

- We are in the final week of our teaching series called “Spiritual Development Practices”
  - These are things that as we practice them, build them into habits, they change how we live. They will help us grow. They will draw us closer to God.
  - We desire to practice loving God. When we love God increasingly it shapes how we see our life. It helps us lean into our identity as loved and valued people. We looked at how our prayer life thrives when we practice praying with trust and expectation. We learned how to approach our bibles like every time we open them we are one Holy Spirit moment away from encountering God himself.
  - We also desire to practice loving each other. When we practice doing this well in line with what Jesus modeled and commanded, it leads to more life giving and fulfilling relationships. We saw that every conflict as an opportunity to lean in and love like Jesus loved and last week Luis led us through his experience in learning to live as a servant in all things and at all times.
  - Lastly, we desire to practice loving the world. By that I mean those around us that do not know Jesus. When we do these practices well, it allows us to participate in God’s mission, to bring about his kingdom, and to help us live for something bigger than ourselves in a way that brings great satisfaction. We saw that you are the only person who is where you are, and how to engage in spiritual conversations. And last week we saw that when we get in the practice of asking, “What’s next?” we move towards God and have an impact on those around us.
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- So what’s the takeaway from a series like this? Pray. Read your bible. Serve. Share Jesus. The same things we have heard before. Yet here’s how this often works in practice.
  - We pray. We try to trust God and have expectation, but then nothing happens. Or worse, something happens we don’t want to have happen and our desire fades.
  - We set a practice of reading our bibles but it certainly don’t feel like we are experiencing God.
  - We lean into a conflict, try to use it as an opportunity, and it goes wrong or it’s so uncomfortable that we won’t try that again.
  - We pay attention, follow God’s leading and have a spiritual conversation that falls flat or doesn’t go anywhere.
  - Our spiritual development, the impact, the difference we were hoping to make, can seem frustratingly distant. Or worse, at some level, not so important.
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- As we wrap up this series, I want to look at an account from the life of Jesus that will help us tie this all together.
  - An account that shows how our spiritual development can be derailed.
  - More importantly, it shows how Jesus draws us from unbelief to belief in the process of our spiritual growth.
  - Someone once said that spiritual growth is the process of moving from unbelief to belief in every area of life. I think that is true, but hear me. **SPIRITUAL GROWTH HAPPENS WHEN I TRUST THE ONE WHO IS WORTHY OF THAT TRUST.**
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- Let’s go back a couple of thousand years. It has been a tumultuous weekend. A Jewish Rabbi has spent the last three years turning the regions near Galilee and Jerusalem upside down with his teaching and his behavior.
  - He had attracted many disciples who had been following him. Crowds had come to expect amazing things of this rabbi.
  - Then, in a shocking turn of events that no one expected, this Jewish teacher, name Jesus, is put to death. He has been dead since Friday and it is now Sunday.

- Some women had gone to the tomb where Jesus was buried with burial ointments and spices and came back saying that Jesus wasn't there and they had seen an angel. There was confusion and considerable amount of pooh-poohing.

*Luke 24:13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus." 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken!*

- Something had happened to their faith.
- We only the identity of one of these two disciples (Cleopas) but we know neither was part of the original 12. While they may not have been in the circle of 12 disciples, they were part of the larger group that followed Jesus. They had spent some portion of the last three years seeing Jesus do amazing things. They had seen him perform miracles. Heal the sick. Raise the dead. They had heard him teach.
- Yet their faith was now stymied. Blocked. Life had simply not turned out the way that they thought it would and it threw them completely for a loop.
- It's like all they hoped for was gone and they did not know what to do with it.
- I wonder how many of you have gone through (or are going through) this. What you thought would happen has not. You thought you believed, but now . . . not so much. Or, it's not that you think you don't believe any more, it's just that you wonder, "what's the point?"

## **I. Spiritual development can be derailed by unmet expectations.**

- One of the things that has the potential to damage our faith more than anything else and has caused many to talk away, it expectations that were unmet.
- These two Christ-followers are not in a good place.

*18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*

- They had experienced amazing things of God in Jesus.
- Powerful in word and deed – see all the miracles he had done. They had seen Jesus do amazing things. They had heard the 12 talk about how he calmed the storm.
- They had experienced his teaching which was different from all they had heard before.
- All this, along with their own prejudices and history, created a very specific set of expectations of what was going to happen. They thought they knew how the story would end. What's fascinating about their statement ("we had hoped that he was the one who was

going to redeem Israel”) is that it is exactly what happened. It just did not happen the way they wanted or expected.

- They simply could not see past those expectations.
- It wasn't simply that they had expectations that damaged their faith, but it was the disappointment attached to unfulfilled expectations.
- In their minds, it turned out more poorly than they expected. Jesus wasn't who they thought he was.
- They wanted something, desperately, and God did not deliver.

*21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.*

- Their hopes were dashed. They “*had hoped.*”
- They were grieved. Their world was rocked.

*14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast.*

- I wonder if this was the main reason they did not recognize Jesus.
- Their outward inability to recognize Jesus mirrored their inward unbelief.
- They were so absorbed in their grief and disappointment they couldn't even conceive that something amazing and better had happened.
- Every person here has expectations of God at some level. Sometimes you are pretty certain about them and sometimes you are simply hopeful. Then our expectations and hopes are dashed.
- That person close to us is not healed. We are not healed.
- Our child moves further down a bad path.
- The guy turns out to not be the guy of our dreams . . . again.
- Our financial crisis has no end in sight.
- Unprocessed disappointment leads to cynicism. We close down our hearts.
- “*Most midlife crises are really just accumulated disappointments.*”
- We begin to doubt the intentions of a good Father. We begin to disbelieve what we used to believe. We refuse to trust and believe further than we are right now.
- **SPIRITUAL GROWTH HAPPENS WHEN I TRUST THE ONE WHO IS WORTHY OF THAT TRUST**, yet we can easily begin to shut down or actively distrust the very one who is worthy of that trust.
- These two disciples are exactly where many of us land when it comes to our spiritual growth. Stuck. Reluctant to process and unable to see past their disappointments.

*25 He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

- And so Jesus began to expose their unbelief.
- He went (into what we now call the OT) and explained why what happened had to happen.
- The sacrificial system. The law. All the things the prophets had talked about hundreds of years before, they all pointed towards Jesus.
- This was not just an intellectual study. He was showing them how perhaps their expectations and ideas were not the ones they should have. He wanted them to trust **THE ONE WHO IS WORTHY OF THEIR TRUST.**

## II. Spiritual development is based on belief in someone trustworthy enough to believe in.

- And in this moment, Jesus came to them. He sought them out. He could go anywhere and do anything, and he went and spent time with these two despairing disciples.
- Their faith was not to be in an idea. It was not faith in faith. It was not knowledge of more stuff or faith because of what they could get out of their religious beliefs.
- It was to be faith in a personal, interested-in-you God. Faith in a I-love-you, I'm-proud-of-you, I-thought-you-were-worth-enough-to-die-for-you Savior.

*28 As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. 29 But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.*

- Their hope had been rekindled. Maybe there was something to explore here. Maybe they had misunderstood it all. Maybe they had to re-visit their expectations.
- He did something they had seen him do before. Maybe all of a sudden they remembered the feeding of the 5000. Maybe it was the breaking and sharing of bread in an intimate dinner setting.

*30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.*

- All of a sudden, they saw it. They recognized Jesus. All their expectations were blown up.
  - His suffering and death were not an interruption or change in God's plan. It was God's plan.
- 32 They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*

- Everything they thought was turned on its head. Jesus was not only alive, but he had accomplished more than they could have ever imagined.

*33 They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together 34 and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." 35 Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.*

- Jesus did not simply reveal himself to the disciples first. He took them through this extensive lesson from Scripture first. Why? He knew that soon he would be leaving the world and people would not have his bodily presence for proof or guidance.
- He wanted these men to know (and all those after them) that he was alive and it was part of God's plan. A plan started long ago. They needed to know that he was completely trustworthy and that he demonstrated this because he planned and delivered on a plan that ended his horrible death and then resurrection because he loved them.
- Christ-followers after these men would have to rely on the testimony of the Scriptures of long ago. Of those before them who saw it and wrote it down.
- They saw it. They were convinced of it. And when they truly saw him and experienced his presence that it became so real they had to immediately travel back to Jerusalem to share this news with the others.

- I was at a point in my life where I had high expectations of God.
- I was doing all the right things (I believed).
- I was following him.
- I was sacrificing on his behalf. I thought that God was going to bless my efforts. He was going to do what I thought he should do. After all, I was praying, reading, serving, sharing.
- Yet things seemed to be going the opposite direction.
- I found myself growing increasingly disillusioned. Disappointed.

- I had depression where I had never had depression before.
  - I was not questioning my faith as a whole, but I wondered increasingly where God was and why he was not showing up.
  - Over the course of a long period, God showed me that he had never not shown up. His plan was always in place. He was doing something that I had not seen and did not expect. He was doing a work in me that could not have happened any other way.
  - I was learning this simple truth: **SPIRITUAL GROWTH HAPPENS WHEN I TRUST THE ONE WHO IS WORTHY OF THAT TRUST.**
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- I love having grandkids because they are quite fun. In the midst of playing, I get reminded of things.
  - My oldest grandson loves to play and wrestle, and occasionally he will jump off of something high and say, "Catch me!" Or he will ask me to throw him in the air like his flying.
  - He doesn't really pause. He doesn't question. He just gets my attention and jumps.
  - He is perfectly willing to risk life and limb for the thrill of the jump because he knows I will not let him fall.
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- My friends, the reason we have gone through these spiritual growth practices is not because we need a list of religious things to do.
  - It's because we have a God who is worthy of our complete trust.
  - We pray with expectation because we know he hears us and will respond to us.
  - We read our Scriptures because we know he wants to interact with us and be known by us.
  - We confidently lean into conflict because he will help us experience freedom and peace in it.
  - We can be servants for others and cost to ourselves because we can trust he will take care of us.
  - We can have spiritual conversations and take risks by asking him "what's next?" because he is always leading and using us.
  - **SPIRITUAL GROWTH HAPPENS WHEN I TRUST THE ONE WHO IS WORTHY OF THAT TRUST.**