

Baggage: Let It Go

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[0 : 0 0] So again, good morning and happy new year. Time is flying by, isn't it? It's crazy. So I don't want to freak anyone out, but guess what?

Early February this year will be the start of my fifth year here. There's a couple people went, hmm? Right?

Yikes. Feels like I just started. My ears are still very wet back here. But it's just quite a journey. And so I feel like I've gotten to know many of you in so many ways, and yet I feel like we've just begun.

So I look forward to what God has in store for us yet. So I hope you all enjoyed time with friends and family over the holidays. That transition back to regular life, your regular schedule hasn't been too painful.

But it's that time of year again. Again, it's the time of year of New Year's resolutions. Seeking to make positive changes in our habits and maybe to also try and break out of some of the ruts that we've developed in our lives.

[1 : 1 2] So I don't know if you are a ratty kind of person, but I certainly am. So I recognize the things, the habits that I've gotten into that I need to break. But even more than seeking to create new habits, I believe we need to recognize old habits.

Recognize the things that we carry with us in our lives. And so we're going to explore this together over the next three weeks in our sermon series, Baggage. Because I'm going to encourage us that we need to live free and travel light.

What inspired me to explore this topic is partly the new year, partly the fact that we're going on a trip in a few weeks, and I'm thinking about packing and passports and all those things, causing me a little stress.

But there are things in our lives that we simply need to let go of in order to grow in our walk with Christ. In Ephesians chapter 4, verses 31 and 32, we're going to jump right in here.

Paul says, Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

[2 : 3 1] Can you recognize any of those negative attributes that Paul mentions in yourself? Because I know I definitely can. I'm not a brawler, but I am bitter at times.

I do get angry at times. I can become bitter or irritated or angry when circumstances don't turn out the way I would like. And maybe you can relate to that. Or when something happens to someone else that I really wanted to happen to me.

Right? Have you ever recognized that in yourself? Something happens to someone and you think, Good for you. Congratulations. Right? How come you won the lottery?

I need it more. So far too many people walk around carrying heavy baggage like this. Baggage from years of mistakes or hurt or pain or bad choices or other issues in their lives.

We tend to pack a bag full of junk and carry it around with us. My friends, in Jesus, there is no condemnation for past mistakes.

[3 : 41] We need to remember that. Because we are given the gift of eternal grace, eternal forgiveness. So it's time to unpack a lot of this worthless weight that we carry around and to learn to live free.

Does that sound okay? Anybody like to learn how to live free a little more? I know I would. Some of the baggage that we carry around with us can take the form of bitterness or anger.

Because of past pain or frustration or circumstances. And that bitterness and frustration or anger can spill over into our current and future relationships and create or compound collateral damage.

We have to let go. When I was in seminary, I would tell my professors, if they're familiar with, so you know the Disney movie Frozen, perhaps you'd rather not know the Disney movie Frozen.

The well-known song from that film is, of course, Let It Go. And many people wish that they had. So I told my profs that I'm trying to adopt a frozen theology in my life.

[4 : 55] And they said, what are you talking about? We should have bombed you out of here a long time ago. And I said, I'm trying to learn to let it go. And they rolled their eyes, but they said, and yet you have a point.

So we have to choose forgiveness. We have to choose repentance in order to be kind and tenderhearted and loving towards other people. Those are choices, conscious choices, we need to make in our lives.

And we're going to begin our new three-week series today by learning to let it go. So obviously, to begin letting go of something, we need to start with knowing what the issue is.

Know the issue. So obviously, we need to understand what the issue or problem is. And in the Ephesians passage we read a few minutes ago, Paul identifies seven specific things believers need to get rid of or to let go of in their lives.

And they are, say them with me if you want, bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, every form of malice.

[6 : 04] That's a nice catch-all. And unforgiveness. And honestly, this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the range of negative feelings or emotions or attitudes that we carry with us.

And maybe you can recognize that. But where do all of these negative emotions and attitudes come from? Where do they originate? Surely it's not like people wake up in the morning.

I don't know if you do. I don't. Do you wake up in the morning and decide to be bitter or angry? I'm going to have a really rotten day and I'm going to start by being mad about it.

Is that how you begin your day? Is that how you begin your week? Maybe on a Monday. But I don't think people do that. I've never heard anyone say, I sure hope someone does something awful to me today just so I can blow up at them and completely withhold forgiveness from them.

Is that a goal for you? Is that a New Year's resolution? I hope not. And yet if we're honest about it, there are many of us who silently hold bitterness and anger and envy and other negative emotions in our hearts directed at other people.

[7 : 14] If I gave you a minute to think about it, you could probably recognize that in your own life. So the first step to what we're looking at this morning is the first step to letting it go is identifying what you're carrying around.

That's where we need to begin. And so here are a few ideas to help get the identification process started. Bring this process to the Lord in prayer.

Ask for his help in revealing any areas in your life that may be holding you back. That's a heck of a first New Year's resolution. Lord, what is holding me back?

Show it to me and help me get it sorted out. Another opportunity to identify is bring the process to some trusted friends. This is scary sometimes.

Ask them to help you identify obvious areas of trouble or blind spots that you may be missing. Do you have those kinds of relationships where you can come to somebody and say, I think I'm having trouble.

[8 : 19] What am I not seeing that you might be? Can you be vulnerable with somebody like that? It's important to have those kinds of relationships. If you don't already have a professional counselor or an advisor in your life, then find one.

I'm working on it myself. Find one and schedule an appointment. And it's unfortunate there's a significant stigma against counseling and therapy in our culture.

Because the fact is, maybe you haven't thought about it, the Bible is very much for the idea of trusted counselors and advisors in our lives. Proverbs has three examples that I'll give you.

Proverbs 11, 14 tells us, Where there is no guidance, a people falls. But in an abundance of counselors, there is safety.

Proverbs 19, verse 20 says, Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end, you will be wise. Proverbs 20, verse 18 reminds us, Plans are established by seeking advice.

[9 : 31] And it goes on, but plans are established by seeking advice. It is unwise to not seek wise counsel. That's what the Bible is clear about, absolutely clear about.

And it's also a good habit to get into from time to time to consider some of the other ways that you can identify baggage in your life. Are there things that keep you up at night?

Are there things that cause you stress? If you can pause and say, Okay, Lord, what is that? What just created that knot in my stomach? Those are some of the other ways that you can identify.

If something makes your palms sweat, if something causes you to be angry or irritated or annoyed, ask the Lord to show you what it is and help you work through it.

Second, we need to bring it into the light. Once you've identified areas of baggage, the next obvious step is to do something about it, right?

[10 : 31] We don't just say, Oh, what's the problem? Oh, that's the problem. I'll just continue to worry about it. Not at all. Once you identify it, you need to work to get rid of it, to let it go.

But thanks be to God that his plan for you is much bigger than just letting go of something and being done with it. He's interested, my friends, in healing you from that.

He's interested in restoring you, in seeing you walk in freedom. He doesn't just want you to walk around more lightly with a spring in your step.

He wants you to be free of, healed from the damage that things have caused in your life. The baggage, the weight of the baggage has left on you. Listen to these words from 1 John 1, 6-9 and you can look it up in your Bible or there's Bibles in the pew in front, but I will read it as well.

Connor, do you want to flip that slide, please? Thank you. If we claim to have fellowship with him, yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

[11 : 42] But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin.

It continues a little bit later. If we confess our sins, you know this, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

In the book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul says that you've been rescued from the dominion of darkness. That's quite an image. God has literally come in and freed you, removed you from the impact that the darkness in your life can have on you.

You and I share an inheritance in the kingdom of light. Does that give you chills up your spine? It does for me. Things like bitterness and anger and malice and slander and unforgiveness, things that are rampant in our world and even in the church in lots of ways, these are qualities and characteristics of the world, not of the kingdom of God, not even close.

So as believers, it's so important for us to regularly evaluate ourselves, regularly consider the fruit that we're producing. When we identify and recognize rotten fruit, the baggage that we're lugging around with us, we better be able to bring it into the light.

[13 : 14] When you recognize something stinks, you want to figure out what the source is, what the root is, and dig it out. We're better able, once we recognize what's at work in our lives, the negative things, we're better able to confess those things, to ask for forgiveness, or in some cases, even extend forgiveness to others.

We've talked about this in the past. Has someone ever hurt you and you recognize either they don't realize they hurt you, they don't care that they hurt you, or they're totally oblivious to it.

Then it becomes your choice to either forgive them, move on and let go of that, or continue to, and I've heard this many times, let them live rent-free in your head.

One of the things that may cause you stress is a relationship where you recognize someone hurt you, they will never recognize that they have, they may certainly never apologize for it, but it's up to you if you want to be free from that or not.

Does that make sense? Ask God who is faithful and just, who forgives and purifies, and he'll lift the burden of negative baggage from our shoulders.

[14 : 34] But here's the key. We need to ask him, and then we need to let him do it. Do you get in God's way sometimes? I know I do.

Lord, would you do this? Oh, wait, I'll jump in and, do you do that? Lord, please help me get over this. Help me move past this. But boy, am I still annoyed.

Well, you can't have it both ways. You can't hang on and let it go at the same time. So doesn't this all sound amazing and wonderful, right? Who doesn't want to walk in the freedom of light, unhindered by baggage.

Don't we all want that? Isn't that what we want? To sleep peacefully at night? To have joy in our lives? So what do you do when your baggage is too heavy, too big, too difficult to work through on your own?

We need to trust the process. We need to recognize the process of letting go can be a long and difficult one at times.

[15 : 44] The process of identifying the baggage that you're carrying can take significantly longer than you may think it should, especially if you've been carrying it for a long time.

The process of coming into the light may not be a simple hop, skip, and a jump from one place to another because there may be times when the baggage just feels too heavy.

So friends, that's when we need to remind ourselves that this is not about us removing this problem on our own, removing the baggage on our own. Because remember what Scripture tells us, with God, most things are possible, some things are possible, thank you.

With God, all things are possible. That's it. We must be willing to trust the process, trust God's process.

1 Thessalonians 4, verse 3 says it clear as day. It is God's will that you should be sanctified. But we need to remember sanctification is not a once-and-done process.

[16 : 58] It is a lifelong process. God's work in you to make you more like His Son will likely take your entire life.

But the question is, are you willing to let Him work? Are you willing to ask Him to help you? Are you willing to recognize and repent from the things that are holding you back?

sanctification is not a single day. It's not a week. It's not a three-month spiritual retreat somewhere. It's not a 20-year journey in church leadership.

It's not any one of those things. It may be many. The process of sanctification is at work in every aspect of our lives. And God uses all kinds of situations and circumstances to constantly conform us into the image of His Son.

Do you understand? Does that make sense? So with that perspective in mind, that it may be a lifelong process, but it is God's process and it is at work, I have a question for you.

[18 : 05] Do you trust Him? Do you trust that God has a plan and purpose for your life? It's a very pastoral ceremony thing to say, right? But it is absolutely true.

Do you trust that no matter how difficult, how bad, how tough your circumstances may be, how nearly unbearable they may be at times, that He will work it all together ultimately for your good?

It's good words. Can you take it into your heart? Can you absorb that truth? Do you trust that there may be situations in your life that the enemy, Satan, may intend for evil, may tend to distract you, sidetrack you, even destroy you, and yet God will even use those things for good in your life if you let Him?

My friends, if you answered those questions with yes, then it's time to let go, begin to let go of the baggage in your life and let's get moving together because today is as good a day as any to say goodbye to the anger, the bitterness in your life that you've been holding on to.

It's a good day to let it all go. And so as we wrap up this morning, I want to draw your attention back to the words of Jesus in John chapter 10.

[19 : 35] I'll just read it for us. This is what Jesus explains to the disciples in John 10. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. And some translations say, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

My friends, the enemy, Satan, wants to steal and kill and ultimately destroy you and me and all of us.

Do you think he enjoys conflict in the world, in the church? He absolutely does. Satan is a loser. He knows he will lose.

But, he is more than happy to do whatever he can in the meantime. One of the ways Satan seeks to do this to you is by weighing you down with so much trouble and stress and anxiety and conflict and baggage in your life that you simply can't move forward.

[20 : 46] I know I've definitely felt these obstacles and weighed in my own life at times. But those are the times when we need to cry out to God and say, I can't do this on my own.

Jesus has come that we might experience abundant and full life in the light of the kingdom. Hear these powerful words, Hebrews 12, verses 1 to 3.

I love this passage. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. So, do you trust him?

[21 : 57] My friends, ask God to help you identify the baggage in your life that is weighing you down. Ask him to help you begin to let it go and drop it at Jesus' feet.

Run the race of freedom with me, with each other, with Christ as our focus, and seek to live in the light.

Amen? Amen.