

I've got two questions for you. The first one is who do you avoid at all costs? Welcome to CPC! Good morning, happy Sunday. Right?

Who do you avoid at all costs? This is the type of person that, when you see them, you're thinking, "Okay, nope. I got to go to a meeting. I don't have time to talk with them." Or it's the type of person who, when you are in your garage, and you see them coming, you're thinking, "Oh, I got to get in the car quickly before I have to talk to them." It's the type of person who, when you go to a family gathering, you think, "I hope they're not there." We all have those people in our minds for various reasons who are the people that we avoid at all costs.

The second question is just as chipper. What areas in your life do you avoid at all costs? These are the areas I want to draw our attention to. It's the type of area where we lay our head down on our pillow at night and go, "Ooh, I don't want to think about that. That's uncomfortable." For whatever reason, it might be awkward. It might be painful. Guilt and shame might start to bubble up in our minds and in our hearts when thinking about those times in our life, maybe looking out towards the future and panicking when we see what's in the bank account or the retirement account. Whatever the reason is that causes us to panic or feel awkward. I believe Jesus wants to talk to us about both of those things.

Last week, Kevin encouraged us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and retreat into lonely places—spend time in silence and solitude. We walked through Mark chapter 1, verses 35 through 39, and there he detailed how great Jesus was at retreating to lonely places, getting away in silence and solitude. I really believe that out of those types of times, when we find the answers to those first two questions, we're going to know what to do with those questions. We're going to know what to do when those people come to our minds, or those scenarios come up in our heads. Without that, I'm not sure that we'll be able to actually navigate what to do when those people come to our minds, or those scenarios come into our lives.

I highly recommend if you missed out on last week, to go back and check it out. But for all intents and purposes, we're going to keep chugging along here in Mark because Mark reads like an action novel. It reads like a Marvel movie. It's really, really quick. And it's always on to the next thing. Yes, Jesus just retreated in silence and got away for solitude, but then boom, we are on to the next thing. So let's be onto the next thing.

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to

anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing as a testimony to them. Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere. Mark 1:40-45

Now, if your Bible's like mine, maybe you're reading from the NIV translation. What you'll see down at the bottom of the page is a little footnote, which mentions that most manuscripts read the word indignant to mean moved with compassion or moved from the inside—the deepest portion of who you are. So that's how we're going to interact with that word today. Indignant as meaning moved with compassion and moved from the inward parts of who you are, the deepest soul level.

And what we see here at the end of this interaction with Jesus is, again, he's kind of deflecting the fame that would normally come with this type of healing and this type of interaction. He's not overthrowing the Old Testament. He's actually working through the Old Testament. That's why he's saying, "Hey, go make sure that you offer the sacrifices that would've been customary after a healing like this has occurred. He wanted to make sure that this guy actually gets restored back into his family and that he doesn't just appear to be healed, but he's actually healed. So he's invested in making sure this man is reinstated into his community. The other thing that we notice is that the man did the exact opposite of what Jesus said.

Before we shame him for that or put him down, we have to empathize with him just a little bit. I'm not trying to detract from the fact that he does the exact opposite that Jesus says to do. But I would like us to empathize with him a little bit because he quite possibly received some of the best news in his whole entire life. How many of y'all, if you would've received some really, really good news, it would be hard for you to keep that news bottled up? When I got engaged to my wife, Brie, I wanted to tell my family and friends. I want to text everybody that I know and tell them this is awesome news. The difference between my wife and me is that I wanted to tell friends and family, and she wanted to tell everybody. She wanted to tell cashiers and walk into restaurants and stores and say, "Hey, guess what, buddy? I'm getting married. This is going to be great."

So surely, we can start to kind of empathize with this man a little bit. He receives some great news, and he does the exact opposite of it what Jesus actually wanted him to do. But first I want to call our attention, as we start to deal with this text, to the fact that Jesus takes personal responsibility for this man's restoration. He's personally invested in this

man's restoration story. He doesn't outsource it. He doesn't tell somebody else to do it. He's not saying, "Hey, make sure that gets done." No, he takes personal responsibility for this man's restoration.

We need to get a little bit of backstory on the historical context, as far as leprosy goes, because if you're anything like me, most of the time, I come to scriptural texts with very Western, very modern eyes. And I just look at healing like this and think, Jesus is doing his Jesus thing. He's at work healing people. That's what he should do, he's Jesus. This man sounds like he's having a hard time. That's great. I'm glad that guy got healed. If that is all we are thinking, we will miss the significance of it.

It would not have been customary for people to see Jesus with lepers during that time. Why? Because leprosy was a disease that would rot the skin. It would decay the limbs until the limbs were no more. During that time in history, it was a topical disease that was mostly on the skin, but it went all the way down into the nerves and into the bones. There would have been open wounds and open sores on the arms and all of the limbs of the body. Because of this, people were incredibly nervous about being around somebody with leprosy. They would actually run away from those who had it because it was thought at the time that even if you breathe the same air as somebody, you could potentially contract the disease. So because of that, people with leprosy were forced to live outside the city walls. They could no longer be a part of what we would think of as normal, traditional, everyday life in society.

They were forced to live outside, and they were forced to live without a chance of a cure. No medical care, no home, no ability to walk in and see family. That was it. There were no visiting hours. There was no FaceTime. Leprosy always got the final word during that point in time in history. As a matter of fact, the only way that they had access to food and supplies that they would need is if they went to what would be considered now the town dump and gathered what the city had discarded. And they had to do that while screaming, "Unclean, unclean, unclean, unclean," as they approached where people might be so that people would have the chance and the opportunity to run away from them. This disease called leprosy was incredibly physically taxing.

Can you imagine with me for a second the emotional toll that it would've taken on somebody? The only time you can get close to a city is if you scream your status out into the world so that it gives people enough time to run away from you. It must have been psychologically and emotionally taxing, too, to bear up underneath something that. And this is why it's important for us to understand these circumstances are what Jesus was dealing with here. It was not typical or customary for people to expect him to have an interaction with this man. People would have expected him to run in the opposite direction. By being near this person, one could actually become this person; by being near this person, one could literally risk everything and become like this person. There's a lot to talk about here with this interaction.

And we're not going to ignore the obvious. We're not going to ignore that Jesus healed this man. He was moved with compassion from a deep place in his soul on behalf of this man. There's no doubt it actually happened, but it falls short if we just say, "Jesus healed somebody,

let's move on." It falls short. Suppose I say that this wedding ring on my finger is just a piece of jewelry. That's not the case, is it? And I know that this is a piece of jewelry, but it's not just a piece of jewelry to me. It represents all the time my wife and I have been together, and it promises all of the future that we'll spend together as well.

Jesus' interaction with this man is a big deal in the Kingdom of God. This is a huge story for us to unpack. And that's why it's important for us to understand why Jesus did actually touch this man. He didn't have to. He could have just said, "Be healed! He could have snapped his fingers. He could have outsourced the job. Yet he was seen personally present in such a way that was wildly inappropriate during that time; he actually touched the man. Why did he do that? I'm glad you keep asking questions that I have written down answers for.

There are two reasons. First, by healing this man with a touch, Jesus was letting others know that this man doesn't just appear to be healed. This man is actually healed. Jesus wasn't interested in the appearance of healing. He was interested in the actual, authentic restoration of this person. How many times do we think Jesus is just interested in the appearance of us being okay?

That's not the case. It's good news that Jesus is interested in the actual, authentic restoration of who we are and our entire world. The second reason why it's important that we see Jesus heal this man with a touch is that he's letting us know, and everyone else around him at the time, that this guy's okay to be reinstated into the community. It's okay for him to be a part of the community.

If this guy had kids, he could go home and pick up his kids. If he had a wife, he could go home and hug his wife. If he had a business that he used to own, he could go back to that business. Because during that day and age, what would happen to someone with leprosy was that the family would have a funeral for the person after the diagnosis. They would split up whatever inheritance there was and leave.

It was important to Jesus that this man actually is understood as literally healed and restored. He's not interested in being a magician. He's interested in actually physically healing this man with complete restoration. And he's letting us know that, in all accounts, this is what happens when the Kingdom of Heaven when the Kingdom of God comes into contact with anything in this world, this is what happens. When anything from the Kingdom of God comes into contact with anything in this world, literally anything, this is what happens.

So we see that this does have some big-time implications for us. We know this instinctually. We understand that this has big-time implications for us in the way we live our day-to-day lives. Because this is what happens when we bring the Kingdom of God into places, this is what happened in the Bible. This is what happens when we can bring it into our own everyday life.

Now we might look at that and say, "Okay, but does that mean in a cheesy Christian t-shirt way or in a bitter bumper sticker sort of way, or in a way that somebody that only always has a critique." And I would push back on that and say, no, that's not what this means. What this

means is that we get to be personally present in the restoration process as well. I kind of want to use the last half of our time here together today to call our memory back to those first couple of questions. Who do we avoid at all costs? Another way that we should put this is who have we banished that God's calling us to be with? Who have we banished?

They may not have leprosy. They may not have been banished in the way that they did back then, but we're pretty good at banishing people today. We're pretty good at this, and sometimes for some really silly stuff. My wife and I went to a movie the other day. We were at the theater, and we got all of our stuff. We're in our seats. We're thinking, "This is great. No, one's here." And then, all of a sudden, people come in behind us. They sit down behind us, and they start talking during the previews, which is totally okay. I can handle that. I'm all right; we're on board. That's alright. You can talk during the previews. And then the movie starts, and they're still talking, and it's really, really loud. My wife is starting to get aggravated because she views it as an injustice issue.

She's like, "How dare they talk during a movie?" And I know it's kind of awkward. I wanted to say something. She wanted to say something. She wanted to be, "Are you going to talk the entire time?" But we didn't. We stayed civil. But in our minds, we completely judged those people. We completely banished them and put them outside of everything.

Maybe it's not for silly stuff like that, but we're still really good at banishing people. Maybe you are good at banishing the over-the-top optimist, the person who's always excited, or the person where today is always their best day. Their vacation is going to be the most incredible. Their kids are the smartest. They are going to go to the best schools. And they're the best on the sports team. And their bank account is always rising. You're like, "Would you please stop? I live in the real world." We start to build walls, and we start to justify why we might banish them.

It might be the opposite. It's not the over-the-top optimist, but it's actually the over-the-top pessimist, somebody that would say, "If something can go wrong, it will go wrong." We start to put them outside, and we start to banish them because we think, you know what? Maybe things aren't always going to get worse. I don't need that type of negative energy in my life. I'm working really hard. My family's got a lot going on. So if all you've got to bring is a critique and all you've got to bring is negativity, then I'm about done. I can't stand more of that.

We start to justify why we would set them outside of our lives and why we banished them as opposed to understanding that this very well might be the person God is calling us to be with and to be present with during their restoration process.

Please know that I'm all for setting safe boundaries. I'm all for setting healthy, safe boundaries. I would never want us, and I don't think Jesus would call us to be in a position or to put ourselves in a position where we might incur abuse or neglect in that way. I want to make sure we get that loud and clear, underline that, and put it in bold.

But I do understand that Jesus is calling us to be present with some people that we would typically tend to banish.

That's what he's calling us to do. This is why Brené Brown says that it's actually hard to hate people up close. If we close the distance between them and us, we might grow attentive to those we are to be compassionate and empathetic towards. As we close that distance, we might actually grow empathetic towards that person. If we spend time in silence and solitude, it might reveal to us where we're supposed to be moved with compassion and who we're supposed to take steps toward. But maybe this is all catching you off guard, and you're like, "This is not what I came to hear today. I did not sign up for this. I do not want to participate in this." Let's back up a step, and take a deep breath.

Maybe for you, it starts with having a conversation with somebody that really listens well. And you can explain to them why you're struggling with banishing that person. Not in a gossipy sort of way, but in such a way that goes, "Listen, I really struggle with this type of person." It's probably the person that's popping into your mind now. Maybe it's a family member, friend, or somebody that works at your office. It could be somebody in your neighborhood or somebody that you haven't spoken to in years. Maybe you can sit down with somebody and say, "Hey, would you help me listen to this person? Because I know God's called me to be with them." That doesn't necessarily mean best friends with them, but it does mean being with them. So how would you go about that?

Maybe it's spending time in prayer, silence, and solitude and asking God to help your heart move with the same compassion as his. Maybe it's asking God, "How come I don't feel your compassion? What's going on in my heart, God. Would you help me become attentive to where I need to be moved with compassion with people as opposed to banishing them?"

Maybe then we can move on to asking them if they would like to go for a coffee. We can have a conversation with them. "Why do you feel so strongly about that?" Or "Could you tell me more about that?" And we can move towards steps that look like prayerful conversations. That's why I would recommend starting with a time in silence and solitude and pray, "God, would you move my heart and break my heart for what breaks yours? Because now I don't feel how you felt when you saw the man with leprosy."

Now, I want to focus on that last question. I want to bring it a little bit closer to home. If I haven't already gotten in your business enough, I'm about to now, because I believe Jesus has called us to go there. And I believe that he's got some stuff that he wants to say to us about the areas of life that we avoid.

What are those areas of life that we avoid at all costs? What are the areas in our life that bring up moments of anxiety? If we think about it too long, as our head hits the pillow at night, we go, "Oh, I can't do that. I need to turn on the TV. I need to turn on a podcast." We think, "Oh no, if I'm in the car and there's a moment of silence, it's radio now! Or I guess not radio anymore, iPods, iPhone, or Spotify. We're thinking, "No, I can't have that moment of silence because it bubbles up too much guilt, too much shame." Maybe something was said when we were younger; maybe it's a pattern of self-destruction that we've struggled with in

our life where we know that those things in our life, we'd be better off without them, but we just seem stuck.

We don't want to think about it. And instead of following in the footsteps of the man with leprosy and falling at the feet of Jesus and going, "Lord, if you're willing, would you help? Would you be involved in this scenario?" We fall at the feet of distraction.

We're really good at this, aren't we? We're really good at falling at the feet of distraction instead of falling at the feet of Jesus. And to be honest, it was apparent to the man with leprosy that he needed Jesus to be present in his life, wasn't it? Everyone else around him had put him outside the city. He saw it every morning when he woke up, and he felt it as he laid down at night. It was obvious to the man that he needed Jesus to be personally present in his restoration process.

But for us, maybe our need is not so apparent because it's underneath the surface, and so we fall into patterns of distraction. We think that if we get one more episode in, if we get one more friend, maybe one more great time with friends, or one more awesome vacation. If our vacation is a little bit better than it was last year, if we make a little bit more than we did last year, maybe if our retirement account looks a little bit better than it did last year, then perhaps, maybe that will either fix it or at least distract us enough to where we don't have to think about whatever that issue is in our life. And if you can't think of what you distract yourself with, it's probably the thing that's popping into your head now.

Jesus' healing, the man with leprosy, is a reminder to us that Jesus is both personally present and he's here for restoration purposes. His kingdom is present, and it is personal. Jesus sits with us. He empathizes with us, and he doesn't just empathize with us. Listen, there is a time and a place for empathy, and it is amazing, but Jesus doesn't just empathize with us. He's actually here on a personal restoration mission for us and our world. So he doesn't just stop there.

There was one specific area and time in my life when I really knew I needed Jesus to be present in my personal restoration process. It was not because of a diagnosis that I received; although I did receive a diagnosis, it was because of the guilt and shame that I had allowed to creep into my life.

During that season, when I was nine years old, I was diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia, ADHD, scotopic sensitivity syndrome, and dyscalculia, which was a ton of stuff. I had to make a list to remember all of them. It was so much. I was nine or ten years old, and I was sitting in the doctor's office. They were telling me, "You are not going to read, and you will not be able to go to college, and you probably won't have a great time in high school." All because the neuro pathways in my brain were a little bit scrambled. When I looked at the paper, what happened was everything would go blurry. So it wasn't an effort problem.

It was not a problem where I needed to try a little bit harder. Whenever I would look at a piece of paper or anything on the screen, anything that was text, it would actually look blurry, and that made it incredibly difficult to even try to learn how to read. And please hear this, I am not disparaging the medical community in any way, shape, form, or fashion.

I am so, so, so forever grateful for their diagnosis because, without their diagnosis, I wouldn't have known what was going on, and I would've just carried on with life. So I am so thankful that they took the time to be able to accurately diagnose what was going on in my mind.

At the time, I was living in Oklahoma with my parents, and my dad was working at a university. There was a doctor and a professor who came to give a lecture on how to overcome learning disabilities. My dad actually went to it, and after the lecture was over, he walked down the front, talked to this man, and said, "Hey, would you please meet with my son?" The guy politely declined. He said, "You know, I'm actually retired. I don't meet people anymore." My dad, being a good dad, convinced him to meet with me. He wasn't leaving until there was an answer that was yes. So I went over to his home office in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, which was about an hour and a half drive from Tulsa.

I remember it like it was yesterday. I remember my mom driving me over to his house. I was let in by his wife and walked upstairs. It was a spiral staircase. And it was the first time I'd ever seen a spiral staircase in person. I was so infatuated with that staircase. So I walked up that spiral staircase and into his home office upstairs. We looked out over a beautiful lake, and I saw what intimidated me more than anything. It wasn't him. He was actually a kind man in his mid-seventies with a big smile on his face, looking at me through amber-colored lenses. What I saw that was most intimidating was the hundreds and thousands of books in his office.

The reason that was intimidating to me was that I knew that I would not be able to read one word. If I was asked to, I did not have a shot. It wasn't that maybe I would get lucky and be able to just pick words apart. Or some days it was worse, and some days it was better, but there was no way in the world I could open up one of those books and read anything in them. So he sat me down, and we began to do testing. He just wanted to make sure that everything was accurate and the way that he had been explained about what was going on with my mind. And it was hours and hours of testing, probably about three hours of testing. And it ended with him. It was intellectually and emotionally taxing because he was putting his finger on the one area of my life that hurt the most.

I carried the most guilt and shame. I shouldn't have been carrying guilt and shame over it, but I was; I totally withdrew from friends and family. I got really good at dodging any place and any time that I might have to be required to read something. And because of that, I thought as soon as somebody found out what was going on with me, surely they would banish me. Surely, they would say, "Sam's that person, never mind." That was my thinking process. So the whole time we're doing testing, that's what I'm thinking. When the testing was over, he wrote one four-letter word down on a piece of paper and slid it across the table. I looked at it, flipped it over, and all that panic, all that fear surfaced.

He said, "Can you read that word for me? And I knew the answer was no; there's no way I could read it. I didn't know what it meant. At that point I knew I was shutting down. All of the shame and guilt I shouldn't have been carrying bubbled up. I burst out into tears, crossed my arms, and wept. I had nothing.

He said, "You don't need to worry." And he smiled at me through his amber-colored glasses. He said, "I don't want you to worry; you'll be able to go to high school and college. And I tell you what, if you want to read all of these books here, you'll be able to do that too." Arms crossed, brow furrowed, I was done. And he said, "You want to know how I know that? Would you like to know why I wear these Amber-colored glasses?"

He said, "Because I have exactly what you have. And I've read all of these books, and I've gone to college. It'll take years for you to be able to do it, but you'll be able to read and do whatever it is that you want to do." I lost my mind when I was up there. Are you kidding me? Is this real life? How is this even possible?

I tell you all of that not to say, "Hey, it's awesome that I was able to actually start to learn how to read. And it was great that I learned how to be able to go to high school and go to college and graduate." That's not the point of the story. The point in the story is that God gave me exactly what I needed at the moment that I needed it. He didn't just give me tips and tricks, which was great. He did give me a diagnosis, but he also gave me a person who was able to empathize with me, who had walked the road that I needed to walk, and was able to sit with me in my personal restoration process and start to peel back every little layer of guilt and shame that wasn't supposed to be there. He could do it because he had actually been there.

That's exactly what God gives us through Jesus. That's exactly what happens here in this story. God gave us a person, Jesus, and he's able to empathize with us, sit with us, show up with us, and has walked the road we have to walk. We can look at it and know that our personal restoration process story has a name, and his name is Jesus.

I want God to be able to slowly bring to mind those areas in your life that you don't want to think about. You may not want to think about it because it's a little too awkward, or there is some guilt and shame attached. Maybe it's a relationship with a friend or a family member that's gone stagnant or stale or been cut off for years. Maybe it's an addiction or a pattern of behavior that you know your life would be better off without. But you just feel stuck.

Perhaps you're feeling lonely and isolated. Maybe these last two years have absolutely taken your energy out, and you are just exhausted. You feel like this can't be what life is supposed to be about; there has to be more to it. Maybe you're thinking that your thing isn't that big. It's not dramatic. It's not like the one that you mentioned there. There are no major areas in my life that I regret or that scare me or bring panic and guilt to mind, so this message must not be for me.

That's not true at all; if it's on your mind, it's on God's heart. It's important to him. Jesus wants to be personally present for you the same way he was with this man with leprosy. Jesus is reminding us that his kingdom is all about personal restoration for us and world restoration.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

And now that you've got those things kind of in your head and in your mind, I want us to imagine what it would look like for us to take the next step.

I want us to imagine what it would look for us to follow in the footsteps of the man with leprosy. Yes, we're going to follow in the footsteps when it comes to Jesus. We're going to be with those that we would typically tend to banish. Get away in silence and solitude with God and ask him to break our hearts for what breaks his.

What would it look for you this week to actually follow the footsteps of the man with leprosy and say, "Lord, if you're willing, would you be present in my restoration process? Lord, if you're willing, would you show up and do something awesome in my life?" Maybe it looks like making an appointment. Maybe it looks like keeping that appointment and getting somebody else involved in your life. Maybe it's being honest with somebody that you've kept in the dark.

Maybe it's having the courage to pick back up your relationship with God or start to serve at CPC because God wants you to be personally present in somebody else's restoration process. Listen, you can do it. You might not think your story's that awesome, or you're that gifted, or you're that talented, but God designed you for a purpose with a purpose. And he wants you to be present in somebody else's restoration process. You can totally do it. There's a spot on the team for you. Maybe it's jumping head first into a community group, and you're thinking that you don't know what to do. Listen, we've got steps for you. We can help you take those steps.

You can ask for prayer from our prayer team if you are not sure what your next steps are (Text the word PRAYER to 650-460-1144). Let's not make any mistakes about this. Let's not get this twisted in any way, shape, form, or fashion. We don't get to approach Jesus and say, "Lord, if you're willing," because of any of our own accolades. I love that. It's not because we're really good or we're really smart strategic thinkers, or we've been reading our Bible enough, or we've memorized enough scripture. We don't know anything about this man with leprosy except for his disease and what he did about it. What he did was simply fall at the feet of Jesus and say, "Lord, if you're willing, I need you to be personally present."

And this is here as a banner marquee moment in our Bibles to let us know that Jesus wants to be personally present in our restoration process. The man didn't have to be smart. He didn't have to be intelligent. He didn't have to be well-rounded or good at making lists and following up on tasks. All he had to do was fall at the feet of Jesus and say, "Lord, if you are willing," and that's exactly what we get to do today because God wants us to know that he wants to be personally present in our restoration process.

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