

August 30, 2015

“Living the Life: Release the Outcome”

Psalm 19:7-14 (first read in CEB, then Message)

Marysville UMC

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My son turns one this Tuesday. Last Thursday, he started feeding himself bananas. You should have seen the look on his face. “Mom! I’m doing it! I’m feeding myself. Peace out. Your services are no longer needed.” It was one of those moments, where my mind drifted towards all the moments I’ll let go of him more and more. Kindergarten, reading by himself, watching him drive away with his new license, his first date, his graduation day, dancing with him at his wedding. Geez, his slippery little pudgy hands and growing brain just figured out how to grasp a banana and find his mouth!

But it was a reminder that we’re not really in control of these beautiful lives we get to live, are we? Moments come into existence, we grasp and try to hold onto them because we can’t bear the thought of not knowing what’s coming next. Of feeling out of control. **Much of our pain and struggle in life comes from resisting what’s coming next, or what we think might be coming next. But the God who is present with us now, is already present in what’s next.** Sure, I have moments where I’d love to see Wesley stay 1 forever, but then I would miss the grace and beauty of everything that’s coming. I want to be there for all of it!

So today, we finish our “Living the Life” series with releasing the outcome. Out of all the topics this month, this is one of the hardest for many. We like to be in control. If you or someone you know is a controlling person, I bet they’re also a person who’s very afraid. When we can’t release the outcome of what will happen, we’re likely terrified of what *might* happen.

We have a drive to produce outcomes. We like measurables, predictions, flow charts. Show me where this thing is heading. Can you imagine walking into a meeting with your colleagues and answering questions on vision and direction with, “Well, this is where we’re at. And I really have no idea what’s happening next. Let’s see.” Good luck.

In many areas of our life, knowing or predicting the outcome isn’t just important, it’s expected and required. So it makes this conversation around our spirituality tough. Life doesn’t work like a highly efficient organization with smooth running systems. **Life is not a formula.** We don’t get to plug in A and B and expect C to happen. We would love for it to be this way, but it’s not. Many of you could stand up right now and share story after story of this being true. Life has been unpredictable and it’s comforting to think we can get a certain result with our effort.

But if we have a sneaking suspicion that there’s got to be a better way to approach life, that maybe there’s freedom on the other side of fear, then the notion of “releasing the outcome” could be powerful for our daily lives.

Psalm 19:7: “God’s instructions are perfect, reviving our very being.”

Notice this does not say, “Jenny’s instructions are perfect.” Or “your instructions are perfect.” One reason we come together on Sunday mornings to worship God is to put ourselves back in the right place in relationship with God. We continue to humble ourselves and direct our love and full attention back to God whose movement in our lives is perfect, And what happens when we trust God to be God? **Our very being is revived.** How many of you could use some of that right now?

It’s like firefighters who’ve battled smoke, flames and wind for weeks, turning their dirt-stained faces to the heavens as drops of rain started to fall this weekend. God revives our very being.

Imagine being so frustrated by a relationship that you just want to throw your hands up and walk away. In a quiet moment, you're reminded why you love this person, you take a deep breath and continue a difficult conversation. You sense the other person melt a little bit. God revives our very being.

Want a verse to memorize and think about this week? "God's instructions are perfect, reviving our very being." See what God could do in and through you as that one sinks in. When we stop controlling outcomes, God's perfect wisdom begins to guide us more and more.

Bob Goff is a lawyer, writer and Jesus follower. His book, "Love Does" inspires me every time I pick it up. He shares this about surrendering: "Depositions are my favorite part of practicing law because they involve a lot of strategy. A deposition in a lawsuit is when the lawyers ask people lots of questions. Sometimes my clients have to be deposed, which means they are the ones asked questions by the other guys' lawyers.

It can feel intimidating with a big room full of lawyers all staring at you. So when my clients are being deposed, I tell them all the same thing each time: sit in the chair and answer the questions, but do it with your hands palms up the whole time. I tell them to literally have the backs of their hands on their knees and their palms toward the bottom of the table. I'm very serious about this. In fact, I threaten to kick them in the shins if I look down and they don't have their palms up. When their palms are up, they have an easier time being calm, honest, and accurate. And this is important, because it's harder for them to get defensive. When people get angry or defensive they tend to make mistakes. But nobody can be defensive with their palms up. Go ahead and try it. Right now, wherever you are. Set your hands on your knees and turn your palms toward the sky.

You can try the opposite too. Clench your fists. Most people could get angry at a grapefruit when their fists are clenched. Something about the hardwiring that God gave each of us links the position of our bodies and position of our hearts. I'm not sure why we're wired this way, but I rarely have a client get frustrated.

Palms up. Release the outcome. Trust God to be God. God's instructions are perfect, reviving our very being.

Living a palms up life means confronting the unhealthy ways we often view life. **The thing that screws us up the most is the image in our head of how it's supposed to be.** When we release the outcome of what something is *supposed* to look like, our image of what's possible explodes. Where in your life do you need that right now? God wants to bring us resurrection and healing...in our marriages, our images of ourselves, our perspective on this season of life, a relationship with a family member or co-worker, our awareness of the poor and hurting in our community, unjust systems in our town and nation. Our God is a God of restoration - of bringing people and things back to life - to wholeness. This is what God does. But at some point, we have to release the outcome and get out of the way so God can work.

What does it mean to release the outcome in our work as a church? **Our carefully crafted and prayed over plans can stop us from seeing people.** I mean, really seeing people. Their needs, dreams, what they could teach us. When we rush to a decision on what we think someone needs, we've decided the outcome without paying attention and cooperating with what God is already doing. The part I dislike the most about this whole contemplative life is how slow it often feels. I want to act now! I want to be a part of something great now! What, you mean, I have to slow down and listen? Ugh.

There's a picture in my office: "I have no idea what's going to happen. And I love it." By the grace of God, I'm very slowly becoming that kind of person.

In God's holy irony, letting go and releasing the outcome allows us to hold on to God in a deeper and more profound way.

Friends, I've been praying for you during this whole series. Praying that God would keep getting lots of space to work in and through you. I first heard about the structure of this contemplative life from Elaine Heath, a professor and author at Perkins School of Theology in Texas. We'll finish today with a video from Elaine.

WRAP UP VIDEO - <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/a-contemplative-stance>

Closing Blessing: **The Holy Spirit is surprisingly efficient when we allow it to work.**