

What Would Jesus UN-do: Self Condemnation

1 John 3:1

Sunday, April 12, 2026

Back in January, we asked the question, “What Would Jesus Do?” And there’s a good reason why we did. We have been created in the image of God. And since scripture tells us that Jesus is the image of the living God, it only makes sense that we should model our lives on him. It’s pretty basic. We ought to be living the way we were created to live.

But there’s another side to that coin. Because, as we all know, sometimes doing what Jesus would do doesn’t come naturally. For instance. Jesus didn’t care what people thought about him. He hung out with the wrong kind of people and he spoke truth to power. That’s hard. Jesus also helped anyone and everyone who needed him, even—and sometimes especially—when it was inconvenient. That’s hard. Jesus loved his enemies. On the cross, he said, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.” That’s hard. And at the end, he gave everything he had, even his life, for others. That’s *really* hard. Jesus perfectly lived out the great commandment. He loved God with everything he had, and he loved everyone as much as he loved himself. And that’s hard.

And here’s why it’s so hard: we are fallen creatures. Scripture tells us we were created in the image of God. We were created *out* of God’s love to live *in* God’s love. But as the story of Adam and Eve also tells us, we messed that up. There is something in us that thinks we know better than God; that thinks we don’t need God’s love or God’s guidance. We can do just fine on our own. We repeatedly bite into that fruit that God tells us not to eat.

And what's especially pernicious about this is that our human culture, pretty much from time immemorial, has shown a tendency to enshrine our fallenness as the normal standard of human conduct. Greed, arrogance, hedonism; these are the things our culture tells us are normal. Living comfortably while those around us suffer and go hungry, this is what our culture tells us is normal. Doing whatever feels good, regardless of its long-term effect on us and those around us, that's what our culture tells us is normal. Which makes it so much easier—almost inevitable—for us to live lives that are all about us, and dead to God.

But God wasn't willing to leave us there. As we discussed last Sunday in talking about Easter, that's why Jesus came: to reconnect us to the kind of lives we were created to live.

But to make that happen. He had to be crucified. He had to take broken human nature up there on the cross with him so that it would die along with him. And through his resurrection, he gave us a new way of living. He brought God's new and eternal life back into the world for those who love and follow him.

But again, he had to die to make it happen. And not just him. Towards the end of his ministry, Luke's Gospel tells us that Jesus "set his face towards Jerusalem." In other words, he started the journey that would result in his death and resurrection; that would result in him bringing new and eternal life back into the world.

And about that same time, he started saying some really confusing things to his followers. He started to tell them that if they wanted to *really* follow him, they would need to die to themselves and pick up their own crosses daily. In other words, he told them that to receive the new, bountiful, and eternal life that he was bringing, they would need to adopt his crucifixion as

their own. Not by giving up their physical lives, but by giving up the lives they had known; giving up the cultural lie that doing whatever feels good is the way to happiness. They would need to let Jesus' Spirit work within them to crucify their fallen human nature.

In other words, before we can even reasonably ask the question, "What Would Jesus Do," we've got to first deal with the question of "What Would Jesus Undo?" What are the things within me that need to be crucified—that I need to open up to God's Spirit—so that I can go deeper into the new life God has made available to me through Jesus?

Now, this isn't an idea I just made up. It's actually a core principle of Methodism: the doctrine of sanctification. The idea that when we entrust our lives to God through Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us, starting us on the road to new, bountiful, and eternal life lived in God's love, hope, peace, and joy. And for the rest of our lives, we work with that Spirit to become transformed ... to change little by little, bit by bit, more and more into the image of Christ. In Methodism, the moment of coming to faith in Jesus isn't the end of our spiritual journey. It's the beginning. And that process involves quite a bit of *undoing*; undoing the messages of self-idolatry, self-love, and self-ishness we're constantly absorbing from the world around us; and undoing those places within us where that message has become embedded.

Now, given all the different ways our fallenness and our culture have encouraged us to go it alone without God, there's no way we're going to be able to cover everything Jesus has got to undo within us in just a few weeks. But I think we can make a good start. And so, this week, we're going to start with self-condemnation: the idea that I'm not worthy, I'm not important.

And this is one I have struggled with my entire life. Growing up, I had a great family and great friends. But just about every one of them was “more” than me in some way. My dad was brilliant. So were several of my siblings and pretty much all of my friends. I had friends and family who were great athletes, totally popular, seemed like they were successful in everything they did. And I was just kind of “meh.” I worked with a guy who once told me I was a Jack of all trades, but master of none. I resented that a lot, mostly because it was true. I couldn’t stop comparing myself to other people, and the result was always the same: I didn’t measure up. I was never good enough.

And I know I’m not the only person who’s ever struggled with this. Our culture practically demands it. Our world is all about being the best, being the smartest, being the funniest, being the richest, having the most power. Enough is never enough. And if you aren’t the best, then you really don’t count. We are encouraged at every turn to define ourselves in comparison to others, and unless you’re the President, or Elon Musk, or an Olympic gold medal winner, that’s never going to turn out well. In our culture love is conditional. You’ve got to earn it.

And, of course, social media just amplifies the problem. So many of the profiles we’re exposed to on a daily basis have been perfectly curated. It’s so easy. Just stage and share the good stuff, regardless of whether your life is really a dumpster fire. And while we know this is going on, we’ve always got the nagging suspicion that maybe *that* person really does have the perfect life. Not everyone could be lying, right? And so, the more we’re exposed to all those perfect lives going on around us, the more worthless and miserable we feel.

And so, while many of us put on a brave face, we're secretly drowning in self-condemnation. Rates of depression and addiction and even suicide are soaring. We are so easily convinced that we aren't worthy of love; that we haven't earned it.

But that's not who we are and that's not how we were created to live. As I share with you every chance I get, God *is* love. God loved us into existence and God created us in God's own image. As I just said, we were created *out* of God's love to live *in* God's love.

And so, despite the Fall, despite our desire to go our own way, God didn't give up on us. In fact, the story of scripture is the story of God's rescue operation; God's mission to save us from ourselves. Starting with the Jewish patriarch Abraham, through Jacob and Moses and David, and ultimately through Jesus, God pulled us out of the hole we had dug for ourselves.

Think about that. God, the almighty creator of everything that is, loves you UNconditionally. God loves you infinitely. As John 3;16 says, God loves you so much He's willing to die for you. God, the almighty creator of everything that is, thinks you're worthy. God, the almighty creator of everything that is, thinks you are lovable. God, the almighty creator of everything that is, loves you.

Now, in putting together this sermon series on what Jesus needs to un-do, I was a little hesitant to lead with self-condemnation because it doesn't seem to fit in with things like selfishness and self-indulgence; the kinds of things that Jesus *obviously* needs to undo. But if you think about it, self-condemnation isn't really all that different. It's just another way in which we think we know better than God. I mean, if God, the almighty creator of everything that is—

the one who knows everything you have ever done, said, or thought—thinks you're worthy and lovable, isn't it a little arrogant for you to think you know better?

So, what would Jesus like to undo in you? Let's start with the self-condemnation. God's love for you in Jesus means you are already good enough. You are already smart enough. You have already accomplished enough. It means YOU are enough.

And, to remind you of this, we've designed these stylish and completely original-never-been-done-before wrist bands, that say WWJU. In a minute, I'm going to invite you to come down to the front and pick one up and put it on. But I don't want you to stop with just wearing it. Because undoing takes time and it takes practice. So, the next time you start thinking you're less-than or unworthy or not good enough, I invite you to switch the band to the other wrist, or maybe snap it. Something to remind you that you ... are ... enough.