

LIVING  
IT OUT



**DAILY  
BIBLE  
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# Be a Tree, Not a Shrub - At Your Best

January 10, 2022

As we start 2022, we all want to be at our best, but most of us are likely nowhere near being there. Instead of being at our best, we find ourselves overwhelmed, overcommitted, and overworked. Sound familiar?

This weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder shared a passage with us from the Bible that illustrates what it looks like when we live life tired and burned out.

## **Jeremiah 17:6**

*They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, in an uninhabited salty land.*

What a great visual for us to think about. This shrub in the middle of the desert can't possibly be at its best. It may be alive, but it is not growing. It is isolated and stuck with no hope for the future.

In this same passage from Jeremiah 17, a contrasting illustration is also given. This one helps us see what it looks like when we are at our best.

## **Jeremiah 17:8-9**

*They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.*

This tree is doing precisely what it was created to do. It is at its best, producing life, even in seasons of difficulty.

So what's the difference between the two? How can our lives look more like the fruitful tree than the stunted shrub? The answer is found in who each one illustrates.

## **Jeremiah 17:5**

*This is what the Lord says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the Lord."*

The shrub is cursed. It's representative of our lives when we do it ourselves. When we try to create our best through our own efforts. Relying on our strength, or even on the strength of others, will never create the life God has intended for us.

In contrast, we see that the tree paints a picture of someone different. Verse 7 describes the person it represents.

### **Jeremiah 17:7**

*“But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence.”*

The tree is blessed. This tree illustrates what our lives look like when we trust God. It is what our lives look like when we place our hope and confidence in him and not in ourselves. It illustrates life at its best.

As you think about your life today and what prevents you from living at your best, consider the tree and the shrub. Are you like the shrub, relying on your own efforts to be at your best? Are you trying to create it on your own? Or, are you allowing God to move in your life, trusting him for the best?

### **Questions:**

When people are not at their best, how might they try to get there?

What have you been doing to be your best? Have you been relying on God or yourself?

Where do you need to start trusting him today?

### **Next Steps:**

Whether you are tired or burned out, God has something better for you. Be open and ready to allow him to work in your life.

Participate in 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting. Check out our [app](#) or [web pages](#) for information on how to participate. Text “21 Days” to 419.419.0707 to receive daily prayer prompts and encouragement.

### **21 Days of Prayer:**

**Day 1 Focus** - To Place My Trust in God ([Psalms 62:8](#))

*God, in your Word you invite me to pour out my heart to you. You are my refuge. I know that anything I think, feel, or do is ok to bring to you. Knowing you are a safe place for me, I come to you and give you everything. From what worries me to what delights me, to what I hope for, to what I'm afraid of, I bring it all to you*

*because I can trust you. (Talk to God about the specific things that are on your heart today). Help me and guide me in every area, in Jesus' name, amen.*

[Today's Parent Prayer](#)

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

# Our Best Us in 2022 - At Your Best

January 11, 2022

Do more, or do less?

When considering how we can become our *best us* in the new year, many will immediately jump to, “What do I need to do more of?” However, wisdom might say that it’s equally important to consider, “What do I need to do less of?”

This becomes evident when we consider our *best us* from the point of view of Jeremiah 17:9, which says, “The human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” In other words, our hearts will complicate things by playing tricks on us. To be our best, it is important to establish where we are physically, mentally, and spiritually. So today, let's ask God to help us see where we are in each of these areas as we try to figure out what’s best for us in 2022.

To combat these deceptions, it is helpful to know what we need more of and what we need less of, which should also help us get a more extensive or more precise picture of what our *best us* can look like.

Ask yourself:

“What are some things I have done in the past few years that are life-giving?” Do more of these!

On the flip side, “What have I done in the past few years that hindered my communication with God?” Or, “What is the root cause of my drifting away from God?” Do less of these!

The answers not only provide a basis or benchmark for understanding where we’ve been but also clarify some really cool growth. Ultimately, this method of thinking provides the best picture of our *best us*. I don't know about you, but when I can see a picture of where I need to go, I enjoy life more and pursue life with greater ease.

The greatest picture we have of this is in Jesus. We can be sure that we have to become more like him to be our *best us*. How do we do that? We love him, we respect him, we honor him—all while remembering he is our friend. Jesus tells us how to love him when he says, “If you love me, obey my commandments” ([John 14:15](#)).

Let's keep it simple, though, by remembering that our best us in 2022 primarily depends on us loving Jesus, truly. So love and respect Jesus with your best.

**Questions:**

What might keep someone from realizing they are not at their best?

What is keeping you from being at your best?

How can knowing Jesus and following his example help us move toward the best life?

**Next Steps:**

Evaluate where you are physically, mentally, and spiritually. Are you at your best, worst, or somewhere in the middle?

Consider what things can help you grow in these areas, but most importantly, talk to God about where you are and allow him to work in your life. Trust him to help you live life at your best.

**[21 Days of Prayer:](#)**

**Day 2 Focus** - For My Love for God and Others to Grow ([Matthew 22:36-39](#))

*Dear God, you said that the greatest commandment to follow is to love you with all my heart, soul, and mind. As I connect with you over these 21 Days of Prayer, grow my trust in you and my heart so that I will love you more. Then, as my love grows for you, help me to love those around me more and more each day. Amen.*

**[Today's Parent Prayer](#)**

# Nowhere vs. Know Where - At Your Best

January 12, 2022

Last weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder stepped into a new series, *At Your Best*. It is apropos to apply the content of this week's sermon to daily life—yours and mine. For those wanting to go *from just living to THRIVING*, leaning into a personal relationship with Jesus is central.

Before discounting any of today's thoughts, know the points of reference are based on real-life experiences—mine. Not unlike the Israelites, I have done more than my fair share of wandering around, whining, and complaining. The mere fact Ben's weekend talk parallels my life experience on multiple levels is profound. (Who ratted me out?)

Were it possible to ask for a show of hands via Living It Out, and if readers were being honest, I imagine numerous hands would go up after being directed to raise your hand if you have ever drifted through life, arriving at *Nowhere*. (Please note: *Nowhere* and *Know Where* are different destinations.) I have arrived at *Nowhere* more times than I want to admit. Without a map or GPS, it is foolhardy to think arriving at *Know Where* is likely. Aimless wandering, like the Israelites, will do it every time—land you in *Nowhere* (again).

Ben aptly reminded us, we don't *drift* into *better*. Nothing (*no thing*) drifts into better. He also noted the difference between being tired and burned out. No quick fixes are available for burn out! Thankfully, there is a way out of these dilemmas.

Take a clear view of reality. Establish where you are (as presented in yesterday's LIO). The next challenge is to move—take a step. The best step I have ever taken is a step out of God's way. Too often for me, the compulsion has been to move in the direction I wanted to go. I would shudder to know how many times the path before me was designed by God, yet I chose another route. It now comes as no surprise the countless times I ended up *Nowhere*.

Thankfully for me, mid-life, one deliberate decision to seek God's direction proved his faithfulness is beyond question. This week's bottom line, "Life is Best, When God is First," played out as I relentlessly followed his clear, unquestionable cue.

It is *never* too late to lean into God, allowing the ultimate external force into your life. Without wavering, I want to go on record and say many things have changed upon making the decision to live out Jeremiah 17:7—“But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence.”

Truly, *life is best when God is first.*

### **Questions:**

Do you find yourself wandering aimlessly? Are you stuck—unable to take a step? Have you given deliberate thought to asking God for guidance? What things get in your way when attempting to be a follower of Christ in all areas of life?

### **Next Steps:**

Examine yourself to identify the things that are keeping you stuck in aimless wandering. Confide in a trust-worthy friend any areas of unresolved brokenness you might have.

Talk through and walk through unresolved relationship issues. Seek God for guidance on how to reconcile those relationships.

Pinpoint what keeps you from stepping into greater trust in God. Connect with a reliable person who is able to offer encouragement and guidance as you step into a deeper level of knowing God and trusting God.

### **21 Days of Prayer:**

**Day 3 Focus** -My Commitments to Him ([Psalm 37:5](#))

*Heavenly Father, you are trustworthy. I know I can rely on you, so I commit everything I have and am to you. May I carry out your will in my actions. May my thoughts and behaviors follow your path for my life. Help me to trust you in all that I do. Teach me to listen for your voice and obey your guidance. You are the source of my strength, and my help comes from you. In your Son's name I pray! Amen.*

### **Today's Parent Prayer**

*This post was written by Karen Peck, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.*

# The Gift That is Fasting - At Your Best

January 13, 2022

Since I can remember, my life goal has been to be *the best* to win praise—not *my best* to honor God and grow closer to him.

In his weekend message, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder introduced us to the history and how-to of our annual *21 Days of Prayer and Fasting*. I struggled with this for the first five years I attended CedarCreek. I was neither a great prayer warrior nor a fan of giving up stuff to please God.

Thankfully, God has continued to shower me with his grace. Over the past five years, he has grown me in many areas of my life, including a new desire to become a committed, first-time participant in this year's 21-day focused effort to draw me closer to him. I believe his desire is to further my journey from serving myself to becoming a devoted child of God, whose life is lived for him. The result of which is to make my life choices an example of the hands and feet of Christ in all things.

First step: Discover the purpose of fasting and why it's important. I am a big fan of intermittent fasting as a way to kill my carb addiction, but I didn't know what spiritual fasting was or its goal. In his [7 Steps of Fasting & Prayer](#), author Dr. Bill Bright writes: "Fasting is one of the Spirit's tools for strengthening and transforming grace in our lives. This spiritual practice is a gift from God meant to grow us and draw us into deepening relationship with Himself."

## **Jeremiah 17:7-8**

*<sup>7</sup> "But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. <sup>8</sup> They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit."*

Fasting has been a discipline practiced by followers of God since the days of the Old Testament. In [Exodus 34:8](#) we read that Moses fasted while on Mt. Sanai as he waited to receive the ten commandments.

We should prayerfully consider making it a part of our lives. As Ben pointed out, there are things to fast from other than food, for example, videos. When I was suffering from terrible fatigue and brain fog during my recovery from Covid, I

discovered puppy, political, and Covid videos, and over time, literally spent up to six hours/day staring at them! I finally acknowledged that was a lot of time spent in self-indulgence and ignoring God, and he graciously gave me the ability to repent and stop.

As Ben encouraged, the annual, 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting is a perfect opportunity for us to refocus our attention away from banal, destructive, daily coping mechanisms and distractions that draw us away from God and lead us into a life of dissatisfaction, fear, exhaustion, and burnout. Instead, use this challenge to move toward a path that is focused on Christ, salvation, and a life of immeasurable blessings for you and those you encounter in your daily walk with God.

**Questions:**

Are you fruitful like the trees that grow along deep water streams, or are you barely hanging on?

Would you like to live a life of grace, blessing, and growth in your relationship with the one who loves you most, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

**Next Steps:**

Pray. Ask the Lord to show you his desire for your life in all things. Ask for guidance as to whether you should fast during 21 Days of Prayer, and if so, what you should give up.

If you have already started the fast, great. And if you haven't started, it is not too late to jump in.

Check out these resources to gain a better understanding of the how, what, when, and wheres of the process:

1. [21 Days of Prayer webpage](#)
2. [21 Days of Fasting webpage](#)
3. Join our [21 Days text campaign](#) to receive daily prompts and encouragement by texting "21Days" to 419.419.07070.
4. Join Ben Snyder on any of our social media platforms for [Morning Prayer](#) at 7:00 am.

## **21 Days of Prayer:**

### **Day 4 Focus -To Surrender to Him ([Romans 12:1](#))**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for all you have given me: all the time, resources, relationships, and abilities. I now give them back to you. I surrender it all. I am only a steward—it all belongs to you. God, guide my actions. Help me to listen for and obey your directions. Teach me to trust you and use what you have given me according to your will. May your will be done in me and through me. Amen.*

### **Today's Parent Prayer**

*This post was written by Martha Smith, a regular contributor and editor of the LivingItOut.*

# Ready? - At Your Best

January 14, 2022

Have you noticed how in stories and movies, sisters have a problem with perfectionism? One is often extremely beautiful, smart, and obedient, while the other sees herself as plain and is always getting into trouble.

In *Little House in the Big Woods*, Laura is jealous of her golden-haired, quiet sister, Mary. In *Ramona and her Mother*, an ornery Ramona is constantly comparing herself to her practical, older sister, Beezus, who always gets A's in school. *Frozen* tells the story of Elsa, who is always trying to keep it together, and Anna, who dreams of falling in love and going on adventures. Even in the new Disney movie, *Encanto*, the main characters struggle with not being enough, or exerting themselves to be "perfect."

Every time, the responsible sister ends up frustrated that she never gets to have fun, and the carefree sister is angry that she never seems to measure up. And just like all of those girls, we also become ensnared. We get stuck comparing ourselves to others, or even imagining what we *should* be like. We set expectations that are way too high. And we are inevitably disappointed when we can't achieve what we want and stressed when we never find time to have fun.

The lyrics to this song by Hillsong offer a different approach, telling us what God has already done for us.

## **"Ready or Not" by Hillsong**

*He's already bought our freedom*

*He's already paid our debt*

*He's already done the miracle*

*He's already conquered death*

*He's our light and salvation*

*He's our rock solid hope*

*He's already done enough for us*

*He's already doing more*

*He's already seen the ending*  
*He's already seen us through*  
*He's already breaking out of us*  
*He's already on the move*  
*He's already won our battles*  
*He's already paved the way*  
*He's already gone ahead of us*  
*And he is ready when we are*

God has already come to us. This is what we celebrated at Christmas—Jesus, Immanuel, coming as a human to be with us. God is here, reaching out, and all we need to do is trust. God doesn't expect us to be perfect; he only asks us to take his hand and follow where he takes us. God sees our mistakes, and he loves us anyway.

### **Romans 5:6-8**

<sup>6</sup> *When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.* <sup>7</sup> *Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good.* <sup>8</sup> *But **God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners*** (emphasis added).

### **Questions:**

Which line in Hillsong's "Ready or Not" speaks to you the most? Can you identify your over-the-top expectations or the ways you compare yourself to others? How can you remember what God has already done for you?

### **Next Steps:**

Listen to "[Ready or Not](#)" by Hillsong. Consider playing it on the way to work or when you're dropping your kids off at school. If you haven't chosen to yet, take the hand God is offering you. He has already done so much with you in mind—he only asks that you trust him. And if you have let go, reach out again. God is already here.

### **[21 Days of Prayer:](#)**

**Day 5 Focus** - Search My Heart ([Psalm 139:23-24](#))

*Heavenly Father, as I come to know and trust you more, help me reflect your love through my thoughts and actions. Search my heart. Find anything in me that is offensive to you, and help me remove it from my life. Lead me to live a life that draws people to you. Help me live my life on Earth in a way that impacts eternity. In Jesus' name, amen.*

[Today's Parent Prayer](#)

**Saturday: Day 6 Focus** - To Listen to Him ([John 10:4](#))

*Dear Father, I am so grateful to have you near me, guiding me with your voice. Give me the faith and patience to listen, so that I will not stray from the path you have planned for me—the path that I trust will keep me safe and bring me closer to you. Amen.*

[Today's Parent Prayer](#)

**Sunday: Day 7 Focus** - To Worship God's Great Name ([Proverbs 18:10](#))

*God, I am in awe of you. Your name is a strong tower, a place of protection and safety for me. I praise you as my healer, my shepherd, and my hope. You are my peace, my provider, my righteousness, and my joy. Your name is great, and I worship you. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

[Today's Parent Prayer](#)

*This post was written by Lydia Snyder, a regular contributor and editor of the LivingItOut.*