

TRUE DEPTH

SERMON NOTES

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ABOUT THESE NOTES

True Depth, and of course the Bible, serves as the text for this sermon series. This resource is provided to help disciples experience true depth in their walk with Christ and service in his name. Swimming in the shallow end of the discipleship pool will cause the church to sink. As disciples move beyond shallow cultural “churchianity” and into the deep waters of biblical Christianity, their characters and witness to the world will be enhanced. May God empower you and your preaching to move the congregation into the deep-end of the discipleship pool.

Cultural churchianity, built on personal preferences, narcissistic consumerism, rugged individualism, and safe status quo, absolutely cannot mix with biblical Christianity. Biblical Christianity involves cross bearing, self-denial, and costly sacrificial love.

A “churchian,” not to be mistaken for a Christian, swims in the shallows. A churchian attends church gatherings, serves others, and seems moral. He is a good person. He practices spiritual disciplines but only when he wants something from God. He tries to be generous. He looks a lot like a true disciple. However, *he* is the center of his religion. He keeps Christ at arm’s length. He follows what he perceives to be God’s will as long as it aligns with his conception of “the good life.” As soon as Christ makes demands, as he often does, problems arise. The churchian ignores any call to deny self and pick up the cross. The cross and cost do not figure into his religion of comfort and convenience.

Although we cannot assume that people become deep disciples simply because they attend church, disciples are not made without the church. Disciples will never learn to swim in the depths without the help of a local church community. God is the one who makes disciples, but he does so through the church. Disciples of depth cannot be made outside of the context of Christian community. And this is the basis for this sermon series.

CULTURAL CHURCHIANITY VERSUS BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY

WEEK 1
MARK 8:31-38

SWIMMING PRINCIPLE

God makes disciples through the church, when they swim away from the shallows of cultural churchianity and toward the depths of biblical Christianity.

INTRODUCTION

When we are children, the deep end of the swimming pool elicits fear and excitement. Even after we learn to swim, most of us are hesitant to swim in the depths. We are tempted to settle for the safety and status quo of the shallow end of the pool. But deep down we long to swim where the water is deep. As disciples of Christ, we long for the depths. To swim in the deep end of the discipleship pool, we need the grace and courage to break free from the quest for comfort and convenience.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Swimming in the Shallows Will Cause the Church to Sink

Many books have been written to highlight the lack of difference between secular people and professing Christians. Especially in North America, divorce rates, addiction patterns, spending habits, and leisure activities for the churched are surprisingly, and sadly, similar to the unchurched. Here are some reasons why.

A. Christian Discipleship

Christian discipleship has been hijacked by the American dream. There has been an attempt to mix the gospel of consumerism—or the pursuit of health, wealth, and happiness, with the gospel of Christ. These two gospels cannot sync. Some, then, are left thinking they're disciples but are really dreamers.

B. Cultural Churchianity

Shallow cultural churchianity is nothing like deep biblical Christianity. Churchianity develops good people who seek the comfort, coziness, and convenience of consumerism. Christianity is designed to develop godly people who embrace the commitment, compassion, and courage of the cross. Discerning whether or not our beliefs and behaviors are based more on cultural norms than Christ's values is crucial.

II. Christians Are Called to Swim with Christ in the Depths

If we going to experience the presence of Christ in our lives, we must choose to swim with him in the deep end of the discipleship pool. We will never find him in the shallow end.

A. The Cost

Jesus demonstrates that there is no discount on the cost of discipleship (Mark 8:31–34). He told his disciples that he would experience the impending deep waters of suffering and death at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders. Then he called his disciples to do the same. Jesus invites all disciples to swim in the deep end through self-denial and cross-bearing.

B. The Benefit

The water we crave is in the deep end of the discipleship pool (Mark 8:35–38). Jesus said, “Whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it” (v. 35). We find abundant life—a life of faithfulness, fruitfulness, and fulfillment—not in the shallows of churchianity, but in the depths of the cross.

CONCLUSION

What decisions are necessary for you to swim further from shallow cultural churchianity and toward deep biblical Christianity? How will these decisions impact your use of time and money? How will these decisions impact your relationships? What will these decisions require you to pick up or put down? Reaching and kicking toward the deep end of the discipleship pool requires commitment and courage. But it's worth the cost because it leads us into waters in which we experience the presence and power of Christ.

REVELATION

WHAT GOD DOES AMONG US

WEEK 2

*MARK 1:9–11; 9:2–7;
14:61–65; 15:37–39*

SWIMMING PRINCIPLE

When we stop, look, and listen up for the God who shows up to speak up, we will receive identity-shaping and mission-directing revelation.

INTRODUCTION

Playing hide-and-seek with a toddler is not challenging at all. After a few minutes, sometimes seconds, the kid gets tired of being alone and wants to be found. She will shout out, “Here I am; come find me.” If you can’t track her voice and find her soon, she will give more clues. “I’m in the bathroom!” She hates to be hidden and wants to be found.

God is like that. He hates to be hidden and wants to be found. God said through Jeremiah, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13). But if we don’t go looking for him, he will come looking for us. God also said, “I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me” (Isa. 65:1). God wants to reveal himself to us.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. God Is Self-Revealing

A. Jesus Embraced the Revelation (Mark 1:9–11)

The voice of Father God revealed the identity of Jesus as “my Son, whom I love” (v. 11). That revelation shaped Jesus’ identity and mission.

B. The Disciples Missed the Revelation (Mark 9:2–7)

The voice of God spoke again, this time to reveal the identity of Jesus to Peter, James, and John. The disciples missed the revelation. They wanted to build three tabernacles for Moses (law), Elijah (prophets), and Jesus. They kept the three on par with each other when the voice of God made it abundantly clear that Jesus trumps the Law and the Prophets.

C. The Religious Leaders Resisted the Revelation (Mark 14:61–65)

Jesus revealed his identity to the high priest and other religious leaders. They defiantly resisted it. They accused Jesus of blasphemy and condemned him to death.

D. The Centurion Embraced the Revelation (Mark 15:37–39)

The disciples often missed revelation and the religious leaders mostly resisted it. Yet oddly enough, a Roman Centurion is the one who was able to discern the revelation of Jesus’ identity and proclaimed, “Surely this man was the Son of God” (v. 39). The disciples had a hard time seeing death as a revelation of Jesus’ divine sonship. But the centurion did.

II. Deism, Diversion, and Distraction Cause Us to Cluelessly Miss or Defiantly Resist Revelation

A. Deism

Deism is the belief that everything God has revealed is all he will reveal. The deists of the Enlightenment period believed that God created the universe and sustains it with laws of nature, but doesn’t actively reveal himself or interact with the world anymore. We adopt a form of deism if we believe that God has stopped actively revealing himself to us.

B. Diversions

Diversions are the things we intentionally choose that blind us to revelation. We pick up the smartphone and check our e-mail. We pick up the remote and channel surf. We pick up the iPad and play a game. Diversions can blind us to what really matters, to the revelation of God among us.

C. Distraction

Distractions are the things we don’t choose that blind us to revelation. Distractions come upon us without our invitation. They just happen. An illness, job loss, or natural disaster can come upon us and potentially blind us to the revelation of God among us.

III. Stop, Look, and Listen for God to Show Up and Speak Up

A. Peter

Peter stopped, looked and listened for God and received a revelation (Acts 10). He was on a rooftop and received a revelatory vision from God. The revelation led Peter to the

dramatic pronouncement that Christ came not only for Jews, but also for Gentiles. Peter's capacity to receive revelation when it came, opened the door for us Gentiles today to come to faith in Christ.

B. Us

When we stop, look, and listen for God, we receive revelation. God provides revelation that is identity-shaping and mission-directing when we give him the space in our lives to do so. God wants to reveal his will and his way to us. We receive it when we stop, look, and listen for him.

CONCLUSION

Paul preached to pagans in Athens that God "is not far from any one of us" (Acts 17:27). God wants to reveal himself in ways that shape our identity and direct our mission. He may reveal himself through a song, situation, person, image, sermon, prayer, trial, retreat, or book. We will resist the revelation if deism gets the best of us. And we will miss it if we are diverted and distracted. But if we stop, look, and listen, we can develop the spiritual muscles to discern and embrace revelation from God.

Find ways to stop, look, and listen for God to show up and speak up. Start a prayer journal to record how you saw and heard God throughout the day. Or recruit a spiritual director to ask you questions that will help you identify revelations from God. Or engage in a two- to three-day retreat of solitude and silence to look and listen for God.

RESTORATION

WHAT GOD DOES FOR US

WEEK 3

*MARK 8:27–33; 10:17–31;
14:27–31; 16:7*

SWIMMING PRINCIPLE

God provides restorative grace-filled mulligans for us when we slice the ball of our lives into the woods.

INTRODUCTION

Golf is a frustrating game. Maybe you feel the same way. Bad shots come easily and good shots are rare for most of us. Many of us need do-overs, a mulligan. If someone offers you a mulligan after you hit an awful shot, you get to hit another ball from the same spot as if the errant shot never happened. A mulligan is a second chance, a clean slate. Unless you're a really good player, you will probably take a few mulligans in every round of golf you play. And unless you're a perfect person, you will need mulligans in life too.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Peter Needed a Mulligan

A. Peter Failed to Embrace the Mission of Jesus (Mark 8:27–33)

Peter hit a good shot when it came to the identity of Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, “You are the Messiah.” But Peter hit a horrible shot concerning the mission of Jesus. When Jesus began to describe his death mission, Peter rebuked him. Peter failed to understand the mission of Jesus.

B. Peter Struggled with Prideful Arrogance (Mark 10:17–31)

A rich man was unwilling to part with his wealth to follow Jesus. Peter spoke up to boast. He said to Jesus, “We have left everything to follow you” (v. 28). Compared to the rich man, Peter shined. But Jesus compared Peter’s generosity to God’s. He basically said to Peter, “You can’t out-give God.”

C. Peter Disappointed Jesus (Mark 14:66–72)

On Jesus’ dying day, he begged Peter to keep watch in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter fell asleep three times. Bad shot, Peter!

D. Peter Denied Jesus (Mark 14:66–72)

Jesus predicted Peter’s denial even though the apostle said he would rather die than deny Jesus (Mark 14:31). But Peter did disown Jesus three times. Peter sliced the discipleship ball deep into the rough.

E. Peter Seemed Ready to Give Up on Becoming a Rocklike Disciple (John 21:1–14)

Peter appeared to have given up on the mission of fishing for people and returned to the safety of fishing for fish. He probably saw himself as damaged goods. He failed so miserably so often that he could never become the rocklike disciple Jesus saw in him. Peter needed a mulligan he couldn’t give himself.

II. We Need a Mulligan Too

A. When We Replay Regrets

We need a mulligan when we replay the regretful shots of the past. When we do this, we stay stuck in the woods and can’t move forward in our discipleship journey. You made a bad decision you can’t undo. You said something you can’t take back. You damaged a relationship that can’t be restored. You need a mulligan.

B. When We Recommit Sins

We need a mulligan when we recommit the sinful shots in the present. Sometimes it is our present struggle with sin that keeps us stuck in the discipleship woods. You look at pornography again. You lose your temper again. You gossip about a friend again. You get drunk again. You need a mulligan.

C. When We Resign Hope

We are tempted to give up hope on becoming a rocklike disciple. Failure often leads disciples to settle for shallow churchianity instead of the true depth of biblical Christianity. There are many Christians who feel perpetually stuck in the woods of their discipleship journey.

III. God Gives Grace-Filled Mulligans

A. Peter (Mark 16:7; John 21:15–17)

God went out of his way to dispatch an angel with a specific message for Peter. The angel said to the women who visited the tomb after Jesus’ resurrection, “Go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee’” (Mark 16:7). Peter was probably not feeling much like a disciple. God, through the angel, singles out Peter. That’s a mulligan!

B. The Hebrews (Lev. 16)

God, through Moses, commanded the Hebrews to participate in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, to ring in every new year. On that day, the high priest laid his hands on a goat, a scapegoat, and confessed all the sins of the people for the previous year. The scapegoat would be led out of the city, carrying away the sins of the people. That's a mulligan!

C. Us (1 John 1:9)

God still offers us grace-filled mulligans when we slice the ball of our lives into the woods. God's grace can restore his image in us.

IV. God's Grace-Filled Mulligans Restore Us

A. Peter (Acts 10:34–35)

Grace is not an excuse to sin but empowerment over sin. A grace-filled mulligan from God will restore a person to what they were created to be. The mulligan of grace changed Peter from cowardice to courage, from racist to inclusive of Gentiles.

B. Us (Acts 2:36)

We can't change ourselves. The grace of God restores us when embrace and take the mulligans he offers.

CONCLUSION

What can we do to play out of the woods? Nothing. The application of this sermon has little to do with us and everything to do with God. All we need to do is take the grace-filled mulligan God gives us in Christ. If we have sliced the ball of our lives so deep into the discipleship woods that we can't find it or play out of the mess, we need to get past our self-mutilating pride. We need to take the mulligan. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! That's the reality that restores us and puts us back on the discipleship fairway.

TRANSFORMATION

WHAT GOD DOES TO US

WEEK 4

MARK 14:12-26

SWIMMING PRINCIPLE

God breaks ordinary people to transform them into something extraordinary.

INTRODUCTION

Frederick Buechner wrote, “You enter the extraordinary by way of the ordinary.”¹ God would agree. God’s MO is transforming the ordinary into something extraordinary. In Christ’s life-transforming hands, lepers became cleansed, the lame became walkers, prostitutes became chaste, tax collectors became generous, Simon became Peter, and Saul became Paul. He transforms the ordinary into something extraordinary.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. God Makes the Ordinary Extraordinary

A. Hebrew Nation

God transformed ordinary Hebrew slaves into a holy nation (Mark 14:12). Mark tells us that the Last Supper took place during the Jewish Passover feast. The Passover commemorated how God took ordinary Hebrew slaves out of Egypt and gave them into Canaan as an extraordinary holy nation.

B. Bread

Christ transformed ordinary bread into his extraordinary body (14:22).

C. Fishermen

God transformed ordinary odorous fishermen into extraordinary apostolic leaders. What Jesus Christ did with the bread and with Hebrew slaves suggested what he was doing with his disciples. He was turning ordinary people into extraordinary leaders.

D. Us

God transforms the ordinary into something extraordinary even today. God still does miracles of transformation today. He takes a mafia member and gives him to the world as an evangelist. He takes a political criminal and gives him to the world as a minister to the incarcerated. He takes a greedy executive and gives her to the world as a generous philanthropist.

II. How Does God Transform the Ordinary into the Extraordinary

A. Hebrew Nation

In between the taking of ordinary Hebrew slaves and the giving of an extraordinary holy nation, God broke his people in the wilderness. The wilderness, as unwelcome as it was, made God's people more extraordinary than they were.

B. Bread

In between the taking of ordinary bread and the giving of his extraordinary body, Christ broke the bread (Mark 14:22). When the bread is broken by the hands of Christ, and only after it is broken, it became something more extraordinary than it was.

C. Fishermen

In between the taking of ordinary people and the giving of extraordinary apostles, God broke them through the death of their dreams. The disciples experienced severe brokenness between the crucifixion of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They experienced the death of their dreams, their messianic expectations of Jesus. They were fearful that the Jewish leaders would do to them what they did to Jesus. The brokenness, in time, enabled them to see beyond their limited theology and personal preferences. God used the brokenness to make them more extraordinary than they were.

D. Us

Cultural churchianity teaches and tempts us to run from brokenness. Churchianity does not endorse brokenness as an avenue through which ordinary people become extraordinary disciples. Churchianity teaches us to run from brokenness. But if we do, we will shortcut the deep work God wants to do to us.

III. The Break Makes Us Extraordinary

A. Biblical Christianity Calls Us to Run to the Brokenness

The Bible is full of narratives in which people yield to brokenness and come out better not bitter. Consider Joseph, Job, Jeremiah, and Paul. They each experienced a significant season or seasons of brokenness that made them more extraordinary than they were.

B. God Removes What Taints Us

God uses brokenness to expose our shortcomings, not to shame us but to transform us. The Jews had to remove all of the yeast from their homes before the Passover (Ex. 12:15). This was a reminder that God will not be content until he purifies us and makes us what he has created us to be.

C. God's Refining Fire Purifies Us

Another image that highlights God's relentless desire to transform us, is the refiner's fire in Malachi 3:2. A refiner of silver would put the silver in a pot and turn up the heat, enough to bring impurities to the surface but without burning the silver. God uses brokenness in the same way with us. Brokenness brings our impurities to the surface so God can refine the silver of our lives.

CONCLUSION

Initially, the happiness of cultural churchianity seems so appealing while the brokenness of biblical Christianity seems appalling. But if we run to and not from the brokenness, God will use it to transform our ordinary lives into something extraordinary.

NOTE

1. Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 78.

SANCTIFICATION

WHAT GOD DOES IN US

WEEK 5

MARK 3:13–19

SWIMMING PRINCIPLE

God uses the local church community that is frightening and frustrating but formative to perform a work of sanctification in us.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the time, a two-for-one deal is a good thing. Two burgers for the price of one at your favorite fast food joint is a good thing—for your wallet not your health. Two pairs of sneakers for the price of one is a fantastic deal. When your favorite bookstore offers two books for the price of one, it's hard to resist. But every once in a while, we encounter a two-for-one deal that is not so welcome. That's what happened to Jacob in Genesis 29.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. When We Say “I Do,” We Get Two

A. Rachel and Leah

Jacob got the radiant Rachel he wanted and the lackluster Leah he didn't want (Gen. 29:14–30). Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, but he gets stuck marrying Leah too.

B. Christ and the Church

When we say “I do” to God, we get the radiant Christ we want and the lackluster church we don’t want. We can relate to Jacob. In Mark 3:13–19, when Jesus called those first disciples to follow him, they were being called not to follow individually but communally. Look at the plural use of the pronouns. Jesus called “them” to be with him, so that “they” might serve him together. Jesus’ call to community is confirmed by the fact that Mark named and described the motley community Jesus chose. Can you imagine Matthew the tax collector spending lots of time with Simon the Zealot? Jewish zealots hated tax collectors because of the latter’s association with the Roman government. When the disciples said “I do,” they got the Christ they wanted, but also a community they would not have picked if they had the choice.

II. Many Are Tempted to Quit or Coexist with the Church

A. Quit

Some people choose to quit the church. Many people become disillusioned with the Christian community. Our expectations for the church are so high that we are bound to be disappointed. Some people divorce the church when this happens and they never return to it.

B. Coexist

More people choose to coexist with the church. There are others who, when confronted with the lackluster Leah-like qualities in the church, choose to merely coexist with the Christian community. They still attend and participate minimally in the life of the church, but they keep it at arm’s length. They tolerate the church, like Jacob did Leah, but they don’t love the church.

III. Jesus Loved the Church Despite All the Reasons Not To

A. The Church

Christ’s love for the church makes her more radiant (Eph. 5:25–27). Christ doesn’t simply tolerate the church, he loves it. Christ shows us that the only way to make the church holy and radiant is to love it.

B. Us

Christ’s love for us makes us more radiant (Rom. 5:8). Christ loved us when we were like lackluster Leah, still sinners. He had every reason not to love us, but he did. His love for us makes us less lackluster and more radiant.

IV. Loving the Church Is a Sanctifying Grace

A. The Church

When we love the church, it is sanctified. The more we love the church, like Christ does, the more beautiful the church becomes. Critiquing, quitting, tolerating and coexisting with the church does not help the church become more radiant; loving it does.

B. Us

When we love the church, we are sanctified. Loving the church not only sanctifies it, but also sanctifies us. When we love the church, we do what Christ did. We become like Christ in the process of learning to love the church despite the many reasons not to love it. Sanctification is the process of becoming like Christ.

CONCLUSION

The church is frightening and frustrating but formative. When we say “I do” to God, we get the radiant Christ we want and the lackluster church we may not want. Learning to love them both is one of the main tools God uses to do a sanctifying work in us.

MISSION

WHAT GOD DOES THROUGH US

WEEK 6

MARK 10:32-34

SWIMMING PRINCIPLE

God accomplishes his mission through us when we dare to join him in the space between the bullied and the bullies.

INTRODUCTION

Every day, tens of thousands of kids are bullied at school, on the bus, in the home, at the playground, and on the Internet. Bullying is a huge problem today. It has always been a problem. A little more than halfway through Mark's gospel, Jesus embarked on a journey to Jerusalem to face some bullies. That's what his Father asked him to do and Jesus did not want to disappoint his Dad.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Jesus

A. Jesus Went

Jesus refused to play life safe in comfortable and convenient Capernaum, where his ministry's headquarters were. Jesus could have stayed in this safe and familiar village, but instead he embarked upon a journey to the big city of Jerusalem. Jesus went on a death mission.

B. Jesus Confronted

Jesus entered the space between the bullied and the bullies in the temple (Mark 11:12–19). Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus went into the temple and flipped over tables of the moneychangers. He did this not merely because they were buying and selling, but because they were bullying poor peasant Jews seeking to worship in the temple. Jesus' actions facilitated his death.

C. Jesus Interceded

Jesus stepped in the space between us and the bullies that were having their way with us (Col. 2:13–15). He liberated us from the bullies of sin, shame, emptiness, loneliness, and others. Jesus made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

II. Us

A. We Must Go

What God did for us, he wants to do through us. God, through his Word, makes it clear that he wants us to join him in the space between the bullied and the bullies. Jesus said, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). The apostle John asserted that "in this world we are like Jesus" (1 John 4:17).

B. We Must Confront

We experience the presence and power of God most profoundly in the missional space between the bullied and the bullies. We don't experience the presence of God when we are building our own personal kingdom of comfort and convenience. We experience the profound presence and power of God when, with commitment, courage and compassion, we enter the space between the bullied and the bullies. That's where God is.

C. We Must Intercede

We must break free from cultural churchianity's quest for personal possessions and power. The stories that sandwich Jesus' statement about going on a death mission to Jerusalem (Mark 10:32–34), focus on the rich young man (vv. 17–31) and the request of James and John (vv. 35–45). The rich man could not part with his possessions and refused to follow Jesus on mission to Jerusalem. Then, right after Jesus described his self-sacrificial death mission, James and John approached Jesus with a request for personal power. They don't seem to get it either.

1. Individuals

God has always raised up a person to join him on mission between the bullied and the bullies. God invites people to join him in bully-bashing mission. He called Moses to join him in confronting the bully, namely Pharaoh, and liberating the bullied, Hebrew slaves. He invited David to confront Goliath the bully. He invited Deborah to challenge Sisera, the bully who oppressed God's people for twenty years. Not only does God fill the space between the bullied and the bullies, he calls people to join him there too.

2. The Church

God has always used the church in bully-bashing mission. Throughout history, God has used the church through the mission of confronting bullies. The church has been on the forefront of confronting bullies such as slavery, racism, sexism, poverty, etc.

3. You

Discern the bully-bashing mission to which God is calling you. God is calling you to a bully bashing mission. To what missional space is God calling you?

God's mission will always take us where his presence and power will sustain us. God does not tell us to go where he is not already present and at work. He leads the way. He gets there first. God's mission will only take us where his present and power will sustain us.

CONCLUSION

Do you remember how Jesus, the bully basher, stepped in the space between you and the bullies that were oppressing you? The bully of addiction, depression, loneliness, emptiness, inferiority, or abuse was having its way with you. Then, Jesus entered into your pain and pummeled the bully. You are free. Now he invites you to join him in taking on the bullies that still oppress the human race, bullies like human trafficking, poverty, domestic violence, racism, etc. Disciples of true depth join Jesus in Jerusalem, in the space between the bullied and the bullies. To what space is God calling you and, most importantly, will you join him there?