Believe: “Am I Leading a Double Life?”
Matthew 6:33

We have been looking into what it means to “act like Jesus.” To be clear, we are not so much looking into the way Jesus performed when put on the spot, but the way that Jesus “practiced” life 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As we commit to practicing life the way that Jesus practiced life, we are developing our spiritual muscles and developing the character of Christ along the way. Again…these practices are not a matter of trying as much as they are the means of training ourselves to live our lives like Jesus would live our lives if He was in our families or worked in our jobs or attended our schools.

Over the past few weeks we’ve looked at three spiritual practices that Jesus lived out regularly: worship, prayer, and the study of God’s Word. This morning we shall turn our attention to the spiritual discipline of “single-mindedness.”

I will address this subject under three subheadings: 1) the danger of compartmentalization; 2) the call to single-mindedness; and 3) the practice of single-mindedness.

I. The Danger of Compartmentalization

“We should all seek to live a balanced life.” How many of you agree with that statement? Here’s another one: “All things in moderation.” Sounds pretty good, right? How many of you aspire to be “well rounded?” These are all concepts that we are familiar with, and for the most part, I tend to agree that these ideas are generally positive notions as opposed to a “workaholic” who ignores his family or a person who is constantly going to extremes based on whatever the latest fad happens to be. I like to think of myself as a well-rounded person, one who doesn’t “over do it” when it comes to eating, drinking, spending money, etc; and one who lives a fairly balanced life. These are all values that I have been taught since I was a child.

But let’s pause for a moment and dig into this “balanced life” concept. John Ortberg unpacks this concept in his book *The Life You've Always Wanted*, and here’s a bit of what he says on this subject:

A balanced lifestyle is not an adequate goal to which to devote our lives. The problem with that goal is not that it is too difficult, but that it is too slight. Balance is not the most helpful paradigm for an ideal life.

Ortberg goes on to reveal why this is the case:
The quest for balance can contribute to a tendency to compartmentalize our faith. Often a balanced life is pictured as a pie chart with life divided into seven or eight slices, one labeled “financial,” another “vocational,” and so on, with one of the slices reserved for “spiritual.” This paradigm encourages us to think of matters such as finances or work as “non-spiritual activities.” It blinds us to the fact that God is intensely interested in our every moment and activity.

Let’s stop there for a second. Let’s be honest: how many of us have actually done this? How many of us have knowingly or unknowingly subdivided our lives into different pieces of the pie, or different boxes in an effort to be “balanced?” (please create a pie chart similar to Ortberg’s if possible and show here. I will attach a picture of it) In other words, how many of us have compartmentalized our lives such that our “spiritual” activities are simply one piece of the pie that may or may not be associated with the other pieces of the pie? Are you a compartmentalizer???

If you have ever said the words, “Business is business,” you have likely compartmentalized your life! If you have ever said, “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas,” you are definitely a compartmentalizer! If you behave one way at school and a totally different way at church, you have likely compartmentalized your life.

Lots of people compartmentalize. Maybe we do that because we think that’s the way to be “balanced” or even organized with our time. I think we use the notion of balance as an excuse. I actually think that’s a bit of self-deception. For most of us, compartmentalizing goes much deeper than our desire to “remain balanced.”

Did you know that compartmentalization is actually a term used in the field of mental health? Here’s how they define it: Compartmentalization is a subconscious psychological defense mechanism used to avoid cognitive dissonance, or the mental discomfort and anxiety caused by a person's having conflicting values, cognitions, emotions, beliefs, etc. within themselves.

Church, let’s talk about “cognitive dissonance” for just a moment. “Cognitive” refers to what we think. “Dissonance” means irritating NOISE…the opposite of beautiful music…like notes that are all playing at the same time, but they don’t create harmony…they create PAIN. Let’s go to the piano and I’ll show you what I’m talking about. When I play notes that make up a chord, it is beautiful and pleasing to the ear. But if I play notes that do not make up a chord, where there is no rhyme or reason for their combination, it creates a sound that is not pleasing to the ear, and in fact, we would be quite happy for someone to never make those sounds again!

Cognitive dissonance is when we have conflicting thoughts, values, feelings, beliefs…and the painful tension they create is too much for us to bear…it causes anxiety and unrest. So what do we do when we sense that painful dissonance? As a “defense mechanism,” we subdivide our
thoughts, we subdivide the way we think of our lives, so that these competing values and beliefs don’t get played at the same time.

For example: We might have a man who is very learned in the Bible, he is a Sunday School teacher and an Elder. But he is also a corporate salesperson who has no problem “overselling” his product to his clients; he’s regularly a bit dishonest about his expense report; and he’s not above stealing a client from his co-workers if the opportunity arises. Since his values as a Christian and an Elder in the church so conflict with his ethics at work, he simply subdivides his thinking to avoid the cognitive dissonance. “Business is business,” he thinks, “but my church life is my church life.”

Consider the woman who regularly reads the Bible to her children and makes them say their prayers at night, always presenting herself as a woman of faith and virtue whenever she is in front of her children. However, when given the opportunity to go out with the girls, she throws caution to the wind while getting drunk and doing things that would make a sailor blush. Because what she is teaching her children is so radically different from the way she parties with her friends, she simply subdivides her life between being “a good mom” and “letting her hair down for some much needed fun.” She has rationalized that, to remain balanced, she needs all of it…the virtue and the vices, the Bible and the booze, but in her thinking, she keeps them in separate rooms. Why? To avoid cognitive dissonance. To avoid having to deal with the tension of what she believes about God with the way she actually lives her life.

Now listen: Every believer struggles with the desires of the flesh as opposed to the desires of the spirit. It’s when we stop struggling and give in to compartmentalization that things get dangerous. The more we compartmentalize, the less we will have a conscience because we will not allow our moral judgment to enter the room where we enjoy sinning. Once we no longer see our sin for what it is, we are capable of doing great damage, and this is true for all of us.

Think about how often have we been disillusioned by famous pastors and clergymen who end up having affairs, sleeping with prostitutes, or embezzling money from the church? It’s the same story…compartmentalization. Even pastors can masterfully rationalize having a “private room” where they can take off their pastor hat and simply “be themselves;” and before long, they are living a double-life.

To live a double-life, to say you believe one thing but then to knowingly live in contradiction to your values and your beliefs is to be “double-minded.” In James 1, the Apostle James states that “the double-minded person is unstable in all his ways…he is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.” If you are currently a “double-minded” person, you know this description is pretty accurate, and I imagine that you are extremely tired of trying to maintain your subdivided life. By the way, if you are a double-minded person, I’m glad you are here, and I
want you to feel safe and accepted. I would also ask you to read the book of James and seriously consider the cost of your double life.

Our post-Christian culture is extremely familiar with the compartmentalized life of the average American Christian, and they are increasingly convinced that ALL CHRISTIANS are living compartmentalized lives of hypocrisy. If you are paying attention, our atheist critics are constantly trying to say, “Quit pretending that you’re different when you know that you’re not. Why even bother living a double life? Just do what you want with whoever you want as long as nobody gets hurt…but quit pretending that you are somehow virtuous when we all know you have a secret life of indulgence.” Unfortunately, the atheists are not completely wrong in this regard. There are many, many church-going Christians who are living a double life, and every time we confirm the atheist’s suspicion, we damage the Kingdom of God. And listen: we also damage our children. Our kids are looking for authenticity, honesty, and consistency. Don’t think for a moment that they can’t see through a double-minded parent…they most certainly can, and it’s the very best way to drive our kids away from Jesus. Compartmentalization is not the way of the Christian. We have been called to something altogether different. So what do we do?

II. The Call to Single-mindedness

Jesus was constantly warning us against living as double-minded people. Jesus said radical things like, “If anyone does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” “Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Jesus did not give us the option to live a double-life as His disciple. He unapologetically wanted us to be ALL IN, or not in at all. He did not grant us the option of compartmentalizing His Lordship over some pieces of our lives but not others. Jesus was not willing to share His Lordship with another competing allegiance. As he said in Luke 16: “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.” To the Church in Laodicea, the Risen Lord says in Rev. 3:“ because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”

I know all of that is pretty intense, but remember: it’s not because of what Jesus wanted from us. It’s what Jesus wants FOR US. Jesus wants us to be free of any kind of slavery. Competing allegiances will inevitably lead to idolatry, and Jesus died to ensure that we would never have to be under the power of idols ever again.

Such is why the Bible constantly calls all of us as Jesus-followers to practice single-mindedness.
In the BELIEVE book that we are reading together, Pastor Randy Frazee writes: To be single-minded means to have one desire that trumps all others. One goal. One focus. The spiritual practice of single-mindedness is all about determining our priorities to ensure we are practicing our faith, living out our beliefs, and accomplishing God’s will for our lives.

I appreciate the way Pastor Randy uses words that apply to our everyday lives in terms of priorities, goals, and focus. But I would suggest that single-mindedness really comes down to the first thing that he said…to have one desire that trumps all the others. That ONE desire that trumps all others will reveal the condition of our hearts.

So let’s take a moment and take a spiritual inventory of our hearts. What is the ONE DESIRE that trumps every other desire? Perhaps you cannot identify ONE desire that trumps all the rest because you have 100 competing desires, or maybe your ONE desire is not something you feel comfortable admitting. Listen: I get it. The heart is fickle, and often times, upon reflection, our deepest desire is actually something other than God.

Remember, the effect of evil on human beings is that we have “disordered affections.” St. Augustine once wrote, “When the miser prefers gold to justice, it’s through no fault of the gold. For although it’s good, it can be loved with an evil as well as a good love. It seems to me that a brief but true definition of virtue is this: ‘It is a well-ordered love.’”

To practice single-mindedness is to have a well-ordered love…a well-ordered heart that cultivates the ONE DESIRE that trumps all others. Augustine writes that to have a well-ordered heart is to 1) love the right thing; 2) to the right degree; 3) in the right way; 4) with the right kind of love.

I think that is the secret of single-mindedness. Jesus said it this way in Mark 12:30, “You shall love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is what a well-ordered heart does…we love the right thing (God); to the right degree (with everything that we are); in the right way (as our top priority every moment of the day); with the right kind of love (a love filled with gratitude and thanksgiving for what Jesus did on our behalf). That doesn’t mean that we don’t love our kids or our spouse, that we don’t love our work or our hobbies. It does mean that our FIRST LOVE trumps all the others. As Jesus taught in Matthew 6: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Paul articulates this picture so beautifully in the third chapter of Colossians:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on

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For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And 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. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

III. The Practice of Single-Mindedness

And that brings me to my final point: the practice of single-mindedness. For most of us, practicing single-mindedness is likely going to require more training than worship, prayer, and Bible-study put together. I wasn’t kidding when I said that there are a lot of compartmentalized Christians out there…and I don’t think our church is all that much of an exception. Many of us are struggling with this sermon and the fact that we regularly live a double life “out there.” So, how do we get started?

James 1 challenges the double-minded with these words:

God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Now…those are hard words to hear…but then James was never one to worry too much about your feelings! However, James is clearly concerned about the soul of one who is living a double-life. He says the cure begins with humility before God. None of us can change our hearts…but God can. In order for that to happen, writes James, we must resist the Liar. To be single-minded is to give no quarter to the lies of our ancient Enemy. It means taking “every thought captive” and holding it up to the teachings of Jesus.
Next, James counsels us to draw near to God. Single-mindedness requires intentionality. None of us will cultivate a life of single-mindedness without intentionally drawing close to God on a regular basis. This is the prioritization that Pastor Randy was referring to. Prioritize your time so that our Lord gets the focus that He deserves. As we draw close to God, He will draw close to us, and that will bring about change. Through His grace, God will cleanse our hands and our hearts. His peace and presence will become our ONE DESIRE that trumps all other desires. You’ll know when that happens because it will feel like genuine repentance…the kind of repentance that is initially painful and leads to sorrow, and yet it is exactly that kind of repentance that leads to a new relationship with God…one in which He exalts you…lifts you up… and carries you.

The final words of instruction come from the passage that we read a minute ago in Colossians 3. Paul writes, “17And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Single-mindedness is ultimately about doing everything…every day…all week long…in the name of Jesus, as an expression of gratitude to the Father. Here is where we can get very practical in our planning and preparation to live with single-mindedness. In other words, what would it mean to begin your day in the name of Jesus Christ? What would it mean to greet your family in the name of Jesus Christ? What would it mean to treat your co-workers in the name of Jesus Christ? What would it mean to drive home in rush hour traffic in the name of Jesus Christ? What would it mean to go shopping in the name of Jesus Christ? What would it mean to watch TV, tailgate at the game, hang out with your friends, and look at your phone in the name of Jesus Christ?

Simply asking yourself that question all day long will train you to be single-minded, even on days when you disappoint yourself or succumb to temptation. Remember, you are not perfect, and you likely won’t be perfect anytime soon! However, don’t run from the dissonance. When you encounter cognitive dissonance at work or with your friends or in your private time when no one is watching, let that bother you to the degree that you are willing to do something about it. Single-mindedness should lead to significant changes in your life simply because you are allowing your ONE DESIRE to influence all the rest of your desires. You are willing to make adjustments to your life so that your whole life will live in harmony with the ONE who now lives in you.

Will that mean that you are not as “balanced” as you once were? Maybe. Maybe people will think you’ve gone off the deep end a bit when you no longer do those things you used to do. But that’s OK. You see, nothing gets done by “balanced” people. No one would have thought Jesus to be well-balanced. Paul certainly didn’t live a safe, middle-class balanced life either. Martin Luther King, Jr. regularly expressed his disgust for those “moderate” Christians who were too “balanced” to take a stand against injustice!

Let me close with this quote from Ortberg that I think captures our motivation to practice single-mindedness:

The quest for balance lacks the notion that life is to be given to something bigger than ourselves. It lacks the call to sacrifice and self-denial—the wild, risky, costly, adventurous abandon of
following Jesus. Ask hungry children in Somalia if they want to help you achieve balance, and you will discover that they were hoping for something more from you. And I believe that, deep down, you are probably hoping for something more from yourself. So is God. Jesus never said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their crosses, and lead a balanced life.” He said to follow him. He wants us to do what he would do if he were in our places.”

That is the purpose of single-mindedness…that is the life you’ve always wanted. That is the life Jesus died for us to live right now. Next week, we’ll go even deeper as we unpack the spiritual practice of surrender. Let’s pray.