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**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Mourning Norm? – Where's Norm

August 17, 2020

Do you ever just think back to January? Or is that just something I do? Some days, I really wish I could go back to January.

I miss coffee shops and easily hanging out with friends. I miss my desk at work. (You can actually see it in some of the “Where's Norm?” promo videos—it's the one with all the cards and coffee mugs.) And I really miss catching up with my coworkers. I even miss exercise—I'm a swimmer, and while some workouts can easily be done without going to the gym, swimming's not one of them.

I can still do some of those things, of course, but there's a balance to be found between not being afraid and still being smart. Some of the things I miss just aren't worth the risk for me right now. I can compromise for the sake of safety, or find temporary alternatives. Still, that means a lot of those things aren't going to feel the same.

Honestly, some days, I just really miss “Norm”—and with all the time I'm spending in my house, with the same few people, doing basically the same things day after day, I feel stuck.

The goal of our current series is to help us move forward in a world of “I don't know.” Last weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder talked about the signs that may indicate you're stuck and how to free yourself. He highlighted three signs of being stuck, which we're going to look at throughout this week:

1. We compare.
2. We criticize.
3. We catastrophize.

I can't speak for you, but personally, I feel stuck, in the muck, out of luck... yeah.

So how do we get unstuck—and how do we move forward when we're uncertain about the future? Here's the bottom line for this week:

You have to let go before you grow.

You see, change is an event, something that happens, signaling the start of something new. Often, the change in our lives is outside our control—it happens

to us. But we *can* control how well we transition through the change. That's because, unlike change, transition is psychological; it's a journey—one that usually *starts* with the *end* of what we considered our norm.

Until we spend time clarifying and even grieving what has ended, we will struggle to fully step into the new beginning ahead—a new season of life that God knew about and planned long before now.

To move forward on this journey of transition, we need to take an honest look at some of the things we're leaving behind: What was good? What actually wasn't? And what is no longer serving us well? We have to let go of some old habits, old sources of worth, and old comforts. Regardless of their value, some of our old methods may no longer serve us well in the new direction God is leading us.

And, yes, we can and should grieve for some of those endings. I miss a lot of things about "Norm," but I know God's here with me on this transitional journey. I trust him to show me how to keep the old things I need (like quality time with friends and life-giving community), how to find new versions of some of my old joys, and how to live without certain things by leaning on him instead. If we allow him to, I believe God's going to work within us in ways we could never have anticipated when Norm was around.

Questions:

Ben talked last week about the three stages of the transitional journey: the ending, the neutral zone, and the new beginning. Where do you feel you are right now?

Do you see any signs of being stuck—comparing, criticizing, or catastrophizing—in your life right now?

Are there things from your old norm that you need to mourn and/or let go?

Next Steps:

We're all going through a transitional journey together, but many of you also have your own, personal transitions outside COVID-19. Whatever old norm/ending you're dealing with, set aside some time to take an honest look at it. Consider which parts of it God wants you to keep, which parts need to be adjusted, and which parts either weren't good or are no longer serving you well. If needed, give yourself the time and permission to mourn the things you'll miss, so you can better prepare to step into the new place God is leading you.

Read and reflect on the theme verses for this series – [John 10:27-29](#). Commit to memorizing it.

21 Days of Prayer: The Sick and the Vulnerable (Day 8):

Lord God, I thank you that you care so deeply about those who are hurting. Today, we pray for healing according to your will, and submit ourselves to your mercy. We pray for those who are struggling with physical illness, diseases of the body. Father, bring your healing power to restore their health and their ability to live a life focused on you. Please give us discernment so we can help those who are struggling with mental illness or spiritual sickness. Help us to walk with them in compassion and love. Help us to love and serve those who are hurting as you did, Jesus, that your name would receive honor and glory through it all, because it is in your name that we pray these things—amen.

The Comparison Game – Where’s Norm?

August 18, 2020

Comparison is a recipe for unhappiness. Comparing THAT to THIS will lead you down a dark hole every time. Back in my day, it was coined “keeping up with the Joneses.” With today’s diverse social media platforms, you don’t have to look at your actual neighbors to see what your life is missing, you simply need to look at your phone. During the weekend message, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder said that whether you are comparing yourself to someone else, that car to your car, that job to your job, that body to your body, or that house to your house, you will find yourself enslaved to THAT! It will monopolize your thinking and THAT will become your master.

Exodus 14:12

Didn't we tell you this would happen while we were still in Egypt? We said, "Leave us alone! Let us be slaves to the Egyptians. It's better to be a slave in Egypt than a corpse in the wilderness!"

This is a perfect example of the comparison trap. The Israelites were not able to realize the freedom they had gained because they were in an uncertain situation in the wilderness. They only knew a life of slavery, and no matter how horrible it was, it was more comfortable than an uncertain future. Because they had lost faith in their guide, Moses, they were more willing to return to Egypt as slaves than to move forward in the wilderness. They were comparing THAT (Egyptian enslavement) with THIS (an unknown future following God). This comparison statement is a sign that the Israelites were stuck!

Exodus 14:31

When the people of Israel saw the mighty power that the LORD had unleashed against the Egyptians, they were filled with awe before him. They put their faith in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

Hallelujah! At this point, it appears that the Israelites were back on track placing their faith in God and Moses. We will discover in tomorrow’s writing that this faith was short lived.

God knew that Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt, but a part of Egypt remained in them. They needed to rewire their thinking away from the Egyptians providing every single thing for them, to learn how to live as free people, and to have faith in the abundance that God provides.

The Israelites also needed to acknowledge what had ended BEFORE they could begin the glorious life that God had planned for them.

Questions:

To whom or what are you comparing THAT to THIS? Have you looked at it with a distorted lens that makes THAT better than it is?

In which area(s) of your life are you stuck? Has it enslaved you?

Are you keeping your eyes on your guide, Jesus, in all areas of your life?

Next Steps:

Identify an area in your life where you are trapped by comparison. Notice how this has caused you to focus on what you lack. Now, approach this area with a thankful heart. Notice how your focus changes from concentrating on what you don't have to being grateful for all that the Lord has provided.

21 Days of Prayer: The Next Generation (Day 9):

Father, remind us that our children are a gift from you for us to share with the world. Continue to equip us with the ability to raise them to follow your truth and discover their purpose. Thank you for giving our children the best of our qualities without losing their individuality. Grant us patience when we feel our child's rebellious nature pull them from their path of faith. Let us not forget that we too endured a season or more of doubt, pride, or selfishness, but the knowledge gifted to us brought us back to our purpose. Amen.

The Blame Game – Where’s Norm?

August 19, 2020

I was married at 30 after 10 gleeful years as an operations director for an international oil trading company. People did what I told them to and consulted with me before changing anything regarding oil shipments. A perfect job for a “control expert”!

At 31, we had our first child. Stevie weighed 9.4 lbs and was in the 95 percentile in everything. No newborn-sized onesies for that guy.

That was 33 years ago and remains the moment of greatest change in my life. I went from being a self-important, business executive, working 18-hour days to being a spit-up covered, exhausted new mother, working 24 hours a day for a baby. That was *the moment* in my life that Lead Pastor Ben Snyder described in his weekend message as *change*.

Originally, I compared my life “then” and “now” and wondered if I had lost my mind to give up the “then.” Eventually, I stopped comparing then with now and embraced being in charge of my little person instead of big boats. So I thought all was well, and I had moved on to my new reality.

By the 18th month, I felt comfortably back “in control,” like in my old job but with diapers. I understand now that I hadn’t moved into the next phase of change called *transition*. I was stuck wanting my comfort zone back. That became clear when we got pregnant again, and I blamed my husband. I know, stupid, but denial is stupid. I barely spoke to him for a month. I criticized him mercilessly to my mother and friends for “his failure.”

Yes, that was really wrong, but I was unable to admit out loud that I was terrified I couldn’t love this new baby as much as our firstborn. So I chose to make this turn of events all my husband’s “fault.” It was less painful for me to make him solely responsible and me the “victim.” Thankfully, the Lord touched my heart, and I realized I had no reason to fear. He assured me that my “heart” is made of spandex, and just like my heavenly Father’s, it stretches to love every new child he blesses us with.

He was right. Since Philip arrived, I have loved him madly. Now, at 31, he is still my brilliant, funny, successful son. No less beloved by me than his older brother.

I asked my sweet husband to forgive me and never compared God’s blessings of my past with the joys and spiritual growth he gave me in this new reality. Instead, I rest in his love as he carries me through every *change*. He uses change to grow us closer to him. Embrace it and close the door on your previously much-loved comfort zone. Like it or not, it’s not coming back.

I pray the Lord will continue to grow my humility. To never again think I have the answers. Instead, I pray he will continue to use time spent in his Word, in prayer, and in service to grow me away from myself and ever closer to him.

Questions:

What changes are you angry about, resisting, or trying to fit into your pre-change worldview?

How's that going for you?

Have you considered God has a purpose for whatever that change is in your life—to experience a closer relationship with him?

Next Steps:

Be honest with yourself. Admit that in God's grand plan you are not in charge. You did not hang the stars or tell the ocean where to stop. We serve at the pleasure of the Lord, God Almighty ... and it is a pleasure when we do it with open hands and hearts.

Recognize and stop resisting God as the creator and master of the universe. Embrace him as your heavenly Father who allows all manner of events to grow us in our station as his children and servants.

Read God's holy Word, the Bible, daily. Then pray to become more like Christ so you can move more seamlessly from change, to transition, and finally peace.

[21 Days of Prayer: Marriages and Families \(Day 10\):](#)

Dear God, today I lift up the marriages and families in our communities. I pray your Spirit would strengthen our marriages and families. Please give a supernatural love and grace to spouses as they interact during these stressful times. You know exactly what each marriage needs, and I pray you would meet those needs. Allow our families to grow stronger during this time. Help parents represent you well to their children and help children have a heart that grows in its love for you. I pray marriages and families would come out of this season stronger and closer to you. Amen.

This post was written by Martha Smith, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

Catastrophizing - Where's Norm?

August 20, 2020

During the weekend message, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder continued our series *Where's Norm?* and discussed catastrophizing. This is one of the three indicators that you're either having trouble finalizing a change in your life or you haven't even acknowledged the end yet.

The reality TV series *Survivor* has shown us what happens to groups of people forced to survive difficult conditions together. They can turn on one another quickly, especially if they're hungry and thirsty, plus there's a lot of complaining. Just like our lives today, it is easy to feel overwhelmed, helpless at times, out of control, or even stuck, and complaining is often our go-to response.

In [Exodus 16:1-3](#), we see the Israelites have just moved from what they describe as an oasis into the depths of the wilderness where they feel like they are in a battle for survival. They are visualizing nothing but chaos and death.

Exodus 16:3

"If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death."

What these tired, barely surviving people needed was a pep talk, a promise. The Israelites just could not see that they needed to put an end to their past in order to properly transition into their future—their promised land by the almighty God. All they could see were their current struggles, having little available food and bitter water.

In [2 Corinthians 10:5](#), we are reminded to "destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ." Most people have had rebellious thoughts their whole lives, but God is telling us to put our thoughts on trial, take them captive, and reprogram them with God's Word.

By reading, memorizing, and using God's Word, we can set our mind on the Spirit that brings life and peace into our lives as believers.

Ephesians 4:21-24

²¹ Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, ²² throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. ²³ Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. ²⁴ Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

Our way of thinking is as vital to our spiritual lives as breathing is to our physical lives. We are reminded in Psalm 119:11: “I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” And also in Psalm 116:2: “Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!”

Questions:

Are you stuck in the wilderness of sin without a guide?

Have you let the wilderness cause you to lose sight of the promised land? Are you willing to be one of God’s sheep—to listen to his calling and let him guide you today?

Next Steps:

Avoid catastrophizing by memorizing Scriptures and meditating on God’s Word for the peace only he can give.

Focus on God today. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts—to name it, grieve it, and release it.

God’s sheep listen to his voice and follow him. He is waiting for you to transition your life into his hands.

21 Days of Prayer: Encourage Each Other's Faith (Day 11):

Heavenly Father, we live in a world that is constantly calling us in any direction except toward you. We need our brothers and sisters in Christ to surround us with encouragement, leadership, direction, and support to help us do what is pleasing to you. So, especially in this season of quarantine and isolation, help us to find new and creative ways of meeting together. Help us to not be discouraged or undone because we can’t do things as we were accustomed, but to embrace new ways of love and encouragement. Help the world to see how marvelous you are through our responses of unity and love as we encourage each other. In Jesus’ name, amen.

This post was written by Gary Schnabel, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

Healthy Endings – Where's Norm?

August 21, 2020

There are some things in life that we look forward to ending. Personally, I like it when these things come to an end—a bad movie, a visit to the dentist, a stressful workday, a long phone conversation ... a pandemic. I could go on and on, and I'm sure you could name a pretty long list without much help as well.

These types of endings are great. They are the endings we look forward to, but what about the endings that we don't want—the end of a relationship, a job, a hobby, your health, a stage of life. These types of endings can be challenging. In fact, they might be so difficult that we don't want to deal with them. Instead, we want to move on quickly to the next thing, believing we are okay.

Last weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder shared with us what William Bridges wrote in his book *Transitions*—that we're better equipped to navigate change and uncertainty when we understand the journey of transition. This journey starts with a healthy ending.

The first step to ensure a healthy ending is to **name it**. It might be something significant and obvious, like a relationship, but it might be something smaller that isn't as easily identifiable. The indicators from this weekend's message can help us see that there may be an ending in our lives that needs to be named. If you find yourself comparing, criticizing, or catastrophizing, slow down and ask yourself if something has recently ended. Once you recognize it, name it.

The second step Ben shared is to **grieve it**. Something has come to an end, and along with that ending comes a variety of emotions. Many of us would prefer to move on to the "next thing" and ignore those emotions, but that doesn't allow us to experience a healthy ending. If you are missing "what was," let yourself remember and reflect on the good things that are no more.

The final step is to **release it** by giving it to God. Surrender your emotions, your grief, and your plans for the future to him. Trust that his plans are good, even if it doesn't feel that way. He can take whatever you are going through and redeem it, giving you hope and purpose for the future.

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

Questions:

Have you recently experienced an ending?

Was it a healthy ending?

If so, were the steps of naming it, grieving it, and surrendering it present?

If not, what is the next step you need to take in order to make it a healthy ending?

Next Steps:

For fun, write out a list of things that you love (or would love) to see end.

Write about your most recent significant ending. Take time to name it, capture your current feelings about it, and begin to grieve it if you haven't. Finally, release it to God and trust him for what's next.

Today's Prayer:

21 Days of Prayer: Deepen Each Other's Love (Day 12):

Dear God, in the uncertainty and unknown of this season, deepen our love for one another. Let the way I treat others be a reflection of the way you have loved me. Let the world see how great it is to follow you through the love your followers show to one another and to the world around them. Help me to treat each and every person with the dignity and worth that you have placed in them. Allow me to see others through your eyes and have compassion and love that is often hard to find in this world. Thank you for loving me. Amen.

Saturday's Prayer:

21 Days of Prayer: Courage to Authentically Share and Care (Day 13):

Dear God, there is no greater purpose for today than to share your story. But we confess how often we miss opportunities to share, or even turn away from a moment when we could care for another. Help us set aside anything that would distract us or take away from this great truth - it's because you first did all of this for us that we now have the privilege to do it for you. When we are united with you, Father, our hearts grow. Give us the courage to believe what you say and then act on it. Amen.

Sunday's Prayer:

21 Days of Prayer: Guest Online and In Person (Day 14):

God in heaven, we pray that you would give us open hearts and open minds to receive those whom you send through our doors, be they physical doors or virtual doors. We trust that each person shows up because you ordained their presence long ago. We thank you for the incredible privilege of telling them about how much you love all of us, but especially them. Open their hearts to the message you have for them today. Give us wisdom as we continue to discover new ways to share your love, and help us to do all we do for your glory, because it is in your name that we pray—amen.

This post was written by Ben Bockert, a regular contributor and editor of the LivingItOut.