

PRACTICING REPENTANCE

CONNECTION IN THE SERIES

In order for our faith to transform and free us in the Lordship and living presence of Jesus Christ, in order that we might remain steadfast amidst our disillusionment, disconnection and disorientation; we need a picture of the world that gives shape to healthy and sustaining practices.

Unfortunately, the picture of the world that we most often live within is **THE CIRCUS**. A three-ringed spectacle in which we find ourselves rotating between passive observer and mastered performer. There is little rhythm in the circus, even though there is constant motion. Likewise there is no cohesive story in the circus. There are certainly parts to play and shows to entertain, but the circus has no history and no conclusion. We run hard, the veg-out; only to repeat the cycle over and over again. In the circus, faith—behavior and character shaping belief—has no room to grow. In fact, growth isn't even part of the circus picture.

So we need another picture to shape our way of living in God's Story. **THE GARDEN** is that picture. An intentionally crafted environment in the presence of God. In the garden there are seasons of work and rest, there are times to plant and times wait for new life. There are ways of recognizing growth and appreciating the value of the ordinary task. There is a sense of participation without control or neglect.

Our participation in the garden is what we are calling the work of *CULTIVATION*.

“Cultivation is an agricultural metaphor: working the soil to prepare it to grow something useful—planting and watering seeds, weeding and pruning, harvesting....In an age of self-absorption, cultivation is a metaphor that can keep us aware that we are **not merely individuals defined by what we consume or possess or do but by our relationships, our values, and our faith, all of which require attentiveness.**”¹

¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Cultivated Life*, 10.

FAITH PRACTICE | REPENTANCE

This afternoon will see that the FAITH PRACTICE of REPENTANCE is our way of remaining attentive; of cultivating grace. *Repentance is recognizing our need for God and his grace as we turn and cling tightly to Jesus!*

*By practicing repentance we are cultivating attentiveness to the **conditions of The Garden life:** the greatness, gloriousness, goodness, and graciousness of God our Father.*

Helping us to see ourselves rightly within His Story, and participate fully in all that he is doing.

How does Practicing Repentance help us **cultivate grace**? In three ways:

#1 | RESTING IN THE COMPASSIONATE INTIMACY OF GOD

Practicing repentance means first that we find rest, peace, in the compassionate intimacy of God our Father.

Hebrews 4:11-16 reminds us that we are all exposed before God and yet brought mercifully and fully into his presence through Jesus. We cannot hide our self-righteousness nor our self-destructiveness from God; and yet we need not fear his holy presence because of Jesus. Likewise, we need not fear what others think of our struggles because we know that it is Christ who beckons us to come into the fullness of life.

#2 | APPRECIATING OUR DEEP NEED FOR OTHERS

Practicing repentance also means that we appreciate our deep need for others.

Hebrews 3:12-13 & 10:19-25 remind us that alone we are vulnerable to blindness—to not seeing ourselves in a healthy way, not knowing God in a healthy way, and unaware of how the enemy might be working. Awareness to our need for others keeps us interdependent and contributing. It also keeps us participating, not isolating or simply sitting by and only taking. If we need others, they need us too!

#3 | ACCEPTING THE PERFECT WILL OF OUR FATHER

Practicing repentance finally, means we accept the perfect will of our Father.

Hebrews 11:1-12:3 is a reminder that our faith starts with and is perfected by Jesus. By the one whom our entire faith family's history comes from and finds fullness in. With eyes opened to the greatness of God's Story in Jesus we can recognize in His Story past and present that we are a people of repentance, a people who turn to him over and over and over and over again, who are raised up to participate in and experience his glory throughout the earth. An awareness that keeps us steadfast, patient, hopeful, and confident.

Practicing repentance keeps our lives in rhythm with God's Story; gives us the attentiveness we need to joyously, faithfully and fruitfully follow Jesus every day.

CULTIVATING GRACE THROUGH REPENTANCE

How then do we practice repentance? Simply by:

CONFESSING

It begins with a confession.

Confessing that I do not always believe—demonstrated in my actions and attitudes—the truths that God is great, glorious, good, and gracious.

In confession there is an acknowledgement of my weakness, but even more so there is an acknowledgment of God's character and purposes. **Confessing our unbelief should move our attention to the truth of God that we are not believing.**

If we simply confess our struggle to believe in attitude and action, little changes. That's why many groups meet for years to share struggles but never experience any victory within or over those struggles.

LISTENING & RECEIVING

Therefore we need not only confess—speak our unbelief—but must also hear—be spoken to—the gospel of Jesus. Thus, we need others to confess to!

As we confess our struggle and begin to recognize the truth of God's character and purposes; we need that truth explicitly and specifically spoken in the Spirit to us through our brothers and sisters (James 1). We need to receive in humility that which is being offered in Jesus through our fellow Christ followers; the broken and shed blood that makes us holy as Christ is holy!

LIVING

In receiving what we have been given in Jesus—an identity, a hope, a future and a mission—we can then take the final step of repentance which is to act on what we believe: **to live!**

To live as ones who are made new in Jesus, ones who believe in action and attitude all that we know to be true of God in Scripture. Knowing that God's grace is sufficient for today and his mercies are new (never ending, always flowing to their fullest potential) and as consistent as the rising of the morning sun.

Confess, listen, receive, and live = repent!

So, let's **cultivate grace by practicing repentance**. To do so, we'll need to break into groups of 4-6 people.