




The Basics of Life in Christ



Week Four

Relinquishment—Letting
Go In Order to Live A True
Life



Introduction: Living with Mudpie Hearts

C.S. Lewis, who could be called the patron saint of modern evangelicalism, is at his most insightful in his small sermon entitled “The Weight of Glory.” In it, he has this gem:

If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

Lewis hits the nail on the head. If we think about how we spend our days, about the things that glue, control, and even compel us, we find that their major problem is that they aim much too low, that the desires that lead us to idolize earthly things are “not too strong, but too weak.” We are consistently disappointed when we realize we’ve spent our days with mud pie delights, and it hurts our hearts. That old prayer of Augustin rings true:

“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

Today we are going to be talking about how to orient our hearts, minds, and daily lives away from mud pie delights and toward that divine holiday at the sea. We’ll be talking about how Christ calls us to practices of *relinquishment*, of letting go of our old manner of life, our misappropriated love, in order to live the kind of life he offers.

The Seed Must Die

Q: How do commercials on TV usually try to convince you to buy something?

In our cultural world, we rarely think of letting go (unless it is so we can get more stuff). We are a people obsessed with accumulation, with what we *have* and what we *want* to have. And we are told, almost constantly, that we need this or that thing to finally be happy.

And we go about experiences, careers, and even life the same way we go about accumulating stuff, with an insatiable desire to consume. The “good life” is about an ever-expanding demand for gratification via accumulation of possessions and experiences.

Contrast this way of thinking with Jesus' words:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”—John 12:24-26

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” —Matt. 6:19-21

The call of Jesus is then, to *let go* of our mudpie desires in order to really live. In Paul's words, this is the work of “putting off the old self with its practices,” and putting on “the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” (Colossians 3:9-10).

Relinquishment: The disposition of letting go of our obsessions, addictions, and misdirected desires in order to experience the abundant life Jesus offers.

Question for Reflection: *If you were to think of some “mud pie” desires that you struggle with, what would they be?*

Desires that Lead us to Relinquishment

As we've said before, the beginning of pursuing the spiritual life is simply taking the time to recognize what we desire, and following that desire to God's throne.

I want...

...to surrender my weaknesses and faults to the forgiving love of Christ and intentionally desire and embrace practices that lead to transformation

...to nurture the spirit of trust that is attached to God alone

...to delight in and recognize the voice and will of God

...to live wholeheartedly in the present moment, alert to God and without judgment

...to follow the simple and often hidden way of Christ

...to free myself from the addiction to and distraction of noise so I can be totally present to the Lord; to open myself to God in the place beyond words

...to live with moderation and full attachment to God—without dependent on substances and attachments that are harmful to my life

...to leave people behind and enter into some time alone with God

...to give caring attention to my relationship with God, accompanied by the presence of someone who helps me listen well to God

...to have Jesus as the Master of my life in absolutely every way

...to patiently trust in God's goodness and timing in the events and relationships in my life

Q: Do you resonate with these desires? Do they spark any memories, thoughts, or reminders for you?

Spiritual Disciplines For Relinquishment

Confession and Self-examination	A process whereby the Holy Spirit opens my heart to what is true about me. It is a way of opening myself to God within the safety of divine love so I can authentically seek transformation. Confession embraces Christ's gift of forgiveness and restoration while setting us on the path to renewal and change.
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Detachment	Means replacing the attachment to (1) idolatrous relationships and (2) self-serving goals and agendas for success, money, power, ego, productivity and image with wholehearted attachment and trust in God alone.
Discernment	Opens us up to listen to and recognize the voice and patterns of God's direction in our lives.
Mindfulness/ Attentiveness	A state of active, open, nonjudgmental attention to what is unfolding now in the moment in the presence of God.
Secrecy	Practicing the spirit of Christ reflected in hiddenness, anonymity, lack of display and the holding of confidences.
Silence	A regenerative practice of attending and listening to God in quiet, without interruption and noise. Silence provides freedom from speaking as well as from listening to words or music (reading is also listening to words).
Sobriety	Sobriety is living in a state of independence from unhealthy mind- and body-altering substances and attachments.

Solitude	Involves scheduling enough uninterrupted time in a distraction-free environment that you experience isolation and are alone with God. Solitude is a “container discipline” for the practice of other spiritual disciplines.
Spiritual Direction	The practice of paying attention to our relationship with God through the wisdom and presence of someone who has walked with God.
Submission	Means aligning my will and freedom with God’s will and freedom. God’s will for us includes freely submitting to each other out of love and reverence for Christ.
Waiting	The ability to sustain a deep desire with patient hope or a shorter frustration with equanimity (mental calmness, composure).

Question for reflection: *Which of these practices inspires you as you think of the desire above? Which could you try this week?*

An Example: Mindfulness/Attentiveness

Q: When do you find yourself more present to your worries, regrets, or frustrations than God's care and love for you?

Desire: to live wholeheartedly in the present moment, alert to God and without judgment.

Definition: A state of active, open, nonjudgmental attention to what is unfolding now in the moment in the presence of God.

The practice of mindfulness seeks to center our mind, body, and soul on the presence and reality of God, in place of constant, nagging, and judgmental thoughts. It is a practice of kind observation of our thought-patterns, worries, and needs, and then prayerfully setting them aside to receive God's grace and mercy.

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me.

O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time forth and forevermore. (Psalm 131)

A guide for mindfulness:

- Sit comfortably in your chair, feet planted and back straight, and close your eyes. Pay attention to your body; the places where you feel pain, or tension. Listen to your breathing, notice the movement of your lungs, the feeling of air through your nose and mouth.
- As you listen to your breathing, pay attention to the sounds and smells around you, to your environment. If a thought bubbles to the surface, greet it with kindness and re-center your thoughts on your breathing, on the rising and falling of your chest, on the feelings of being in your chair, right now.
- As you breathe, begin to say these words quietly to yourself, “I have calmed and quieted my soul” on each exhale. As you repeat this word from God, allow yourself to be aware of God’s love for you. Perhaps imagine yourself in a favorite place, a special, safe place, a place where you know that God is with you.

- Let the these divine words sink into your soul, heart, and body. As you repeat them, feel the Spirit's comfort, Jesus' grace, and the Father's love enveloping you.
- Now, after a while of simply sitting in God's love, slowly attune yourself again to your breathing, to the rise and fall of your chest. Become aware again of the sounds of the room, the feeling of your feet on the floor. Take a deep breath, as though it were one more sip of clean, cold water, and open your eyes, ready to walk renewed by God's love.

Questions for Reflection: *What was this experience of mindfulness like for you? What emotions come to mind? How do you feel now? Take some real time and write your thoughts below.*

Schedule (From Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*):

NEXT WEEK: First, Prayer

Week Five (2/14): “**S**haring” Your Life in a Culture Designed for Privacy—practices that lead us to inter dependence and community.

Week Six (2/21): “**H**earing” from God—practices that form the mind of Christ in us.

Week Seven (2/28): “**I**ncarnating” Jesus—practices that let us be Jesus to the world.

Week Eight (3/14): “**P**raying” my life—practices that lead me to pray without ceasing.