

Series Slide

Exactly one year ago- I preached a sermon for a Vision for 2022.

You may remember it was the sermon where we looked at the 3 Van Gogh paintings that hang in our hallway.

That Vision was to Humbly Risk.

In other words- without prideful ambition for our own name, God was calling us to take risks that honor him.

Before we completely leave 2022 behind- I want to recap some of those risks we humbly took.

While all of us may have individual steps of faith we took, I can think of a 3 we took together as City Church.

First, in February last year, we were at the beginning of the process of building on the land we purchased on Bridge avenue, for our permanent location. And, I don't know if you know this or not- but the prices of materials went through the roof.

Faced with backing off and moving back to square 1, or trusting that the LORD would provide what we needed when we needed it- we kept going. And so far- the Lord has provided. Mostly- through the way that many of you have humbly, and joyfully, given to the church. So many of you are sacrificing for something bigger than yourself- and through the Scriptures that the Lord used in All-IN- you saw something much better than money...something more fulfilling than greed or fear. I'm really thankful for your humble risk.

Second, one of the goals of your All-In giving was to hire a full-time Children's minister. Again- you humbly risked to give- and put us in the position to actually pursue the hire. In March of last year, It became clear to us that hiring from inside was not going to be possible this time. In our 11 year history- we have never hired onto our staff from outside of our church. So, we sent an email to a network of affiliated churches we belong to- The Summit Collaborative- and within minutes the director of the Collaborative had connected us to Elisabeth. Jeremy conducted a FaceTime interview- and then we met with her in April- by June- she was moving here as our full-time City Kids minister.

We had to humble ourselves- because we had to do something that wasn't "our way". And it was a risk- because anytime you hire from outside- you wonder about that person adapting to the culture and mission of the church.

I'm really pleased to say that after 6 months- Elisabeth is doing a great job- and is definitely a wonderful part of not only our staff team- but of our church family.

Finally, God brought something to fruition in 2022 that he had been brewing in me for more than a decade. For a year- I had been feeling like there was something he was calling me to do- beyond what I was currently doing. I had read Scripture, prayed, journaled, talked with trusted counselors, Read Scripture, read books, thought, prayed, journaled...on repeat...and I just couldn't figure out what it was.

So I told the LORD, "Ok, this thing you have for me to do is beyond my vision. Its out of the realm of understanding that I have. So I'm going to focus on what I KNOW you've called me to. Leading & sacrificing for this church, and leading & sacrificing for my family."

In February, about a month after preaching that sermon on humble risk in 2022, I had a moment of desperation for both our church and my family. For the church, that desperation was fueled by finding out the building was going to cost a lot more than we had originally planned.

For my family, one of my sons had a pretty harrowing and ongoing crisis at school. In both situations, I was utterly helpless. I couldn't change either situation. And these were my callings- to lead and sacrifice for the well-being of my church and family.

So I took the morning to pray. I grabbed my Bible and my journal. And spent 3 hours praying, reading, and writing.

It was from that moment of crisis- and prayer- that the LORD finally showed me, at least in part what to do next. He wanted me to call a group of people that would join me last summer to learn about and pray for Spiritual Renewal for our church. So we did- for 9 weeks.

By the end of that time- I knew the Lord wanted me to send a letter to all of you- about what we're doing now- seeking the Lord to help us better understand and love people by learning His way for Sex & Gender & Spiritual Renewal.

That was and is a risk. Its a feels much safer to not talk about it. But God called us to Humble Risks...and Risky Humility. To break the status quo- trusting that He would do something with our faithful obedience to him.

**Title Slide: "Spiritual Renewal: What it is and How It Comes to City Church"-
Isaiah 6, Eph 1:15-19, Romans 5:1-5. 12:1-2**

So every 4-6 weeks- dating back to September of 2022- through the end of this year- I will be preaching on Sex, Gender & Spiritual Renewal. It is purposefully slow. It is deliberately not aiming at quick speech or hot takes or sound bites. Rather- patient, thoughtful submission to the Word of God. The kind of approach that settles into what we know God has called us to- while we learn and wait for him to show us what's next.

So today- is another one of those messages. And today, we're going to major on the Spiritual Renewal part- more than the Sex/Gender part.

In fact, my aim today is simply to help us get our heads around what Spiritual Renewal is...how it happens...and how you can be a part of it in 2023.

Maybe you're here for the first time- as a New Years resolution- then you came here looking for spiritual renewal. Good news- you started at the right time!

Or maybe you're wondering "What in the world does Sex & Gender have to do with Spiritual Renewal"? If you stick around in 2023- i hope that becomes abundantly clear.

Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a high and lofty throne, and the hem of his robe filled the temple.

2 Seraphim were standing above him; they each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3

And one called to another:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies;

his glory fills the whole earth.

4 The foundations of the doorways shook at the sound of their voices, and the temple was filled with smoke.

5 Then I said:

Woe is me for I am ruined

because I am a man of unclean lips
and live among a people of unclean lips,
and because my eyes have seen the King,
the Lord of Armies.

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that he had taken from the altar with tongs. 7 He touched my mouth with it and said:

Now that this has touched your lips,
your iniquity is removed
and your sin is atoned for.

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking:

Who will I send?

Who will go for us?

I said:

Here I am. Send me.

Ephesians 1:15-19

15 This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, 4 endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. 5 This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.

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.

Transition: Today, I want to keep this as simple as I can. I'm going to define Spiritual Renewal, Show you what hinders spiritual renewal...and then tell you what we can do now to prepare for it.

1) Spiritual Renewal is when God acts to change the way you think, feel, & act from self-centered living to living sacrifice.

Many people think about Christianity as a one time encounter with Jesus, where you are faced with your own sin, and then you believe that Jesus died for you...so you won't go to hell.

This is inaccurate.

Romans 12:1-2

That last verse we read from Romans shows ongoing renewal- in other words the way you think changing bit by bit- to more like the way Jesus thinks.

And- there is an ongoing change in action. Paul writes here that when you understand that Jesus died and resurrected to save you from your sin- to unite you to God and make you a part of New Creation- IN VIEW OF THE MERCIES OF GOD- your BODY becomes a living sacrifice.

Want to know what Spiritual Renewal has to do with Sex & Gender? What it has to do with your body? EVERYTHING. As you ponder- meditate on- think through your whole life what God has done and will do- you don't see your body as your own. It belongs to God. And you offer it as a living sacrifice. For God to use. Its not "My Body, My Choice." Its God's Body- his choice.

Following the passage we read in Romans 5 about Spiritual Renewal- Paul writes in Romans 6 that we offer the members of our Body as instruments of good...instead of being enslaved to the urges we have and using our bodies to please those urges. In other words- Paul says- Either your body will control you- or you will be submitted to God to use your body for good. Hands, feet, and sex.

The soul is not some inner part of you. It is ALL OF YOU. The way you think, feel, and act with your physical body.

So- when you entrust yourself to Jesus- there is an ongoing renewal of the way you think- and the way you act toward worship of God...what about the way you feel?

Eph 1:18-19

Take a look at what Paul writes in Ephesians 1.

In Ephesians- his prayer for the church is that the "eyes of their heart" would be opened so that they would "know" the hope of God's calling them out of their sin and into his way of living. That phrase "the eyes of their heart" and the word "know" are not academic phrases. This isn't about knowing facts. He's writing to the Church in Ephesus. They already "Know" it academically. They are the church. They KNOW the facts about Jesus. They can share the gospel. They can tell you that Jesus died for their sin and is coming back to make all things new. They can tell you that Jesus is their only hope in life and death. They can tell you they are reconciled to God.

So Paul is writing this TO CHRISTIANS. TO THE CHURCH...and he is saying I'm praying that you FEEL that reality. That it lights you up. That the thought of it absolutely overwhelms your day-to-day activities.

Romans 5:5

Paul writes- Gods love has been poured out- overflowed- into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Again- He is saying that becoming more intimately familiar with what God has done in Jesus to rescue you from your self-centered life and include you in his plan to make the whole world new- to put everything right again- to rid the world of death, and sin, and disease, and evil- and to make it a place where we live in harmony- in shalom with God and with each other- He is saying it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring his love home to overflow in your heart as his love overflowed to you.

These are more than FEELING passages- but they are certainly not less.

In other words- there is an experience of believing that Jesus lived the life you were supposed to live, but didn't- then died the death you should have died for your sin... but now don't have to...and now can expect to be a part of New Heavens and New Earth when Jesus returns...there is an experience of knowing that in your head and believing it...and maybe even somewhat changing your life around to live like God wants you to live...but still not feeling it.

But the Holy Spirit will do the work to bring your heart- the way you feel- and what you WANT to do to align with it.

Back to 1)

This is Spiritual Renewal- when the gospel of Jesus starts overwhelms you to the point of no holds bar- thinking, acting and feeling the beauty of making God the center of all you do.- otherwise known as worship.

2) Spiritual Renewal is frozen by Status Quo, but thawed by Crisis.

I told you that in February of last year, I had a one-two punch of Crisis.

Each in the 2 primary callings of my life. This church and my family.

Both of those crises hit me on the same day. I felt out of control. Our well-thought-out plan to have the funds we needed for the building had just taken a critical hit with news that it was going to cost hundreds of thousands dollars more than estimated.

And the nice status quo of my kids getting up and going to school and learning in a safe environment- suddenly that disappeared from my life.

And I could not control any of it.

The result?- In my lack of ability to control outcomes- I realized what was actually there all along. A desperate need for God to act. That's the thing about Spiritual Renewal. it

allows you to see what's actually there- instead of the illusion of control that you think you have.

And when this happens- it looks a lot like the Van Gogh painting "At Eternity's Gate"- the one that hangs in our hallway.

Van Gogh At Eternity's Gate pic

I love that this painted by a fire. One- because often God is represented with fire in the Scriptures. 2 because it reminds me that even though the man in this picture is not a position any of us choose to be in...desperately praying to God to act in some way because your life is spinning out of control- you are never closer to God...than when you are deeply aware of your need for God. This is a thawing of the soul.

That's what happened on that day last February. Something that I had been scrapping and clawing to understand about what the LORD wanted me to do- was revealed in a moment of weakness and helplessness that I had not had in years.

Do you know this church was planted from a moment of Spiritual Renewal like that in my life?

My marriage was nearly lost, my son died- I felt completely incapable of controlling the outcomes of my life. And it was in those dark times- that the fire of the Lord became warmer and brighter- and from that- the Lord not only saved my marriage- but lit us up to come back to Murfreesboro where we had lived 10 years prior in a Status Quo illusion that we could get up everyday and control the outcome of our lives. Go to work, get some Toots wings or Demos' spaghetti. Watch some TV...and enjoy our suburban picket fence life until...i suppose we died (which we also tried to avoid ever talking about).

But when the death of my marriage, my son, and at times it felt like my calling to ministry was unavoidably in my face- there was no more pretending I had control. So I desperately turned to God in prayer. And he changed my family...and birthed this church from it.

And now I hardly ever go to Toots or Demos'.

Look at the picture. Is this not the moment most of us spend our entire lives avoiding? It's the moment none of us want to have. Because none of us want to 'feel bad'- we'd rather just be satisfied with the products we bought- and will throw away in a year. And yet- it is from this moment that Spiritual Renewal happens.

Back to 2)

Have you followed what's happening in the NFL?

Last Monday night- Damar Hamblin of the Buffalo Bills made a routine tackle. Status Quo.

But when he stood up, he immediately fell over unconscious. After CPR- and AED were applied. He was rushed to a hospital. Where he lay critically ill for days. His heart stopped on the field.

And suddenly- what felt important- a huge football game with major playoff implications- was permanently canceled. Sports broadcasters were openly praying on the air.

It was normal to see groups of men kneeling- not in thought- but in prayer.

Tweets and posts on Social Media went out from men who never spoke openly about God- directly asking people to pray.

Is it Spiritual Renewal. I have no doubt it will be for some people. But you can definitely watch at least temporarily that when people are faced with death- something completely out of their control- something bubbles up inside us to call out to God.

The status quo was broken on Monday night. And suddenly everything that was important before was now trivial. And men and women hit their knees to cry out to God.

In fact, if you watch NFL games today- you'll see it before so many games. Instead of a rote "LORDS Prayer" said as a Good Luck charm- Large, strong men are specifically recognizing their smallness- their weakness- and depending on God for at the very least- the physical healing of Damar Hamblin.

Earlier- we read from Isaiah 6. This is a moment of Spiritual Renewal.

Isaiah 6:1

Notice it starts with death. The Death of King Uzziah...contrasted with Isaiah seeing a vision of the Lord as a King. IN the temple seated on a throne. And there was smoke everywhere- again- the warming, thawing fire of the Lord.

You can read about King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26. Think of Uzziah as a Tom Brady. A powerful king that did everything right.

But look what happened. Uzziah- who at first had humbled himself before God and was relying on God- let his life become status quo. He forgot that it was God that was providing for him...and giving him the strength to do what he was doing leading Israel.

2 Chronicles 26:15-16

He built this catapult arrow shooting stone launching war machine and everybody loved it because it could also send and receive Faxes...and worked as a calculator too...

...he was marvelously helped- until he became strong. He forgot his weakness. He forgot that God was Strong- that he was dependent on God for his position and power as King.

And in his Status Quo arrogance- he went into the temple and acted as a priest...which led to his death...as God struck him with leprosy.

Isaiah 6:1

This is the context in which the whole nation of Israel has been shaken. If Uzziah isn't good enough to be a priest and king- who is? Our mighty ruler has fallen.

So God shakes Isaiah. And gives him this vision- only God is able to sit on a throne in the temple. Only God is strong. He is holy. Different. Better. Above us.

Isaiah 6:5

From that Isaiah is humbled. He sees God for who God is- and in turn he looks at himself and he sees his own sin. He is not holy. He is not clean. He is not enough. He is powerless. Weak. Notice he says "Now I've seen the REAL king. The TRUE lord of armies. It was never Uzziah. It was always you. Our hopes were never in Uzziah as King- only ever in you!"

This is an Eternity's Gate moment.

6:6-7

And yet, God in his infinite mercy- makes a way for Isaiah. He atones for his sin. He cleans him up so Isaiah can come close. Notice its not that Isaiah proved himself to God- It is that Isaiah saw himself as sinful, and God as holy- and confessed that to God with a desire to be made right.

6:8

From that, Isaiah responds to God's call- offering his entire self- willingly- joyfully- as a living sacrifice.

God calls him to go and deliver a message to Israel- that God is their true King. He calls Isaiah to deliver the message to Israel that will hopefully bring all their nation to their knees- to Eternity's gate.

He gladly now knows who he is- and he has a meaning- a mission a purpose- a partnership with God to live for God because God has cleaned him up and brought him in.

Van Gogh "The Sower"

That lead us to another Van Gogh painting that hangs on our walls. The confident, yet humble sower. In Van Gogh paintings the color yellow represents the presence of God. So the man at Eternity's gate- is turned into the sower- taking the word of God...the message of God...the presence of God out into the world to cultivate- while he himself joyfully experiences the presence of God (note the yellow sun in the center of the picture)

Back to 2)

But none of this happens, if the status quo isn't broken up.

That's why I talk to you so often about mirror moments. Or about meditating on Scripture. Or about having real conversations in your community group and with your family. Because we are so often, day by day, pulled away from Eternity's gate and into the bland existence of seeking the next emotional hit from someone liking an Instagram post or taking another vacation. It's all status quo. Only seeing God for who he is, and yourself for who you are- will result in the repentance necessary to drop to our knees in prayer. Everything else is just another salad from Toots. Mostly Iceberg lettuce.

We can't bring Crisis into our lives- and I'm not saying you should.

But open your bible and read. Hit your knees in prayer.

Hebrews 4:12-13

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 No creature is

hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.

Just through reading and meditating on God's Word- the status quo can be broken- a sort of inner crisis can come- that leads to renewal. But besides reading the Bible and praying regularly- is there anything else we can do to prepare for Spiritual Renewal?

3) To prepare for Spiritual Renewal- Reveal hidden sin, Get rid of doubtful habits, Obey the Holy Spirit, Confess Jesus publicly.

This comes from a small group of people in Wales that began praying for Revival in the ____ century.

That revival resulted in thousands coming to Know and follow Jesus.

I just want to briefly give you a description for each of this.

1- Do the work of being honest about sin you are hiding. Hidden sin can stymie the work of the spirit in your life and in others.

Revival is simply the viral like spread of individual renewal. If you, out of fear of exposure, are hiding your sin- unable to admit it- talk about it, confess it...you could be the domino that refuses to fall. Your sin could stop the Revival we're praying for.

This is bigger than you. But when sin is brought to light- because we know there is no condemnation for those who trust in Jesus death on the cross in their place- taking the condemnation and punishment for our sin- you don't have to be afraid to expose it.

How? Are you in a community group? Start there. Set up a meeting with your community group leaders and have a chat. Talk with a trusted friend in this church. Or send an email to elders@borocitychurch.com.

It doesn't matter how nice a new building we build. Unless we trust God with our sin- our church will not see revival. Unless the Lord builds the house- he labors in vain that builds it.

2- Get rid of doubtful habits.

3- Obey the Holy Spirit
10 second rule

4- Confess Jesus publicly.

Share the gospel- we are specifically going to help you with this in 2023.