

Naming Our Devices & Desires in a Culture of Addiction

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. I'll be reading today's scripture lesson from Psalm 16, verses 1 through 11.

Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, you are my Lord, I have no good apart from you. As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those who run after another God shall multiply. Their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup.

You hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel. In the night also my heart instructs me.

[1 : 14] I have set the Lord always before me, because he is at my right hand. I shall not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices. My flesh also dwells secure.

For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your Holy One see corruption. You make known to me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

The grass withers and the flowers fall. But the word of our God stands forever. Thank you, Susie. Good morning, everyone. My name is Andrew, and I'm one of the pastors here.

Mark, we're so glad to have you here, and so proud to be partnering with you in this mission to Japan. We believe here that missions exist where worship doesn't.

And we so hope that your labors will result in worship. Let the nations be glad, right? Let the nations be glad. We're going to open up God's word from Psalm 16 this morning, but let's go to the Lord in prayer first.

[2 : 16] Oh, God, we ask that your spirit would so descend upon us in this moment that we would be utterly convinced of the words that you speak to us in the scriptures and in Psalm 16.

Would we so believe that in your right hand are pleasures forevermore, and in your presence is the fullness of joy. Would you so convince us of that truth that we would pursue holy habits of grace, being near to you, intimate with you, close to you, God, in our daily lives?

Because we just can't get enough. Make us those kinds of trees. Make our church that kind of garden of trees, we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen. All right.

So this might sound kind of weird, but it might sound kind of creepy, but I'm just going to go with it. But the thing that's been on my mind the most lately is eighth and ninth grade boys.

All right. That's something that I've been thinking a lot about lately, eighth and ninth grade boys.

And it probably started about a month ago because I was invited to preach at a youth retreat.

[3 : 26] It was the retreat held by the church that I grew up at, the same youth retreat that I grew up attending. And so what happened was me and Amy, we got there. Some of our youth came as well. I didn't have to preach until the next morning, so we just kind of settled in, went to the dining hall to have dinner with everybody else.

And I was like, cool, I got this. All right. I'm just going to start mingling, get to know these students. There are about 110 students, sixth through 12th graders. No sweat. Should be fun.

Right. So I go and I sit down with this table of like four eighth grade boys, or they're about to be ninth grade boys. And I think to myself, oh man, these guys are going to get a kick out of having

dinner with the guest speaker.

Right. Can't wait to show them how cool I am. Right. But you know, like pretty much one minute into sitting with these eighth grade boys, these awkward eighth grade boys trying to chat with them, I was like, oh shoot.

Everything I'd prepared is totally not going to work. Like five out of the six talks that I thought I'd finished, you know, all my reheated, slightly modified Christchurch content that works here with you guys, I realized all of that was totally going to fall flat unless I made some major changes.

[4 : 43] And I knew this like conceptually as I was preparing. I did make a lot of changes to my content, but clearly not enough. Because when I sat down with those eighth to ninth grade boys in real life, it struck me like, yo, I might be the special guest preacher here, right?

Specifically chosen by their youth pastor to teach them about repentance. But come on, no one's here at camp for me. All right. Haylin, did you sign up to go to camp to listen to me?

No, you didn't, right? No one signed up to listen to some millennial dad give six talks about repentance. repentance, right? No one did that. I was the honored guest preacher, but I was so not the main event, right?

I was more like, I felt like I was the vegetable that they had to swallow in order to just enjoy everything else about camp. That's how I felt. So I ended up spending like way more time in my room during that retreat than I expected, just kind of reworking my material, really just forcing myself to focus on the question, how the heck do you like so capture the attention of eighth and ninth grade boys that they don't feel the urge during every single one of your talks to get up and use the bathroom?

All right. That was my goal. Or more seriously, I just thought to myself, how do I engage the heart of an eighth grade boy? How do I lead a ninth grade boy into a deeper relationship with Christ?

[6 : 04] Those are some of the questions that have been on my mind a lot lately, and they're hard questions. But, you know, even though being the speaker at that camp was probably one of the hardest and most humbling things I've done in a long time, it was actually a really good exercise for me as a pastor and a preacher to try to get into the mind of eighth and ninth grade boys, especially because we have six of them right here in our youth group, in our church, and I'll be leading them in a small group this year.

So this is where my mind's been at, eighth and ninth grade boys, and, you know, honestly, especially so this week, right? After the Appalachee High School shooting, Colt Gray, right, the shooter, he's 14 years old.

He just started his freshman year of high school. And a thought that I had this week was like, man, it's crazy that even in an eighth grade boy, there's already so much, like, destructive, life-taking potential.

It's so crazy to think about that, right? But, you know, another thought that I had was that, you know, man, if a broken family and a gun in the hand of a ninth grade boy can make him such a deadly, life-taking force in this world, how much more might the gospel, how much more might the power of God and the love of the Father in the heart of a ninth grade boy make him a delightful, life-giving impact on this world?

And this is a word to all of us, especially those of us who are ministering in our kids' ministry, in our youth ministry. We aren't glorified Christian babysitters. We're called to lead these kids, these youth, into deeper relationships with Christ and his church.

[7 : 41] But now, of course, the question is, well, how do you do that with, like, an eighth grade boy? How do you do that? And in trying to answer that question, I've been trying to reflect upon who I was as an eighth grade boy growing up in the church.

And honestly, when I think about that, Andrew, I'm like, okay, yeah, I use the bathroom a lot, too, during tons of sermons, all right? And I know for sure that my youth group leaders, they, like, pulled their hair out over me and my buddies because all we ever cared about was having a ton of fun. We never showed up to worship God or to listen to the teaching of the Bible. All we were there to do was play basketball, eat lots of junk food, laugh like crazy, hang out with girls, and throw dodgeballs at each other, right?

As an eighth grade boy, all that I lived for was pleasure and entertainment. I was a junkie for dopamine and delight. And my vision of the good life of paradise was fun and games and laughter all the time and endless entertainment and all the physical and emotional pleasures that I could think of.

To eighth grade, Andrew, heaven would be paved with hardwood floors so I could play basketball 24-7, all right? There would be my favorite TV shows streaming endlessly from everlasting to everlasting, and there would be a stream flowing through the city filled with nacho cheese.

[8 : 56] And I would love it. Because, again, all I lived for was pleasure, or at least pleasure as I knew it. And you might say that these temporary, material, consumable pleasures were even my God's.

My whole life was devoted to them. These pleasures were what I woke up in the morning, got out of bed to pursue. I hungered for them. I labored for them. I sacrificed for them because I believed that they would satisfy me, fulfill me, make me happy, and make me whole.

And now maybe you're expecting me to say that this is everything that's wrong with modern, western, contemporary culture and society, that we're all like eighth grade boys with an inordinate desire for delight and in passionate pursuit of pleasures at all costs, right?

Maybe you're expecting me to say what so many other religions say, what you've heard so many Christian pastors say, that self-control and self-denial and self-restraint and the suppression of our desires is the right way to live righteously in the presence of God.

But what I really want to say is what if the problem isn't so much that our desires are too strong, but actually that our desires are too weak and tragically misdirected?

[10 : 08] I love how C.S. Lewis puts it in his sermon, *The Weight of Glory*. He basically says that, you know, sure, the New Testament does talk a lot about self-denial, but the New Testament never talks about self-denial as an end in and of itself.

Lewis says it is right. It isn't a bad thing to desire our own good and to hope for enjoyment in this life. Lewis says that, yes, Jesus talks about, you know, denying yourself and taking up your cross, but the focus should actually be on what we get.

What does Jesus say? Deny yourself, take up your cross, and what? Follow me, Jesus says, right? See, Christianity isn't first and foremost about self-denial. It's about getting to be with Jesus.

So C.S. Lewis writes this. He writes, *Indeed, Eighth grade Andrew was far too easily pleased. Even 36-year-old Andrew is far too easily pleased. When I often dream of that city flowing with streams of nacho cheese, right? Even though that nacho cheese makes me have to wake up in the middle of the night because I'm so thirsty, right?*

[11 : 44] Reach for my water bottle. God instead promises us a better stream, the stream of living water, so that we might never have to thirst again. That's what we're supposed to desire.

So you see, the problem with the world is not that human's desire, but it's what humans desire instead of God. The problem is that we've exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and we've desired created things over the Creator.

Instead of crying out to the Lord like David does here in verse 1, *Preserve me, We lift up this prayer all the time.*

So all these different, like, creaturely things, and maybe not explicitly from our lips, but in our hearts, and with our hands, and through our habits, *We build a dependence upon these things, often without even thinking about it.*

So the question I want to ask this morning, the question I want us to consider is, *Do you believe, or rather, can you believe, in a God who offers Himself to you as the fullness of your joy, pleasures forevermore, and the fulfillment of your deepest desires?*

[13 : 20] *Can you trust that that is who God is? That He wants your joy? That He wants your pleasure? That He is your joy? And that He is your pleasure?*

See, Psalm 16 is King David's prayer of confidence that the answer is yes. Yes, we can trust Him to be the fullness of our joy and pleasures forevermore, the fulfillment of our deepest desire.

Or we could look at Psalm 16 as King David's prayer of defiance against all the other voices in the world, tempting him to believe that the answer is no, God doesn't want your joy. No, God doesn't want your pleasure.

God doesn't want to fulfill your deepest, purest, and highest desires. Others, Psalm 16 is the prayer of God's people fighting to believe that God is better, that God is enough, and that blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers, but whose delight is in what God says and in who God is.

Psalm 16 is a prayer of confidence, a declaration of faith, fighting to believe what it says at the very end of this psalm, in verse 11, *you, God, make known to me the path of life and not death.*

[14 : 35] In your presence there is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. This is what Psalm 16 is about.

It's basically saying in the words of John Piper, if you think that God is incapable of making you happy forever, you don't know God. You don't know God.

For what is fuller than fullness, what is longer than forevermore, nothing can outdo God in filling you with all the life-giving joy and pleasure that you were created to experience in relationship with Him as His beloved child.

Now, if you're new here today, Jonathan started us last week in this series in the Psalms. He started with Psalm 1, and the specific question we're asking as we go through the Psalms this fall is, what are the holy habits of grace that God's people should weave into our lives in order that we might be a garden full of trees planted by the stream of living water, yielding fresh, juicy fruit in season and never withering?

What does it look like to be a deeply rooted, flourishing tree that is constantly being nourished by the life-giving presence of God? What kinds of holy habits keep us in communion with Christ who is the vine?

[15 : 56] That's our focus this fall. And as we go through these holy habits, I'm going to keep warning us again and again and again as often as I can that the danger in a series like this on spiritual disciplines and on holy habits is to think of these holy habits as just some spiritual techniques to practice in a transactional relationship with God.

Like just some things we do to manipulate God into blessing us, put quarters into the slot machine, right? Like if I say my prayers, God will make sure my children are going to be okay and have a nice day at school.

If I practice the Sabbath faithfully, if I don't work on the Lord's Day, then my business will make even more money than if I disobeyed the Sabbath rule. But see, the point of these holy habits is not to get stuff from God.

It's to get God. It's to be with God. The point of being a tree with deep roots in God's stream of living water isn't just to enjoy the fruit, but to enjoy the union and communion that exists between a healthy tree and a fresh flowing stream.

The point of our holy habits is for us to enjoy God, really to know the pleasure of being fully human. This is core to what we believe at Christ Church. Did you know this is one of the very first teachings, one of the very first official doctrinal standards that the church has in our Constitution?

[17 : 15] Westminster Shorter Catechism, question one, what is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This is what we're after in this series on holy habits.

Not some rule-abiding, super-disciplined, self-controlled robot Christians. We're after joyful children of God who intimately know the pleasure of communion with their Father in heaven.

But now maybe this sounds nice and ideal, but it's really hard for us to imagine enjoying holy habits in the presence of God.

It's hard for us to imagine enjoying this habitual communion with this God who's so far away. And I mean, this is who I was when I was an eighth-grade boy. That's how I felt. Even when I wanted to try to grow as a Christian, grow in my relationship with God.

I remember in eighth grade, I was at another camp, and I was just challenged to give Jesus the steering wheel of my life. This is before Carrie Underwood's song, right? But somehow it clicked for me.

[18 : 19] That picture, it clicked for me. Like, yo, Jesus gave His life for me. I should live mine for Him. So I started to try to engage in these holy habits, to read the Bible, to pray, to spend time with Him.

But I could never follow through with any consistency. Because again, what I was truly living for was fun and pleasure. And reading the Bible weren't that to me, right?

And maybe that's how a lot of you feel about all these different kinds of holy habits. Not really excited about these holy habits that God invites us into. Skeptical that they'll lead to pleasure and joy and just fullness in God.

And if that's you, I totally get it. But what I want to suggest is that maybe the problem isn't that the holy habits, maybe the problem isn't that Christian spiritual disciplines are boring.

Maybe the problem is that we're boring. Maybe the problem is that we become too easily satisfied with lesser habits that have conditioned us to enjoy lesser pleasures.

[19 : 20] Maybe the problem is that we've become the people in verse 4 habitually running after other gods, habitually offering up to them our own life and blood offerings. See, whether or not you're interested in the holy habits or the Christian spiritual disciplines, we all have habits.

We all have habits. But I think for a lot of us, our habits and our daily rhythms are largely unexamined, right? I think if we examine them, we'd realize how much they are shaping our hearts and shaping our desires and even shaping what we find to be enjoyable and pleasurable. And I think if we examine them more closely, more intentionally, we'd also realize that these habits and these rhythms are not just some neutral patterns that we've simply chosen to adopt, but they're habits and rhythms forged within a culture with a lot of backward values and a lot of empty promises.

If you haven't picked up any of Justin Whitmell Early's books, I highly recommend his book, *The Common Rule*. And if you are parents, the book that I really recommend to you is *Habits of the Household*.

That book's money, all right? Gotta get that one. But today I want to share with you a good-sized chunk of what he says about our habits and life rhythms in his book, *The Common Rule*. And in it, he actually challenges us to see our daily life habits, what we do as soon as we get out of bed, as liturgies, as patterns of worship that are forming us more than we even realize.

[20 : 48] So listen to what he says. This is a long chunk, so bear with me. This is what Justin Whitmell Early writes. As far as our habits go, the invisible reality is this.

We are all living according to a specific regimen of habits, and those habits shape most of our life. A study from Duke suggested that as much as 40% of the actions we take every day are not the products of choice, but of habits.

And just because we don't choose our habits doesn't mean we don't have them. On the contrary, it usually means someone else chose them for us who probably doesn't have our best interests in mind.

Take your work schedule or your social media scrolling, for example. Think about your internet history or how you spent your mornings last week. Think about the time you spend with your family versus the time you spend looking at a screen during a normal day.

These things define vast portions of our lives. And while we would like to think we've carefully chosen them, most often we haven't even given them a second thought.

[21 : 49] Most often we just swim along with those around us. And much more often than we would like to admit or even understand, we are nudged into those choices by those who want to make money off the patterns of our daily life.

This wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for the fact that habits form much more than our schedules. They form our hearts. Calling habits liturgies may seem odd, but we need language to emphasize the non-neutrality of our day-to-day routines.

Our habits often obscure what we're really worshiping, but that doesn't mean we're not worshiping something. We have a common problem. By ignoring the ways habits shape us, we've assimilated to a hidden rule of life, the American rule of life, which forms us in all the anxiety, depression, consumerism, injustice, and vanity that are so typical in American life.

See, Justin Early is trying to show us that we are all being formed, and if not by holy habits, then probably by many unholy and unexamined habits that we probably just see as neutral and natural. But as King David warns in verse 4 here, many are the sorrows of those who run after another god. So a question for all of us is what habits in our lives are actually acts of worship toward false gods?

[23 : 12] Like, for example, what are your phone habits? And what do they reveal about your desires and your beliefs and how you view the world? And I gotta admit, my phone habits are terrible.

All right? This is a very embarrassing example, maybe even inappropriate, but we're gonna go with it. Just yesterday, I had to use the bathroom. All right?

So I went into the bathroom, I closed the door, I sat down, and as I started to go, it occurred to me, oh, shoot, I forgot my phone, right? And I was like, mad at myself.

I was mad at myself, like, dude, you're being so unproductive right now, you could be cleaning out your inbox, what if you get a great idea for your sermon? Should you yell to Chelsea to get your phone for you?

What should you do? Or should you just suck it up and just get through the moment? Like, no joke, that was my thought process. And I'm realizing that my phone habits are impressing upon my heart and my mind the false and idolatrous belief that productivity and efficiency and time maximization should be my highest values, like even over hygiene, apparently, right?

[24 : 24] But seriously, think about it. For many of us, our phone habits indicate that many of us think that we're actually quite like God. We think we're omnipotent, we think we're all-powerful because our phone can help us accomplish so much.

We think we are omniscient that we're all-knowing because our phone can deliver us so much knowledge, right? We think that we can be omnipresent, we think we can be everywhere because our phone allows us to be everywhere, we can be on the top of Mount Everest through our phones, right?

Even if, when honestly, it makes us less present to the people in our own house, in our own families, right? One of my favorite writers, Alan Noble, he writes this, I think he's a wonderful commentator on our cultural moment.

He writes, the beauty of using my iPhone as my alarm clock is that when I reach over to turn it off, I'm only a few more taps away from the rest of the world. Before I'm even fully awake, I've checked my Twitter and Facebook notifications and my email and returned to Twitter to check my feed for breaking news.

Before I've said good morning to my wife and children, I've entered a contentious argument on Twitter about Islamic terrorism and shared a video of Russell Westbrook dunking in the previous night's basketball game.

[25 : 34] Or maybe for some of you, your phone reinforces to you that you can and should be entertained at every moment in your life. Maybe that's the implicit belief that your heart is holding on to. Standing in line at the grocery store, waiting for your kids at their sporting events on your phone rather than watching them play, doom scrolling, waiting for my sermon to be over, right?

Pastor John Mark Comer writes, how do you pray? How do you read the scriptures? Sit under a teaching at church or rest well on the Sabbath when every chance you get you reach for the dopamine dispenser that is your phone.

So do you see how our habits shape our hearts and the people that we're becoming and even what we find to be pleasurable and enjoyable and worth our time?

See, this is exactly why we need holy habits to reshape, to reform our hearts, to recalibrate what we find to be delightful and pleasurable even if at first these holy habits seem undesirable and inauthentic.

The philosopher Jamie Smith writes, not all sins are decisions. Once you realize that we are not just thinking things but creatures of habit, you'll then realize that temptation isn't just about bad ideas or wrong decisions, it's often a factor of deformation and wrongly ordered habits.

[26 : 53] And overcoming them requires more than just knowledge, it requires re-habituation. A reformulation of our loves. And see again, that is the goal with these holy habits.

Not simply being able to say, I prayed, I read my Bible today, check. It's to experience God. It's to experience God like David experiences God here in Psalm 16.

It's to love and to treasure God as our highest good. I love what David says in verse 2, I say to the Lord, you are my Lord. I have no good apart from you.

For King David, Yahweh is his Lord and Yahweh is his good and that is not at odds at all with each other but actually integrally tied together.

God is his Lord and God is his treasure. God is his everything. God is his good. Then in verse 5, he says, the Lord is my choice portion, right? The only cup I'm interested in drinking from, the one who holds the world in his hands, the creator and sustainer of the world, the writer of history, he is the one who holds my lot.

[27 : 56] He personally holds my lot in life within his almighty yet gentle hands and he has never let me down. Verse 6, that's what it says there. He has never let me down. I love how it says the lines have fallen, right?

They've fallen in pleasant places. Like David doesn't say, the Lord God has helped me, he's given me strength to move my own lines exactly where I want them to be, to make my life turn out exactly how I planned.

No, it's completely passive here and even surprising, the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. My life has turned out just fine within the Lord's plan.

Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance, more beautiful than I deserve and more beautiful than I could ever have imagined for myself and that's the kind of God that I have is what he's saying here.

See, David here in Psalm 16, he's practicing the presence of God. He's practicing the presence of God. His whole life and his outlook are saturated by the presence and the guidance and instruction and counsel of God even at night.

[28 : 57] Verse 7, I bless the Lord who gives me counsel. In the night also my heart instructs me. Verse 8, I have set the Lord always before me. Basically, I live as if I'm always in the presence of God, as if God is always in front of me, also at my right hand.

He's my ultimate helper, my ultimate strength. In fact, I am completely dependent upon him and because of this, I know that I will never be shaken because I'm in the presence of God because he's at my right hand and the result, verse 9, is this, therefore, my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices, literally in the Hebrew, my glory rejoices, my flesh also dwells secure.

Verse 10, for you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your holy ones see. Now, how could David say such a thing? He died. How could he say such a thing? Was this just hyperbole?

Many of the more liberal, modern commentators want to say that David either was just speaking in hyperbole or that he was just speaking wrongly here. But we know from Peter in Acts chapter 2 and from Paul in Acts chapter 13 that there's a better way to read this psalm.

According to the apostles, David was prophesying about Jesus, crucified and risen, the most holy one who went to the grave but rose and did not see corruption.

[30 : 20] David was prophesying that because of what God was going to do through his offspring, Jesus, David too, by faith in that offspring, he knew that his body was secure, that his soul would not ultimately be abandoned to the realm of the dead.

And this promise that David rejoices in here, it's a promise for all of us. It's a promise for everyone who is united with Christ by faith. This is what God offers us, ultimate security, freedom from abandonment and death and decay.

It can be yours in Christ. He is the only God who can offer this to us. Only Jesus, only the resurrected Son of God has made known to the world, verse 11, the path of life.

Only the resurrected and ascended Lord seated on the throne on high can guarantee us our deepest, highest, and purest desires. Because it's only in his resurrection presence, which we will celebrate here at this table, that there is fullness of joy.

It's only in his right hand, his nail-pierced hand. It's only by his pain that he has secured for us pleasures forevermore. And this is the gospel. This is the good news.

[31 : 30] Not only that God offers us abundant life, fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore, but that he passionately wants it for us and that he passionately pursues it for us.

So passionately that he gives himself over for us and to us in Christ. At his own expense. That's the gospel. See, every other counterfeit God, every other counterfeit God makes us pay the cost.

Every other God makes us chase after them, but not the God revealed to us in Christ. Verse 4, For many are the sorrows of those who run after another God.

Many are the sorrows of those whose gods make them pour out again and again sacrificial drink offerings of blood day by day with no end in sight. But the gospel says, Many are the joys of those whose God runs after them.

Those whose God does not cry out for more of their blood but offers his own blood. This is the only kind of God whose name is worthy of our lips.

[32 : 30] And that's what we get to celebrate. That's what we get to proclaim at this table where we will rightfully and joyfully take his name and his body and his blood upon our lips and we will taste and see that he is good.

And we will remember the pain of his nail-pierced right hand which secured for us pleasures forevermore. Pleasures even enough to satisfy the eighth grade boy in each of our hearts.

Amen. Let's pray. God, we want to delight ourselves in you. Delight yourselves in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.

That's what the psalmist says. God, be our desire. Be our delight. Allow us to know the pleasure and the joy of habitual communion with you and make us that garden of trees planted by your stream of living water.

Lord, we desire to be with you and for those of us who don't, I pray that they'd want to want to want you, God. Because in your presence is the fullness of joy and at your right hand, your nail-pierced hand in Christ, there are pleasures forevermore.

[33 : 52] God, help us to believe that with all our hearts. Draw us near to you. Thank you for running after us and we ask that you continue to do so because that's what we need as your people, as your children.

In Jesus' name, amen.