

UNEDITED DRAFT

Today we will continue the second of a 4 part series of messages called, "Engage." We are talking about how God calls every single Christian to get off the bench and be an engaged follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, if you were here last week, I am really surprised to see you back this week, because we talked about money. Jesus told us to watch out for all kinds of greed, and that life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions. Jesus warned about what will happen if we consume, consume, consume... that is, if we use our money selfishly, and we are not rich toward God. So I challenged you all to figure out the percentage you give to God, and wrestle with the question of whether or not you are being rich toward God, or if you are hoarder.

Like I said, it was a tough message, so if you're back this week, you are apparently a glutton for punishment. Last week I told you I had to sneak that tough message on you because if I told you about it ahead of time, you wouldn't have come. Well, I'm afraid this message is probably going to hurt about as much, but in a different place. Don't even think of getting up to leave, the ushers have locked the doors. (Just kidding.)

I'm afraid that we in the church world sometimes give the mistaken impression that "being in church" is what being a follower of Christ is all about. If you're in church regularly, then you're a good follower of Jesus, and if you're not in church very often, well, we better send the elders after you. One of the main factors most churches use to see if it's vibrant and growing is to compare year over year church attendance. Was our average attendance in 2013 higher than in 2012? Yes. Great. As long as more people come to church, we're on the right track.

But being a follower of Christ isn't that simple. I do believe that someone who is rarely in church will very likely not be very close to Christ either. My observation has been that someone who doesn't spend time in these rows is probably not enjoying a close connection to the Lord Jesus. However, the opposite is not always true. As long as someone does sit in these rows once a week, they will be closely connected to Christ. I have known people that never missed a weekend service, but they were living a life of open sin. Or they came to church, but during the week they did not live as a follower of Christ.

And you probably know people like that. Maybe your parents got the family to church almost every week, but you know there was serious dysfunction in your family between church appearances. Dad didn't miss church, but he did miss important events in your life, and failed to show the love of Christ Monday through Saturday.

So I want you to understand this: there is no value to simply being in this building and sitting in rows. We believe that the real goal is to connect people to the Lord Jesus Christ in a living, growing relationship. To be connected to Jesus, we need to listen and learn, and listen and learn, and hear God's truth and remember it. But that's just part of what we need. We deceive ourselves if we believe that because showed up and listened and I learned, then I'm done until next week. It's not all of what we need. So why is just listen and learning not

enough? Why is simply attending church not enough? Because Jesus said so. So rather than explain it myself, I'm going to let Jesus do the talking.

Matthew 7:24-27

24 “Therefore... Any time a reading starts with a “therefore” we really have to have an idea of what came before. The words we are looking at come at the very end of Jesus' famous “Sermon on the Mount.” Try to take some time today or tomorrow to reread Matthew 5, 6 and 7. On a mountainside with his disciples, Jesus preaches a really long sermon and teaches some really amazing things across a broad range of topics. He starts with “Blessed are the poor in spirit... blessed are... blessed are. Talks about being salt and light in the world. He is the fulfillment of the law. How hatred for someone is the same as murder and lust is the same as adultery. He talks about divorce. And getting even. And loving your enemies. Giving to the needy. How to pray. How to be rich toward God. Not worrying. Not judging others. And more. Rich, rich teaching.

So at the end of all of this amazing truth, Jesus says:

Therefore everyone [that's all of us] who hears these words of mine [that's the come to church part. Listen and learn and memorize.] and puts them into practice [uh, oh. Listening is not enough. What else do we need? To put them into practice.] is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

So listen: Jesus makes a huge point here that we cannot miss. I'm sure Jesus was glad that everyone had sat through his long sermon and listened carefully. Maybe Matthew was there taking notes since he includes all the details of this sermon. But simply listening to it was not enough. Listening to it and remembering was not enough. Listening to it and feeling convicted by it was still not enough. Jesus wanted them to listen to it, take it to heart and put it into practice in their lives. Jesus wanted them to do something with this. Jesus wanted it to change them. And if they didn't actually apply it to themselves and put it into practice, they were like the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. And his house fell down with a great crash. A life lived out of line with God's Word, ignorant of personal sin and its consequences, and not trusting daily in Jesus' much needed grace and forgiveness, and not responding to all of this with intentional and joyful change... that is a life that is going to fall down with a great crash.

And some of you... perhaps many of you... have already experienced this first hand, haven't you? As you look back on your life, can you think of times when you weren't putting the words of Jesus into practice in your life? And how did it go for you? Would “great crash” be a good way to describe it? Some of you have crashed your marriage because you didn't hear his words *and* put them into practice. Some of you have crashed your finances living a consumer, selfish lifestyle and not being rich toward God. Some of you have crashed your relationship with your kids, and now they're grown up and they don't talk to you. Some of you have crashed morally. Some of you have crashed your body.

Those of you who have crashed, listen to what Jesus says... and apply it. Past crashes can be fixed and future crashes avoided. Some of you are pre-crash. Maybe you're young enough that you haven't had a major crash yet. Good news for you: if you listen to Jesus carefully today and do it, you will avoid the crash. You get to do it right the first time. So you need to listen carefully to.

So here it is simply: Hearing and doing are what make the difference. Listen and practice. We're all going to face storms in life. You can build on the solid rock.

Let me quickly illustrate why “doing” is so vitally important. Do any of you have workout equipment in your basement? Are you still using it. If you put your hand up, it’s because you recently bought it. But I want you to remember when you did buy it. Just buying it already made you feel better, didn’t it? You now would have easily accessible in your basement the equipment you would need for a more fit and healthy you. But let me ask you: is owning it enough? Is knowing how to use it enough? Is knowing that using it will make you a more fit person enough? It’s not, is it? You also have to do it. You physically have to go down to the basement and use the equipment for it to make any difference whatsoever in your health and life.

So too with the teaching of Jesus. Learning it is a good start. Remembering it and really storing it for long term is excellent. But it’s still like the fitness equipment in the basement. God wants us to use it.

So, what does it look like to hear God’s Word and put it into practice? We’ll see what that means in relation to three “S” words: Sin, salvation and sanctification.

Sin. If you listen to God’s Word you’ll hear and know that God hates sin. Anything you do contrary to the will of God is open rebellion against the Creator of the universe. It is sin. So here’s what it looks like to put God’s word into practice when it comes to sin. It means not just that you know and believe that drunkenness is wrong. That how your treating your spouse is wrong. That sexual immorality is wrong. That lust is wrong. That lacking contentment is wrong. That gossiping is wrong. It’s more than just knowing these things. But also that *your* drunkenness, lovelessness, sexual immorality, lust, greed and gossiping... is wrong. That *you* have offended the Almighty God. And that he is angry and that his anger should be taken out against you for eternity. It means you feel convicted of your sin. To put it into practice means you don’t blame. You don’t excuse. You don’t rationalize. You don’t explain away. You don’t deflect. You confess because God word has cut you to the heart.

Hear and put it into practice when it comes to sin.

Salvation. To put God’s Word into practice is to not just know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he lived a perfect and holy life. That he died on the cross for the sins of the world. That he rose again from the dead and seats at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge all people. It’s more than just hearing this and knowing it. It’s truly applying to yourself this good news of full and free forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Christ sacrificed himself on a cross for *me!* For my sins of drunkenness and lovelessness and sexual immorality and lust and greed and gossip. His blood shed was for those specific sins *I* committed... and every other one too. Christ didn’t just die for the world, but for *me!* I am in him and he is in me. I am the dearly loved child of almighty God. His amazing grace is mine!

And finally, putting God’s word into practice also is evident in our:

Sanctification. I don’t usually like to use theological words like sanctification, but it starts with and “S” like sin and salvation, so I thought it might be more memorable. Sanctification is the life you live as a changed follower of the Lord Jesus. Knowing how offensive and damnable our sins are, and knowing how expensive and gracious our salvation through Christ is, (expensive because he had to shed his blood and give his life to accomplish it! Gracious because you didn’t in any way deserve it.) your life is changed. You listen to Jesus’ Words with an eager, joyful, peaceful heart and say, “Lord, I want to do that! I want to live that way!” And so you start watching your heart and your life for things like drunkenness and you stop it. And you start loving your spouse. And you

commit to being pure and watching your thoughts so you don't lust. And you be rich toward God. And you speak well of others. You don't just hear it. You don't just know it. You live it. You practice it.

James who was the brother of Jesus, not surprisingly said some very similar words in James 1:22-25.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. [We come and we listen and we feel like we're already making progress. I went to church, I sat in a row, I listened to the sermon, I even sang some hymns and felt something... a little guilty about something. So I made progress. So we go to church and we feel moved, perhaps convicted, perhaps encouraged and hopeful, perhaps inspired. But what are you going to *do*. Well, ultimately nothing. James says that you have deceived yourself. You believe there was some benefit to this, but just like the fitness equipment in the basement, unless you put it into practice, it's of no use.

Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

What a vivid way to describe this. If you come to a place like this, and you listen, and you hear about your sin. And salvation. And sanctification. You hear, but then you don't put it into practice, is like you getting up in the morning and looking in the mirror and going. Whoa! I need some work. I do that sometimes. I'll grab my thick glasses off the night stand, go into the bathroom. I look with horror at what I see in the mirror: hair standing up. Gunk in the eye. Crease mark from my pillow running across my cheek. It's scary, and I'm thankful even my own wife and children didn't see me on my way into the bathroom. How foolish I would be if I saw that image of myself, and then walked back out, pulled some dirty clothes out of the hamper and went to work.

We don't do that, though, do we? We stand in front of the mirror until it gets better. Until we've fixed it. So too, the person who hears God's word but doesn't put it into practice. "Yeah, whoa that sin is ugly. Oh well." You leave it and don't do anything. You see Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and you're indifferent... or still feeling guilt. You see how God wants you to respond to his grace, but you go on living like you always have. God wants you to hear and put it into practice!

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. So, here's what it looks like to both hear and put into practice the words of Jesus.

Did you hear the blessings of putting God's Word in to practice? Two words jumped out at me. FREEDOM. And BLESSED. When you live in line with the will of almighty God in the peace and joy of Christ's full and free forgiveness, and you do it... practice it... then you are living truly free. Satan lies and says God's way is slavery and restriction and no fun. Try it. Do what God says, and then come tell me how restricted and burdened and boring life was. It's not going to happen. True freedom comes by serving God. True blessing come from practicing what God says.

Friends, God is calling on you to engage. God's calling you to be an engaged follower of Christ. For most of you, the problem is not that you have not yet learned, and you have not yet heard. It's that you aren't putting into practice what God says.

And you've probably noticed there is a gap between what you know and what you put into practice. Over here is everything you know about sin, and salvation and the sanctified life God calls you to live. But over here is how much of that you actually do... how much you apply and practice in your heart and in your life. There is a gap between the two, isn't there. So how do we narrow that gap? Certainly we need more time learning and meditating on the Word of God and time in prayer.

We talked about that three weeks ago (word) and two weeks ago (prayer). But for some of you the gap has remained. What else will help narrow the gap even further?

Let me read a passage to you from Hebrews 3:12-14:

12 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

So the writer the Hebrews also talks about having a living and active connect to God. We can't just hear and know, we must believe and do. To share in Christ, we need to hold firmly to the end. We don't want to lose our faith and wander from Christ. So what will help us hold firmly to the end and grow in our connection to Jesus Christ. **Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.** James said, "Do not merely hear the word and so be deceived, but do what it says. What helps bridge the gap from hearing to doing? **"Encourage one another daily."** Every single day one believer encourages another believer to not just hear but to do.

Friends, this is huge. The Lord Jesus says we need to walk together and encourage one another. That's not a weekly task that is accomplished in these rows or within these walls. It's a daily task that has to take place in our homes and in our daily environments. We need know each other well. We need to be involved in each other's lives. We need to have meals together. We need to hang out together. We cannot encourage one another daily, if we only see each for one hour weekly. We can't.

In other words, as important as this time is weekly for us to gather and sit in rows and listen and pray and worship (and it is vitally important!), we need something more. We need time in circles. Rows are for large gatherings and for learning and worshipping. Circles are small gatherings where we get to know each other on a personal basis and can encourage one another during life's storms. We can encourage one another so we're not just hearing, but also doing... practicing, the words of Jesus.

Now I want to admit something to you: our church is currently not doing a good job in creating opportunities for you. I'm working on this, and I'm hoping to make some changes. Meanwhile, I want to ask you to take some personal responsibility for making this happen. How can you spend more time with fellow follower of Jesus so there are more opportunities to encourage another? There are lots of ways we can do it, but I want to ask you to do just one thing in particular that we start making this happen. Within two weeks, would you invite a fellow member to your house or out to eat, or something, so you can get to know them better and have opportunities to encourage one another? It can be someone you've though, "I've always wanted to get to know them better." Or it can be friends you've known for a long time, but you haven't gotten together in a while. It can also be larger groups. Maybe several couples want to get together for dinner. That's fine too. I wouldn't make it a group larger than 12 adults because then you have a large group where sharing is more difficult. By the way, the pastor's family is not excluded. We can invite, and we can be invited. And sometime during the course of the get-together, someone get the ball rolling with this question: "What can we pray for for you?" This will open the door to offering encouragement to door another. If you want bonus points, schedule a next get-together before the current one is over. We need to be together to encourage one antoher. And what we find as Christians meet in circles and not just in rows is that the gap between knowing and doing is narrowed as we help and encourage and pray for one another. Let's engage! We're not going to just hear the word. Let's do it. Amen.