

Series: Reboot

Sermon #4

Atomic Spiritual Habits

Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:6-10

Dr. Matt Cassidy – January 23, 2022

Well hey, good morning, Grace! You're probably thinking, *Oh no*. Yeah, I've got a blackboard, so brace yourself. Get out your notes. We've got a lot to look at today.

A number of years ago I had this epiphany or vision, whatever it might be. But I envisioned myself getting to heaven in that completely glorified state—all better, completely fixed, the way I was meant to be. And while that part was wonderful, the part that nagged me then and has for years now is that when I arrived I seriously wondered if anyone would recognize me. I get a glorified body and all that, but I was thinking soul and spirit mostly. It had to do with the transition between where I am now and where I'll be then. Was that so drastic that friends and family would walk up to me and introduce themselves like we'd never met? In other words, that sin has so saturated my personality and is such a major ingredient of contamination in who I am, that if all of that were to be taken away, would be there enough of Matt left?

And so, that idea—that I could make that final transition and be unrecognizable—frightened me and shamed me. Then I thought, *You know, I have a new vision*. And my new vision is to have just a mild, subtle movement from this life to the next, trying to become like Christ. Well, that's what the Bible says. It's always said that, that we glorify God by becoming like Christ in all of life, and the closer we become like Christ in all of life (how we were meant to be), the easier that transition is.

But my epiphany, my vision, whatever it is, whatever I had, made it super concrete for me. And I've been on that trail ever since. So, in some respects, that how we end up at *Reboot*—our series called *Reboot*. And the reason we're doing this is because people want to change their lives. The theme of *Reboot* is that we want to live to think biblically, live biblically, in the culture. (We're not going to isolate from the culture.) But we're doing that courageously together.

And in our series together—*Reboot*—as we’ve worked our way through, we started very general, and then it’s getting more specific. It’s getting not only more specific, but it’s becoming more practical. And today, it’s super feet-on-the-ground, very practical. As a matter of fact, today’s sermon could be “How to Change Your Life.” It could be used for parenting, it could be used for work or whatever it might be. In the context of the Bible here, boom—how do you change your life? How is God involved in life change? That’s our theme today.

And I’m so committed to having a goal and a value that I want you to right now take out your notebooks or those fancy phones and I want you to make goals for 2022. I want you to think about a goal that’s body-oriented, soul, and then spirit. Body—I don’t know—just thinking out loud—but lose some of that COVID weight (for a friend). But anyway, or run a half marathon. We’re going to do body, soul, spirit, because it’s going to make sense in a minute, I’ll tell you.

But in the context of soul change, that would be to become a more generous person, for example. Or to maybe overcome some old memory or programming that’s in your past. *I’ve got to change that*, in a soulish way.

Another layer deeper still is spirit. I want to be sacrificial in my life. I want to give my life away like Christ did. One of my spirit goals would be that I want to hear the voice of God. I want to know that voice and I want to respond to it. I can hear and not respond, but I want to hear the voice of God, I want to hear that whisper from the Spirit, and I want to be able to respond to that.

Now we’re going to look at it in a way that is very body/soulish so that we can understand spirit. Because what I think happens is that people don’t change in their soul and spirit because they’ve mystified that type of change. And what’s interesting in the Bible, and what we’re going to look at today, is that—no—the way the body changes is the way your soul and spirit can change. Don’t make it too complicated; just understand how it’s done.

When you look at life change, you’re going to go to Romans 12:1-2, because in these two sentences that we’ve been looking at for weeks now, you can see it’s all about how to change—how God changes us. It talks about how you have to behave differently and you have to think differently. And those are the major ingredients for life change.

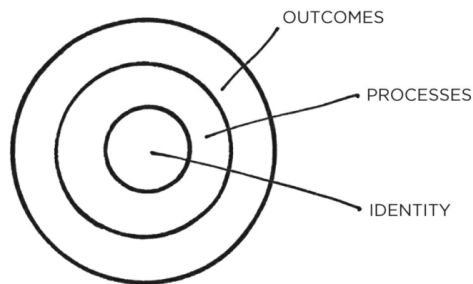
Romans 12:1-2

Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Look what it says in chapter 12, verses 1 and 2: “Therefore I urge you, my brothers and sisters, by the very mercies of God”—there’s behave, right? “... present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” Think right. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what the will of God is, which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Three Ways to Try to Change Behavior

THREE LAYERS OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE



Now what I want you to see—I’m going to start writing now—but what I want you to see is there are three layers of life change. And the outside layer is---you could call these “goals.” It’s kind of what you get. It’s setting some kind of goal and making that happen. And that’s one way to change in some respects. [Outcomes]

And another one, getting closer inside, would be what is sometimes called “systems” or “discipline”, sometimes “routines.” [Processes]

But what we’re going to talk about today as we get closer inside, we’re going to look at how real change happens here on the inside level, and it’s based on identity.

And you can see that goal-setting is not bad, but it doesn't cause life change. If you want to—I don't know—lift a hundred pounds, and you keep working towards lifting a hundred pounds, when you hit a hundred pounds, you're done. That's not a life change. That's just a goal that was achieved. Sometimes when you commit to the system itself, that's fine. But then when your goal is met, you're done.

Identity is about who you are or who you ascribe to be. And you're working from there outwards. I'll explain this as I go, but this model of starting with identity is the biblical model. That's how God works. He's going to define who you are—and this is the nature of Bible change—God declares who you are, and we spend the rest of our lives convincing ourselves that God is truthful in what He's declared. This is what God has planned for us to change, is starting at the beginning and working its way out—our identity.

It Starts Here: Our Identity in Christ

So, let's just start there. In the context of identity in the passage itself, Romans 12:1-2, it says—how does it start? It says, “Therefore by the mercies of God, my brothers and sisters ...” And the whole point of the “therefore” is everything that preceded it, particularly everything that's found in Romans chapters 3-8. You could go through those chapters and find several passages that are absolutely, positively declaring who you are according to God's point of view. It doesn't matter what you want to believe, it doesn't matter what other people believe—here is what God has said to be true. He's said this to be true.

I. Identity: Romans 1-8

Romans 5:1: “Therefore since you have now been justified by faith, you are at peace with God through Christ Jesus our Lord.” I'm at peace with God.

Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” That's me. I am at peace and there's no condemnation towards me. That's my identity.

And then a little bit further along in Romans 8, he said, “God did not give you a spirit of slavery that brings you to fear. No, He gave you a spirit of adoption that has sons and daughters call out to God, ‘Abba, Daddy.’ The most intimate word to describe the Creator of the universe is found in Romans 8:15. We're adopted and our spirit cries out to call Him, “Daddy.” That's true. That's the way it is. That's what God says. Boom!

II. Think Right (Not Wrong)

Now convince yourself of that. How do you do that? Well, you start here—thinking. You’ve got to think right. As a matter of fact, what does it say in Romans 12:2? “Do not be conformed to this world”—don’t think wrong, think right—“but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” He’s trying to get us to renew our minds based on our identity. And so, the idea here is that this is supposed to validate and reinforce what’s already true. We’re supposed to be thinking like what we’ve already been declared to be.

2 Corinthians 10:5

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Here’s a passage that is perfect for this—2 Corinthians 10:5. See how it’s thinking-oriented? “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” We’re taking thoughts and making them obedient to what we already know. We’re taking thoughts captive. We are sitting these values down, these recordings in our head, these sorts of things, and we’re saying, *Look, you’ve been nagging me for twenty-seven years. I’ve been living my life around something that’s not true here, and I’m sick of it. And I’m taking that captive and I’m demolishing arguments that are contrary to what the word of God says.*

Ephesians 4:14-15

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the head, that is, Christ.

There’s another great passage in Ephesians 4. Listen to the thinking: “We’re no longer infants”—right? We’re not kids anymore—“...being tossed around by the waves, and blown here and there by the winds of teaching of cunning and crafty and men who are deceitful and

scheming. Instead, we speak truth in love and now in all things we grow up into Him who is the head, which is Christ.” We’re just going to keep growing up in the way that we think about the Christ who is the head of us, who has made us this way, who has declared us this way.

Application: Read Romans 3-8

The first bit of application—I’m sorry, I meant homework—is I want you to read through Romans chapters 3 through 8 and write down words that are declarative as to who you are in Christ. And what I would like you to seriously consider doing—it’s a great habit—is to inject your name. It says, “Therefore you are justified—now you are justified with Christ Jesus and we are at peace with God.” Insert your name: “Matt is now justified through Christ in faith, and now Matt has peace with God.” There’s something about personalizing. Go through chapters 3 through 8, find five of those sentences that absolutely tell you who’s true in your identity, write your name into those, and memorize and meditate on them. Put them on the back of an old business card and carry them around with you everywhere you go. And you’re going to learn how to think what’s true about your identity. You’re supposed to marinate those words into your brain. That’s thinking right.

III. Behave Right

Then, what else does the passage say? In Romans 12:1, it says “Behave right.” Behave right. “Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living and holy sacrifices, acceptable and pleasing to Him.” And what did we learn about what it means to be a living sacrifice a few weeks ago when we were tearing up that Bible? We were finding that a living sacrifice means lordship. In a simple word, it means you do whatever the Bible says, whether you like it or not, whether it’s comfortable or not. You follow what it says because it’s authoritative in your life.

But look what it says: “Let your bodies be a living and holy sacrifice.” The point is that God is saying in that passage, *Your bodies are part of this process. What you do with your body, how you behave, is supposed to be reinforcing—right here—what is true in your identity.* And when we start behaving like who we are, we start practicing that in our regular lives.

This model of thinking right in our identity and behaving right in our identity is classic to almost all of the epistles. Most of the epistles have some kind of outline like this, generally

speaking: first, truths about the nature of God; and then some kind of truths about our identity in Christ and how God relates to us; and then there's a list of a bunch of do's and don'ts.

Now what I find interesting is that so many Christians run to the list of do's and don'ts, over here to the goals, and they set the goals based on do's and don'ts. But this is no way for life change. It doesn't work. It gets you a few successes in a row—look at you, checking your boxes—but it's not changing an identity. It's not based on something that's intrinsic, working its way outside. And this is how God changes us. He does it through both.

You know a great figure of speech that grasps this identity and behavior and how they're supposed to sync up? It's one that's pretty common to all of us. It's ... listen ... ready? “What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?” *I know you, and this place—you're not supposed to be here. Your identity and who you are --- uh-uh. What's a prince or princess behaving like that for?* That's how it works its way out.

Application: Goal for Your Soul

So, here's the next little homework assignment. Here's what I want you to do. Let's look at whatever the goal for your soul is. I mentioned generosity. I think some of that has to do with the fact that I just saw a Ted Talk, and it was as secular as the day is long, but this lecturer was saying that generosity is one of the single greatest attributes to display a healthy soul. It was about givers and takers and how givers are healthier and happier.

So, you say, *I'm going to be a generous person. This is soulish. I'm going to be a generous person, so I'm going to set up behavior.* That means you have to do something, and the discipline of doing something would be getting on a budget, learning how to spend less and give more. And I would say a goal—you want these achievable, easy wins—would be to give one percent more than you're normally giving. Give one percent more over the next, whatever, six months, something like that.

And here's why you don't want to start here [*on the outer circle*] with a goal of giving one percent. Because once you do, you're done. A generous person hits one percent and says, *Wait a minute. I'm a generous person—now I'm going to give one percent more on top of that.* A generous person just keeps on giving. They're negotiating not how much they get to give, it's like how little they get to keep.

So, being goal-centered gets you in and out, but it doesn't change your life. Believing that you're a generous person and behaving like you're a generous person causes you to start becoming a generous person. That's how that works. It's beautiful—it's genius.

So, let me just review. The way you have real life change is starting with identity—who you are or who you want to be. And then, thinking that way and behaving that way.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Let's take a step back and look. Anybody here with some counseling background? Does any of this look familiar? Because this model right here is one of the most popular models in psychology today, because it's so effective. It's called "cognitive behavioral therapy." Cognitive behavioral therapy: I'm thinking right—cognitive; behavior—I'm doing right; and it's based on identity. Cognitive behavioral therapy has been around seventy-five years. I'm not promoting that. What I am promoting is a 2,000-year-old life-change model that looks like cognitive behavioral therapy. It just took them a long time to figure it out.

Cognitive behavioral therapy literally has shown brain change when it's applied, in a study that's very recent—last October—on social anxiety. They did what's called active MRI's where it shows what's happening in the brain. And after some sessions in cognitive behavioral therapy, based on identity, thinking right, behaving right, the body chemistry changed. You started seeing protein differences and electric differences going on inside the brain, oxygen levels changing throughout the brain, and they are physiologically changing because of this.

So, let me just show you how this works again, using something very simple that we all understand, in some respects: an athlete—a person who says, "I am an athlete" or "I'm aspiring to be an athlete"—"I wish I was"—"I'm an athlete, that's my identity." The way an athlete thinks is that pain is part of the process. So, an athlete doesn't complain about pain. He's not surprised by pain. He has pain and he just plows through it. An athlete gets used to losing, because losing is part of learning how to win. And so, they're not moping around all the time and being discouraged. They have a short memory. Being an athlete is learning how to get back up.

Those are some attributes you have to have in order to think like an athlete. You know how athletes behave? Are they going to work out tomorrow? They're thinking about it---no, they're not thinking about it—they're athletes. They do it. They made decisions ahead of time,

and then they took their own freedom away. So, they don't wake up in the morning and wonder if they're going to work out. I'm an athlete! I'm working out tomorrow. Because that's what I do.

An athlete goes to the grocery store, and you know all those middle aisles? Those are for non-athletes. That's where non-athletes go. Athletes just stay on the outside—the fresh stuff, you know. They look down those middle aisles and think, *Hmm, no, not happening*. If they find themselves on one of those middle aisles staring at a box of Oreos, they have to say, *What's an athlete like you doing on this aisle? Come on, man. It's diet and exercise. Come on.*

So, I just want you to see how that works in the physical sense: *I'm an athlete, so I'm going to think like and behave like an athlete*. The same is true for your soul, your personality, and those sorts of things—and your spirit. This is how they change and how they grow too.

Watch the magic here, though. I want you to see something. This has a compounding effect. If you think right, based on your identity, it's going to help you behave right. And if you behave right, it will reinforce the way you're thinking. So, *I don't think I want to work out tomorrow, so I'm just going to pretend and behave. I'm going to fake it until I make it*. And halfway through that workout I'm starting to think, *It was a good idea that I'm working out, because that's what athletes do. Sometimes I think I'm an athlete, and I'm going to think my way into behaving*. And it just keeps getting better and better. It compounds. This is why only a one percent change can make a lifetime of difference. One percent—that's why I'm saying it's achievable goals, simple wins.

Here's the problem. See how it works? See the power of this energy? It cuts both ways. It can also go this way: you start thinking bad, you'll start acting bad. You start acting bad enough, you'll start thinking bad. You get two or three of these *I'm not going to behave like an athlete and I'm going to eat all I want, I'm going to not work out, I'm going to think differently about life—it's supposed to be pleasurable, not painful*—all of this—and the next thing you know, you'll be thinking of yourself as kind of a loser, a slug. *I'm just going to ride it out. I don't care anymore*. And it just feeds both ways.

And so, people will tell you, you do this a couple of times in the wrong direction—one percent difference makes all the difference in the world a lot of time for good and for bad. So, be very careful about habits that you form, because they reinforce your thinking and they can reinforce your belief on identity.

Application: Where to Start?

So, in the context of application and our homework, where do you start? Where do you get on board? There are two ways of looking at it.

One, where do you need to get on board the most? Some of you don't know who you are in Christ. I'd start right there. Get that written down, write all kinds of cards, and get it everywhere you can see. Sometimes the thinking is the part you need the most work on, based on maybe your background, or maybe you're an emotional thinker instead of an intellectual thinker.

Some of you just need to get on board with the behavior. It might be whatever you need the most.

Here's another way of looking at it. This is like a merry-go-round and you get on wherever it's easiest to get on. I'm going to use this again—physical metaphors are easy. When I'm not thinking right about my diet and exercise, I'm just going to do it anyway. So, if I'm getting on here and if I do this and I behave long enough, I'm going to start thinking, *Yeah, turns out eating the right foods and exercising is a good thing to do*. Sometimes I have to start with thinking to convince my behavior to catch up. What I like about it is, wherever it fits in—if you're a junior high football coach, these kids aren't going to think—they're in junior high. So, you just yell at them and make them behave. And they after a while, by the time they get to high school, they're starting to think like athletes. And then they're going to start behaving like it. By the time they're in college, this is a done deal. A college athlete gets this. But a college athlete, by the way, who is just goal-oriented or system discipline oriented, is the college athlete that, once he graduates from college, he's no longer an athlete. And so, he just lets his body go to ruin. If he was basing his college experience on saying, *Look, I'm a person that's committed to being shape because it's good for you*, then he or she is going to continue throughout.

So, the point is, thinking leads to behavior, behavior leads to thinking, all complimenting the identity working its way out from identity. It works both ways as the threat.

So, where are you going to start? Here's what I would recommend—a super easy win. Pick a way to do something body, soul, and spirit, a super easy win—one percent change can change entire life because of the compounding power of consistency of this model. It starts from the inside out.

Let me show you one more time in the Bible how Paul uses this model. And it's one of the reasons that I keep referencing physical fitness—because Paul does. And why does Paul use physical fitness to help us understand spiritual fitness? Because he wants to demystify how a person's soul and spirit are altered. We know how athletes work. We know how our bodies work. There is cause and effect to that. And Paul says, *Right. Just take that and move it over to the metaphysical parts of your life. It works there too.*

1 Timothy 4:6

If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed.

So, watch how in 1 Timothy 4, Paul is going to coach Timothy in how it ought to be. Here's what he says about thinking right: "But put on these instructions before the brothers and sisters and you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus. I want you to be nourished on the words of faith and the sound teachings that you have followed." That's thinking right. "I want you to be nourished by these things"—it's that marinating on what? Instructions, words of faith, sound teaching.

1 Timothy 4:7-8, 10

... train yourself in godliness,⁸ for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come ...¹⁰ For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

But he doesn't leave it there. He brings it to behavior. *I want you to behave like who you are.* So, he goes on and says, "Train yourselves in godliness, because while physical training..."—he saying, *This is simple, you know this*—"... has some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promises both in this present age and the age to come." The spiritual disciplines make it all the way to heaven. "It is for this end that we toil and we struggle because

we have our hope set on the living God, who is our Savior to all people, especially to those who believe.”

So, listen to the vocabulary words Paul is using as a reference to the physical, as applied to the metaphysical, our souls and spirit. He uses words like “train”—that’s literally *gymnazo*. Guess where we get the word “gymnasium”? The physical training—that word is where we get the word “gymnastics.” It’s almost the exact word as “gymnastics.” And don’t think of the individual sport of gymnastics; it’s more like the highly disciplined, repetitious learning in a sporting event that today we would call “make it muscle memory.” Be so repetitious in the way you behave that you can’t even think about doing it. It never gets to your brain, it’s just straight to your spinal cord and back.

And then he goes on and uses words like “toil” and “labor.” You do this until you grow weary. If you’ve been involved in weightlifting, it would “lift until failure.” The idea is that if you just keep doing this behavior, it’s going to be painful. And the last word he uses is “struggle.” What’s the Greek word for struggle? *Agonizo*. Anyone? Yeah—agony.

So, Paul’s point is that you’ve got to be thinking like an athlete, you’ve got to behave like an athlete. Of course, because they’re athletes. *Do that in your spiritual life*, he says. You’ve got to be meditating on these things, nourishing your souls on these things, and then behave like it. Behave like it’s going to be painful, agonizing. You need to do it until it’s muscle memory. That’s how a life is changed. It’s based on who you are in Christ and reinforcing who you are in your thinking and your behavior. That’s how you become like Christ in all of life. That’s a good lesson.

IV. The Power of the Spirit

But wait—there’s more. Because God doesn’t just leave us with cognitive behavioral therapy, right? Watch this. He’s going to add something to spin this thing in a powerful, miraculous, unending way. And that is the power of the Holy Spirit.

Remember last week I said that the way you become God’s child is the same way you become God’s perfect child? It is by grace through faith alone.

Galatians 3:1-3

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ² I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Look what it says in Galatians 3:1. “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes you saw Christ Jesus was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit of God by observing the law, or by believing in what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

One of my mentors, a gentleman named Dr. Haddon Robinson, said this passage is the most neglected passage in the New Testament by the American church. Because the American church says, *Be saved by grace through faith—now get busy*. And you see this in church after church. They don’t believe that you are transformed by God’s grace and then you continue to be transformed by God’s grace. It is by God’s grace that we change.

And what’s difficult sometime is that people don’t understand that it’s the power of the Holy Spirit. How do you know you’re not involving yourself in legalism while you’re doing all behaving—behaving to the point of pain—*agonizo*, right? Well, it has to do with where you’re putting your faith or hope. If you look at the passage, it says, “I just want to know this: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by practicing the law or by believing what was heard?” Paul is not saying to stop practicing the law. Most of the law is really great—the non-Jewish laws. Go ahead, practice the moral law. Don’t hope in it. See, it’s all about hope or trust. I’m going to trust that the law can make me better. I’m going to hope that the law can change a heart and soul. Again, this shows up a lot in parenting, because I’m going to use a model that’s behavioristic and control-oriented instead of *Don’t you know? It’s the power of the Holy Spirit that does this*.

So, it’s very subtle. It might even look the same from the outside looking in. But the person—they’re going to know where their hope is.

Let me give you two examples of how to live by the power of the Holy Spirit in this and not be legalistic. When I was in my thirties I was not doing a great job pretty much anywhere,

especially at home, so I wasn't much of a husband and I wasn't much of a father. So, I'm in my thirties and I'm young and strong, so I did what I do. I made a list. I made a list of things that I needed to do daily to be a better husband and a better father. I had fourteen to-do's. I put it on the front of my notebook, my daily planner. I'd look at it every day. And man, I went after it. And after two weeks I was miserable. I couldn't get those fourteen things, I wasn't getting much payoff, frankly. By week three, everyone was miserable. *Could you please stop this? It's not working for anyone.*

And it's the nature of a to-do list. It's the nature of the law. It's not made to tell you what you're doing right; it's made to tell you all the ways you're failing. And so, after week three I'm just crushed. And I said this prayer. Listen to the prayer. It's going to sound exactly like a salvation prayer. Because that's the way you become a child of God, and that's the way you become a perfect child of God. And so, I went to bed and said, "You know what? I'm done. I quit. God, look, I've done everything I can do. It's not working. I give up and I quit. You know, Lord, if you want me to be a better husband and even a mildly average father, at this point (I'd love to just be average), you're going to have to change me. You're going to have to change my heart. I'm done. I mean, I don't even know how to be completely selfless. I don't even want to be completely selfless."

I woke up the next day and soon after that—I know, it's predictable as a Hallmark movie, right? It's like, the next thing you know, I'm doing the fourteen things and liking it. I know. I know people love big miracle stories usually about someone getting healed. That's a miracle. I mean, ask around. In my life, He changed my soul because I gave up on trying to perfect being a husband and father. I was trying to perfect that by the flesh. I was a foolish Galatian. And then I said a salvation prayer about my sanctification and I started getting in on the loop in a way that magnified my identity. And I was thinking right and then I started behaving right.

That's one way of doing it. Try as hard as you can, run head on into the wall—actually, sometimes when I counsel people in their thirties, especially their late thirties, I just say, "You should try harder. I don't think you're trying hard enough. Because you still don't get it."

And they're thinking, "What!"

And I say, "Yeah, just keep trying harder. I can tell you're still a foolish Galatian, so I'm just trying to make this thing go faster."

And that's why I don't do a lot of counseling.

Anyway—I'm a little distracted here—there's another way to do this besides failing. And that is to just get carried along in the Spirit. It's to understand what's happening here and how it happens, and that your hope is in the power of the Holy Spirit and you can't wait to brag about God's miraculous intervention in your life, in your body, in your soul, and in your spirit. And so, you just have this genuine humility that's floating through you, and there's this constant sense of tranquility because you're at peace, you know who you are, and you're doing what you can to think right and behave right. But your hope is in the power of God's Holy Spirit working in your life. You're just constantly being reminded that you're so sinful that Jesus Christ had to die for you. And I'm so loved that He would be willing to die for me. That is a form of worship that gets this spinning in the right direction. And the glory goes to God.

How do you know if you're being legalistic or actually being part of God's plan in all of this? Here are a couple of ways—winning and losing. Let's say you're a highly disciplined person—you know, good for you. I've heard those things are true. And you're doing it—you're getting all your fourteen points done. And when you're doing it in a legalistic way, you're usually pretty self-righteous about it and generally judgmental towards other people that can't do the fourteen things. It's like you're in charge; you're doing it. And generally, you focused on two or three areas that—never mind your pride—it's this one place. And so, self-righteousness is a consequence of legalism.

Another one is when you're not so good and you're failing a lot. Your attitude—you're spinning this thing the wrong way and you start thinking you're a failure. You bring shame into your relationship with God and a sense of sorrow and grief because you're not getting it done and you're thinking right and you're certainly not behaving right. And so, you can't believe that what God is saying about you is true.

Either way, legalism doesn't work if you win and it doesn't work if you lose. Do you know why? Because it doesn't work. It was never meant to work. It was always meant to be an identity change based upon the grace of God intervening to make us well; to make us not just a child, but a perfect child.

All right, we're done. Here it is. Here's your homework. Body, soul, spirit. Easy wins in 2022, body, soul and spirit. Write something down. Let the body part be an instructor as to how soul and spirit things work. And see where you get involved with identity, how you think and

how you behave, or how you behave and how you think, always waiting for the Spirit of God to give you that power.

In closing, let me give you a final, really great story. It's just a week old. I'm so proud of Melinda, because she's taking every thought captive. What was happening in her life very recently was she just felt like she wasn't keeping up, wasn't measuring up to who she ought to be and what she ought to be doing. Her identity was "I'm not doing enough and therefore"—the performance thing—"I'm maybe not liked by God" or whatever it might be. And it was weighing heavy on her soul.

So, here's how she took every thought captive. Was it nurture or nature? Where was she getting that? It wasn't true. Her behavior was not reflecting that. Where did she get that? So, you go to nurture/ nature. Was she nurtured in that way where no matter what she did, her parents were saying, "Why didn't you do more? Shame on you for that 99"—that sort of thing. That's not her background. Her parents were lovely. The whole environment in her house was mostly encouraging all the time.

So, then she goes to nature. Well, there are two natures involved here. The nature of man is to go to religion. You can see it throughout the Old Testament, even in the 400 silent years. Good heavens, that's when all the rules are written that are insane and why Jesus has to come in and say, "That is not what I meant." Because we just add rules whenever we can. We go to performance because it inflates our ego. But it destroys us either way. And so, there's some of that in the nature of who she is. And then, Satan, friends—he's the accuser. You think he's showing up to say, *Hey, good job? You're doing a great job following God.* No, he's going to find those two things that you didn't do and never let you up.

What I've found to be particularly grateful for in watching Melinda negotiate this is that she understood the power of reading. We'll talk about this next week, but what you read is often what you think. And she reads multiple devotionals in the morning in addition to her reading the Bible, and she looked at a couple of those authors and said, "You know what? This is the harsh parent that I'm listening to." Sometimes it has to do with what era they were writing in. It's all about the majesty of God and the transcendence of God—I'm all in favor of that—but never balancing that with the immanence of God and the love of God.

So, every day she was reading this devotion that says, *Still not enough. You could have done better. Do you have idea how holy God is? And then there's you.* And she said, "I'm not

reading this anymore. I'm going to exchange that source of thinking for a different source of thinking that reflects the identity that's true." And now she's off understanding who she is in Christ because she had to get somebody else out of her head so that it would be more consistent with what is true. It's powerful.

We're going to do this together. We're going to learn what our identity is and we're going to behave like that and think like that, and that's going to keep spinning. If we become a church like that, we'll be a church that changes people's lives, because we've gotten on board with the model that God has.

There's one other thing I want to show you. See this superpower over here? There's another one going this way. It's spinning it in the right direction this way. And that is for next week.

All out of time. Cliffhanger. Don't miss it.

Let me pray as we commit to this.

Lord Jesus, we lift up this moment to You, that we would become a church and that I would be a person of radical change because of who You say that I am. You've declared that to be true, I've attached those Bible verses to my name, and that's my identity. And Lord, I would ask that You would help us all understand what that means and that we would reflect on that as it changes the way we think--maybe that needs to change—or change the way we behave—maybe that needs to change.

But Lord, help us become a community of people who don't stagnate, that don't brag about how bold they were as a Christian when they were in college. Let them talk about miracles that took place in their life last month, because they hit some wall and they were foolish Galatians and they brag about being a foolish Galatian and they brag about the Spirit changing who they are and what motivates them. Lord, make us a church like that. There's the light on the hill. That's what people are looking for.

And so, God, with Your Spirit, overwhelm this church so that we would be that. If no one watches and no one hears, it still glorifies You. And we do this, we become like Christ in all of life, for Your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.