

Designing Women – and Men

On Sunday, we moved forward in our New Year's sermon series called "Getting Myself Together."

1. Warm-up Question: At the outset of Sunday's sermon, Jeff mentioned that one of his favorite daily centering rituals is drinking his morning cup of mocha hot chocolate. What's one of your best daily centering rituals?
2. Life is full of stress and sadness. As an example, Jeff shared the stress and sadness surrounding his Mom's death on Christmas Eve.
 - a. As you look back over the past year, when did you feel the most stress or sadness?
 - b. Sometimes our greatest stressors can be the stuff we worry about that might never happen. As a wise person once said, "I have suffered many calamities in my life. Some of them actually happened." What's one of your biggest worries about the future?
3. One of the characters in our church Christmas program said, "Life has a way of gobbling up all the energy a person can muster." If we're not careful, we can easily end up living depleted, sad, stressed-out lives. But then along comes the Bible promising us access to something called *shalom*. *Shalom* is a Hebrew word often translated as "peace." But our English word "peace" fails to capture the fullness of the Hebrew concept of *shalom*. Perhaps our closest English word is "tranquility," because *shalom* includes not just peace, but joy, contentment, and quietude.
 - a. BeliefNet.com explains *shalom* this way: "The biblical concept of peace (shalom) does not focus on the absence of trouble. Biblical peace is unrelated to circumstances; it is a goodness of life that is not touched by what happens on the outside. You may be in the midst of great trials and still have biblical peace. . . . Most people in our world have trouble understanding peace as a positive concept. All they know is the negative aspect of peace, which is the absence of trouble." In the past, when you've asked God for peace, have you been asking for the negative aspect of peace – i.e., the absence of trouble – or the positive aspect of peace – i.e., a tranquility that transcends trouble? If given a choice, which kind would you rather have – and why?
 - b. Shortly before his death, Jesus told his followers, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives." John 14:27. This is a staggering promise. Jesus seems to be saying that the same peace he experienced as Son of God – *shalom* – is available to us too. In fact, *shalom* is probably the exact word Jesus used when he uttered this saying. Have you ever seen someone exhibit that kind of peace, i.e., a peace that transcended circumstances? Tell us what you saw.

- c. If you were to paint a picture illustrating *shalom*, what would you paint?
 - d. For a biblical example of *shalom* in action, read Acts 16:19-34. When in your life have you come closest to responding to crisis the way Paul and Silas did here?
4. The Bible tells us how to get the *shalom* Jesus promised. Isaiah 26:3 says, “Thou wilt keep in perfect peace [*shalom*] the one whose mind is stayed on thee.”
- a. What do you think it looks like to “stay” your mind on God?
 - b. Why do you think “staying” your mind on God brings *shalom*? How does it work? (Jeff used the example of osmosis. Does that resonate with you?)
5. Jeff suggested that people of faith throughout the ages have “stayed” their mind on God by engaging in a consistent rhythm of spiritual experiences – things like church, Bible study, prayer, meditation, spiritual music spiritual books, spiritual friends, acts of spiritual service and generosity. By consistently engaging these practices, our ancestors in the faith kept consistently focusing their mind back on God, so that with each experience, bit by bit, God’s *shalom* seeped deeper into their souls. If that’s so, and if we want *shalom*, we need to be very intentional about designing a rhythm of spiritual practices for our life. Jeff encouraged us to use the template shown on the next page to begin developing our own personal 2019 Spiritual Action Plan. Take a look at the template (attached).
- a. Have you had a chance yet to begin pondering the self-assessment questions? If so, what initial insights have you gained?
 - b. Look at Question 1 midway down the front page of the template: What personal spiritual practices are most life-giving to you? And what spiritual practices do you feel God calling you to stretch and grow into? (For examples of spiritual practices, see Question 1 on the template.)
 - c. Luke 4:16 says, “When Jesus came to Nazareth . . . , he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day, as was his custom.” On Sunday, Jeff emphasized how important consistent weekly worship was to Jesus and is to most of us. Why do you think weekly group worship is so important? What does it do for you?
 - d. Now look at Question 3 on the front page of template. In your preliminary thinking, what life growth goals are you pondering for 2019?
 - e. Jeff encouraged us to begin thinking about our Spiritual Action Plans, but not to finalize them until we hear the next few sermons which will tackle key life-growth areas like relationships, finances, body care, and mental blocks. At the end of the series, all who wish will be invited to complete a Personal Spiritual Action Plan for 2019. Of course, we’re not all put together in the same way, and we’re not a cookie cutter church. So we won’t all feel led to prepare a Plan. What are your preliminary thoughts: Do you feel that preparing a Plan might be good for you? Why or why not?

Template for Preparing a Personal Spiritual Action Plan aka, “My Rule of Life”

For Calendar Year 2019

Begin with some prayerful Self-Assessment – Where Am I? How Am I Doing?

Prayerfully consider the following questions and jot a few notes to yourself.

1. How do I feel about my spiritual life right now and why do I feel that way?
2. What’s going well?
3. Where am I feeling most challenged or distressed?
4. What do I want more of? What do I want less of?
5. If I could hear my own eulogy, what would I want to hear? Am I on track?
6. What do I sense God most wants for me right now?

With the foregoing thoughts in mind, begin to create your own Spiritual Action Plan for 2019.

My Spiritual Action Plan – My Intentional Spiritual Goals and Rhythm

Remember: Be realistic, especially if this is your first Spiritual Plan. You can build on it in years to come. Rome was not built in a day. View this as Phase 1. With each practice or goal you set, be sure to say how/when you will do it.

1. What spiritual practices are most life-giving to me? What spiritual practices do I feel God calling me to stretch and grow into? (Examples: daily prayer and Bible meditation, participation in weekly group worship, finding a spiritual small group, listening to worship music as I drive to work, giving thanks for 5 simple things every day, making a service commitment, developing a breath prayer, tithing my income, etc. For more examples and think more deeply about this, take the Soul Care Survey found at <http://lifejourney.church/soulcare> or pick up a hard copy of the Survey at the Welcome Desk at church.)
2. Given the foregoing, what will my spiritual rhythm be? In other words, what specific spiritual practices am I going to weave into the fabric of my life – when and how often?
3. What additional life practices and goals do I feel called to commit to? These goals go beyond specific spiritual practices and address the growing edges in life God is calling us to tackle. Examples: Love rather than analyze God, replace anger with grace, work less hours, exercise, eat better, spend more time with loved ones, develop a new hobby or recreational outlet, embrace my job as service to God, be less materialistic, be less judgmental, forgive my greatest enemy, let go of self-interest, see Jesus in the faces of the people around me, make a career change.)

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4. Are the goals I'm setting responsive to my self-assessment above?
5. Are the goals I'm setting realistically attainable this year? Am I stretching myself too far to fast?
Am I stretching myself to little?

What Will Be My Form of Accountability

What steps will I take to remind myself and hold myself accountable for keeping my Spiritual Action Plan for 2019? Some possible options are:

- ✓ Promising myself to re-read my Plan weekly and prayerfully until it becomes second nature and habit.
- ✓ Sharing my Plan with a good spiritual friend and asking him/her to pray for me and to ask me, monthly or quarterly, whether I'm keeping my goals and rhythm. (This can be a verbal ask/response or an email ask/response.)
- ✓ Have occasional conversations in my Oasis Group or other spiritual small group to discuss and share our experiences with our Plans.
- ✓ Programming my Google calendar (or similar system) to prompt me with questions/reminders about my Rule of Life.
- ✓ Creating a Vision Board.
- ✓ Other creative ideas?

Note: Begin sketching out your Plan, but don't finalize it yet. The sermons over the next few weeks will challenge us to think about specific areas of life that we often find challenging – things like relationships, finances, body care, mental blocks, etc. These sermons may help you identify areas for growth that you want to incorporate into your Spiritual Action Plan.

At the end of this New Year's Sermon Series, we'll have a chance to finalize our Plans, and those who wish will have an opportunity on a Sunday to participate in a prayer for God's help in living into our Plans.