

Value 1 - Following Jesus

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[0 : 00] We introduced our new Tri-State Community Church mission statement. Our mission statement is actually a bigger, or the mission statement is a summary of what Paul was saying in Ephesians chapter 4.

As John and Tim and I looked at the different passages about the church, the reason we chose Ephesians 4 as our core is we really came to the conclusion that that's the place where God gets down to brass tacks.

That really explains what is the church for? What is our purpose together? Now, there's other passages. 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14, of course, talk a lot about the church.

Romans 12 talks about the interaction of the gifts. You look at Colossians 1. But that Ephesians 4 passage is really the heart. And so we're about, we exist to glorify God by walking closely with him. I'm cheating. We exist to glorify God by walking closely with him. Remember, I talked about the fact that in John chapter 14, when Jesus introduced the Holy Spirit, he said, I will send you another helper or another comforter.

[1 : 32] That word is paraclete, which literally means someone who walks alongside. We are walking closely together with the Holy Spirit, learning what it means so that we can strive together to become more like Jesus every day.

That's the goal. And that is really our best life, is to become more and more like Jesus every day. So we exist to glorify God by walking closely with him, striving together to become more like Jesus every day.

That's our goal. And that's really what a mission statement does. It gives us the goal. But how do we get there? What is the means that we get from this point to that point?

What's the process? Well, that's why we have values. And over the next five weeks, I'll be going through the core values that we've identified for ourselves as a church. It's to follow Jesus.

It's to cultivate love for God. It's to cultivate love for one another. It's to make disciples. It's to seek unity.

[2 : 48] Those are the core values. And in those core values, as we practice them, this mission becomes reality. And we get to the point in our lives where, as we look at yesterday, we see that we've made another step to be more like Jesus.

And we can anticipate that tomorrow we'll be more like him even more. And so it goes all the way through life. Now, as we talked about our mission, we uncovered four problems.

Do you remember those four problems within our mission statement? These problems get in the way of us accomplishing this goal. They will be addressed as we practice our values.

The first problem was we really don't know Jesus as well as we think we do. And I think it's important that we accept that fact, that we embrace it and own it.

Recognizing, first of all, that God is revealing himself to the words of the Bible, to the guidance of the Holy Spirit within community. See, God is constantly revealing himself. But we don't know Jesus as well as we think we do.

[3 : 58] Culture gets in the way. Our own bias gets in the way. We need to confront those things with the reality of what the Bible says. If you remember, I issued a challenge to you to make it a goal to read through the Gospels over the next three months.

One chapter a day, so nothing overwhelming. But one chapter a day, read a chapter of the Gospel, starting in Matthew, ending in John, and ask the question, Lord, what does this tell me about Jesus?

And what do I need to copy? Because that was the second problem. We don't really know Jesus, number one. Number two, we don't really know what about Jesus we need to be emulating.

What is it in his character, in his person, that we need to see reflected in us? And as we take that daily step of reading through the Gospels, that will begin to be unearthed.

The third problem was that we don't recognize the process. God didn't just flip a switch. You know, it says in Romans 5.1, Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God.

[5 : 07] In a moment, in an instant. When you say to the Lord, God, I acknowledge that I'm a sinner. I acknowledge that I am hopeless in and of myself.

But you died on the cross for me, and I accept what you did on my behalf. You're justified. You're declared righteous before God. But there's a process that goes on, this process of becoming like Jesus, is a lifetime journey.

The theological word for it is sanctification. It's an ongoing process. It doesn't happen with the flip of a switch. It's a hard road that we have to follow.

Now, it's the best road. But it's challenging. It's hard. The next verses in Romans 5 talk about the difficulty that we face going through this life of following Jesus, of becoming more like him.

You can see the same idea reflected in James 1. Can't all joy when we face various trials and temptations? Because those are the things that God uses to make us more like him.

[6 : 19] So, we don't know Jesus as well as we think we do. We don't know what we should be emulating in Jesus. We don't appreciate the process. And then the fourth thing is that we don't really value what is being offered to us.

Now, some of that, frankly, is the way that in the last 50 to 60 years that we have presented the gospel. Because we've made the gospel all about where you go when you die.

Now, that's a good thing. I'm excited about going to heaven. I'm excited to see streets of gold and discover the mansion that God has been preparing for me, according to John 14. And, most importantly, to see him face to face.

But what about now? What about my life now? The hardships that I have to deal with on a day-to-day basis? The challenges of living in this world?

Of an aging body? How do we deal with these things? And the things around us are so loud. They seem to be overwhelming.

[7 : 26] We need to value what God is offering to us and see that it has benefit today as well as into eternity. Paul said in 1 Timothy 4 that godliness is beneficial in this life and in the future.

We need to own that. We need to recognize it and come to value above everything else what we have in Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 6.33, Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things, and he's talking about all the things we worry about, all these things will be added unto you.

We need to make him our supreme value. And when we do, everything about life has changed.

Everything about life has answers, has purpose, and becomes a tool in the hands of God to make us more like Jesus.

So now as we spend the next five weeks going through these values, we're going to address those problems. We're going to see what it is to follow Jesus, to cultivate love for God, to cultivate love for one another, to make disciples, to seek unity.

We're going to see how those problems are solved as we live out these values. And make no mistake, you're going to see this statement over and over and over again.

[8 : 51] you're going to hear us talking about our values from the pulpit, in conversation, in Sunday school, in classes. This is what we're about because this, make no mistake, is God's plan for us.

We exist to glorify God by walking closely with him, striving together to become more like Jesus every day. That's our purpose and that's what we want to focus on.

So turn in your Bibles, to Matthew chapter 4. This is going to be our core passage for our first value, which is to follow Jesus.

Let's pray together and we'll unpack this passage. Lord, thank you that you don't just leave us hanging.

That you don't leave us wondering how we're supposed to become the people that you want us to become. You don't leave us as orphans.

[9 : 59] Instead, Jesus came, he died on the cross, he showed us how to live, he died, he rose again, he's seated at the right hand of the Father, and now we have an even more intimate relationship with you and the Holy Spirit, literally living inside of us.

And Lord, as we learn to relate to you, to enjoy fellowship and to learn and to follow you, I pray, God, that we would become more like Jesus, that we would see transformation, that we would be

the people that you designed us to be.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. One of the things I just, as a side note, that you're going to see woven through our mission and our values is relationship.

I saw a news report or a podcast, I don't remember exactly what it was, but scientists are discovering that literally all of creation is about relationship.

Nothing, nothing is in isolation. Everything relates to everything else. We see that certainly in the Trinity. The Father relates in a loving relationship to the Son, he relates to the Holy Spirit, and there's this love relationship that's then reflected in the body of Christ, and it's reflected everywhere we look.

[11:19] Relationship is essential. Relationship is the means, the context by which God does his work in our lives. We need to constantly keep that in mind.

We're never living our lives in isolation, but always we're surrounded in loving relationship with God vertically and with each other. That's an essential piece of what it means to follow Jesus.

So let's read together Matthew chapter 4 starting in verse 18. Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew, his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

And he said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately, they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, in the boat with Zebedee, their father, mending their nets, and Jesus called them. Immediately, they left the boat and their father and followed him. There's an image that I want you to have in your mind as we talk this morning about following Jesus.

[12:34] And I'm going to get it set there even before we start to unpack this passage. I read an account of a man who went up on a big adventure up in Alaska, up on the frozen tundra up there.

That is, it was very interesting as it relates to our following Christ. Through the tundra, there's game trails. And those game trails, scientists think, could be as much, could be thousands of years old.

As generation after generation of generation of wildlife has worn these paths which have created a path of least resistance to resources that they need to survive the severe winters of living up there so close to the North Pole in northern Alaska.

Those paths lead the way to food. They lead the way to water. They lead the way to safety. And every generation of caribou or reindeer or bears, whatever lives up there, they teach their offspring to follow that path because it's the path to life.

If you've ever been hiking, especially in the snow, it's really good to put somebody big at the front to blaze the trail, to push through the snow, and then everybody else follows like a little family of ducklings and they follow in the path that that first person blazes for us.

[14:09] That's the imagery of following Jesus is we're walking a well-worn path and along that way we discover what it means to live in Christ.

We discover the path to life. So keep that in your mind is that image of following Jesus as we go. So let's talk a little bit about what's going on here in Matthew 4.

A little bit of context. We're not going to turn there but we're going to pull from Luke 5 and John 1.

This was not the first encounter between Jesus and these men. Andrew had been following John the Baptist and he introduced his brothers to Jesus because John the Baptist introduced him to Jesus.

So we see contact there. In Luke 5 we also see that Jesus gathered a crowd on the shore of Galilee as Peter came in from a long night of fishing that had been fruitless.

They hadn't caught anything. And the crowd was pushing in on Jesus so he had the water behind him and he needed more room. And so he said to Peter let me use your boat and he got in the boat.

[15:23] Peter pushed away from the shore just enough to create some margin kind of like we have margin here. And so Jesus could speak to the crowds and they could hear him speak. And then as repayment for use of Peter's boat Jesus said why don't you put out put your nets down.

and of course Peter brought in a bumper crop of fish after a fruitless night of trying things his own way. And so they had seen Jesus. They had a rudimentary understanding of who Jesus was.

At this point of the journey maybe you have just a rudimentary understanding of who Jesus is.

Maybe you haven't put your trust in him. You just heard about this guy and you've heard that something about him dying on the cross and the sins of your life being forgiven because Jesus took that punishment for you.

You don't know much. That was me in 1980. I read a tract it told me about Jesus dying on the cross for my sins and giving an offer of new life.

I didn't know much but I knew enough to take the next step to invite him into my life to take that gift that he was offering of eternal life and take it as my own and then to enter in first, timid, awkward steps of following him.

[16:46] At this stage of the journey this is the basics that we're covering today. This is a place where you may not have a lot of information but you have enough to know that this Jesus is trustworthy.

He's worth at least testing the waters and taking the next step. If you will. It's over the beginning of that game trail. So that's where Peter and his brothers, James and John, that's where they were. But look at what happens. Jesus says to them, follow me and I will make you fishes of men. And what do they do? Do they think about it? No. Do they bargain? No. We do see a guy later in the Gospels who tries to bargain with Jesus when he issues that call.

But these guys heard the call, dropped what they were doing and went and followed. Boys wondered what their dads were thinking.

I am a dad and I have had my children in the midst of a task get distracted, drop what I had assigned them to do and they walked off. Like, where are you guys going?

[17:55] Get back here. Did that go through Zebedee's mind? Or did he also recognize that his sons were getting a higher call?

We don't know. We actually don't know anything about Zebedee other than his two sons follow Jesus. We don't know anything about Peter and Andrew's dad. Doesn't say anything about him other than it was a family business.

But they left everything. They dropped the nets immediately and followed Jesus. They had enough information to recognize that this call was worth the transaction, worth the trade-off.

We can abandon our career to follow Jesus. We can abandon what we put our hope in before to follow Jesus. That's where it all starts.

Remember I told you the fourth problem with our mission statement is recognizing the value that's being offered to us? At this stage of the journey, it's a big step of faith.

[18:59] These guys took a huge step of faith to decide to go ahead and follow Jesus on the limited information that they had. We need to do the same thing. We may not see the value.

We've got to trust that it's there because God loves us. He's good. He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins. So we're following Jesus.

We make the decision to follow Jesus just like the disciples did. What does that look like? What does it mean brass tacks moment by moment, day by day, what does it look like to follow Jesus? I'm glad you asked. The actual, the answer to the question is actually in Matthew 4.19. And we're going to use Matthew 4.19 as our definition of what it means to be a follower of Jesus or disciple. So it starts with Jesus issuing the call to each one of us follow me. And our response in our heads is, okay, I don't know much, but I think you're trustworthy, so I'll take that step.

[20:09] I will start to follow you. And what we're entering into at that point is an apprenticeship to Jesus. My youngest son is planning on entering an electrician apprenticeship this spring.

What does that mean? He's glued at the hip to a master electrician who's going to show him the ropes, literally show him how to hold his hands, how to hold the tools, how to do all the steps along the way to becoming a master electrician.

They will have connection of life, they will have connection, obviously, in the conduct of their work from day to day. And Micah will learn through observation what it looks like to be an electrician. That's what Jesus is inviting us into. Become my apprentice. Now, something I want to make clear really quickly. There is confusion in the American contemporary church about what it means to be saved.

And there is a belief that I disagree with that you can accept Jesus as your Savior, that he died on the cross for you, that your sins are forgiven, and just stop there and then go on with your life.

[21:29] That is not in the pages of Scripture. Now, let me make something very, very clear. All the work that's done is done by Jesus and we walk by faith all the way through.

Jesus died on the cross for your sins, you put your trust in him, but it's not just a matter of trusting that your sins are forgiven and you're done. Oh no, you're actually turning from an old way of life to a new way of life.

There isn't a break between saving faith and then, later you decide to become a disciple. No, in making the decision to follow Jesus, we're making the decision to follow him.

That's an important distinction. And I'll tell you why it's important. A lot of the promises about abundant life for Easter, the three weeks of Easter, I'm looking at doing a sermon, just a short sermon series on what the abundant life is.

That life is predicated on us obeying God, on us following him. The idea that, well, you just pray a prayer and you're set, you're part of the family of God and that's all you have to do, cuts you off from all the riches that God has available to you.

[22 : 52] So, not only do we come to Jesus by faith, but we so also walk in him. Colossians 2, 6 says, as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, so also walk in him.

It's a lifestyle. Let me read it again. Therefore, as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so we receive him by faith, that Jesus' work on the cross was for us, so walk in him.

That's the life rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving. That's how we live. And that's what I'm talking about today.

We receive Jesus by faith, we walk with him by faith. And what does that mean? Our confidence is that as we follow in his footsteps, empowered and taught by the Holy Spirit, that we are going to see that growth that he wants to see in us.

If that doesn't make sense to you, stop me. Catch me out. Not right now, but afterward, we can talk about more. Because this is a very important thing, because there's a lot of confusion out there in the church at large.

[23 : 57] that ultimately leads to disappointment. We're saved by faith, we walk with Jesus by faith. So the first step of following Jesus is to decide to follow him.

The second step, Jesus said, follow me and I will make you fishers of men. I will make you. God is doing a transforming work in us.

He's changing us. There's an interesting verse in Philippians 2. Paul says, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Now the legalists among us just stop right there.

Oh, it's my job to work out my salvation. No, no. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling knowing that it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work according to his good pleasure. We're in partnership with God. We're working with him. Jesus is in the process, just like he was with the disciples, of making us what he wants us to become.

[24 : 59] And so we're going to take a few minutes and unpack some tools that God has given to us to use in that process because this is a partnership.

You are working with God to see that transforming work take place. helps if I push the right button. I'm going to zip right through here.

There we go. So this fancy image is a picture of core disciplines or means of grace that God uses to build us to become more like Christ.

There's a couple things I want to point out about the group of them before I get into the nuts and bolts. First of all, I've put five things here. These are the core things that we see in the Bible and in church history as disciplines that godly people practice in their lives.

But these aren't all of them. There's others. There's taking time for solitude. There's taking time to be in silence. There's fasting. There is things that we do in community.

[26 : 10] There's things that we do in isolation. But these are the main ones that shape us into the image of Christ. The other thing is, I was very intentional about choosing a Venn diagram when I designed this.

A Venn diagram shows the interrelationship between different parts. If you look at this, each of those five is connected to the others. They overlap, and they overlap on purpose.

Our reading of the Bible should be shaped by our life of prayer. mission which informs our worship, which affects our relationship and community, and is then expressed as we go out into the world in mission.

Mission actually affects how we understand and read the Bible. I'll give you an example from my own life. Over the course of my life, people have said to me at times, wow, John, you really know the Bible well, and you're quick on your feet.

How did you develop that skill? That skill and that knowledge? What seminary did you go to? Well, I went to the seminary of hard knocks, and my major was, my professors were teenagers in youth ministry.

[27 : 23] Those kids ask hard questions. And in learning to answer them and build credibility and help them grow in their relationship with Christ, I learned this stuff.

my reading of the Bible was shaped by my mission in my life at the time, which was working with teenagers. Those things feed each other, and that's what this image is intended to describe. Now, you'll notice that Jesus is the center. Remember, we're striving together to become more like Jesus every day. these things point us to the Lord.

Each of them is empowered by the Holy Spirit. We don't do them alone. This is not work that we do to earn bounty points with God. These are practices that we take on working with the Holy Spirit to see Him do His work in our lives.

Critical difference there. And then, of course, surrounding it all is the Father. as God the Father has brought us into the family, but as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become the children of God.

[28 : 35] So all these things work together to give us a life that's permeated with relationship with God. So let's look at the intimate details.

We're going to start with the Bible. We need to be students of the Bible. We need to be reading it. We need to be engaging our brains. And we need to be doing it daily.

I've made the joke to people individually. I may have said it up from up here at the pulpit. I would challenge you that you can only eat food on days you read the Bible and see how that works for you.

If your diet of the Bible is only what is delivered from up here in the pulpit, you're going to starve to death. Just like if you only ate one day a week.

We're not designed to work that way. Sorry, you're just not that smart. I'm not that smart to live on just what comes into my ears once a week. And on top of that, I'm not that good of a communicator.

[29 : 39] We as a pastoral team are just not that good to give you what you need from our study of God's Word to carry you forward. Now, is it important? Yes. Does it give us a rallying point as a body?

Yes. The sermon is a key part of our life together as a church. But it's not the sum total of what you do in the Bible. You should be reading every day. I discovered early in my Christian walk that the Christian people that I admired, my heroes in the faith, consistently demonstrated a habit of reading the Bible through annually.

So I took that on as a challenge for myself as well. Trust me, you're going to go through and hit Leviticus and the end of Exodus and go, why is this even in the Bible?

Why am I getting a verbal rendition in Exodus of the layout of the tabernacle? What the heck is a tabernacle? And in Leviticus, intimate details about how to diagnose leprosy.

Who cares? And then you get to 1 Chronicles and you get the phone book of ancient Israel.

Literally, first ten chapters of 1 Chronicles is just a list of names.

[30 : 56] And the first time you go through there you go, why am I reading this? Well, it's an act of faith because Jesus said, if you remain in my word, then you are my disciples, then you'll know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Paul said all scripture is inspired by God and profitable equipping us for good works. We need to be in the word. And you know what happens? As you go through, you discover there's value in those passages, even the obscure ones.

There's little nuggets in there that as you sift through, they begin to stand out. You begin to see the tabernacle, for instance, that there's pictures of Jesus in the tabernacle.

But you can't get there if you don't read it and read it and read it and read it and read it. Now the other challenge I've given you is your starting point is the Gospels. Read a chapter of the Gospels every day.

My practice is I read through the Bible in a year, about three and a half chapters a day, and then I read through the Gospels every day. So over the course of a year, I go through the entire Bible once, and I go through the Gospels three times.

[32 : 10] And I can tell you that has really been beneficial to me. But now you need to be careful. 1 Corinthians 8 says that knowledge puffs up.

It makes you arrogant. So as you grow in your knowledge of the Bible, guard yourself, lest you become cocky and arrogant, you become like a film critic who's evaluating sermons and podcasts and other believers.

Oh, you think that's so cute. When you grow up, when you are as smart as I am, when you know the Bible as well as I do, then you'll catch up. No, that's not the purpose of reading the Bible. It's not to build your brain, it's not to help you win Bible trivia, it's to give fuel for the Holy Spirit to work in your life. Knowledge puffs up, love builds up.

We need to be people who are taking the Word but not allowing it to make us arrogant. We need to be wise about what we learn. So the next thing is prayer. We need to learn how to pray.

[33 : 17] And it's interesting, I can tell you from my own experience of prayer over the course of my life, to see how it went from a rote thing where I'm just following a preset prayer. For example, I was taught the ACTS acronym, ACTS, Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

A lot of you probably got that. And so I followed that. I use a few minutes to worship God, that's adoration. Then I confess my sin. Then I express thanksgiving, and then I offer supplication, asking for things.

It was very rigid. Boom, boom. But then as I started praying for people, as I knew them, God, the Holy Spirit would say to me, hey, you need to pray for this thing in their life.

Remember, you heard them say this thing? And so my prayer time expanded. And then the Lord would work in my mind as I became more skilled at prayer, and he would say, you know, you're praying for a listening heart, for instance.

They said a Bible study, that they want to hear God better. And then you start to pray off of that. The Holy Spirit works creatively in your mind, and pretty soon you become better and better at prayer.

[34 : 31] Your prayers for people gain depth, and they're informed by what you read in your Bible. You start praying the Bible for the people around you and for your own life.

You start looking at the promises of God and owning them for yourself and for the people around you in prayer. There are some prayers in the Bible that are guaranteed answers.

For years, I prayed James 1.5, if any of you lack wisdom, I said, that's me, still is, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives generously without scolding, and he'll give it.

All you have to do is ask. John said in Luke's gospel that you can ask the Father for more of the Holy Spirit, and he'll give them to you. There's no condition there except to ask.

So find those prayers and pray them for yourself, for your family, for the people here in this body, and pray them, and watch and see what God does.

[35 : 34] So we're in the Bible, we're in prayer, that leads to worship. As you're praying and seeing God answer prayer, your eyes are going to turn upward. It's inevitable.

That's why we're saying turn your eyes upon Jesus this morning, because worship helps us understand the value of what we have in Christ. Remember that was one of our four problems?

As we're worshiping God, as we're celebrating who he is, as we're looking around to see the fingerprints of God in our lives and the lives of the people around us, we're moved to worship.

worship, we're celebrating who God is, which opens our eyes to appreciate him more and to see him more clearly and to put things into proper perspective.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full on his wonderful face, and what happens? And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

[36 : 34] And those things could be the things that pain us. I was thinking about Trish this week. She's going through chemotherapy every six hours. That poor woman isn't getting any sleep.

Because it's not like chemotherapy is like two seconds. Don't push a button and it's done. No, she's going to wake up if she's sleeping. She goes through a process that is hard.

And then she probably goes back to sleep. And before she knows, it's six hours again and again and again. we need to turn our eyes upon Jesus.

But there's also the things that are glamorous and exciting that pull our attention. Success in life, the brass ring, a bigger house, more cars, our hobbies, whatever the case may be.

Those things that distract, that become idols, turn your eyes upon Jesus. And those things lose their luster. where the Puritans said that God's goal is that the things of heaven become so, so fill our minds and our hearts that we lose taste for the things of earth.

[37 : 47] That's the goal. So we're in prayer, we're in the Bible, we're in prayer, we're worshiping. We have to do it in community. We have to.

We cannot do this life alone. We have to do it together. And so we share together, we talk together, we pray together, we problem solve together. And then this leads into the final piece of our

definition of discipleship, which is, remember, Jesus said, follow me and I will make you, that's what we're talking about here, here, and I will make you fishers of men.

The things that are important to Jesus become important to us. So it starts in our head, we decide to follow Jesus, it comes down into our heart as he's transforming us, making us like him.

We see the fruit of the spirit expressed in our life, and then we begin to do the things that Jesus did. We become his hands and feet. We carry the gospel into each other's lives, into the lives of the people that we cross paths with every day.

His mission becomes ours. We become the vehicle of his grace. to each other and to the world. We need to be together.

[39 : 07] So look at these five things. Now this diagram, and we're building out a drop down on our website called resources. And what you're going to begin to see more and more is more and more resources that you could use, short little descriptions of how to have a quiet time if you don't know how.

how to study the Bible, how to become more effective at prayer. We're going to give you those resources so that you've got the means to become better and better and better and more skilled at these things because they really matter.

They're important. So our first value is to follow Jesus, to enter into apprenticeship to him, to walk the path to life.

That's the key. Turning your Bibles to Exodus. We're going to close with this. This is why we read the entire Bible.

There's a movement across the country of people saying, you know, yes, we know that the Old Testament is inspired, but we have the New Testament, so we really don't need to read the Old Testament.

[40 : 18] Cutting yourself off from a lot of truth if you neglect the Old Testament. We need to be back in because this is our history. This isn't just Jewish history.

This is our history. And this that I'm going to read to you is a picture of what you're going to experience. This is a picture, actually, of what every person experiences when they come to Christ. So turn to Exodus chapter 4. We're going to be looking at the last verse. So here's what's happened. At the end of Genesis, the people of Israel, Jacob's children, moved to Egypt to get out of a famine.

It's about 75 people. Between the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus, there's a 430-year span of time. And now in Exodus, that family of 75 has grown to be a nation of several million people.

And the Egyptians have enslaved them and used them to do building projects around the nation of Egypt. They were oppressed, and they turned to God and said, God, deliver us.

[41 : 33] God chose Moses, sent Moses to them. Moses goes to the Jewish people and says, you know what? God has heard your prayers. God is listening. God cares for you.

And this is what happens. Exodus 431, so the people believed and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel, and that he had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshipped.

They saw that God cared for them. That's what happens when we come to Christ. A lot of times we come to Jesus initially because we recognize that there's a problem in our lives.

And we see that the only place that problem can be solved is in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And what do we do? We bow low, we accept God's offer of eternal life, and we worship.

But then, if you go into chapter 5 of Exodus, Moses goes to Pharaoh, tells Pharaoh, hey, we need to go worship our God, we want to take the entire nation, go three days journey out into the wilderness, let my people go.

[42 : 41] And Pharaoh says, no, I'm not going to do that, you're the basis of our economy. As a matter of fact, if you've got time to worry about worshiping your God, you clearly have too much time on your hands, so we're going to make your work harder.

See, up to that point, the primary job of the slaves was to make bricks. And the key ingredient of the bricks was straw. And the Egyptians provided the straw for the Egyptians. And Pharaoh says, you lazy, good for nothing slobs, we're going to solve this too much time on your hand problem.

We're not giving you straw anymore. You have to go get the straw, and you still have to meet your quota for bricks. We're not easing things off. You clearly just need to work harder. And so the Jews go to Moses and say, where's this deliverance you're talking about? You've made our lives worse. You've made things harder. What's going on? And look at the end of chapter 5, starting in verse 22.

Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, O Lord, why have you brought harm to this people? Why did you ever send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done harm to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.

[44 : 04] If you have not said that something along those lines to God in your life, trust me, you will. what difference does this Christian life make, God?

You told me that if I followed Jesus, that you would supply all of my needs according to riches and glory. Paul wrote in Philippians 4. You said, if I seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things will be added unto me.

And yet they're not. What are you doing? Where are you? I don't see any deliverance at all. This is where trust comes in.

This is where we need to go back to following Jesus, go back to the basics. Grab a hold of God and say, I'm not going to let go of you unless you bless me, like Jacob did.

And look to him to fulfill his promise because God is faithful. God loves you. when you're at your worst, when you think this is all a sham, you need to look back to the cross and remember that Jesus died for you.

[45 : 20] You need to dig back into his word. You need to pray. Don't run from him in frustration. What Moses did right is Moses ran to him and said, what's going on?

You have to ask that question because following Jesus is just like that. there is much that goes on as we follow Jesus that just doesn't quite meet our expectations.

But God is at work. This is God's work as we strive together to become more like Jesus every day. We've got to follow Jesus with resolute determination.

And when we do, trust me, you will discover that not only have you been richly rewarded for following him, but you had no idea how good it would be.

And the things of earth do grow strangely again. So that's our first value. We need to determine to follow Jesus.

[46 : 28] Let's pray. Father, thank you that following you is worth it. That all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ.

That you are our hope. Let's rest in that sure hope and continue to walk in you even when the time is hard, especially when the time is hard.

Trusting that you are at work to make us more like Jesus, which is the absolute best thing we could ever have. Pray in Jesus' name. Amen.