

# Submission

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let me say, as I said at the beginning of our time together, welcome, especially if you're new. Happy Valentine's Day and happy Lent. If you know anything about Lent, it's sort of odd to say that.

It feels a bit like there's some tension there between those to which to celebrate, you know. Well, I'm celebrating Lent with my black dress. But in fact, the concepts around Valentine's Day and around Lent are closer than we might think at first glance because in all of our focus during Lent on our brokenness, on the brokenness of the world, on the struggle of daily life, on the inevitable fact that things fall apart in this world, all of that is meant to drive us deeper into the love.

Of God to understand that love, to rely on and be nourished by it afresh. And so we're beginning a new series with that in mind.

The series is called Habits of Holiness. And I realize as I say that, when you hear Habits, you immediately think of, oh, I'm going to leave with a to-do list.

Not again. You know, my list is already so long. And then I say Holiness. And I think for a lot of us, the word Holiness sort of conjures images of, you know, we think of holier than thou.

[ 1 : 38 ] We think of holy rollers. You know, we think of sort of teetotaling legalists and Bible thumpers. That's sort of the connotation for me for years before I was a Christian and even for some years after I became a Christian.

That's really what I thought of when I thought of holiness. Holiness. And so for most of us, including I think most Christians probably in this room, we don't really have a good working understanding of what holiness is and how it might connect to something like the love of God.

They almost sound diametrically opposed when you hear some people talk about it. But the thing we need to understand as we sort of move into the passage that we're going to look at today is that Christianity is based on the idea that God has initiated a kind of cosmic renewal project through Jesus.

That Jesus didn't just come to die for your sin to make sure that you could get along with God, but rather he's come to restore and to make all things new. And so being a Christian means that we are a part of that renewal project.

And understanding that, here's how holiness fits into that understanding. And this is a quote by N.T. Wright, who's sort of a well-known New Testament scholar.

[ 2 : 55 ] He says this, Christians are called to anticipate this renewal that God is doing in the world. We're called to be previews of this new heavens and new earth that God is bringing about in this way.

He says, we're called to anticipate this renewal in the present by replacing the slave habits of mind, heart, and body with freedom habits. Habits that both share in God's freedom themselves and bring that freedom to the world.

That is more or less what Paul's understanding of holiness or sanctification is. It's the learning in the present of the habits which anticipate the ultimate future.

Does that make sense? Holiness. So the idea of learning how to live in anticipation of what God's doing in the world. So by this understanding, holiness is less about being teetotaling legalists and Bible thumpers.

And it's more akin to the idea of a slave who has been set free, who then has to learn how to live as a free person. Or as a person who's been paralyzed, who has been healed and has to learn how to walk and then to run.

[ 4 : 08 ] So holiness, the equivalent for a person like that would be sprinting down the road. Right? Experiencing the freedom of having the power of mobility. Or it's like a blind person who's had their

sight restored, who then has to learn how to see and to make sense of what they see.

Experiencing the freedom of sight. Holiness is a kind of comprehensive spiritual freedom that we're given in Jesus as a gift, but we have to learn how to live it through cultivating these habits.

So this is what it means for Christians to pursue holiness. It means cultivating habits, what Wright calls freedom habits. I love that phrase. That allow us to experience and display the freedom we have in Jesus.

So during Lent, we're going to be looking each Sunday at some of these habits. These habits of holiness. And so tonight we're starting with probably what is the most foundational habit, freedom habit there is.

And that is the habit of submission. Submission. It's almost like an S word. That's another word that we have a hard time with. We're going to get into that. But in order to help us understand this, we're looking at James chapter 4, verses 1 through 10.

[ 5 : 26 ] If you want to turn there, if you have a Bible, otherwise it'll be up on the screen. James chapter 4, verses 1 through 10. And we're going to see two things about submission. First, submission means realigning our hearts.

Realigning our hearts. And second, submission to God leads to freedom. So it means realigning our hearts. And it leads to freedom. Let's pray for God to lead us in this.

Lord, we do. We recognize that as we talk about something like holiness and such a concept as submission, there are so many objections that are immediately raised in our hearts.

Even in my heart, Lord. It's so easy to put off talking about something like this. And yet, Lord, we need it. And we trust you more than us to know what we need. And so we trust you now to do your work in us through your word.

Lord, we know that you love us and we know that all that you do in us is good. And so we ask for that. In your son's name. Amen. So first of all, submission to God means a kind of a realignment of our hearts.

[ 6 : 32 ] As I said a moment ago, I think that submission is something that if you're anything like me, we have a really hard time with this concept. And I think there's a lot of reasons for that.

I think we have pretty negative connotations. I do think that for many of us, we've either seen or heard about or maybe personally experienced people who have abused their authority. You know, maybe it was a dad.

Maybe it was a pastor. Maybe it was a boss. But people who have abused their authority and maybe we've been hurt by that. You know, anybody who's ever been in an abusive situation, you know, this is what comes to mind.

Because you've seen that authority abused. And so when you hear the word submission, you hear it as subjugation. Right? But I also think that we live in a culture that is very much opposed to the idea of submission really in any form.

And I think it's because we live in a culture that more than any other culture in history, by a long shot, values expressive individualism. In other words, our culture values the idea that the highest ideal is to be true to yourself and to pursue your desires.

[ 7 : 49 ] That your ultimate loyalty should be to yourself. And being true to yourself means living a life where you're pursuing and seeking to fulfill the desires of your heart. That's expressive individualism.

And you hear this again and again and again and again. The moral of the story is be true to yourself. Because we live in a culture that values this so much, we hear something like submission. That's anathema to everything that our culture holds dear. So I think this is what's going on. This idea of expressive individualism, be true to yourself, this sounds great, but when you begin to think about it, you begin to see how it actually starts to cause a number of problems.

And that's what James is honing in on in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 4. He says, a question. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. So what's he saying? He's saying this. What's wrong with the world? Why can't we all just get along?

[ 8 : 57 ] Everybody I know is for world peace. Why don't we have it? There's nobody who disagrees with that and says, no, I like war. So why don't we have it? Why do people fight?

Why do we fight? Why are there factions and divisions and arguments and standoffs and resentment in this church? Why does that exist? He says the problem is desire. It's that your passions are waging war within you. Your passions, your desires are the problem. So, why if somebody asks you, why if somebody says, hey, there's this great book that I read and I love.

Have you heard of it? Or, oh my God, this incredible band. I just saw this amazing show. Have you heard of these guys? And why, if you haven't, why do we lie and say, oh yeah, they're great? I mean, it's a small little white lie. In the great scheme of things, it's rather insignificant. But why do we do that? I mean, did you wake up that morning and think to yourself, one of my top goals today is to find somebody to lie to?

[10:12] No, you didn't. It's just in the moment you're caught up. This person's enthusiastic. This book or this band or this person seems really important. And you're going to feel stupid if you haven't already heard of them.

And you're going to seem like you're kind of not in the know. And so, what do you do? You say, oh yeah, oh, it's an amazing book. Oh, I've totally read it. I've totally seen that band. Oh, they're incredible. Yeah. You have no idea what they're talking about.

Why do you do that? It's not because you want to lie. It's because in that moment, the desire for approval is way more important. And so, a little, little lie come between you and this other person. Desire, right?

Why does the husband who gets married, has a couple of kids, and then decides 15 years into the marriage that he is in love with another woman with whom he's having an affair, leaves his wife, leaves his kids, pursues this other woman, and you ask him why, he says, why?

I'm being true to myself. I'm following, this is what I think I need to do to pursue happiness, right? That used to be a huge scandal. It used to be something that nobody talked about.

[11:19] But more and more and more, we live in a culture where these kind, that kind of thing is actually more and more and more, I would say, almost celebrated. It's this idea of, well, this person's being true to themselves. This is what, this is the desire of their heart, and they've got to be honest, and they've got to follow that.

People say, well, my marriage just isn't really fulfilling me anymore. I need to leave. I need to find something else, right? And increasingly, the culture almost celebrates that.

But it's desire waging war within us, waging war in our relationships, waging war between us. And so James is saying, listen, we need to realize that many, if not all, of our problems come because we're ruled by our desires, rather than by God.

And he's saying, if we continue to be ruled by desire, we're going to continue to experience what he says, enmity. Enmity between one another and enmity with God. So he says in verses 7 and 8, the answer to this, and this is very biblical language, you know, I mean, resist the devil and submit ourselves to God.

What we need to understand is the word submission, we think of submission as a sort of a passive, sort of, like I said, subjugation. No, no, no. Submission is an act of allegiance. Somebody says, what side are you on?

[12:43] And you declare, I'm on this side. It's allegiance. The word literally translates to align yourself, under something or someone, to align your life, to align yourself under something.

So what James is saying is this, we need to resist this satanic lie that has been whispered ever since the fall of humanity that says, the best life is the life that you live for yourself.

That's freedom. James is saying that's a lie. You need to resist that. It's a trap. And he says that will lead you to actually being in subjugation to your desires for the rest of your life.

He says instead, you need to align your life, align your priorities, align your desires under God.

That's the only way to have peace. It's the only way to have order within and without. So think of a solar system.

All these gigantic planets, asteroids, all kinds of things kind of swirling around in perfect harmony, a perfect dance. Why aren't the planets crashing into each other? It's because they all have a common point around which they orbit.

[13:58] The sun. In other words, the planets are submitted to the sun. Their entire path through the heavens is aligned with the sun.

And because of that, you have this beautiful symphony of movement rather than chaos. What's the alternative? Each planet has its own orbit.

And what happens? They're constantly slamming into each other. It's chaos. That's what James is saying is true about us. If each of us is going along to our own orbit, there's going to be constant collisions and enmity.

The only way for there to begin to be peace, the only way for there to begin to be restoration, is if we are all aligned with the same center point, which is God.

So that's what he's saying. Submission first means realigning our hearts so that we're no longer submitted to our own desires, but instead to God. Which means cultivating a habitual humility.

[15:00] Habitual humility through daily submission to him. And I know as I say this, there are some of us who are hearing this and sort of still skeptical.

You know, kind of wondering why? Why would anybody do this? I'm not really sure it's that bad. And the next point we see is this, that the reason that we would do this, and the reason this is something that we're all called to do, is this.

That submission is the only way that we will ever experience true freedom in our lives. It's the only way to freedom. And if it sounds like a paradox, submission leads to freedom, it's because it is a paradox.

You're right, that's a paradox. See, Christians actually believe in a lot, we believe in a lot of paradoxes. And one of the paradoxes that we believe in is the idea that the road to freedom is found through submission to God.

Right? So Christians are people who believe that any attempt at freedom apart from God actually leads to slavery. And living in submission to God actually leads to freedom.

[16:06] So if you haven't read the Brothers Karamazov, I would highly encourage you to do that. There are great translations and bad translations. For some of you, probably half of you in this room have started it and then never finished it.

I would encourage you to push through because it's really an amazing book. And there's a great place in it where there's a character, Elder Zosima, who's a monk, a monastic, and there's this wonderful passage where he is contrasting sort of our common approach to an understanding of freedom in the world with the Christian definition of freedom.

And he's talking about the monastic life. Now that's not something that's gonna apply to many of us, the monastic life. Most of us are not monks and nuns. But the underlying truth that he's getting at applies to everybody.

He says this. He says, The world has proclaimed freedom especially of late. But what do we see in the freedom of theirs? Slavery and suicide. He says, For the world says, You have needs, therefore satisfy them.

Don't be afraid to satisfy them, but even increase them. This is the current teaching of the world. And in this they see freedom. But what comes of this right to increase one's needs?

[17:25] For the rich, isolation and spiritual suicide. For the poor, envy and murder. For they've been given rights, but have not been given any way of satisfying their needs.

So he says, This is a recipe for insanity. To be encouraged and given the right. Go out. Satisfy yourself. Satisfy your needs. That's what life is all about. That's freedom. You're told and encouraged to do this.

You're given the rights to do it, but you're not given the means to do it. It's a recipe for futility. It's a recipe for despair. It's a recipe for insanity. And he says, Very different is the monastic way.

Obedience, fasting, and prayer are laughed at, and yet they alone constitute the way to real and true freedom. Why? Because I cut away my superfluous and unnecessary needs.

Through obedience, I humble and chasten my vain and proud will, and thereby, with God's help, attain freedom of spirit. And with that, spiritual rejoicing.

[18:33] So I know this is a long quote. What is he really saying? He's saying this. True freedom, the kind of freedom we all long for, true freedom begins with spiritual freedom.

Spiritual freedom. Freedom of spirit. So he's saying this. You can have all kinds of stuff. You can have degrees. You can have money. You can have wealth. You can have a laundry list of accomplishments.

You know, you live in D.C. and you meet people, and a lot of people don't care as much about money, but they care so much about accomplishment. And you look at people's resumes, and you

cannot believe. You're like, in 22 years, you've gotten 18 awards and 30 degrees. And I can't, you know, every year I meet people who just are more amazing. And I'm like, well, time must work differently for you. You know, I graduated college. Yes, you graduated four different colleges, and got, you know, you have two PhDs. It's incredible. He says, you can have all this stuff, and yet never be free. [ 19 : 32 ] Because why? Because it's never going to be enough. It's never going to be enough. You're going to keep going, and going, and going, and going. You've been given, you've been encouraged, go out and satisfy your desire.

But as Osama says, you haven't been given the means to satisfy them. So you keep going, and going, and going. And he says, you'll be enslaved by the tyranny of things and habits the rest of your life.

Now, we may not think of ourselves as slaves, but all being a slave means, all it means, is that someone or something else is calling the shots in your life about the most important things in your life.

Right? So if you tell me that you can't stop overeating, you're a slave to food. Right? If you can't stop drinking, then you're a slave to alcohol.

If you can't stop losing your temper, you're a slave to anger. I've promised myself that I wouldn't lose my temper with my family again. And I cannot tell you how many times I've made that promise.

[ 20 : 37 ] Until it has broken my heart and made me realize that I'm a slave to anger. And if I don't do something about it, if I don't find a way of being freed from that, I'm going to damage not only myself, but the people I most care about.

If you can't stop sleeping around, you're a slave to sexual desire. Right? If you can't stop conforming to what others expect of you, then you're a slave to the approval of other people.

If you can't stop compromising your faith, your values, your priorities to get some guy or girl to like you and want to date you and be with you, if you can't stop compromising in all those areas just to get somebody to want to be with you, then you're a slave to that person and they're your master.

You see how this works? If there's anybody else calling the shots in your life, anything else calling the shots in your life, then you're a slave. So Zosima says, what you need is freedom of spirit.

So the question is, what sets our spirits free? What liberates us spiritually at the most foundational level? And it's this, freedom of spirit means knowing that our deepest need, the need under the need, under the need, under the need, has been satisfied.

[ 21 : 57 ] That's freedom of spirit. What's our deepest need? The Bible would say it's this, to know in an ultimate sense that we are truly known and truly loved.

To know that you are fully known and fully loved. Both, because if you're fully known without being fully loved, that's terrifying.

If you're fully known, or if you're fully loved but not fully known, that's kind of superficial. But if somebody really knows you, everything about you, and they truly, deeply, fully love you, that begins to speak to the deepest need of our heart.

That's what we ultimately need. And that's something that we can only find in God, and that's why the gospel is such good news. Because the gospel says this, God fully knows you.

You know, we pray that prayer at the beginning of worship every week, the God to whom all hearts are open and all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid. You know, I know that we do that every week, and it may be lost on us because we do it every week, but does that not terrify you sometimes?

[ 23 : 08 ] I'm praying to the God who knows that junk. And yet, because he's that God, he knows all of that junk. And yet, he also fully, completely, utterly loves us.

Why? Because it doesn't depend on us. He loves us, not because of what we've done for him, but because of what Jesus has done for us. So the hinge of this whole passage in James is verse 6.

The simple statement, God gives more grace. And why is it just a sentence, God gives more grace? Well, it's because no matter what you say, God's response is to give more grace.

God gives more grace. Plain and simple. If you belong to God through Jesus, you say, I love you, God. I want to worship you every day.

God gives you more grace. If you say, God, I'm angry and confused. Why didn't you answer my prayer? Why did you let that happen? God gives you more grace. If you say, God, forget you. I'm out of here. I'm leaving. I'm never going to church again. I'm leaving all this behind.

[ 24 : 10 ] God gives more grace. If you complain to God, and you say, God, you don't give me enough, and you give all these other people, you bless them, and give them the things that they want, and look at me, and I'm alone, and I'm miserable, and how could you do this, God? God gives more grace.

No matter what we say, no matter what we do, no matter how much we rage out, no matter how much we betray, no matter how much we turn, no matter how much we run, no matter how much we flee, no matter how much we doubt, no matter how much we question, no matter how much we rage out, God gives more grace.

God gives more grace. And you ask, how is that possible? And it's because of this. It's because God can give infinite grace because Jesus gave God infinite obedience.

So when we look at these verses, verses 7, 8, 9, and 10, all of these things, resist the devil, purify your hands, purify your hearts, all of these things, the first thing we need to realize is our hope rests not in our ability to do that, but in the fact that Jesus has already done these things.

He's already done it. That amazing passage that we reflected on in our collect earlier, you know, James says, resist the devil. That's exactly what Jesus did in the wilderness, right?

[ 25 : 19 ] He says, you know, wash your hands, purify your hearts. Jesus had clean hands. He had a pure heart. It says, draw near to God and he'll draw near to you. No one was closer to the Father than Jesus.

And yet, for our sake, God turned his back on him so that we could be reconciled to God in such a way that no matter what we do, God would always say to us, more grace.

So God is always forever on your side because of that. So freedom of spirit means knowing that. It means knowing more grace, more grace, more grace, no matter what, no matter how much we fail, more grace.

It means knowing that God fully knows and fully loves you no matter what. And nothing you do can increase that one inch. Nothing that you do can decrease that one inch. It is yours forever and always.

That's freedom of spirit. So then you ask, well, okay, if that's true, then why would I change anything about the way I live?

[ 26 : 24 ] I mean, if it's not going to impact the love, then why does it matter? And it's because we need to learn how to live as people who are spiritually free.

To not do so is like growing up in a cage and somebody comes along and unlocks the door and opens it, and you say, well, I'm just going to keep sitting here. It's kind of easy to do that because after a while you get used to that kind of life.

It can be scary to do something new and different. But we need to understand that many of the things that Christians do, you know, if we have this idea that Christians, that holiness is really like a slave who's been set free, the chains have fallen to the ground, and now they're free to walk out the door.

And that can be terrifying if you've lived your entire life as a slave. And yet we've been given our freedom. And if you push through the terror and the newness and the difference, there's life.

There's life out that door. So many of the things that Christians do, like fasting, like Sabbath keeping, listen, fasting is not about a 40-day plan to lose weight and get healthy.

[ 27 : 45 ] No. I mean, you can do that if you want. But it has nothing to do with this. The reason Christians do things like fasting and Sabbath keeping and things like this, they're not done for that.

They're not done to please God or to make God happy. It's not like if you're really hoping that you get into that program, so you do some fasting, so God's like, well, she's extra devoted, so I'm going to get her into that program.

Because she's really shown me, she's really putting in the effort. That's not how it works. The reason that we do these things is because, listen, listen to this. They're small, small but vital acts of insurrection against the slave masters of this world.

They're small but vital acts of insurrection, of defiance, against the potential slave masters in our lives. So whenever we fast from meals or from alcohol or from caffeine or from screen time or whatever, these are all small things.

They're all seemingly insignificant, but they're not because they're small but vital acts of defiance against those potential slave masters. They're you proclaiming, I don't belong to you.

[ 29 : 01 ] I don't work for you. My allegiance, my alignment, my submission is to Christ, the one who set me free, the one who does truly know me and love me unlike you. So when we take a day every week and we set it aside and we turn from our work and make it a Sabbath, when we embrace our family and our friends, our need for rest and recreation, to have the freedom to worship God, we do that not to make God happy but because that's what free people do.

That's what free people, that's the definition of freedom. So Deuteronomy 5, God says to his people, I freed you from slavery in Egypt, therefore keep the Sabbath always.

And I said this a few weeks ago when we talked about Sabbath, what's the connection? Why would God say, hey, I freed you from Egypt, you're no longer slaves, therefore keep the Sabbath. Why does God say that?

Because a slave, by definition, is someone who cannot decide when they stop working. That's a slave. And God says, you're not a slave.

You have the freedom to choose to stop working. Keep the Sabbath. Why? Because every time you proclaim your freedom to the world against those former taskmasters in your life, you're actually glorifying me because I'm the one who set you free.

[ 30 : 23 ] So people who have found freedom in God desire to live that out. So we submit ourselves to God not to make Him happy or not to earn favor with Him, but because we understand that that is the way to train our hearts, to habituate our hearts toward freedom, toward holiness.

And you know, the amazing thing is, and I know I've got to wrap this up, so I'll just tell just three more stories, just the first story. Just kidding. The way that, the impact that this kind of freedom has on us isn't just for us, but in fact, and I don't know if you've experienced this in your life, people who have been set free through their submission to God actually become agents of freedom.

They can help other people discover freedom as well. I heard this great story about a guy like many of us, doesn't go to this church, but a guy who went to a conference.

A lot of us go to conferences for work. And he went to this conference. He's married, has kids, but he was there alone. And after a full day of sessions, he comes back to his hotel room.

Not five minutes after he walks into the door, there's a knock at the door. And he opens it, and there's another woman who's there at the conference who, very attractive, very provocatively dressed, as soon as he opens the door, she pushes past him, comes into his hotel room.

[ 31 : 53 ] Yeah. And listen, listen, this is, this is for most, for most guys who travel for business, this is one of the primary fantasies that people talk about struggling with when they travel, is this idea of kind of anonymous sex with a stranger.

This woman comes into the room. She makes it very clear that she is, she is interested in having sex. And he tries to say no.

She continues to provoke. He says no. She continues to up the ante and provoke even more. Until finally, he says, you have to leave now. Gets her out of the room, immediately goes and finds two other guys that he knows who were at the conference who were also believers.

Says, I've got to, before, before I do anything stupid, I've just got to tell you what happened so you know. Tells them all, tells them everything. And then he says he went to bed that night and he admits that he tossed and turned the whole night struggling with desire to go and find that woman and take her up on her offer.

And yet he didn't. So, four years pass. guy goes to a conference. Same kind of business.

[ 33 : 14 ] Sees the same woman. She comes running up to him. She says, I've got to talk to you. He's thinking, oh no. You know. You know. I mean, he's afraid of all kinds of things.

What is she going to misconstrue what happened? Is she going to, and she goes, that night that you said no and you kicked me out changed my life. She says, she confides that she had been abused as a child, that since her early teens the primary way she had related to men was sexually. And she's a very attractive woman and virtually no man had ever turned her down. And so what she had realized is that she had been caught in a cycle of reliving, recapitulating the trauma that she experienced as a child again and again and again and again.

And this is sometimes what happened. It's a form of slavery. But that encounter that night where he had the ability because of his submission to the Lord to say no actually catalyzed in her a deep soul searching that led her to God and to the beginning of healing in her life.

She said she had reconnected with the church community and that she had begun to heal. So you see freedom not only is something that is for us but it's something that freedom begets freedom

which begets freedom.

[ 34 : 33 ] You become the more you submit to the Lord and experience that freedom the more you can help and cultivate and catalyze that in other people. So very quickly to wrap up just two points about what this looks like practically.

Just two quick things I'll say. So you say what does this actually look like day to day? Two things. Community and spiritual disciplines. The community point the community point we already made the only way you can really live a life in submission to God is by living a life where you are submitted to other people.

You can't do one without the other. So this story that I just told you is a great example of that. You know if you've ever read the Odyssey and you know there's that place with the sirens and Ulysses wants to hear the sirens right?

But what's the deal with the sirens? The minute you hear them you lose all control and you just want to drive the ship up to where they are to see them and what happens?

The ships run aground on the rocks that are under the water and the ships sink and the sailors perish. Well Ulysses knows this. He says when I hear the sirens I'm going to lose my mind.

[ 35 : 43 ] So what does he do? You might know the story. He tells his crew to plug their ears. He says plug your ears and lash me to the mast. And then when I hear the sirens I'm going to start freaking out.

He says I'm going to start threatening you. I'm going to start saying crazy things to you. I'm going to threaten to kill you and to throw you overboard. I'm going to make all these horrible threats. I'm going to freak out. I'm going to be fighting. He says no matter what I say no matter what I say don't listen to me until we get out of the range of their call and then you can let me go.

See that's what this guy was doing at the conference. He began to feel the pull of desire the desire that wanted to subjugate him. And he said I cannot do this on my own.

So he calls he goes to these two guys he says lash me to the mast. And this is what we do in our lives. I know that I made vows to my wife but I know that there will be times when I am tempted to break those vows.

You know that you have values and priorities that matter to you but you know that time and time again you're going to be tempted to break those things. And that you're not capable of staying true to that on your own and so you gather a community around you and you say to the men or the women in your life you say if I start getting crazy if I start saying things that don't sound like my faith that don't sound like me then you need to lash me to the mast.

[ 37 : 05 ] You need to hold me accountable to these deeper vows that I've made. You need to keep me from doing crazy things. We all need those people in our lives. Community. Community. And then the last thing I'll say is this and we'll talk about this for the rest of Lent so this is sort of an introductory sermon.

It's understanding that the Christian life is one that is made up of discipline. It's one that is where we're called to cultivate virtue and cultivate a character that reflects the holiness to which we've been called.

So this is why we spend time reading scripture. This is why we pray regularly. This is why we get together and do what we're doing tonight. It's in all these ways we are not trying to make God happy.

We're doing this to not necessarily to have amazing spiritual experiences. The goal is the cumulative effect over time on our hearts. Habits that allow us to be more and more holy. Habits that allow us to experience more and more freedom. Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven we recognize that this is only possible because of your grace and love and so we ask that if nothing else we would be impressed in our hearts with the love that you've shown us in your Son Jesus Christ that it's his obedience not ours that gives us hope and yet help us to understand that it is our obedience that allows us to experience the fullness of that hope in our lives here and now.

[ 38 : 36 ] We pray this in your Son's holy name. Amen.