Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we continue a sermon series titled, “So You Can Know For Sure.” It is a study through the Gospel of Luke.

The text we are studying today is ▶ Luke 5:12-16.

I began my study of this passage on Monday last week, as usual. I worked through diagramming and translating the original Greek text, doing some syntax and word study. I considered the literary and historical context. I surveyed some commentaries. I identified a number of potential lessons to be learned from the text.

But I was having a hard time landing on one principle or idea that is reflected throughout the text.

That I would be having difficulty landing on an idea early in the week is not unusual. For me, sermon preparation involves actively and prayerfully working and waiting for the picture to come into focus. And I never know exactly when that is going to happen. But it always does.

I confess, I had a fleeting thought that it might not happen—that maybe this would be the first week the well would run dry. That thought was not from God. It came in the context of physical and emotional weariness. My mental saw blade was pretty dull, and I wondered if I had enough energy and mental acuity to cut through the work.

As of Monday, my 87-year-old mother had been in the hospital for two weeks dealing with bouts of sepsis, renal failure, pneumonia, atrial fibrillation, hypertension, edema, aspiration, and hospital delirium. My wife, Cathy and I are her primary caregivers and we advocate for her daily with doctors and nurses because she cannot communicate clearly for herself.

My sister came from out of town for a day and a half, which freed us from the hospital but added more stress because of some dysfunction we're experiencing right now in my own family of origin. Every family is dysfunctional; there are just variations in flavor and intensity.

Then my daughter Candace ended up in the emergency room. She fell and cracked her head on the floor, raising up a mouse on her forehead and blackening one eye. Not a big deal for most people, but she just had brain surgery and has some hardware in her head. She had to have a scan to make sure everything was working properly.

Then we caught a young kid annoying our neighborhood, banging on doors then running, and sneaking through yards. He may also be the one who threw rocks in our pool and ripped our porch light out from the wall, but we didn't actually see him do it. Turns out he lives in our neighborhood, and we had to have an awkward talk with his mother.

Then Cathy, who is the COO and Chief of Staff at ASU New College on the west campus, had another in a series of brutally challenging weeks at work. A sixty-hour work week is normal for her. While I get hundreds of emails weekly, she gets thousands.

I share all this not so that you will be impressed or feel sorry for us, but to show that our life is not all that different than yours. It's crazy. The type of craziness may differ, but the level of craziness is probably similar.

And our text for today has something to say about it. It's going to help us deal with the chaotic, draining busyness of life. It's going to help those of us who feel trapped in survival mode.

But back to my story.

Mom is better and has been moved to the rehab facility to regain her strength. Candace is fine; no harm done to the neuro hardware from her fall. And I did not strangle the neighbor kid or my sister.

But Cathy and I are still tired.

I got up Tuesday morning to have my daily quiet time. It is the time when I am alone with God to listen to his word to me in Scripture, to reflect on it, to apply it to my life, to be silent before him, and to pray.

My reading plan for Tuesday had me go through Romans, chapters 9 through 12. I read with prayerful anticipation, looking for things that stand out to me as somehow important or needful or relevant to my life right now.

▶ Romans 12:2 jumped out at me, so I paused to look at it more closely. Then I wrote it down in my journal. It says,

> CSB17 Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

I realized that this was a gift to me from God. This verse contains the idea that had eluded me the day before. In our text in Luke 5:12-16, Jesus is the embodiment of the idea presented in Romans 12:2.

Jesus is our example of a person struggling against being conformed to this age, including the struggle against being pushed into the mold of incessant busyness and cultural expectations and even religious norms.

Jesus is also our example of allowing himself to be transformed by the renewing of his mind so he can see what God the Father wants him to think and be and do.

Hopefully, this will become clear as we work our way through the text, which begins in ▶ Luke 5:12.

> ESV Luke 5:12 While he [Jesus] was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. . . .

We don't know which city Jesus is in. We only know that it is not Capernaum because he has just left there.

Jesus encounters a man "full of leprosy." The socio-historical significance of a man full of leprosy is lost on us, but not on the original readers of this text.

Physically, the term "leprosy" could refer to any one of a number of skin diseases that were all called "leprosy" in that day. To be "full" of leprosy suggests that the disease covered much of his body.

Socially, the man with leprosy would have been an outcast. Because leprosy was highly contagious and without a cure, the man would have been banished from regular life and would not have been allowed to be in close proximity to other people. He would have been expected to yell, "unclean" as a warning to anyone who might come near. No one would ever touch a leprous person.

Religiously, a leprous man—especially one full of leprosy—would have been stigmatized as a horrible sinner. Religious people considered leprosy to be an outward symptom of an inner degeneracy. He would have been ceremonially unclean and barred from worship.

When the leprous man sees Jesus, he does not yell, "unclean." As recorded in the last part of ▶ verse 12, he does something else.

> ESV Luke 5:12 . . . And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”

The man with leprosy is convinced that Jesus is able to heal him. This is remarkable. Healing from leprosy was rare. Even in the Hebrew Scriptures, only two people in Jewish history are recorded as being healed from leprosy, Miriam (Numbers 12) and Naaman (2 Kings 5)—both miraculously healed by God himself. Ancient rabbis in the first century considered curing leprosy to be as difficult as raising a person from the dead.

Nevertheless, the leprous man believes Jesus can do it. But humbly, he does not presume that he will. The phrase “if you will” is a third-class condition, indicating the man does not know whether Jesus will choose to heal him. The leprous man expects nothing. He doesn’t try to bargain with Jesus. He doesn’t even try to explain the unfairness of his condition. He simply falls on his face and begs for mercy.

Two Sundays ago, we talked about the draining demands on Jesus’ time, especially from throngs of people wanting to be healed. We saw how Jesus struggled to maintain his priority of preaching.

If Jesus were conformed to this age, he would likely view this leprous man the way the world views him: He is a person to avoid. He has nothing to offer. He is contagious and therefore dangerous. He is disreputable. And he is an impediment to Jesus’ primary goal of preaching.

If Jesus were to ignore the man, to keep his distance, and to walk around him, no one would bat an eye because that’s what everybody does. It’s the way of the world. It would conform to cultural expectations.

But Jesus does not conform to this age. He discerns that it is his Father's will to heal this man, and to do so in a shockingly non-conforming way. ▶ Verse 13 explains,

> ESV Luke 5:13 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him.

Jesus does what nobody ever does. He touches the untouchable.

From a purely physical viewpoint, touching the leprous man is completely unnecessary to healing. In other instances, Jesus heals people without touching them. In one case, recorded in John 4, Jesus healed the son of an official from about 20 miles away.[1]

I believe Jesus touches this man to convey a message. "You are not untouchable to me. My love for you is undeterred by your condition. Your disease does not keep me from accepting you."

When we look back once again at ▶ Romans 12:2, we can see that, in touching and healing the man with leprosy, Jesus does not conform to cultural norms. He operates way outside the ways of the world.

Clearly, it was the Father's will for Jesus to be non-conforming toward the leprous man.

And we look back on God's will in this case as good and pleasing and perfect. Such compassion. Such love. Such grace. We see in the leprous man a symbol of our own degeneracy. And we see in Jesus' touch the love that drove him to the cross to heal us.

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[1] Swindoll, Charles R., *Luke*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2017), 139.

But how was Jesus able to overcome the pressure to conform to this world? How was he able to be transformed by the renewing of his mind such that he could discern his Father's will?

Good question. We don't know. Not yet.

In ▶ verse 14, Jesus renounces conformity to the age in yet another way. It says,

> ESV Luke 5:14 And he charged him to tell no one, but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them."

Apparently, Jesus flunked Marketing 101. He instructs the healed man to tell no one?! You can almost hear the advice of the world. "You want to be an influencer, don't you? You need followers. You need a platform. You need to generate a buzz. You need to leverage this miracle. Run it up the flagpole. This needs to go viral. Just think of the likes and shares and followers you'll get. We could even monetize this."

But Jesus deliberately downplays his miraculous work. He avoids popularity based on the sensational.

Instead of being concerned to pump up his own reputation, Jesus wants to restore the reputation of the healed man. The charge that begins with "go and show yourself to the priest," reflects instructions from Leviticus 14:1-35, which lay out a week-long process of priestly examination and rituals to restore to fellowship a Jewish person previously considered unclean.

When we look back once again at ▶ Romans 12:2, we can see that the instructions of Jesus to the man healed of leprosy do not conform to cultural norms. He operates way outside the ways of the world.

Clearly, it was the Father's will for Jesus to be non-conforming toward the leprous man.

And we look back on God's will in this case as good and pleasing and perfect. Such unselfishness. Such concern for others. Such humility.

But how was Jesus able to overcome the pressure to be self-centered and self-promoting in conformity to this age? How was he able to be transformed by the renewing of his mind such that he could discern his Father's will?

Good question. We don't know. Not yet.

In ▶ verse 15, the pressure gets turned up.

> ESV Luke 5:15 But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities.

The parallel account of this story in the gospel of Mark reveals that the healed man could not contain himself. Against orders, he spreads the news of what happened to him.

The result is described by the tenses of the main verbs here in verse 15, which are not readily apparent in English. The original Greek verb translated "went abroad" is διέρχομαι (*dee-AIR-coe-mai*). Here, it means to spread. It is in the imperfect tense, which describes something that kept on spreading. In this case, the news kept on spreading.

The original Greek verb translated "gathered" is also in the imperfect tense, which describes something that kept on gathering. In this case, the crowds kept on gathering.

The news kept on spreading. And the crowds kept on gathering. Jesus goes first-century viral. And the demands on Jesus' time kept on growing. And these are not frivolous demands. People want to hear what he has to say. People are sick and want him to heal them.

What is the conventional wisdom of the world for dealing with legitimate demands on your time that keep on growing?

It can vary.

To some, the answer is to work harder, do whatever takes, suck it up and get it done. That's how I was raised. And that's how I can get myself into trouble.

To some others, the answer is to try to pursue and protect work-life balance by their own strength and smarts so they can feel content and fulfilled both in their professional life and their personal life. Good luck with that.

To still others, the answer is to check out, apathetically abdicating responsibility for meeting life's frenetic demands on the thinking that it's too hard and not worth it.

Jesus does not conform to any of these ways. ▶ Verse 16 describes his non-conforming strategy.

> ESV Luke 5:16 But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

The Greek verb translated "would" is again in the imperfect tense, indicating that Jesus kept on withdrawing and he kept on praying.

This sets up an important dynamic.

While the news about Jesus kept on spreading and the crowds kept on gathering and the demands kept on increasing, Jesus kept on withdrawing and praying. It was his regular practice. It was his standard spiritual discipline.

This makes no sense to this age. It is non-conforming.

Withdrawal is a sign of weakness. It is a poor use of precious time when demands are overwhelming. It doesn't get anything done.

And prayer is a last resort. A prayer is something you throw up in the air as your only hope after you've tried everything else.

Withdrawing to commune with God is for monks and retirees who have nothing else to do but sing Gregorian chants and play pickleball. Movers and shakers are not withdrawers.

So says the world.

But Jesus has no interest in conforming to the ways of the world. He wants to discern and do the will of his Father.

How was Jesus able to overcome the pressure to conform in the face overwhelming demands on his time? How was he able to be transformed by the renewing of his mind such that he could discern his Father's will?

It is simple.

And incredibly challenging.

He kept on withdrawing and praying.

Here is a ▶ diagram of the process.

In the face of overwhelming demands on his time, Jesus regularly and strategically withdraws to commune with his Father.

In the context of communing, Jesus is transformed, his mind is renewed.

Jesus is then able to discern what his Father wants him to think and be and do in the midst of the busyness. It is through solitary communion with his Father that Jesus draws renewed strength, perspective, and guidance.

The pattern of withdrawing is reflected in our text here in Luke 5:12-16. The purpose and result of withdrawing is explained in Romans 12:2. It is to allow our minds to be renewed so that we can discern the will of God.

Jesus could have chosen otherwise. As shown by the ▶ alternative path in the diagram, he could have chosen ***not*** to withdraw, but instead to capitulate to the demands on his time—to cave under the pressure—to let the demands dictate. In doing so, he would conform to this age by doing what everybody does—either work harder, or try to achieve work-life balance on your own, or just check out. If Jesus were to conform to this age, he would then find it difficult to discern the will of his Father and would likely confuse it with other things.

This diagram represents the choice we all face every day. In the face of demands on our time, are we going to strategically withdraw or capitulate?

That decision is crucial. It is the difference between being conformed and being renewed. It is the difference between discerning the will of God and confusing it.

The big idea in this is pretty simple but not easy: ▶ Strategically withdraw. As Jesus did.
You can be creative in adapting a plan for strategic withdrawals that work for you. One size does not fit all.

Any plan is better than no plan. And no plan is good if you don't use it.

Let me share with you my current plan just to stimulate your thinking.

My goal is to strategically withdraw at least five days a week.

My usual desolate place of withdrawal is my study at home at 4:30AM. At that hour, nobody is trying to reach me. I can be alone and quiet with my coffee.

First, I pray, thanking God for the day and for his presence and asking him to show me from his word in Scripture what he wants me to think or be or do.

Then, I read Scripture. To me, reading Scripture is a form of conversation with God because I am reading his words to me. My reading plan sometimes changes from one year to the next, as I try different approaches and Bible translations.

I generally like plans that provide a balanced diet of biblical reading each week so that I don't get stuck in Leviticus and Leviticus only for weeks on end and give up.

There are many different plans available. Some are available for free online. Others are Bibles that can be purchased with daily readings arranged for you.

Right now, I am using the *CSB Day-by-Day Chronological Bible*. It arranges the Bible chronologically into daily readings, according to the historical order of events. I like this because it helps me to keep in mind the overarching story of the Bible as it unfolds.

Each day, I alternate between reading from the Old Testament and reading from the New Testament, such that I am steadily reading through both at the same time.

Also, if the reading plan does not include a psalm, I throw one in for good measure because I love to read them in my quiet time. They are rich with human emotion and struggle and God's attributes.

If you are not in the habit and my reading plan is just too much for you right now, come up with an alternative that works for you. Maybe you could start by simply reading one Psalm a day. Or just use the daily reflections from the sermon that are on the back of the Sermon Notes and emailed each weekday.

When I read, I do so with anticipation, looking for something that stands out as interesting or relevant or needful for my life right now. When I find it, I write it down. And I also write down a summarizing a praise or principle from the text—sort of like finding a big idea everyday.

Then, I prayerfully reflect on what I have written, asking God to help me apply it to my life. This includes a timed 5-minute period of silent meditation.

Then I pray for other things on different days of the week. I pray for staff on Mondays. Requests on Tuesdays. Family on Wednesdays. Moon Valley and elders on Thursdays. And government and missions on Fridays, including people I am praying will come to believe in Jesus. I have all these

requests and people programmed to pop up on their respective days as prayer tasks in Outlook.

All this usually takes me about 45 minutes. Then I go swim laps for 30 minutes during which I think and pray some more about what I have read.

By 7:00AM, I have had my quiet time, worked out, showered, fed the pets, had breakfast, made the bed, emptied the dishwasher, perused online news and ESPN, read and responded to some emails, and Opie and I are ready to head to the office to begin our workday.

I am trying to convey that regular, strategic withdrawal is doable, and it can be normal for you, regardless of where or when or how you do it.

Like most anything worthwhile, you can expect it to feel awkward and fruitless at first, until you get the hang of it. And even when you get the hang of it, there can be rich seasons and dry ones.

But if you want to be transformed by the renewal of your mind so that you can discern the will of God, it is indispensable. Strategically withdraw.

Your choice. Withdraw or capitulate. Be transformed or be conformed.

Let's pray. Lord, in the face of all the demands on our time, give us the resolve to regularly and strategically withdraw to commune with you, so we may enjoy your company and discern your will for us. Amen.