Believe: “How Do I Honor God?”
Colossians 3:16-17

Happy New Year Church! We are among those whom God has chosen to live in the year of our Lord, 2019. Let us be grateful for this opportunity, and let us make the most of the time that has been given to us, Amen?

This morning we return to our Believe Series, and since we have a few newcomers since November, please allow me to briefly recap where we’ve been, where we are, and where we are going.

The BELIEVE series is based upon a book called BELIEVE that was assembled by our good friend, Pastor Randy Frazee. The book, comprised mostly of scripture, is divided into three main parts: thinking like Jesus, acting like Jesus, and becoming like Jesus. The order of the book reflects the pathway of spiritual growth that Paul articulates in Colossians 1 when he prays that the church would “be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” In other words, Christian transformation begins in the mind in terms of how we think; then the TRUTH of Christ and a biblical worldview makes its way into our hearts when we begin to act upon what we believe; which finally then leads to the ultimate end of the Christian life, which is to BECOME like Jesus in every way possible. When we become as Jesus is, we will inevitably accomplish our mission which is to be the light of Christ in a hurting culture. So that’s what this series is about, and I want you to know that this series is designed for the whole family! Our students have been and will continue to track along with us in their personal reading, the Sunday School classes, and so on. We don’t always have the opportunity to align the sermon series with the student ministries, so this has been a special treat for the families in our church.

Now, we began our BELIEVE journey this past fall by unpacking the ten core beliefs that Jesus held to be true…understanding that to be a Christian is to not only to believe IN Jesus, it is also to believe what Jesus believed, amen? If you have just recently begun attending here at Colonial, we would love to get you a copy of the BELIEVE book and get you into a group, so please drop by the information desk on your way out and we’ll get you set up. Don’t worry if you missed the first part of this series. You are welcome to jump in with us right where we are, and should you desire to get caught up on the 10 belief statements that we covered last fall, you can read the first 10 chapters of the BELIEVE book at your leisure and/or view the messages on each belief through our website or the ColonialKC YouTube page. As I said, you are welcome to just pick up with us where we are as we begin the next 10 weeks that focus on what it means to act like Jesus. Our series will then conclude with the final 10 weeks that focus on what it means to BECOME like Jesus, which should take us through the end of May. So…now you know where
we’ve been, where we are, and where we’re going as a church in 2019. I hope every person here will plan to join us! Now, my goal this morning is to set up this next 10 weeks with some preliminary thoughts on the spiritual disciplines, and then I will conclude with a brief reflection on the subject of the day which is WORSHIP. Let’s PRAY FIRST, and we’ll get started.

Some Thoughts on Spiritual Disciplines When we talk about acting like Jesus, we are inevitably entering into the subject of “spiritual disciplines,” and since those words carry some baggage for many of us, let me be clear about a few things.

First, let me begin by defining what spiritual disciplines are NOT. Spiritual disciplines are NOT some rigorous, legalistic attempt to earn God’s favor or to impress God with our devotion. Spiritual disciplines are not to serve as some kind of a barometer to see just how “serious” you are about following Jesus. Spiritual disciplines are NOT yet another way to feel terrible about ourselves regarding all the things we should be doing. And spiritual disciplines are NOT EVER to be tedious or exhausting. So…if the concept of “spiritual disciplines” conjures up any of these things that I’ve just mentioned, please erase those pictures from your mind. I tell you all of that because, like many of you, I’ve tried to incorporate certain “spiritual disciplines” into my life and experienced shame at my inability to meet all of my self-imposed goals and so on.

One of the books that really reshaped my perspective on spiritual disciplines was John Ortberg’s The Life You’ve Always Wanted. I read that book 14 years ago and I find myself returning to it regularly because it makes this topic digestible for simple people like me. * Ortberg is a disciple of the deceased Dallas Willard who was arguably one of the finest thinkers and writers on this subject in the past century. Willards’ The Divine Conspiracy and The Spirit of the Disciplines are also great books to read as we think about what it means to train our spiritual lives to align with the practices of Jesus.

In his book, Ortberg creatively recasts the disciplines with imagery that I found helpful, and I think you might as well. One of those images includes the term I just employed a moment ago…did you hear it?

Ortberg associates the spiritual disciplines with the word “TRAINING” as opposed to the word “trying.” For most of us, we think of the Christian life as that which requires us to “try harder.” Trying harder is exhausting and frustrating, but trying harder is usually what we do when we walk out of a church service. Listen…trying harder is never the point of the Christian life. The grace of Jesus Christ allows us to quit trying, and to start training.

Imagine if tomorrow a man came up to me and told me that I needed to run a marathon and win, or else my family would be taken away from me forever. That would be bad! Those of you who know me know that I am NOT a runner. I run when scary things chase me and that’s about it! So…if I was forced to run a marathon tomorrow, with the future of my family hanging in the
balance, I would try VERY HARD to do so…I might even die trying, but my family would be toast, right? Why? Because I have not been training to run a marathon…and no amount of trying would compensate for the lack of training, right? The story I just told you is scary, intimidating, and hopeless…but that’s often how we feel when we think about our spiritual lives. It’s “Win the marathon, or you’ll burn. The race starts now!” But that’s not the Gospel.

We have been saved by grace through the blood of Christ on a cross. We are not saved by trying harder; we are saved by what Christ has already accomplished on our behalf. Jesus purchased our lives for God, and He made it possible for us to live in His joy right now, no matter the circumstances of our lives. But to experience this life of joy, to develop the mind of Christ, to live as Jesus lived…we must train our spirits, and even our bodies and our minds, to receive that which Christ died to give us. We must also be trained in order to lead others to the life of Christ that He purchased for them.

So, as those saved by grace, our goal is to be growing in our capacity to love God and to love people the way Jesus loved God and loved people. The spiritual disciplines are the training required to acquire that goal. Now, make no mistake…growing in our capacity to love God and to love people is no less challenging than running a marathon, and to live in such a way will require training. But this training is something WE GET to do. Jesus made this new life possible for us…the Holy Spirit will do the work in us that we cannot do…so even the training is an expression of grace.

Ortberg writes, “[Because of grace] we are free of having to impress God or anyone else with our spiritual commitment. Spiritual disciplines are to life what calisthenics are to a game. Once the game starts, basketball players get no bonus points based on how many free throws they shot in practice. The only reason to practice them is to be able to make them in a game.”

This basketball imagery was very helpful for me years ago when I first read Ortberg’s book. You see, I love basketball. When I was a kid, I had dreams of playing college ball, even playing for the NBA…go ahead and laugh…I know that’s a funny picture given my vertically challenged 5’5” frame. When I was a kid, I had no way of knowing that I would be a hobbit, so my dreams to play competitive ball led me to practice every day, even when I had to shovel snow off the driveway. You can ask my parents: I was a basketball addict. I trained myself to shoot well, to dribble with both hands without looking at the ball, to leap as high as I possibly could to defend and to get my shot off over taller opponents. I trained myself to do things that I could not do by simply trying harder. I understood then…and I guess I have always understood…that training allows me to develop skills that I do not naturally possess.

When I took up golf in my mid-20s, it was the same thing all over again. I understood that I needed to hit a thousand balls with my wedge if I ever hoped to nail the green under pressure.
when playing a tournament. Hitting a thousand wedge shots was never the point: the point was hitting one wedge shot when it mattered the most.

The spiritual disciplines are exactly the same concept. Exercising self-control, turning the other cheek, loving my enemies, extending forgiveness, waiting upon the Lord, sharing my faith, discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit, loving generously, and submitting my will to God’s will are all real expressions of loving God and loving people that do not come naturally for me…and no degree of “trying harder” will lead me to perform those behaviors when it matters the most. If I am going to live as Jesus lived…if I am going to develop a Christ-like character and behave like He behaved under pressure, it will require training…a specialized kind of training that develops my capacity to love God and to love people in real time situations that occur all day, every day in my job, my family, and all the interactions I have throughout the week.

So…what are those spiritual disciplines that help us train ourselves to live as Jesus lived? Over the next 10 weeks we will unpack the spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer, Bible study, single mindedness, total surrender, living in biblical community, utilizing our spiritual gifts, offering our time, giving our resources, and sharing our faith.

The first spiritual discipline is critical to the life of every believer, and that is the spiritual discipline of WORSHIP. I will quickly unpack worship under 4 subheadings: the meaning of worship; the essence of worship; the practice of worship; and the power of worship.

1. The Meaning of Worship
The word “worship” comes from the Old English, and it was originally pronounced “worthship.” That is because worship is all about attributing ultimate WORTH to something or someone. And here’s the truth: we are all going to “worship” something. We are all going to attribute ultimate worth to something or someone.

For the atheist or those who have no relationship with God, ultimate worth may be attributed to family, or work, or pleasure, or education. Everyone lives according to that which they worship…everyone has a “functional deity” that holds ultimate worth in their lives.

As Christians, we worship the Lord! Whether it be through song, proclamation, meditation, or dance…Christian worship proclaims the triune God, Father-Son-Holy Spirit, as the only one WORTHY of praise and adoration. Why? Why is God the only one worthy of our worship? Because of who God is and because all that He has done. Only God is infinite; only God is Creator of all that is. Only God is perfectly loving, perfectly just, and perfectly perfect! And only God loves us enough to send His only Son to pay the debt we could never repay. There is only one King who stepped off His throne to become one of us. We worship God because He is the Truth, and because of the TRUTH about what He has done for all of us.
II. The Essence of Worship
Much has been written about worship, and we all have subjective opinions about how worship should be practiced in a church service or what kinds of songs should be sung. But the essence of worship is never about a particular form or a particular building or a particular style of music. Jesus wrapped up what God is looking for from our worship in John 4 when He said, “But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The TRUTH that Jesus is referring to consists of those beliefs we covered in depth regarding who God is, who we are, and all that God accomplished on our behalf in Jesus Christ. To worship God in truth is to agree with, to submit to, and to proclaim the TRUTH of who God is. To worship God in spirit is to ascribe ultimate value to God from the very depths of our hearts…wherever we are, whatever the circumstances. Worship is not ritual; worship is personal and confessional…it comes from the heart.

III. The Practice of Worship
I love the way Pastor Randy Frazee describes the practice of worship. He writes, “When we engage in the practice of worship, we crawl off the throne of God, where we do not belong, and crawl onto the altar of God, where we do belong.” This is exactly the picture of worship that Paul describes in Romans 12 where he writes, “I appeal to you brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

So worship is not only attributing ultimate worth to God, it is also presenting ourselves to God with honesty, humility, and as an act of surrender. We confess and repent of our sins, we fire ourselves from the position of playing God, we receive once again the grace and forgiveness that Jesus provides for us on the cross. We then submit our spirits to the Lordship of Christ and the sovereign providence of God, and we say THANK YOU!

Don’t underestimate the value of saying THANK YOU to God when you worship. All throughout the scriptures we find a constant, redundant instruction to give thanks to God! When we worship, we thank God for who He is and what He has done, even when our lives are complicated or we are going through a period of suffering. Paul writes in Colossians 3, “…be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

I visited with a beautiful, amazing 95 year old matriarch of our church this week named Ruth. Her body is worn out; she is confined to her home with hospice care; and she spends most of her days bound to a bed. But her spirit is very much alive, and she continues to worship God every
day. She actually told me how she practices worship. She speaks with a very soft tone, slowly and thoughtfully, and here is what she said: “Jim, every day I wake up and I begin my day with a simply prayer: ‘This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it. I will enter His gates with Thanksgiving; I will enter His courts with praise.’” Ruth practices the spiritual discipline of worship, and it shapes the way she sees the world and all that she is experiencing. Ruth worships God in spirit and truth…and there is a power that rests upon her, even in her difficult and often painful circumstances.

**IV. The Power of Worship**

Speaking of the power of worship, I think it is safe to say that authentic Christian worship releases the power of God in the lives of the worshippers like nothing else in all of creation. Many of us beg and plead God for His power to overcome sickness, to save our loved ones, to help us endure suffering, to experience freedom from our addictions, to resist temptation or to discern our next step. But here’s what I can tell you with all certainty: if you want to see the power of God work in your life and your circumstances, you need not beg God…you need only to WORSHIP God with faith and thanksgiving. This is the testimony of Christ followers throughout history. Who could forget the testimony of Paul and Silas in Acts 16? Following a horrible day of getting beaten, arrested, and imprisoned, Paul and Silas did not withhold their worship from God. Instead, this is what happened: “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.”

Worship invokes the power of God in the lives of the worshippers. Worship in the midst of hardship is particularly powerful.

This is where we often get things wrong. So many people withhold their worship from God because they are unhappy about the circumstances in their lives. In fact, many people knowingly or unknowingly are “punishing” God by withholding their worship, as though God owes them an apology, or at the minimum, an explanation for why things did not turn out the way they wanted them to turn out. But what happens when we withhold our worship from God? Things go from bad to worse. And so we feel even more justified in withholding our worship until eventually we convince ourselves that there is no God and we are all alone. But that is simply not true.

It is both counterproductive and unreasonable to withhold our worship from God because we are unhappy with our circumstances. God is worthy of our worship always because of WHO God is and WHAT God has done…from the creation of the universe, to the taste of good food, to the beauty of music, to the sacrifice of Jesus on a cross…there are no circumstances that should ever lead us to withhold our worship. There is ALWAYS more to be thankful for than to curse, and God’s loving nature does not change because of our temporary afflictions. Here is the truth that
we find in scripture and in Christian history: the more difficult our circumstances, the more we need to worship God!

When Jesus was most pressed and exhausted, He took time away to worship God. When He was on the cross, Jesus was quoting scripture…He was still worshipping God. Worship…all day long…every day…in all circumstances…is the fuel that empowers the Christian life. If we fail to worship God, we will be running on empty, and our Christian walk will lack the power that Christ died to provide us.

If you are struggling to worship God…or if you find worship boring or routine…here’s what I can tell you: your God is too small. You have a woefully inaccurate picture in your mind as to who God actually is. This is why what we believe directly influences our behavior. If you actually believed that God is the Alpha and the Omega, the Great I AM, your loving Father, your Savior and Friend, and the only ONE who loves you without condition…the only ONE that will never leave you and never forsake you…then you would worship God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. You would relish the opportunity to sing His praises and to present yourself to Him as a living sacrifice….and not just on Sundays. I’m talking all week long.

So, do you worship authentically worship God?

Authentic worship begins with an authentic and accurate picture of who God is…which means you will need to spend some time in scripture and in prayer to firmly root that picture in your mind.

If you’ve read the BELIEVE chapter for this week, you know that the question of the week is: How do we honor God in the way He deserves? The answer is clear: We worship God for who He is and what He has done for us. That is the first and the greatest spiritual discipline of the Christian life. Next week we will look to the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Will you pray with me?