Boyd. It went something like this: If I was to be invited to a party and, upon arrival, was told that Barbara could come in, but Boyd couldn't, it would make no sense. You can't separate the two. We are one in the same. It's the same idea with Jesus. If we ask him into our life as Savior, but not as Lord, we are trying to divide something that cannot be divided. He is Savior because he is Lord and he is Lord because he is Savior.

We want the "greatest hit" of salvation without the surrendered devotion to him as Lord. Perhaps it's that we don't really understand who he is and what he's done for us. Perhaps it's because we still struggle to believe it. Or maybe we believe life will be more satisfying with ourselves in the center of it. If you have not surrendered your life, what is it for you?

But here's what I know. My testimony has two key moments in it. The first was when I trusted in Christ alone for salvation when I was a kid, and the second was in 1999, in the middle of the night, after studying the Sermon on the Mount for weeks, and being confronted with the fact that I was living far far away from God and was miserable because of it. And in that moment, I surrendered, I gave it all to him and invited him to be Lord, **and my life has never been the same since.** Jesus said whoever loses his life for his sake will find it. It's only when we give it away to him that we find the life God meant for us to live. It's not a one and done. It's a daily pursuit. You and I will stumble along the way, but we can run to the cross where all of our stumbles were paid for, confess what has happened, and allow him to remake and restore us.

We put God first when we live with new activity.

Mark tells us Jesus called them to himself so that they might be with him. It's a small phrase we could quickly read over, but it has tremendous importance. They were to be with him so he could make them more like himself. Proximity fosters influence. That's why most of us are a lot more like our parents than we ever planned! Jesus was going to take the time for them to know him and to ultimately train them for what was to come. Now, we can read this and think it was an experience only for these guys. And, to an extent, it was, because they were in his physical presence. But what was it they were doing?

When they heard Jesus speak, they were hearing the Word of God. When they spoke to Jesus, they were essentially praying to God. They were secluded from life, up on a mountain. And they were all enjoying his presence. Learning the Word, praying, seclusion, presence...what does that sound like? Spiritual disciplines.

For many of us, we hear that phrase and can't help but think it sounds like punishment, or some list of religious activities that good Christians do all the time. All of that misses the point.

Disciplines are times when "we might be with him", times to enjoy his presence, to discover who He is and who we are in him, to be developed and trained, and to ultimately move him more and more into the center of our lives.

Struggling with your identity? Being with him through disciplines allows us to be reminded who he has made us to be, what he calls us, and how he accomplished it. Struggling with surrendering your life to God? Being with him through disciplines reminds us who he is and what he has done for us. A regular reminder that Jesus gave his life so that you could have eternal life could inspire that surrender. It is in the practice of disciplines that we allow Jesus to make us, and it's from there that he sends us out.

And if you're not sure what to do, follow Jesus' lead. Jesus gets away, and Luke 6 tells us this moment was preceded by an entire night of praying. Follow the disciples' lead. They went to him, sat in his presence, listened to his Words, asked questions, and ultimately worshipped him. You can start that tonight. We are going to gather to place God at the center of our church and joyfully worship him through song, praise, and prayer, to be reminded of who he is, what he's done, and who we are in him. Come to Worship Night.

The beginning of becoming is being...in his presence, secure in your new identity, and surrendered to whatever he wants to make you. I want to close with a story of a guy who recently answered this call. Last week I announced that we want to tell 1,000 stories of courageous next steps in becoming more like Jesus. God is calling all of us to take that next step, and I want to close with the story of our own Eric Williams, who took the step of putting God in the center of his life.

Eric took the courageous next step to put his faith in a God he didn't completely understand, to surrender his life to God, let him tell him who is he, and pursue him regularly to be in his presence and let Jesus make him who Jesus wants him to be. His story can be yours. Jesus is calling. Will you answer by letting him be the center of your life?