

Everything's Better When You Know Where You're Going
Everything's Better Series Week 2
1/14/18

Welcome/Intro

If you're new, today's a great day to join us—second week of a very short series called “Everything's Better”

Whether you're a resolutions person or not, every one of us at some level would love for the days that stretch ahead on the 2018 calendar to be better in some way than 2017 was
Healthier, better relationships, better handle on your money, or just less drama and pain in your life

Most of us look at the calendar ahead or think about the next 50 weeks stretching out ahead of us and at some level we'd love for some THING, some part of our lives, to be better

So we're taking a couple of weeks to talk about a couple of core biblical principles that help to make everything better—that if you do these two things, they infuse fresh energy into the whole system to make everything just a little bit better

Last week we said: ***Everything's better when we're connected.***

We're made to flourish as relationally connected human beings. All kinds of studies that show that we're healthier physically, emotionally, and spiritually when we're in healthy relationships

What we're all about here is connecting people to God and to each other, because the Scriptures teach and science has proven that everything's better when we're connected

And we looked at a story where Jesus taught his closest 12 disciples the value of being connected with him and of serving together in community

Because everything's better when we're connected

This week, we're going to look at another principle from Jesus's life that if we'll follow him in applying this to our own lives it'll make everything just a little better

And that principle is this: ***Everything's better when you know where you're going***

Have you ever been in a situation where you knew EXACTLY what you had to do in that moment? And maybe it was daunting or challenging or anxiety-producing

But at the same time, wasn't there something utterly refreshing in knowing EXACTLY what you had to do?

Crisis does this, doesn't it? When there's a crisis with your kids or your money or your health or your job situation or your marriage or even if you're like at the scene of an accident

it can be really scary but at the same time if you're willing to embrace it, there's something VERY CLARIFYING about saying "it's totally clear what I need to be about right now or in this season"

When we have clarity around what we're doing and why we're doing it, it can bring order to our lives in a way that nothing else can

That purpose becomes like the sun in the solar system of your life—that's the center and everything else goes in its proper place

Everything's better when we know where we're going, why we're here, what our purpose really is

What if you lived 2018 on purpose? What if you spent the next 50 weeks of 2018 with absolute crystal clarity around what you were about in a way that the solar system of your life was all functioning in right relationship to why God put you on this earth?

Today we're going to watch how Jesus does this and how having absolute clarity around his purpose and why he was here

How that frees him to go against the flow of what people wanted him to do or expected him to do so that he might do what he was actually made and meant to do

Bible/No Bible: Mark 1—same biography of Jesus that we were in last week

if new and new to the Bible so glad you're here, Mark is one of 4 biographies we have of Jesus

And in Mark chapter 1, we get a brief description of Jesus's first ever public ministry—this is his big debut

He goes to his local Jewish synagogue which is just a local place of worship for the first century Jews and he does some teaching and the people are utterly wow'd and in awe of his ability to teach

And then he does a miracle, and the place explodes: "Who is this?!? What kind of power does he have?!?"

And they start spreading real news, not fake news, about the local boy who grew up with them who teaches and works miracles with an authority that they've not seen before

And after a full day of teaching in the local synagogue Jesus goes to the house of one of his disciples, and the people hear that he's gone there

So they all gather together at that house and here's the description that we get:

³² That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴ and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Now there's one part here that's a little strange to some of us—this whole thing about demons. Sounds a little strange for some of us and it does come up throughout the biographies of Jesus especially

In fact, we're going to look at a story next week where Jesus empowers his disciples to deal with the demons, so here's what we're going to do

NEXT WEEK we'll take just 3 minutes to do a quick aside about the whole demons thing in the Bible and how the Bible talks about them

But here's what's important for today's discussion: Every time Jesus goes head to head with a demon, he wins.

At every turn in the Jesus story, from the start to the end of it, Jesus is re-claiming human beings, made in God's image

Whether it's physical diseases and sickness or spiritual disease and sickness rescuing them out of darkness and into his wonderful light: inch by inch, person by person, over and over again, relentlessly.

And everyone sees it, and he's a smash hit. The whole town crowds this little house--this is Jesus's big opening night, his big first act, and the crowds love him.

Have you ever had an opening night before?

A big assignment or opportunity at work or in school or in an athletic competition or on a stage where you felt the weight of a public performance that you hoped hoped hoped would go over well?

Maybe you imagined how it would go

And Depending on your personality, you either imagined crushing it and everyone loving you and you being the star OR you imagined failing miserably and feeling like an utter failure!

The optimists and pessimists among us tend to dream a little differently!

But Jesus here, he crushes opening night. He's a hit. And with the initial response of the crowds comes all sorts of things: some are opportunities, great opportunities, to do more good for more people

But what also comes with crowds and applause are a whole set of pitfalls, and temptations that Jesus is going to have to navigate for the next 3 or so years of his public life

And one of the questions that constantly hounds Jesus as the crowds grow and grow over the course of his public life is

“how will Jesus handle the opportunities and the pitfalls and temptations that always come with success and crowds?”

Because everything's better when we know where we're going, know what we're here to do, and sometimes success and crowds obscures and clouds that purpose, distracts us from that purpose in ways that are very, very hard to resist or see through

We're going to see what Jesus does next, but first I want to pause and ask you the same question--hopefully at some point in your life, you've experienced something that you called success in some field or endeavor

And just like it was for Jesus, with success often comes a whole package of opportunities as well as temptations and pitfalls. ***How have you handled the opportunities AND the pitfalls and temptations that have come with your experiences of success?***

What's your track record? How have you responded when you've been successful?

This is crucial because if you step back and look throughout the biblical story success is the most spiritually dangerous place anyone goes

Success and busyness are the most spiritually dangerous territory that people inhabit.

We know this right? You've seen this in your own life.

When crisis comes, when challenge comes, in the face of difficulty and hardship, throughout the Scriptures and throughout our own lives and throughout our country return to God, cling to God, and become very very spiritual

And then the crisis passes, life as normal returns. People are successful, safe, well-taken care of, fat and happy, and we get busy doing other things we drift from God and go their own ways

Jesus has a successful debut and opening night and the mission-critical question for him as we talk about living a life full of purpose is: what will he do next?

And it's the same question that hangs over you and I when we experience success at any level if we're going to live a life that has more of a purpose than merely more crowds and more of whatever they want to keep them happy and applauding

Here's what he does:

³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

This sentence is the antidote to a life of merely riding the approval of the crowds, it's words of gold

First, Jesus gets up early—that's not it, that's not gold, some of you are so cranky and grumpy in the morning that nobody wants to talk to you, maybe even God!

But this whole idea that Jesus finds a physical and relational space APART from the crowds and from the success that he just generated

is mission-critical to him living a life full of purpose that is bigger and more substantive than simply generating more and bigger crowds

The antidote to falling in love with the crowds or our own successes

is leaving those crowds and unhooking from those successes and hooking into the God who is larger, more important, and ultimately more real than either the crowds or our passing, temporary successes.

To let God shine HIS light and life into you and allow you to see the crowd and success for what it is.

I have over the years occasionally gotten bogged down by winter. Gray and cold for weeks on end can start to wear me down and make me just kind of blah

So for Christmas this year, my wife gave me this: a sunlight designed to help reset your internal bio-rhythms, the circadian rhythm, to keep you from getting that seasonal winter blues—if you believe what the box says it'll cure just about anything, maybe my wife just hopes it'll cure my winter grumps!

I mean you turn this thing on and look what happens! TA-DAH!

You get this much light, you figure either you'll start feeling a little better or you'll burn out your retinas! It's either a homerun or a strikeout with this thing!

So just about every day since Christmas, for me I'm a morning person so mornings do work for me, and so at some point in the morning before I start my work day, I get my Bible and my prayer journal and this little light

And I turn on this light and sit right next to it, and I pray that just as this light shines on my body to reset my internal clock and refreshes and restores my bodily rhythms

That the Scriptures I read and the time of prayer would flood my soul and my spirit with the Light of Christ to reset and restore my spiritual rhythms, so that I might hear and see and know the larger life of God, flooding into my being that it might flow through me.

How do you stay spiritually grounded amidst the temptations that come with busyness and successes and crowds?

You find some time and space to unhook from busyness, successes, and crowds and you hook into the larger light and life of God, the deeper life of God, the greater power of God, to let the light of God flood into your soul and your spirit

When we do that, it puts those things in their proper place. Crowds and success aren't bad things, they're just not ultimate things.

Crowds and success make wonderful pets but terrible masters.

Do you know how many lives have been ruined by the pursuit of crowds and success?

Do you know how many marriages have been shipwrecked, kids birthday parties missed, how many people have been used and exploited in someone's striving and grasping for more crowds and more success?

Jesus withdraws from all the voices clamoring for his attention to hear the voice of the one he constantly called his Good Father, to get direction and guidance and most of all to remain rooted in his light.

So Jesus got up and got going early in the morning and he didn't tell anyone where he's going
So back at the house, everyone wakes up and they're wondering where the star of the show is, so they start scrambling around looking for him.

Here's what happens next:

³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Now again, depending on your temperament or stage of life, these are the words that you'd love to hear or dread hearing: "everyone is looking for you!"

If you're a mom of little kids, you get this incessantly! Mom! Mom! Mom! We're all looking for you!

But it would seem that Jesus's friends are a little concerned—they've all started to hitch their wagons to the Jesus star

And in order for stars to continue to grow their fan base they can't just go disappearing on their fan base!

'Everyone's looking for you, Jesus, where have you been?

Let's go back to that crowd and give them what they're looking for: more miracles + more teaching = more fame and more fortune and influence!"

These are some of Jesus's closest friends and followers and they're totally drinking the crowds and successes Kool-Aid!

And this is why Jesus got up and got away even from his closest friends for just a few minutes to hear this deeper, quieter, more important voice

because sometimes even those who are closest to us and love us the most will unknowingly feed our worst inclinations and direct us down the unhealthy paths

Jesus has spent time with God in quiet, by himself, has some perspective on the crowds and successes he had from the day before,

he's gotten a refresh on his purpose—what he's here to do--And everything's better when we know why we're here, what we're here to do, and where we're going.

So here's Jesus's response:

³⁸ Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Jesus, there's an already, ready-made, ready-to-grow crowd right here clamoring for more of your time and attention! Let's go back to them and keep good going!

But Jesus has spent time with God, allowed God's voice to speak louder than the voices clamoring for his attention

And he knows in a fresh way after his big opening day debut why he's come: to pour out light and life across many places, to many people throughout the area

He's not come to build a platform for himself, he's come to serve others all throughout the region

Coming off his time of prayer, he has clarity around why he's here, what he's here to do, and that frees him to not get hung up on all the false and shadow missions that are calling out to him

And that will CONTINUALLY call out to him throughout his public ministry

Jesus had his real mission—to teach and to heal and ultimately to lay his life down for the sins of the entire world and conquer death for all of us forever and ever amen

But there were always shadow missions available to him to use his power and his gifts for lesser purposes of fame, fortune, and glory

Jesus is staring down the same challenges and same hard decisions that you and I have to make in this life

Because you've been given gifts from God and opportunities from God, whether you believe he exists or not

And the pervasive question hanging over your life and my life is will we use those gifts and opportunities for the purposes that he has for us or will we instead take those gifts and opportunities and leverage them for lesser purposes?

If you step back and look at the Christian story, here's the big-picture of what the Scriptures say that we're here to do.

In the beginning, God creates men and women in his image that each of us might do 3 key things roughly in this order:

- 1. Love and know the God who created us.** The picture we get in the very beginning is long walks with God on the beach!

That's what we're here to do and everything's better when you know where you're going.

2. **Reflect unique aspects of God's character to each other**—some of us are quieter, some louder, some have gifts of working with our hands others gifts of organization or leadership or helping the rest of us to not take ourselves quite so seriously!

Regardless, we were designed to relate to one another in such a way that every single time we interacted or related to one another, we experienced some small slice of God's character, his love, his grace, poured out through one another

If you're on your computer or phone or tablet and you click or tap on an icon of some sort, what launches is what that image represents: You click on your calendar app, your calendar pops up; you click on your web browser icon, it launches the internet

God designed the world to run that every time you and I got clicked on, every conversation, every email, every text, every Facebook post, every comment, every interaction would trigger in us something of God's character, we'd express through our own personalities something of God's love, truth, justice, mercy, wisdom.

That's what we're here to do and everything's better when you know where you're going

3. **Create and generate flourishing:** God creates paradise, puts Adam and Eve in the midst of it and says, "I want you to go to work in this paradise to make it even more paradisaal, more beautiful, more bountiful, to make it flourish more and more."

That's what we're here to do. And everything's better when you know where you're going

This is God's great big purpose for every single person on this planet, and in this story we see Jesus doing just this:

1. Knowing and loving God—check! That's why he goes out to a **solitary place to pray!**
2. Reflect God's image perfectly to the people around him—check! This is **how he relates** to the people around throughout the Jesus stories—how we see him treat people, how he cares for people who are overlooked and marginalized. In every single interaction Jesus is demonstrating God's love, God's grace, God's passion for truth and justice, for mercy and for wisdom

We see it as well in **Jesus' teaching**, he's pouring into the people around him the truth of who God is, what God is like, in a way that no one else has before or since

3. Go to work making the world around him flourish—check! This is what Jesus is up to with his **gifts of healing!** Taking sick things and sick people and making them well, pouring life into people and situations around him.

Jesus is taking the gifts God's given to him and he's putting them to good use for God's mission to make the world around him and the people around him to come more alive.

And because Jesus understands that this purpose ORIGINATES from God and eventually flows BACK to God, he's not hooked into the temptations that come with crowds or power

He can say NO to the shadow mission that is implicit in the phrase "Everyone's looking for you!"

He can say "Let's move on to other small villages and towns in the area, to be instruments of God's life to those people as well--THAT'S why I've come"

His purpose is clear, and everything's better when you know where you're going.

All of us, this morning, are invited to find our OWN particular expression within this great purpose for why God put human beings on this earth to begin with:

to know and love God, to become the kind of people who express God's character and nature to one another in our relationships, and to be a part of his great joy-to-the-world restoration and flourishing effort

Over the years in various contexts and classes and seminars and books I've been challenged to write some sort of a life mission or purpose statement

And typically what happens to me in those settings is I'll work and work and work and edit and write and re-write and tweak again

And then one of two things happens: either I totally forget about it and never look at it again OR a couple of weeks later I'll take a look at it and say, "Yeah, that's dumb"

But back in August I took another crack at a sort of life mission statement that I didn't hate 2 weeks later and in fact I've spent much of the past few months praying through and editing and trying to keep in front of me and it's actually been re-centering for me several times over the past couple of months

It's still a work in progress, I'm still needing to tighten some parts of it up and clean up some things

And like most things for me, it's too wordy and too long. But I thought I'd share a couple pieces of my in-process draft of my own little purpose statement

as an example of how I've been thinking and praying about this whole idea of purpose and how having clarity around purpose helps to organize the important things

Here's the core of it: ***I exist to help lead and create Christ-centered communities of human flourishing that leave life in their wake....***

One of the things that I love about this for me is that this doesn't just apply to my work as a pastor, it actually applies first and foremost to my family

I want my family to be a Christ-centered community of human flourishing for my wife and my kids that leaves life in its wake.

How do I love my wife and my kids like Christ does—the kind of love that helps each of them to come more alive, that helps them to flourish? That's a great place for me to start praying, to pour some R&D into

And what does it mean for our family to exist for more than ourselves? How do we bless and serve all those around us?

Jeff Pidgeon story: 4 kids, soccer coach, last kid, coaching, hosts everyone over at his house early on: "about community as much or more than soccer"

That's leaving life in your wake.

And of course, it applies here at church. My hope and prayer for everyone who's even remotely in orbit in or around our church community—whether that's you, your friends or neighbors

is that you and they would experience the love of Christ in us and through us in some way that will help them to come alive, to flourish.

We believe and have experienced the love of Christ to be an animating, activating, awakening, flourishing agent in our lives, like yeast working through the whole dough, causing everything to rise

AND as we gather, we want it to be much more than just about us. Last week we collected 464 bags of groceries, 240 cans of additional food were donated by a local company, and \$400 cash was given towards the feeding of the 5,000 effort

Steve and I estimate that all combined we probably generated something more like 6,000-7,000 meals

Hungry people fed? That's life in our wake. And that's just the start of it for 2018 as we look to continually become more and more a funnel for God's life to flow through us into our surrounding community.

Having this as a personal mission or purpose statement has helped me over the past few months

Because it's so easy to slouch into something less alive, to slouch into something that would be much easier

so much easier to slouch into just comfort or convenience or laziness in how I relate to my family or how I do my job here

Putting this in front of me on a regular basis and praying through it and offering it back up to God helps me when there are shadow missions that call my name or draw me away from the real purposes God has for me

And everything is better when you actually know what you're here for, where you're going, and you're not just slouching your way through life.

So as we close today, here's your **TAKE-WITH: Wildly Important Take Home** Question—everything's better when you know where you're going, in the story we just read, it had a whole lot to do with Jesus's work and the call on us to do work that leads to flourishing

Block off one dedicated bigger-than-usual-for-you chunk of time for a time of prayer

[whatever a good chunk might be for you: maybe you never stop, taking 15 minutes would be huge. Maybe you regularly spend 30 minutes, taking 2 hours would be a big step]

- **Love for God**
- **Character reflecting God's character in every interaction**
- **Work that leads to flourishing**
 - **Heart: What am I passionate about, heartbroken about, or fascinated by?**
 - **Gifts: what has God wired me up to do?**
 - **Opportunities: what doors have opened or do I need to ask God to open?**