

Weekender Slide

Series Slide

Dr. Judith Bardwick is highly respected researcher, author, speaker, and business management consultant that has specialized in the psychology of the work place since the early 1980s.

She wrote a book in the early-90s entitled **“Danger in the Comfort Zone: How to Break the Entitlement Habit That’s Killing American Business”**

In that book, she notes that successful organizations and institutions face a lurking, underestimated enemy..once they finally arrive and become masters in their field- that enemy is COMFORT.

See when a company starts- it typically has to scrap and hustle to get traction and growth, but when they arrive- when business is good- they get comfortable. They take their foot off the gas. They stop taking risks. They became complacent. They let ease and good feelings stagnate their growth...and then they die.

Judith Bardwick says- Risk is necessary for growth. But the more you have to lose... the less likely you are to take the kinds of risks that made you successful in the first place. These companies slip into a mode where they merely try to protect what they have, instead of continuing with a scrappy entrepreneurial spirit. They retreat into the comfort zone- and then they take all the people they are leading into the comfort zone...where no one grows...and then the company files for bankruptcy.

The late, great rabbi and family therapist Edwin Friedman who did a lot of work with corporations, governments, families and churches...put it like this.

“There is no way out of a chronic condition unless one is willing to go through an acute, temporarily more painful phase.”- Edwin Friedman

Here’s pastor and cultural commentator Mark Sayers on how this works out specifically in the church.

“For change to occur, the leader must enter into a process of growth, knowing that the process will lead through some uncomfortable terrain. We know that leading is often painful and challenging. Yet we also live in the age of Instagram influencer pastors, some of whom use social media to advance ministry and unintentionally spread a myth: that we can lead while staying within the comfort zone. This can lead us into the error of believing that success in ministry is leading well and feeling good all the time. This dynamic creates congregations that live within their comfort zones, led by leaders who wish to preserve their comfort zones.”- Mark Sayers, Non-Anxious Presence

Welcome to the 21st century American church.

Where Pastors manage the congregation's anxiety by never shaking things up in a way that might upset the comfort zone of the people...so that the people of the congregation never upset the comfort zone of the pastor.

Until the church is 6 elderly folks who pine about the good ol' days when the baptistry and the seats were filled... when people shared the gospel with others and there was a tangible presence of the Spirit of God. And all they have left is a 7 figure bank account and 6 rapidly approaching funerals.

Title Slide- "The Danger of the Comfort Zone: How City Church Will Grow & Overflow"- 1 Samuel 3

But this message is not for other churches. Its for this church. Its my pledge to you that the elders and staff of this church will continually allow the Lord to shake us out of our comfort zone- and we will lead you out of yours. Because that's how we will overflow good into this community.

And- I fully expect most of us not to like it....at least some of it. Including me. I don't like change. I'm not crazy about risk. I don't like pain or suffering...but I also know that if I lead in a way that avoids risk and difficulty...I'll stunt my growth and yours. The road to Spiritual Renewal goes through hard things.

But we have to shed this idea that what feels good, what keeps the status quo and the waters calm is always...or even most of the time...what produces the most good in us and through us.

We have a savior that pursued his joy THROUGH a bloody, humiliating crucifixion.

And without his resolve- without his sacrificial leadership...I am lost. I am dead in my sin.

City Church- Don't get this twisted. We're not headed for a new building to get comfortable.

Jesus said...

Mark 8:34-36

"If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life?"

Today- I'm going to show you how this worked out in Israel from 1 Samuel 3.

Then- at the end of this message- I'm going to show you one way the Lord is leading pushing us out of our comfort zone- specifically with our Next Gen ministry.

1 Samuel 3:1-4:1

The boy Samuel served the Lord in Eli's presence. In those days the word of the Lord was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread.

2 One day Eli, whose eyesight was failing, was lying in his usual place. 3 Before the lamp of God had gone out, Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was located.

4 Then the Lord called Samuel, and he answered, "Here I am." 5 He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"I didn't call," Eli replied. "Go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

6 Once again the Lord called, "Samuel! "

Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"I didn't call, my son," he replied. "Go back and lie down."

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, because the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. 8 Once again, for the third time, the Lord called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli understood that the Lord was calling the boy. 9 He told Samuel, "Go and lie down. If he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 The Lord came, stood there, and called as before, "Samuel, Samuel! "

Samuel responded, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

11 The Lord said to Samuel, "I am about to do something in Israel that will cause everyone who hears about it to shudder. 12 On that day I will carry out against Eli everything I said about his family, from beginning to end. 13 I told him that I am going to judge his family forever because of the iniquity he knows about: his sons are cursing God, and he has not stopped them. 14 Therefore, I have sworn to Eli's family: The iniquity of Eli's family will never be wiped out by either sacrifice or offering."

15 Samuel lay down until the morning; then he opened the doors of the Lord's house. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, 16 but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."

"Here I am," answered Samuel.

17 “What was the message he gave you? ” Eli asked. “Don’t hide it from me. May God punish you and do so severely if you hide anything from me that he told you.” 18 So Samuel told him everything and did not hide anything from him. Eli responded, “He is the Lord. Let him do what he thinks is good.”

19 Samuel grew. The Lord was with him, and he fulfilled everything Samuel prophesied. 20 All Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a confirmed prophet of the Lord. 21 The Lord continued to appear in Shiloh, because there he revealed himself to Samuel by his word. And Samuel’s words came to all Israel.

Transition: This chapter is the uncomfortable transition of Samuel into the leadership of Israel- and Eli out of the leadership of Israel. Israel goes from never hearing from the Lord in v 1 of chapter 3- to consistently hearing from the Lord in v 1 of chapter 4. That’s a very good change.

But it didn’t happen because they kept the status quo. No. They both had to get REALLY uncomfortable to find this Spiritual Renewal.

So today I’ve got 2 hard things we have to do...in the midst of difficult changes... to grow and overflow good things together as a church.

1) Stay receptive to the Word of God with the People of God...especially the difficult ones.

So, you might be asking- do you mean the difficult WORDS of God or the Difficult People of God...the answer is yes. Both.

First remember what’s happening at this part of the biblical story.

Eli and his sons Hophni and Phineas are the priests, the spiritual leadership in the Temple. Hophni and Phineas have been sleeping with women in the temple and stealing the meat that people bring to make a sacrifice...and they are eating it, and giving it to the father Eli. Now Eli- on one hand has confronted them. On the other hand, he’s been eating all the meat they have been stealing from people so much so that he’s overweight.

He’s already heard from a prophet that he and his sons are going to die under the judgment of God.

At the same time, God was at work through Hannah’s prayers for a little boy. Hannah selflessly dedicated Samuel to the service of God in the temple where he is under the leadership of Eli and his corrupt sons.

Also remember that this directly follows the time of the Judges in Israel- in which more and more foolish and selfish leaders made decisions that denied the presence of God and put the people they led in danger.

So 1 Samuel follows this verse at the end of Judges which shows us the state of Israel.

Judges 21:25

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him.

So then 1 Samuel 3 opens up like this

v1

Its what I call a “gray zone”. Its not black or white...but an in between...a transition. On one hand...to all of Israel everything looks status quo. Eli and his boys are still in charge. They are still running the temple. But Samuel- this small boy- is a bit of Holy Resistance. In a culture where there is no authority and everyone does whatever they want...Samuel is serving the LORD. He's not serving himself..and he is regarding God as his authority...his King.

And yet...for Israel...they haven't heard from a prophet in a long time. All we know about at this point is this one prophet that only Eli knows about that came and said- The time of judgment is here. Because of the way you have led Israel- you and your sons are going to die.

So- on one hand- its business as usual. On the other hand, underneath everyones noses- God is at work through a little boy to completely turn things around.

v 2 & 3

In these verses we get more contrast between Samuel and Eli.

First- Eli's eyesight is failing. Not only is this true, but its also a metaphor for what has happened to Eli in his status quo complacency. He's lying down in his usual place and he's blind. He can't see spiritually. He is complacent to the presence of God- he's let his sons do whatever they want in the temple for the sake of his own comfort- so he doesn't have conflict and he can still benefit off of the meat they are stealing. This has caused him to grow into a leader who spiritually cannot perceive what God is doing.

He's just Lying blind in his usual place.

Meanwhile, Samuel is resting in the presence of the Lord, where this lamp that represents the presence of God is bright. Do you see the contrast? Eli is complacently in the dark...passively going along with evil...Samuel is innocently in the light...drawn to presence of God around the Ark of the Covenant.

v 7-9

Its at this point that God audibly calls out to Samuel. He mistakenly goes to Eli 3 times thinking that Eli has called him.

And then we get this interesting phrase. "At that time, Samuel did not know the Lord, because the word of the Lord had not been revealed to him".

I want to point something out here. Samuel is around some pretty good things. He's near the Ark of the Covenant- he's participating in all the religious rituals of the Jews- but still God has not had not REVEALED himself to Samuel through his word.

This is still true of us today. You can be around church and religion and morality and a good family...you can go fishing and hiking on the weekend and think about God as a creator...but you cannot have an INTIMATE RELATIONAL KNOWLEDGE of God... without him revealing himself to you in his word.

I can study about the historicity of Jesus or the evidence of the crucifixion and resurrection....but I cannot understand who Jesus is or what his death means unless it is REVEALED to me by God's word.

Samuel heard an audible voice- we have the Bible.

Additionally in these verses- we start to see a change in Eli- Eli steps up into his role as mentor, a father figure to Samuel- and he tells Samuel what to do. Even though its been years since anyone has heard from God- Eli hearkens back to those days, and he selflessly recognizes his role- as mentor to Samuel. The ice is starting to thaw. The darkness is giving way to the light. Spiritual Renewal is making its way to Israel.

v 10

So Samuel- does what Eli tells him. God uses the very imperfect Eli- to instruct and mentor Samuel- so that Samuel- when God calls him...knows what to do. And look at this phrase. This phrase along with the verse that is coming up here soon- is written on Page 49 of my journal right now. That page is a written prayer for Spiritual Renewal that I've been praying for our church since June 9th of 2022- nearly everyday.

Here's the prayer.

READ FROM JOURNAL.

That prayer came from the Renewal Cell prayer group that I was in last summer, specifically thanks to Amanda Richter for sharing the prayer she was led to begin praying during that group.

And at the top of that prayer is written- SPEAK LORD YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING.

Its a dangerous prayer. But its a prayer of receptivity. Its a prayer that says to God- I'm not here to tell you how to do things- I'm here to listen.

Its the exact opposite of Hophni and Phineas. Whose ears were closed to the voice of God. Their hearts and minds were trained on taking for themselves. They took sex from women. They took meat out of pots. And they would not listen to their father.

I wonder how Eli felt here? On one hand, there has to be a sense of mourning for the way he has failed his sons...and the way they have failed their father. On the other hand, there has to be a sense of hope for Israel. Here is a child under his care- finally ready to listen. Ready to hear not just from Eli- but receptive to hearing from the Lord.

v 11-14

So God speaks to Samuel. And its not a real easy message to hear. Its a message of Judgment. That God is cleaning house. And Eli and his sons are going to die.

v 15-16

I love that right here it just says- Samuel went to lay down until morning. Cuz you know this brother wasn't getting any sleep. He knows that Eli knows that God called him. Which means- he knows Elis is going to ask what the Lord said.

Can you imagine? How heavy that would feel to an adult...much less a kid.

Samuel doesn't want to hurt Eli. In a sense, he looks up to Eli as a father. And now he's been entrusted with this message of Eli's demise.

v 17

Eli comes to Samuel as a mentor and tells him that no matter how hard the message is...its his duty before God...as a prophet to whom God speaks to deliver the message as God delivered it to him.

v 18

So he bravely delivers the whole thing...and Eli's response is the other verse I have written at the top of my Spiritual Renewal prayer.

“He is the Lord. Let him do what he thinks is good.”

Wow.

Can you imagine receiving news like this..and not raging, blaming, kicking, screaming, making excuses, or justifying your sin...simply saying “He is the Lord. Let him do what he thinks is good.”

Do you see what this is? Its the opposite of the end of Judges.

Judges 21:25 & 1 Sam 3:18 on same slide

Eli himself- through the receptivity of the Word of God, delivered through this little kid... is embodying repentance and faith that is changing the spiritual temperature of Israel.

Its a small move. But its the right move.

There is no king in Israel...now replaced with 'He is the Lord'.

"Everyone doing what is right in his own eyes" now replaced with "Let the LORD do what HE thinks is good...even when that means stopping me from doing what I think is right in my own eyes."

Back to 1)

This is a little spark of Spiritual Renewal. Its hard, but Its hope.

The word of the Lord has returned to Israel...and through Samuel and Eli being ready and willing to receive it and obey it...the hope of renewal is coming to God's people.

That's why I'm telling you its so important for us to stay receptive to the Word of God among the people of God.

See- the Word that first came to Samuel wasn't a word ABOUT him. IT was given TO HIM to give to Eli. And it wasn't an easy word.

If Samuel is some lone gun just trying to have a spiritual experience- First of all- he wouldn't even recognize the Lords voice. He had to have Eli- who had experience hearing from God- even in his old age...and having been far removed from God's last words- God used him to mentor Samuel- so Samuel was ready to hear.

And if Samuel just takes the word of God without the relationship to God's people that he has in Eli- then the word makes no sense- and Eli has no shot at repentance.

Was it difficult for Hannah to leave her son at the temple? yes.

Was it difficult for Samuel to live in the debauchery of Hophni and Phineas...in all their hypocrisy day after day? Yes.

Was it difficult for Eli to face the reality of the Word of God and the judgment of God that was coming? Yes.

But through it all. God was saving his people. He was bringing his Word back to Israel..and it all had to start through Samuel and Eli- playing the roles they were called to play in the temple...eager to listen and receive God's word...and to submit their lives to it.

City Church- This is why we deeply emphasize spiritual disciplines. Reading the Word of God...and responding to it in prayer and in obedience. This is a keystone habit that is absolutely necessary for an intimate walk with God in which you not only know things ABOUT God...but one where you KNOW God as a loving and good Father.

But it is never disconnected from the way God wants to use you in this church. What you hear from God in his word- will first be applied in "One Another" type obedience in the household of faith. Yes- sometimes that will be hard words that have to be said. But because of Jesus- they will always be hopeful words- for our good and the flourishing of this church in this city.

Transition: That brings us to the other thing we absolutely have to keep reminding ourselves to not slip back into the comfort zone...that is we must...

2) Remember the Kingdom of God is upside down...and belongs to the kids.

At the end of chapter 3, we get a summation of the change that will eventually happen in Israel...even before we're told how it happens.

Its like a peak into the future before the next chapter tells us HOW Eli and his sons are removed from leadership...we get the assurance that the Word of the LORD will again flow to Israel. Like someone turning on a water spicket that has been dry years, through Samuel- the word of God will trickle, and then stream...and then flood out to all of Israel. People will know the LORD again.

v 3:19- 4:1

Notice- it happens through Samuel, starting as a child under a mentor...even a very imperfect one...learning who the Lord is...and who he is...through the revelation of God's word. Before there can be spiritual renewal for Israel- it has to happen for Israel's leaders.

Listen- this is a principle that I'm living by right now. I'm not calling you all to Spiritual Renewal without first submitting myself to the self-examination and repentance that God requires of me. Leaders mature...Leaders grow...and then those they lead can grow.

...and in Samuels case...as often is the case throughout Scripture- God starts with an underestimated child.

God's kingdom is upside down.

Leaders in God's don't lord authority, they come not be served...but to serve.

In the Kingdom of God, those that scramble to be first...the consumers who just look out for themselves...will be last. And those that fall behind...they will be called to the front of the line.

And the overlooked child will be more powerful than the celebrated king....in the upside down kingdom of God.

Look what Jesus said.

Matthew 18:1-5

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "So who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? "

2 He called a small child and had him stand among them. 3 "Truly I tell you," he said, "unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child — this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever welcomes one child like this in my name welcomes me.

Jesus used a child to show people what it takes to enter God's Kingdom. Children in the first century were not doted on...they were means to an end. Jesus says, 2 things here about children and the upside down kingdom. First- he references humility. The kind of humility we saw in Samuel. Samuel was receptive. He was open. He was not trying to be the teacher to everyone around him...or take the highest seat at the table...instead he knew he was a servant in the temple that had a lot to learn. So he was receptive to Eli...and to the Lord.

The second thing Jesus says is that whoever welcomes a child in his name, welcomes him. Jesus on more than one occasion says that when you receive with joy the overlooked, the pushed out, the looked-down upon- that you are actually ministering to and loving him.

Children often can't get us promotions. They can't move us up in the world. They don't increase our productivity. They can drain us of our time, money, energy, and attention.

This is NOT the way Jesus calls us to see children.

He says, welcome them. In his name.

Can you imagine if Eli had not welcomed Samuel. Or if Eli would have jealously not directed Samuel to listen to God...because he wanted to preserve his life and his position of leadership? Tragedy for Israel..more than they were going to experience. Hope would have been lost.

Jesus says, "When you see children as a burden, when they are merely complications to the way of life you are wanting to protect- you are missing the upside down nature of the Kingdom of God. Its through the difficulty of children...its through caring for and mentoring, and struggling with kids that my Kingdom will come. AND- he says- you have something to learn from kids. Particularly humility and dependence. Kids can't provide for themselves. And unless you come to God like a kid to a parent.....needy yet trusting...you won't see the Kingdom of God.

In fact, no one knows this better than Jesus.

Jesus himself was an overlooked child. The God of the universe, humbly born into a cattle trough. Raised by a teenage mother in a carpenter's home. Slowly growing in his relationship with the Father as he read the Scriptures in the temple. Virtually completely off the map until he was 30 years old.

Very few saw what was coming...but Jesus would grow up not only to lead a time of Spiritual Renewal for Israel...but through his death and resurrection- he accomplished our salvation.

Have you ever thought about the role Mary and Joseph- or Jesus' temple mentors played in his life at Hebrew school?

Luke gives us a little fast of it in his gospel.

Luke 2:41-52

41 Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. 42 When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the festival. 43 After those days were over, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44 Assuming he was in the traveling party, they went a day's journey. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46 After three days, they found him in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all those who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

49 "Why were you searching for me? " he asked them. "Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house? " 50 But they did not understand what he said to them.

51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother kept all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

Jesus himself, just like Samuel, humbling himself under sinful and flawed teachers... who exposed him to the Word of the LORD...and through that...he understood who his Father is...and who he is....and from that...he overflowed our salvation.

Back to 2)

It's so important in this time of Spiritual Renewal for our church- that our attitudes change toward our kids. This is the Next generation. We cannot see them as burdens. We cannot look at teaching them as insignificant or something that you do if you are "good with kids".

In fact, through observing and listening to children- the Scripture shows us we'll actually learn a lot about God and ourselves.

Our kids and youth are the future leaders of City Church. We told you a couple of years ago that our We want to welcome them...mentor them...invest in them...in this next season.

And that, is going to mean changing some things...for the better....but at first, its going shake things up a bit.

More on that in just a second.

I have 2 invitations and an introduction to you today.

First, I wonder who God is speaking to today. Who God is calling today. Even though you know its going to be difficult to let go of your old life...you know God is calling you to trust and follow Jesus.

Here's the good news...the gospel.

Because Jesus lived a perfect life in your place...and then Jesus took the judgment of Eli- he took your death on him on the cross...you are free today to say yes to his invitation to humble yourself and follow him into participation in the Kingdom of God.

Today, will you embrace the difficulty of change- knowing that Jesus- and the people of this church- want to walk with you in it every step of the way.

Don't put it off. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day trust Jesus.

The second invitation is for those of you who are walking with Jesus to ask yourselves, "Am I ignoring children? Have I thought mainly about children as a hindrance to the Kingdom of God instead of an example of the humility it takes to enter the Kingdom of God? Am I focused so much on my own life, my own consuming,- that I have resisted Gods call to cultivate a heart for God in kids?"

Maybe you're one of 25 people we need to step up to lead our kids in this next season. Obviously, with Eli- God's not looking for perfect model of righteousness...he's calling people who can help the kids recognize Gods voice...so that they know God themselves. Would you talk with the LORD and see if this is a way he's calling you out of your comfort zone?

Finally, an introduction.

This summer we're going to introduce a new ministry at City Church for 4th to 6th graders.

Its called District 46.

This means 2 significant and possibly difficult comfort zone shake ups for parents of 4th-6th graders...but I believe it is going to pay off big time for all of us.

One shake up- that is going to be beautiful...is on Sunday mornings after we move into the new building on an undisclosed Sunday in July- 4th & 5th graders will be joining us in here in worship every Sunday.

And we are going to, all together, embrace the fidgets and the boredom and the squirming. Not just the parents, but all of us. Together. Because we believe together that our worship gatherings are more than information downloads. Parents, your kids are going to observe and be around other adults as they worship.

They also are going to pick up more than you might think from our liturgy and our sermons. They will hear our pillars every week in a benediction. They'll be exposed to the call to worship, the confession time, and the assurance of pardon. And yes, even in a sermon as they squirm or fidget or color or play in the floor..or in the back...they'll hear the Scripture...what you are learning and being called to. Which means they have the ability to see whether or not your life is matching up with what you are being taught.

Additionally, we're going to provide some things for kids making this transition to engage during the worship gathering...including a little game I'm gonna play with them WHILE i preach the sermon.

Then, on Wednesday nights we'll have our NextGen night. Our City Youth- 7th-12th grade will meet together...and our 4th-6th graders will meet together from 6-7:30 in District 46.

If you have a 4th and 5th grader, I want to show you the very short intro video they are watching right now in City Kids to get them excited about it. Then Elisabeth, our City Kids Minister is going to come briefly and tell you a little more about it.