

If you could be any character in the Bible, who would you want to be? (Title Slide)

Take a moment. Let's think about that.

Most of us have a favorite Bible character but that might not be the same as the person we'd like to be.

- Raise your hand if you said "Jonah"
  - o None of you want to disobediently run from God's calling, spend three days on the verge of death and then get upset when a nation repents and turns to God?
- Raise your hand if you said "Job"

I was looking at books on characters of the Bible the other day. Check out these titles:

- Great Characters of the Bible
- Twelve unlikely heroes
- The Patriarchs (Beth Moore)
- Men of Character Series
- Journeys of faith: retracing the faith-filled steps of great Bible characters

It turns out there aren't too many books written about mediocre people in the Bible. You know, I don't think any of us strive to be mediocre Christians.

Francis Chan once said that his favorite Bible verse was "Elijah was a man just like us." (James 5:17)

At the same time though... I don't know how many of us are living out the faith we want to have. For many of us I think we experience these ups and downs in our faith maybe day to day or week to week or month to month.

When it comes to Christianity I think a lot of us have a tendency to feel like this boy:

Show video clip

But Kory said in his last sermon that if we're going to do evangelism from the margins we'll have to:

- Reclaim what it means to be the church and embrace that we're called to be different
- And be the community that the world cannot offer

So if none of us want to be mediocre Christians – why aren't these things a reality yet?  
And what can we do to be an effective missional community?

There's this interesting passage in 1 Corinthians 3 where Paul is addressing Christians that go to church but aren't living very spiritual lives. They go to church but they look like the world.

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup>I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. <sup>3</sup>You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? <sup>4</sup>For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?

You know, I think if we saw a church like this nowadays we might say – those people are hypocrites. But Paul doesn't call them hypocrites and Paul doesn't call them unsaved. He simply says that they haven't grown up yet. And look at how he can tell:

- They talk and reason like the world (v1)
- They follow the flesh (v3)
- They are jealous and they quarrel (v3)
- They're divisive. They choose sides when there are no sides (v4)

That's not an effective missional community, right?

If you want that, just join the [I Love NE Facebook Group](#).

I have to imagine though that the Corinthians weren't aiming to be mediocre infantile Christians, right?

The author of Hebrews picks up on this idea and goes a bit further with it and we start to see a clearer picture of what's expected of Christians and what Christian maturity looks like. (Hebrews 5:11-6:3)

"**We have** much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. <sup>12</sup>In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! <sup>13</sup>Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <sup>14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

We have this relative and every time they see **Shepherd** they say, "These are the best days of your life." Why? Because Shepherd doesn't pay bills. He gets everything he needs from other people. There's zero anxiety.

So when we think to ourselves, "Why would anyone want to be an infant Christian" I think the answer is: because it's **easier**. Because it's comfortable. Because it's nice. According to the author of Hebrews – they problem is they no longer try to understand. They've been given just enough for them to have new life in Christ and that's all they're interested in. Look at the rest of the passage with me:

**6 Therefore** let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death,<sup>(a)</sup> and of faith in God,<sup>2</sup> instruction about cleansing rites,<sup>(a)</sup> the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup>And God permitting, we will do so.

Man the first time I read that I just went whoa – *these* are the elementary teachings? What? You know and you think, "Okay, okay. Let's read that again."

So there's three sets of two here.

There's:

1. **Repentance** from acts that lead to death and faith in God
2. **Instruction** about cleansing rites and the laying on of hands
3. **The** resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Here's what the writer of Hebrews is saying in today's terms.

1. **You should have a repentant attitude towards sin and towards trying to earn your salvation**  
**You should trust in God as your only Lord and Savior**

So acts that lead to death is a phrase that applies to both the Jewish and Gentile audience. For Jews it meant – stop trying to earn salvation through circumcision and the law. For gentiles it meant – stop living a life of pagan idolatry and sin. Together then, these are acts that lead to death. One is religious and the other is secular but both are deadly. Another way of understanding this is – you should be actively pursuing a different way of life from the rest of the world. And instead put your faith in God. For Christians – there's three components of faith:

There's knowledge

- I know Jesus was a man who lived a long time ago and claimed to be God

There's assent:

- I know that Jesus is God

(And so far we've made it just as far as the demons go.)

And then there's trust:

- I know that Jesus is God and I live my life according to that truth.

2. **You should know what baptism is, you should be baptized and you should be involved in the life of the Church**

Cleansing rites here for the early church would've referred to baptism and laying on of hands would've referred to membership into the local church. A lot of Christians today are happy to attend a church but they don't necessarily see the church as "their church" they don't necessarily invest in or belong to a church. They go to church but they don't have a church. They don't seek to bring anything to the table.

3. **The afterlife & Judgement**

Lastly, the writer of Hebrews thinks that eternal judgment should be an elementary teaching of Christianity. That one day you'll be held accountable for everything you do and that every choice you make matters. Small or large – every single action and decision is an eternal one.

Now that you've heard the explanation of those terms – some of you are able to nod along and go “Oh yes, I understand that. I've repented from my old way of life, I've put my faith in Jesus. I've been baptized. I'm a part of my church community. I recognize that one day I'll be held accountable and seek to live my life accordingly. Or at the very least you understand those things and are working toward them.” Isn't it interesting that if we stopped right there, we'd have an effective missional community, right? I mean we'd be embracing that we're different and we'd be a type of community that the world can't offer. Yet scripture raises the bar even more. It wants us to move past the basics into a grown-up faith.

I think there's three most important characteristics of grown up faith that we see either explicitly said or implicitly said in the text.

### **1) The first is that a grown up faith lives in light of eternity**

There's a couple different ways that we could phrase that – we're fully surrendered to God. We accept and trust in the Christian Worldview. My preference though: We live in light of eternity. What do we mean by this? We don't live according to our old ways. We repent of acts that lead to death. We draw a hard line in the sand and we say: No, the pursuit of what I think will make me happy is not my highest cause and objective and purpose. We trust the God who created us to know best how to live our life. We enter into the life of the church. And we live as if one day we'll have to answer for it and be accountable to it. We live in light of eternity. There's nothing wrong with trying to be relevant. But we need to also embrace that we're different.

### **2) Grown up faith seeks to understand**

I love Ravi Zacharias International Ministries Motto: Helping the thinker believe and the believer think. One of our early Church Fathers, Justin Martyr, was a philosopher before he converted. And when he converted he continued to wear his philosopher's robe. Early Christians had this very minority worldview and so they saw it as incredibly important to be able to explain and understand their faith. We see this in the scriptures where Christians are told to be prepared to given an answer to anyone who asks for the reason for their hope. We also see from scripture – that it's one of the ways that God wants us to love him.

Mark 12:33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Thinking about God, pursuing Him with our minds, learning more about Him, reading the scriptures, learning theology, listening to sermons, joining a small group – we can't give up trying to understand. If we're living in light of eternity – we won't.

Augustine said that “No one believes anything unless one first thought it believable... Not everyone who thinks believes. Since many use their thinking in order to not believe. But everyone who believes thinks. They think in order to believe and they believe in thinking.” (In other words, they believe in using their brains).

Robert Louis Wilken said of the early church “The intellectual effort of the early church was at the service of a much loftier goal than giving conceptual form to Christian belief. Its mission was to win the hearts and minds of men and women and to change their lives.”

Paul once reflects that the gospel is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the gentiles. Those were the two audiences that Christians were talking to. The Jews couldn't understand why anyone would worship a man who was clearly born of a woman. And the Gentiles had even less framework for the gospel. So when Paul goes to Athens to share his faith they say “You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” (Acts 17:20)

Paul had to know what he was talking about and know it so well that he could explain it to people that had no framework for it. Think about what we said before – people want to be infants so that life can be easy. People want to stay infants so that they can depend on others and don't have to do much themselves.

I remember my last church had a safe and I never learned the combination to it. Why? Because if I knew how to open the safe it could open up a whole can of worms. Right? Sometimes we don't grow up It'll mean that our lives will change, it'll mean that our responsibilities will change. If we're living in light of eternity though – that won't be an issue.

Mission-minded Christians. Grown up Christians. Those who respond to the Great Commission will know the importance of continual learning and continual effort to understand. And they'll do so not just so they can know God more but so that others can know God more.

And that brings us to the third and final characteristic of grown up Faith.

### **3) Grown up Faith Goes**

If you hear nothing else from the sermon hear this. When the author of Hebrews says that we ought to be **teachers** and when he says that we need to be **acquainted with the teaching about righteousness** – He's saying that need to be missional. Some translations choose to translate that passage as “justice.” That we would be acquainted with the teaching about justice.

Nt Wright says, “What the writer here longs for is that people should become proficient in understanding and using the entire message of God's healing, restoring, saving justice. He wants them to know their way around the whole message of scripture and of the gospel, to be able to handle this message in relation to their own lives, their communities, and the wider world, and to see how all the different parts of God's revelation... have the power to transform lives and situations.”

Did you catch that. Being acquainted with the teaching about righteousness means that we would understand scripture so much that it changed our lives for the better and that it would cause us to change the lives of others.

**My biggest challenge right now (TITLE SLIDE)** – that I'm aware of in my own walk is that I see godliness as a list of religious practices that I do and a list of sins that I don't do. Ask me a few months ago to create a list of Christ-like attributes and I would list things like “humility” and “servant leadership” and “love” and “moral purity” but most likely I would forget to mention that Jesus was mission-minded.

But see – there’s a problem when we think to ourselves that grown-up faith is a list of spiritual disciplines that we do and a list of sins that we don’t do. And the problem is that grown up faith goes.

(James 1:27) **Religion** that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Even when we talk about being Godly or being made in the image of God. I’m so quick to point out that God exists in community as a Triune God and so we’re made in community. But I’m also quick to forget that God is by nature a going God. He’s a missional God. He makes Himself known to Adam and Eve. He makes Himself known to us through all of nature. He gently pursues Adam and Eve in their sin. He reveals himself to Abraham. He reveals himself to Moses. And God the Son comes to us in Jesus. And the Holy Spirit dwells in us believers. Being missional – responding to the Great Commission and making disciples of all nations – that’s not something we do in order to be obedient to a command – it’s something we do when we want to look more like God. We don’t do it because “we’re told to” We do it because it’s who God is and it’s who we’re made to be.

We have this tendency to separate sanctification and evangelism. I know I do. I often measure spiritual maturity not by how many mouths I’ve fed or who I’m pouring into or when I shared the gospel last but I’ll measure it by “did I read the Bible every day last week” and “Did I successfully overcome temptation” and those things are good but that’s not spiritual maturity.

So none of us set out to be mediocre Christians. Do you remember that video we showed of the kid who was convinced he could pour juice and so he just kept trying? That’s what it looks like to be young in the faith but to not give up trying to understand. We need to keep pushing forward and pushing past. So maybe our community isn’t as different as we’d like to be. Neither was the early church and yet we see just how effective they were. And we are seeing how effective we can be. But we can be more effective. So let’s get the elementary teachings down (which most of us probably have) and let’s not stop there and let’s not stay there but let’s push forward to this grown up faith where the church lives in light of eternity, seeks understanding, and Goes. Because going is godly and being godly means going.

I’d like to summarize our sermon series so far and just explain where we’ve come and where we’ve ended up. God has made us and we sinned. And that sin separated us. So God made a way for us to be with Him. He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins – to pay the price for our sins so that we might know God. He did it for relationship. It wasn’t a “no strings attached” sort of gift but rather God wanted more from us because He wants more for us. And God asked this people – that entered into relationship with Him to go and make disciples of all nations. And as they did those who were new to the faith were then asked to grow up – to live in light of eternity, to never give up trying to understand, and to go forward into the world with God’s mission. The truth is, Elijah was a human – just like us. And the Holy Spirit wants us to know that mediocre, infantile Christianity is not all that God has or wants for you.

Now – I hope you’re asking “How do I go?” That’ll look different for each of us. Over the course of the next several weeks we’ll be sharing different ways that we can go. Starting next week with how we as a church intend to respond to the Great Commission together in a way that acknowledges the situation of our current culture.