

We All Want to Change (and We All Are)

Well, good morning everybody. If you have a bible, go ahead and turn with me to the book of **Luke 6**—it'll take us just a bit, but we'll get there eventually. Hope you guys had a good Christmas and New Year—I know it was likely at least a little bit different this year for most of us, but hope it was good nonetheless. Today, to *kick off* the New Year as a church family, we are entering into a **new teaching series** called **Formation**—which, believe it or not, is not named after the Beyonce song. That would've been cool—I'm sure there are churches out there that have done that. But *our* series, rather, is about the idea of *spiritual formation*—which is just a fancy term for how we *change* to become more like Jesus. This series, at its core, is a series about **how we change**.

Now that question right there (in its most generic form) is one that an awful lot of **people want the answer to**. *Especially* this time of year. Many of us, right now, are in the process of deciding what we want to *change* about ourselves in the new year, in the form of New Year's Resolutions. In the next few days, some of us will start doing our best to become healthier, better, less anxious, less stressed, and maybe even *slimmed down* versions of ourselves. Now, some of us are way more into that stuff than others, and some of us are way more *successful* at it than others. But there's just something about a new calendar year that just whispers to us, “this is your fresh start.” “This is your chance to become different.” “This is your shot at *change*.” Usually, this time of the year, that's one of the most pressing things on people's minds.

This year, it might be the **second most pressing** question, right after “how do we make sure 2021 is absolutely nothing like 2020 was?” But it's a popular question nonetheless. But **whether it's this time of year, or just *always* on our minds, we all want to change**. And for followers of Jesus, that question gets even more specific. For us, it's not just that we want to change *in general*, but that we want to change *specifically* to become more like *Jesus*. *That's* what we're after—change in that particular direction.

But I think all of that prompts the *question*, **how do we actually do that?** How do we *change*? How do we *become* these new-and-improved versions of ourselves? That's the million dollar question. If we knew *that*, we'd be a lot more successful in our efforts. And believe it or not, the bible actually speaks to that very question on more than a few occasions—it is very interested in helping us figure out how we change. And that, really, is what we're going to dissect for a bit this morning.

But first, we need to quickly speak to a popular *notion* of how we change. Some people—quite a lot of people, in fact, would insist that **we change primarily through what we think**. Meaning that if you want to change, you primarily just need to get the right *information* into your *mind*. This has been the predominant way of thinking about change in our country, really since the Enlightenment three hundred or so years ago. One of the people who originated this philosophy was a man named Rene Descartes. He believed that human beings were “thinking things”—that we are essentially, just brains on a stick.

But you **don't have to know anything** about Rene Descartes or philosophy to believe this. For example, I submit to you this *R. Kelly* lyric for your consideration (yes, if you're wondering—we are covering the philosopher Descartes and R. Kelly in one teaching—you're welcome for that). The philosopher *R. Kelly* once said this:

If I can see it, then I can do it. If I just believe it, there's nothing to it. I believe I can fly.

That's from a song called “***I Believe I Can Fly***,” a song written exclusively for the movie, *Space Jam*. Which, as I understand it, is a *documentary* about a time that Michael Jordan used his basketball superpowers to fight off an invading alien race. But here's the reason I bring it up: that line from that song is a perfect summation of the belief that we change primarily through what we *think*. Did you hear **the logic he used**? He said, and I quote, “if I can see it (meaning, if I can *envision* something in my *mind*), then I can *do* it.” “If I just *believe* it (meaning, intellectually agree with something in my mind), there's nothing to it.” So **R. Kelly too, even though he may not sit down and read philosophers like Descartes every night—he nonetheless agrees that we change through what we think.**

And even though **most of us wouldn't say that we got it from Descartes or R. Kelly**, we tend to believe this too. This is just how we are trained to think: that if we just “set our mind” to something, if we *learn* something with our minds, then transformation will automatically follow. You will hear that message over and over again in a dozen different ways. **Which means this is probably what you believe, whether you realize you believe it or not.** We tend to operate by this philosophy when it comes to how we *change*: that change happens primarily in our *minds*.

If we want to become a **healthier** person, we read a blog post or ten on dieting. If we want to be a more **disciplined** person, we subscribe to a self-help podcast. If we want to be more **organized**, we follow ten different Instagram accounts that post organizing tips.

If we want to change, we assume that we just need to get the right *information* into our minds. Because we believe change primarily happens through what we *think*. That's the assumption.

And we have very much **adopted this philosophy of change within the Church**. We also assume that the way people become more like *Jesus*, is through how or what they *think*. We've concluded that the best way to help people grow is through *information transfer*: sermons, bible studies, Sunday school classes. I mean, think about the way *this room is set up*. I'm up here on a stage, spewing information about God and the bible, and you guys are out there listening, maybe taking notes, *taking in* that information, in hopes that it helps you or changes you in some meaningful way. We've decided inside the church as well, that if we want people to *change*, the main thing we need to do is put more *information*—more right *thinking* about God—into their *minds*.

Now, **this philosophy** on how we change **isn't wrong**. It's not *incorrect*. How we *think* is one important *component* in how we change. But I think **it would be a mistake to believe that we change only through what we think**. Simply put, **information alone is not sufficient to change a person**. And I think if we stopped to think about it, we actually know that. For instance, how many of us *know* that working out more regularly would make us healthier and more fit, and still do not work out regularly (no need to raise your hands)? How many of us *know* that spending less money on unnecessary things is the right and better thing to do, and still have not spent less money on those things? Right. So **what we're saying there** is that we have the right *information*—we have the right *thinking* in our minds—and yet somehow it is not leading to *transformation* in our lives. Knowing the right things did not magically turn us into different kinds of people. That's because *information* does not inherently lead to change.

And even as it relates to *spiritual* transformation, how many of us have **known somebody** who seemed to have all sorts of right *thinking* about God—they knew their theology backwards and forwards, they could teach a *graduate-level theology class*—and yet that person's *life* did not look remotely like *Jesus*? Their posture towards others was mean and cruel and judgmental and self-righteous, despite all the right *thinking* about grace and mercy and compassion and love that they had in their minds? Right. That's because *information* does not inherently lead to *transformation*.

So it would seem, then, that when it comes to how we *change*, **we actually need something more** than right *thinking*. Right thinking is *great*—I'm a fan—but it would seem that it's not enough on its own. So what else do we need? That is **where Luke 6 comes**

in. So with all that in mind, let's take a look. ~~Just FYI—I'm gonna read from the NIV translation today rather than the ESV. Just didn't want that to throw anybody off. But take a look with me in Luke 6, starting in v. 46. This is Jesus talking, and he says this:~~

[46] "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

So that's obviously a **rhetorical question**. Jesus is implying that there is a **contradiction** at play in those who call him "Lord," and yet do not do the things that he says they should do. "Lord" was a term of respect, acknowledging *submission* to the person you were speaking to. Sort of like "sir" today but a little stronger. So calling a person "lord," and then blatantly disregarding the things they were telling you to do was a contradiction in terms. Jesus calls that for what it is. Then he continues, v. 47:

[47] As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice [if you like circling or underlining things in your bible, go ahead and underline that phrase "puts them into practice"], I will show you what they are like. [48] They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. [49] But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

So here, Jesus draws out **a contrast** (if you were around when we covered the identical passage to this one in Matthew, the next minute or two will probably sound familiar to you). The **contrast is between two different types of people: one person who hears what Jesus says to do and puts it into practice, and another person who hears what Jesus says and does not put it into practice**. Jesus says that those two types of people will experience very different *life outcomes* from one another: it will go *well* for the person who *does* put it into practice, and not *well at all* for the person who doesn't.

Now, notice that **the contrast here isn't** between the man who *hears* Jesus, and the man who *doesn't* hear him. It's not between the man who possesses the right *information* about God, and the man who doesn't. It's between those who *hear and practice*, and those who only *hear*. Which means that apparently to Jesus, **information alone is not sufficient to change us**. Otherwise, *both* people in the story would've been in great shape. After all, they both had the same *information* inserted into their minds. They both had the same message delivered to them.

But Jesus is saying that it is **not enough to just possess certain thinking about God. That's a great and necessary place to start—but in and of itself, it will not change you.** It will not lead to lasting, noticeable transformation in your life. What *will* change you is *knowing* those things about God and *then putting them into practice.* **To actually change, it's not enough just know things—you have to do something with what you know. And not just do something with it one time, but “put it into practice”—you have to act on it over and over and over again.**

To put that another way, a central piece of how we change is through our habits: the things we *do* over and over again. A guy by the name of James K.A. Smith wrote a fantastic book a few years ago about all of this titled *You Are What You Love*—I would *highly* recommend that book to you. In the book, he famously describes all of this with this memorable little sentence. He says, *the things we do, do things to us.* There is a direct connection, in other words, between *repetition* and *formation.* We become the people we are largely based on the things we *do* over and over and over again.¹

Let me try and illustrate it to you like this. When I was about twelve years old, my dad and I walked into a **Hardees** for an early morning breakfast (which is a sentence that only makes sense in the 1990s). We walked up to the counter, and my dad ordered a biscuit and a black coffee. And I thought that sounded like a grown man thing to do, so I *also* ordered a biscuit and a black coffee. Keep in mind I was *twelve* years old. So my dad understandably looked over at me and said “Kent—have you *had coffee* before?” To which I said “have I *had coffee*? Psh. Of course I have.” Funny thing was...I had *not.* But my dad just let it happen. So we sat down with our food, I took the first sip of my coffee and immediately spit it out onto the table—both because of the temperature and the taste. Because for most people at least, coffee is what you call an *acquired* taste.

At **age twelve, I did not inherently like coffee.** *But* here's what happened over the next few years. My dad started showing me how to doctor my coffee up with cream and sugar to the point where it essentially tastes like hot chocolate. And every morning on my way to school, I would have a traveler mug full of very hot chocolate-like coffee that I would drink. Every single morning. To the point that eventually, I started doing less and less cream and sugar, to where the coffee actually tasted more and more like *coffee.* To where eventually, I became the type of person who not only didn't *hate* coffee, who not only *enjoyed* coffee, but now I am a coffee *drinker.* I am the type of person who loves to drink coffee. **A transformation of sorts has occurred to where I am now a**

¹ This is paraphrased from a fantastic quote by a guy named R.J. Snell, in his book, *Acedia & its Discontents.*

fundamentally different kind of person than I was at age twelve. The *habit itself*, practiced over and over again, *changed* a part of who I was. Does that make sense? **Our habits have the ability to turn us into different types of people over time.**

Now, something that is so important for you to know: **this is happening in your life all the time, whether you realize it is happening or not. You have habits, right now, in your life, that are slowly transforming you into a certain type of person.** For better or worse, in big ways and small ways. The question for all of us is not “are we being formed?” The question is “what are we being formed *into*?” You see, **formation is not a spiritual thing as much as it’s a human thing.** Every moment of our lives, everything we do or don’t do over and over again is forming us in a certain direction.

When you **come home from work each day**, immediately turn on TV or Netflix and watch for one, two, or six hours—that habit is *forming you into* a certain type of person. When you wake up each morning, immediately reach for your phone, and spend twenty minutes scrolling through Instagram before you do anything else, *that is forming you into* a certain type of person. When you have a glass of red wine every night before you go to bed, when you stop to get a fast-food breakfast every morning on the way to work—all of those habits are *forming you into* a certain type of person.

Or **a little more seriously**, when you quit your job every time your job is mildly frustrating or difficult to you, *that is forming you into* a certain type of person. When you write off friends every time they engage you on an aspect of your life you don’t want to be engaged on, *that is forming you into* a certain type of person. When you go and find a new *church* every time you get kind of bored or tired of your current one, *all of that is forming you, over time, into* a certain type of person.

We often think that our habits are formed out of the things that we love. This is why we say things like “well I’m just lazy, and that’s why I like to watch so much TV.” “Well, I just get bored easily, and that’s why I don’t like to stay at one job or in one city for very long.” And that may be true to a certain extent. **But what I’m trying to show you is it also works the other way around: we are often lazy because we watch so much TV. You easily get bored because you have spent a lot of your life not staying in one place for very long. Our habits, over time, form us into certain types of people. The things we do, do things to us.** To use a well-known business principle, *your system is perfectly designed to give you the results that you are currently getting.* If you currently have a desire and an affection for something, it’s largely

because the habits in your life have been set up in such away that produced that affection.

So—and here’s where this becomes **so immensely practical for followers of Jesus** in the room (look right at me)—**if we want to become the type of people who look more like Jesus, our habits are a massive part of how we will get there.** If you will change your habits, *you* will change as a result. If you *will not* change your habits, you likely will not become much more like Jesus at all. So the question we want to ask with this series each New Year is “what habits can we integrate into our lives that will form us in a *helpful* direction?” What *helpful* habit can we leverage to help us become more and more like Jesus? Because remember: it’s great to *know correct* things about Jesus. That’s important. But if we want to *change*, we still have to *put what we know into practice*.

So each year, at the *beginning* of the year specifically, we focus on one particular “habit” or “practice” that helps us do just that. Over the years, Christians have often referred to these as “spiritual disciplines.” You may hear us say “disciplines,” “habits,” and “practices”—we’re going to use those words fairly interchangeably. But the point is that each year, we want to learn or re-learn one practice that, over the long haul, can help us become more like Jesus.

And **this year**, we’re going to focus on the practice of *rest*. We’ll be looking at how the Holy Spirit uses *rest* to form us, over the long haul, into the image of Jesus. How does *that* sound? Does anybody want some *rest* in 2021? So that’s our pitch to you: alongside whatever other New Year’s resolutions you are or aren’t making in 2021, I want to ask you to consider making *rest* a priority in your life.

And here’s part of the reason. I don’t know if you’ve thought about it like this, but there **will likely not be a better time** *in our lives* to learn how to rest than right now. I mean, for most of 2020, life for most of us has *had* to be substantially *slower*, right? I know there are exceptions to that—medical professionals and the like—but for the vast majority of us, our life has had more *margin* in it, in 2020, than it ever will again.

Now, over the next six to twelve months, that’s **going to slowly change**. There’s now a vaccine, that vaccine is going to make its way to more and more people—and things are going to (slowly) start returning to some version of normal. And praise *God* for that reality. But that means the temptation is going to be to immediately ramp your life back up to its previous levels of hurry, overbusyness, and exhaustion. But *right now*? Almost all of us have an incredible, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn how to integrate rest

into our lives. And then build life back around that as things return to normal. That's one reason I think right now is the perfect time to learn how to rest.

Now, all that said, **some of us might be thinking**, "okay, but is *rest* really something we have to spend a whole *series* learning how to do? Like isn't *rest* just a matter of taking some time off? How complicated could that be, really?" Well it depends on what you mean by *rest*. If you just mean "not doing anything," you're probably right: that doesn't take a whole lot of instruction to learn how to do. But **if by "rest," you mean the *biblical* kind of rest—the kind of rest that restores and refreshes and replenishes you at a soul-level, that's a little different.** If you want the kind of rest that turns you into a new, different, better type of human being—that leads you towards physical and emotional and mental and spiritual health—it's a little more involved.

Let me try and **show you what I mean** from the bible. Turn with me backwards a handful of pages to **Matthew, chapter 11**. Before we're done today, I want to take a look at one of the more popular passages in the bible about rest. To a lot of us, this passage will sound pretty familiar. But I want us to focus on one part of it that we sometimes tend to read right over. So take a look with me at Matthew 11, starting in **v. 28**. This is Jesus talking, and he says this:

[28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Okay. Now I won't make you raise your hands on this, but let me just ask: **how many of us in the room feel** *heavy-laden*? How many of us feel *burdened*? How many of us feel *exhausted* by life as it stands? Especially after this past year. I mean, 2020 was just that kind of year for a *lot* of us, wasn't it? I don't know of many people at all who weren't a little more worn out than normal by the end of last year.

And for a lot of us, the **2020 stuff was on top of our already-exhausting lives**. We've got the job, the career, the degree or degrees we're working towards. We've got the roommates or the boyfriend or girlfriend, or the wife or husband—maybe the kids. And then on top of all *that*, we've got all the things we know we *should* be doing that we just don't ever seem to get to: cleaning the house, organizing our lives, working out, eating better, keeping up with family and friendships. We feel like we're being a bad friend to this person in this way, and we're being a bad mom or dad or son or daughter-in law in

these ways. We're being a bad student or a bad employee in those ways. All of that can just be exhausting.

And for at least a lot of us that follow Jesus, there sometimes can be this **religious guilt** that we drape over the top of everything else: we feel like we're not reading the bible enough, we're not praying enough, we're not doing enough good things in the world, we're not telling enough people about Jesus. So now we don't just have regular burnout, we have religious burnout as well. I know a lot of you are tracking with me when I say that it can all be just plain *exhausting*.

And **into the midst of all of that, Jesus says** to you and to me, "*I will give you rest.*" I will give you *rest*. "Come to me," he says, and you can find reprieve, release, restoration from all of that. I love the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases these verses from Matthew 11 in **the Message translation**. He puts it like this:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

Just one verse earlier *in* Matthew 11, Jesus prefaces all this by saying that **"no one comes to the Father** except the Son and anyone the Son chooses to reveal him to." So true, soul-restoring rest comes only from knowing God the Father through Jesus. When you enter into a relationship with God made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, you gain access to rest *for your soul*. You find *shelter* from the burnout and exhaustion that is life in the modern world. If you're here this morning and you don't know Jesus, if you don't hear anything else I say, hear that: **true rest comes through Jesus**. Rest is *available* to each of us, *there*.

But I do want you to **notice that Jesus doesn't say** that rest comes *automatically*, just as a result of knowing Jesus. Look back at the passage with me. So in v. 28, Jesus says, "*come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" Simple enough. But then he circles back and says the same thing with a little more detail. **Verse 28 tells us what is available to us, while verse 29 tells us how we access it.** Verse 29 tells us that this **rest comes through taking Jesus' "yoke"** upon us, and "learning from him." Did you see that? He says *that* is how we will find the rest on offer to us—by taking on his "yoke."

Now, when Jesus talks about a “yoke,” that’s not talking about eggs (that’s *yolk*). The word “yoke” was shorthand in Jesus’ day for a rabbi’s set of teachings or practices. To “take on a rabbi’s yoke” was to take on his way of approaching life. It was to model *your* way of life after *his*. It was to imitate him—not just in the things that he knew or believed, but in the way he structured his day-to-day rhythms. So Jesus says “if you want to find rest for your souls, you need to **model your life after mine**”. **If you want to access the life that is available through Jesus, you need to adopt the *lifestyle* of Jesus.** You need to make his rhythms of life, *your* rhythms of life.

So rest is **not just about taking some time off every once in a while, or about taking a vacation, or about vegging out for a day or two each week. It’s about restructuring your life around the things that Jesus says lead to rest. It’s **not just about** how you approach your time or day or week off—it’s about how you approach the entire *rhythm of your life*.** I think a lot of us want to keep our lives full of noise and activity and overwork and busyness, and then want to just read a passage like this one and go “rest, please, Jesus.” And him just, “ahmmmmmm,” give it to us magically. But that’s not how it works. Jesus says, “if you want rest for your souls, you have to come and *learn from me*.” Structure your life the way I’ve structured mine. Go about your life the way I say life works, and then you will find *rest*.”

Maybe this will help. I want you to imagine that you’re back at your **first day of school**. And let’s say when you show up, your teacher starts handing you all the things you’re going to need. They hand you a couple textbooks, a three-ring binder, a few folders, some pencils, some pens, some erasers, some highlighters, and some paper clips. And they say to you, “you need to carry all of these things with you from class to class. You need all of it for every class.” Carrying all of those things in your arms is quite overwhelming. Maybe even impossible. You’re going to drop things frequently, you’re going to be exhausted trying to carry it from class to class—overall, it’s not going to be an enjoyable experience.

But let’s say that you go and find **a backpack** to put all of this stuff in. And there’s a place for the books, a place for the binder, the folders, the pens, the pencils, the erasers—there’s room for all that different stuff in the backpack. So you put it all in there, and then you carry the *backpack* from room to room. Now, has anything changed about what you have to carry? Nope—in fact, you’ve actually *added* one thing *to* it (the backpack). Does carrying a backpack still take effort and energy? Yep. But how much

easier is it to carry a backpack than it is to cradle all that different stuff in your arms and keep it from falling? *Remarkably easier.*

I think that is a picture of what Jesus offers to us through his “yoke”—a backpack. He’s not necessarily telling us to scratch all the things in our life, but he is offering us a better way to *carry* all of the things in our life. And his way of carrying everything still takes effort, it still takes energy—but it is remarkably easier and more restful than the way we so often try to do it all. I think the reason some of us are stressed out and overwhelmed is because we haven’t yet learned how to carry our life the way Jesus says to carry our life. But if we are willing to *learn to do life* the way Jesus says life works, things can change for the better.

So to accompany this series, we’re going to publish something we call a *Practice Guide* on our website. It is essentially a book full of practices, most of which directly correspond to a week of this series. But each of them are meant to help us learn the *yoke* of Jesus that leads us to rest. They are habits we can put into practice on a regular basis that lead to true rest. Now listen: whether or not you choose to go through the Practice Guide with us is entirely up to you. Nobody’s making you. I obviously think it would be good for as many of us to do as want to, but nobody is coercing you into it.

And I’ll just *go ahead and warn you*: if you choose to do it, there are likely going to be moments during this series where you think to yourself, “man, rest takes *work*.” And you’re not wrong in thinking that—we just got done talking about how there is a certain paradoxical nature to how we learn true rest from Jesus. The truth, like Jesus says, is that *rest* is not just something we fall into. It’s not just something we wake up and stumble into. It’s something that we *learn from Jesus* how to do.

So the *question I have for all of us* is this: are we willing to learn from Jesus how to “take a real rest?” Are we willing to structure our lives like he structures his. Are we willing to organize our day-to-day like he organized his? For the rest of the series, like I said, we are going to give you some specific practices to participate in to make it happen. But for this morning, I just want to ask you: are you willing to learn from Jesus how to take a “real rest”? If you *are*, there is rest for the taking. Let’s pray.