

LIVING  
IT OUT



**DAILY  
BIBLE  
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

# Here's how we can be the Church that Jesus intended us to be:

September 11, 2017

If you could know what it is that God wants you to do, would you want to know it?

## **Acts 1:8:**

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

This is the last thing Jesus told his disciples, and the mission he gave to them and the church as a whole. 2,000 years later, the church is still attempting to live out this mission. Theologians call it “The Great Commission.” It’s clearly important, as it is actually captured in all four gospels and the book of Acts.. These last words were both a command to be followed and an encouragement that his followers wouldn’t be alone. Jesus entrusted his followers with the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the task given to them. In spite of this, they found themselves stuck.

Roughly 20 years after Jesus’ death, in AD 50 on the cross. The disciples found themselves quarrelling amongst themselves, debating the terms under which the Gentiles would be accepted into their church family.

In the book of Acts, we get a glimpse into a meeting of the early church leaders, a meeting that is referred to as the Council of Jerusalem.

## **Acts 15:4-12:**

*4When they arrived in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. 5But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, “The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.”*

*6So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. 7At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: “Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. 8God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. 10So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors*

*were able to bear? "We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus."*

*<sup>12</sup>Everyone listened quietly as Barnabas and Paul told about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.*

While Paul and Barnabas were excited to share the news of what God had done, others were not so excited. Paul and Barnabas were moving forward with accomplishing the mission that God had given them, but they were encountering people who were not like them. This ultimately brought to the forefront a question that the early church had to answer: would they accept those who were not like them? Would they accept them as God accepts them, or would they subject them to the religious rules that were once requirements of God's law?

Today, we have to ask ourselves similar questions. As Ben said this past weekend, our temptation is to accept people who think, talk, and act the way we think, talk, and act. We tend to accept people who are like us, and we resist people who are not. However, if we want to be a church that reaches this city, **we need to be the church that Jesus intended it to be.** It is important we be a church that is attractive and not subtractive. If God accepts someone, then we are called to do the same. We should not create challenges for new believers or for those investigating their faith in God by burdening them with rules or unreasonable expectations.

So, how do we do this?

We do it by staying in our lane. We let God do his job, and we do ours. Over the next four days of the LivingItOut, we will be discussing exactly what that looks like. We will be breaking down Acts 15:4-12. I am so excited for the journey God is about to take us on as we seek to be the church that God has called us to be.

*Place yourself at the Council of Jerusalem. What are some of the thoughts and feelings that you would have had during this debate?*

*Describe a time when you accepted someone who was not like you.*

*Describe a time when you resisted someone who was not like you.*

**Prayer:**

*God, thank you for accepting us and sending your Son to die on the cross and pay for our sins. You covered a debt that we could never pay. Thank you that no matter what our past is, or where we came from, we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of our Lord Jesus. Help us to accept people as you accept them, and not resist people who are not like us. Lord, help us be a church that honors you by being attractive and not subtractive to those seeking you. Amen.*

*This post was written by Ben Bockert, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study*

# How to Stop Judging People:

September 12, 2017

Among the greatest challenges in our walk with God is complying with his directive that we resist the temptation to judge others.

Most of us understand God's reasoning on an intellectual level, particularly as it is presented in **Matthew 7:1-2**: *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup>For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

But despite these cautions – and our own best intentions – we too often traverse our days leveling a series of judgments on the world and people around us. Sometimes, our judgments are merely the result of transforming our experiences into assumptions. For example, if a motorist speeds past us on the highway, we may judge him as reckless or immature (or worse).

In other cases, we fall prey to unconscious biases. While each of us wants to believe that we are objective and ethical, it's clear that we are often driven by – and make judgments based upon – the things we *expect* to be true or *want* to be true.

And then there are darker situations involving judgments that are more contrived, judgments that create a sense of superiority and separation. In these cases, we effectively raise ourselves by lowering others who do not think, talk, or act as we do. Sadly, news reports today all-too-often involve situations in which people make harsh or hateful judgments based purely on superficial factors such as skin color, gender, ethnicity, or orientation.

In reality, each of the above situations is equally flawed. This is because as humans, we cannot truly know the hearts of our fellow man. And for this reason, it is not our role to judge one another.

## **It's God's job to know the heart. Ours is to trust God.**

Throughout Scripture, we are presented with examples of Jesus' teaching that we are to consider our own sins before daring to cast judgment on those of others.

In **Romans 2:1-3**, the Apostle Paul makes this point emphatically: *"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. <sup>2</sup>Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. <sup>3</sup>So when you, a mere human being,*

*pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?"*

In this fourth week of the "Who Needs Church?" series, CedarCreek Lead Pastor Ben Snyder leveraged the Scripture of the Book of Acts (Acts 15:4-12) as a means of helping us to appreciate our opportunity – and duty – to make our church more inviting to others. This means leaving judgment to God and welcoming, accepting, and seeking to know all of those whom he accepts. From a practical standpoint, this enables us to step into our mission of helping spiritually restless and unchurched people love Jesus.

Written by Luke, Acts 15 describes the travels and travails of Paul and Barnabas as they sought to spread the Good News through a series of missionary trips nearly 2,000 years ago. This quest led Paul and Barnabas to enroll Jews and Gentiles alike in the Word. As Ben Bockert shared in yesterday's edition of *LivingItOut*, the diversity of these encounters led them to confront several thorny questions from the Pharisees: Would they accept those who were not like them? And if so, would they accept these individuals as God accepts them, or would they subject them to the religious rules that were once requirements of God's law?

The answer to these questions is effectively delivered in **Acts 15:8**: *"God knows people's hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us."*

This verse reveals a clear set of facts supporting God's authority and our opportunity to grow his kingdom: Only God knows people's hearts. And if he accepts them, so too should we. It's not our role to judge others, but rather to understand them. And judgment shall be left to God, whom we can always trust.

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, help me to resist the temptation to judge others. I pray that you will help me to always remember that it is you alone who knows the hearts of others and that by trusting you, I am better able to accept, love, and welcome them into fellowship with you. Amen.*

# How the Church Can Hurt and How the Church Can Help.

September 13, 2017

One of the greatest privileges I've ever had is to be involved with CedarCreek's baptism team. There is nothing like the experience of watching someone go public with their faith and actually see the Holy Spirit working in their life. When someone gets baptized at CedarCreek, we ask them to write a little bit of their story, what brought them to God, and why they want to get baptized. I have read some of the most incredible life change stories, and I feel so grateful to be able to get to know people and see what God has done to change their hearts.

Maybe the reason I am so affected by them is because my journey was long and hard, and my story is a lot like many of theirs. For a long time, I stayed far away from the church and God because I was hurt by a church as a kid. I thought that God would never accept me. And if that was how his people behaved, I didn't want anything to do with them anyway.

The love and acceptance that I have felt at CedarCreek has definitely changed the way I feel about church in general and God as well. When I came here, people started telling me that God loves me no matter what, and that although people aren't perfect, my church family loves me, too.

For so long, I felt like I had to get myself together before God would love and accept me. I had some major abandonment issues, and my idea of God was based on an absent father. My church family helped me realize that God is so much bigger than that! When I began to understand that God loves me even though I sin, that he sent his Son to die for those sins, and that he gave me the Holy Spirit to help guide me through this broken world, it helped me to love the way God loves.

When I think about that perfect love, I love God even more. When I love God, it's easier for me to obey his commands (like loving my neighbor and my enemy). God tells us not to judge other people, especially those outside the church. We are to be kind and understanding toward them in order to make our faith attractive to them. I know when I was judged by my church as a teenager, I didn't go back. We must make everyone feel welcomed and loved. We must show the love of God to everyone we encounter. I don't know about you, but I certainly have no room to judge. Jesus says "let him who has no sin cast the first stone," and I am definitely not picking up any rocks!

When I read those stories of life change, or when I talk to someone during weekend services who has had an encounter with God that has changed their

heart, I celebrate! I rejoice, just as I know God and the angels are rejoicing in heaven.

**Luke 15:3-7**

<sup>3</sup>So Jesus told them this story: <sup>4</sup>“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. <sup>6</sup>When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup>In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!

This passage points to the importance of celebrating and rejoicing when the lost is found. In verse six the shepherd says to his friends, “Rejoice with me” and in verse seven, we see that all of heaven rejoices when one lost sinner returns to God. It can be easy for us to focus on the negative or to focus on the ways that the newly found still don’t think, talk and act like us. Instead we should place our focus on what God has done and rejoice in the life change that has happened.

How can you take a step back when you find yourself judging others and, instead, find something good to celebrate about that person?

Think about the ways that your life has changed since accepting Jesus. Did you ever consider the fact that we celebrate with you as your church family? Did you ever think about God and the angels rejoicing in heaven?

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for your mercy and grace, for loving me while I was still a sinner, and for sending your Son and Holy Spirit to me. Help me to remember to show love wherever I go and to accept the guidance of your spirit to help me in this world. Help me bring honor and glory to you in all that I do. Amen.*

*This post was written by Kelda Strasbourg, a regular contributor of the LivingItOut Bible Study*



# How to Know When You're Hurting a New Christian's Faith:

September 14, 2017

Us and them.

As a sports fan, my first thought when I hear this is, “us **versus** them.” Cleveland against Pittsburgh, Ohio State against Michigan. But in today's society, terms like “us,” “them,” and “those people” have very different meanings. Even in biblical times, separations existed between tribes and ethnicities. Initially, new Gentile converts were welcomed by the church, but as news spread, divisions occurred as the Jewish Christians demanded that they be circumcised. After much discussion, Peter explained that God accepted the Gentiles, just as he accepted them.

## **Acts 15:9:**

*He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith.*

The Jews made a distinction between themselves and the newly converted Gentiles. They placed unrealistic expectations on their brothers and sisters in Christ. We can be guilty of this as well. When someone first becomes a believer in Jesus, we sometimes think they should be in church every Sunday, join a LifeGroup immediately, go on a mission trip, and tithe. As God makes no distinction between us and them, neither should we. Our job is to remove those burdens (or our expectation that new converts should immediately do everything right) rather than place them on others, especially those new to the faith.

## **Acts 15:10:**

*So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear?*

Remember learning to ride a bike? I'm currently teaching my son to ride a bike without training wheels. He is understandably nervous because he has never ridden a two-wheeled bike before. Knowing this, I talk him through the process, explain how to get started, and what will happen when he falls. If I treated him the way the Jews treated the Gentiles, I would send him off without a helmet, maybe even tying one hand behind his back, and making him carry a backpack full of weights. That would certainly make it difficult to ride a bike, even for an adult. Those are akin to the barriers we create by placing certain expectations on other people.

If we expect anyone, especially new believers, to be at church every Sunday, we will be disappointed (true confession: I wasn't at church last week because I was out of town.) It might be unfair to judge others by their outward behaviors because we don't know the intentions of their hearts. We can also make it far more difficult than it already is for people to connect and open up about their struggles. The truth is, once we come to know Jesus, we begin a journey, we haven't arrived at a destination.

We don't have to just accept the poor choices others make; we need to hold each other accountable. So how can we remove these burdens instead of building up walls? The best example we can be to believers at any stage of their faith is outlined by Luke in **Acts 2:42-47**, which describes the ways early Christians welcomed others into their community: they ate meals together, shared their possessions, and invited others to live life together. To whom in your life should you be more welcoming? Is there someone you can invite to your house for dinner, or include in a LifeGroup activity? How can you encourage a new (or mature) believer?

**Prayer:**

*God, help me remove the barriers in my own life, so I can stop building walls for others. Forgive me for judging others and setting unrealistic expectations for them to live up to. Show me who in my life I can encourage in their faith. Amen.*

# It's Not Your Job to Clean Up Everyone Else's Life, and That's OK.

September 15, 2017

One of my daughter's favorite foods is pancakes. She has them almost every morning. She'll try any kind - whether they're blueberry, chocolate chip, M&M, or just plain - she loves them.

The problem with pancakes, as any parent will tell you, is they are typically served with a sweet sticky substance called syrup. My daughter - usually a clean eater - always manages to get syrup on her hands and face. This, however, is why God gave someone the idea to invent baby wipes. These magical pieces of wet paper towel-like objects are a great tool for the parent of a pancake loving two-year-old. It takes roughly 15 seconds, and the sticky two-year-old is back to normal.

As gross as cleaning up your kid's mess can sometimes be, it is one of the things I love about being a parent - cleaning up my kid. It is one of the things she cannot properly do, though she tries. I love being able to clean up both my son and my daughter, but I know that the day will come when I no longer need to do that. This is evident to most parents, and when this time does come, most don't even want to clean up their children anymore.

Why, though, as adults, do we feel the need to clean up other adults? Obviously, it's not their after-eating mess we desire to clean, but instead, their behavior. We, as Christians, tend to have very earnest desires initially. We want - like God - for everyone to come to faith in him (**2 Peter 3:9**). But it seems over time, we forget how we came to faith in Jesus, or how we were as baby believers, and we expect those in our lives who don't know him to accept him and become just like us right away.

If you're like me, you didn't first stop all your sin and then come to know Jesus. No, instead, you came to know Jesus personally, and over time he helped you to overcome the sin in your life.

In his message last weekend, Ben taught from **Acts 15:9**, where Peter says, "*He made no distinction between us [Jewish Christians] and them [Gentile Christians], for he cleansed their hearts through faith.*" Notice, he doesn't say the Jews cleaned the hearts of the Gentiles. He doesn't say that it was the Jews who convinced the Gentiles that what they were doing was wrong. Instead, he says that God cleansed the hearts of the Gentiles through faith.

You might be thinking, *“This is obvious, I know I’m not supposed to cleanse people of their sins.”*

Most of us probably know this.

However, many times, we don’t act like this.

Instead, we want those who watch certain movies, listen to certain music, talk a certain way, hang out with certain people, or do certain not-so-legal things to immediately drop all that before they come to know Jesus. We shift from being the bearers of our stories to the writers of theirs - a job we were never meant to take.

Jesus told us our job, and it was not the author - or editor - of everyone else’s story:

**Acts 1:8:**

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

As Ben said last weekend, God’s job is to cleanse an individual’s heart through faith, and not works; our job is to **witness**.

We are to be Jesus’ witnesses about what he has done in our lives to other people, not to try to clean them up so they’re presentable to him.

Our message to others should not be, *“You should stop doing all those things, because...”* But something more like, *“When I didn’t know God... and then he...”*

Today, let’s look at a passage from **1 Peter 3:15-16:**

*<sup>15</sup>Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. <sup>16</sup>But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.*

What is the main point Peter is trying to get across in this passage?

How have you suffered a guilty conscience by not being gentle and respectful?

What can you do today to be more of a witness and less of a “cleanser”?

**Prayer:**

*Heavenly Father, you are more than good to me. You have blessed me with so much mercy that I cannot put it into words. Help me, Father, to know how to interact with people who don't know you. Help me to be a witness, and help me to resist the temptation to always try to clean up people who don't know you. Today, Father, help me to take one step in this direction. I ask these things in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*