

Becoming The People of God: Renewing The Mind

We live in unsettled times. For many of us, it feels like, in the last five to eight years, something has shifted in the social landscape where the ground has almost moved beneath our feet. When we launched this vision in 2018, we had no idea that out on the horizon, there would be a pandemic that rattled and changed much of what we had done. We didn't realize how much that would transform the world. But the underlying assumption is that the world is a bit different. Our culture is a bit different. Everything seems to be shaky. The institutions that once seemed very settled and secure are no longer stable. The ideas and assumptions that seem to rattle us through ideological warfare are eroding trust in one another, as well as in our institutions. It seems that the cultures run much more on fear and outrage than we're used to, much more so in the way that it's hard to hold a populace together.

We live in unsettled times. While I believe that our age has some unique challenges to it, the uniqueness of our moment really isn't all that unique in the sense that every generation, particularly of followers of Jesus, have to wrestle with how we remain faithful to Jesus in our particular time.

One of the gifts of the Christian faith is that we have a multi-millennia old tradition, which we lean into in times of unsettledness. So, while our unique moment poses unique challenges, some that we'll talk through in a second, we take great hope in the fact that generations of followers of Jesus before us have also navigated unsettled times.

First and maybe one who seems to have a lot that correlates to our moment is St. Augustine. Saint Augustine was a fourth-century African towering theologian whose mark, not just on the church but on Western civilization, is immense. In his *Magnum Opus*, the *City of God*, he's writing in response to a very unsettled moment. He's writing at the downfall of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire, at that point, had ruled for about a thousand years, and most believed that Rome would essentially last forever. The idea of Rome falling was so foreign to the contemporaries of the time that when it began to be ransacked in AD 410, it seemed like the world was crumbling because, in many ways, it was. What happened just prior to that was Emperor Constantine had recently legalized Christianity to be the empire's formal religion. So when the fall of Rome took place, the reasoning of the culprit or the scapegoat was the Christians.

And so Augustine, reflecting on this, wrote this monstrous work, *City of God*, in which he's reflecting on this tension between what he calls the city of God and the city of man. He's saying there are two different cities, and he's not speaking of locales. He's thinking of two kinds of ways of living that coexist and overlap and intertwine. He's writing a defense of the Christian faith and saying that this is not the reason for the fall of

Rome, but rather, there are other things going on. I want you to listen to the way he describes these two cities. He's writing in about AD 410, so this is quite some time ago, yet it still seems very prescient for us.

Two cities have been formed by two loves, the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God. The heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men, but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory. The other says to God, thou are my glory and the lifter up of mine head. Augustine, City of God

What he's saying is these two that contrast, the City of God and the City of Man, are built fundamentally on two different types of love—one for the love of God and one for the love of self. Now, he's not even necessarily saying that these are at war with one another. He's just naming the reality of the distinction between these two cities.

Augustine's framework is really helpful when we consider how we exist in our own unsettled times because we live as Christians to these two different kinds of loves. How do we exist in our day and age, faithful to the way of Jesus, and yet live in a country, in a culture that seems to be built on a different form of love? How do we both follow Jesus and be a good citizen? How do we both follow Jesus, love our neighbors, and work in environments that pull and draw us away from the way of Jesus? There's that tension between these two cities, and that tension is where we're supposed to live.

I was praying this morning, working through Matthew 16, when Jesus says, "*Whoever wants to follow me must take up their cross, deny themselves and follow me.*" We've talked about that as we've gone through the Gospel of Mark, but what I was reminded of, in light of today's sermon, is that so much of following Jesus is about crucifying the self. It's about laying down all other allegiances to the City of Man or to whatever other allegiance we may have and taking up allegiance to Jesus Christ. It says this is the task, but it's not easy. Nobody wants to take up their cross; nobody wants to be crucified. We will face challenges.

This era in which we're stepping into will be filled with difficulties, and I want to name just four that I believe we are uniquely faced with in this time. In no way is this list exhaustive, but rather, these are the four I see. I went back and listened to the elders as they were processing this years ago. It was amazing how consistently these challenges have continued from 2018 to the present.

The first challenge we face, and we've talked a lot about this past year, is this idea of life balance or ambient anxiety. We live in an anxious

age, what sociologists call the burnout culture. There's this constant oscillation between online outrage and mind-numbing escapism into entertainment that shocks our nervous system, which leads to anxiety, exhaustion, and sheer fatigue.

There are these twin gods of accumulation and accomplishment that enslave us where we constantly hop on this treadmill of working to earn, to consume, and then repeat. These gods are relentless; they're graceless. They care very little for your personal sanity. To be quite frank, most of us are caught in this, and we're simply too tired to actually live well. We're exhausted. The frenetic, always-on culture zaps us and pulls our energy in a thousand different ways.

I'm reminded of that Catholic writer Ronald Rolheiser, who writes this: "We are distracting ourselves into spiritual oblivion." Most of us suffer and live within this ambient anxiety that's present before us that we manage and hold, but we never quite overcome.

The second challenge we face is ideological division or moral relativism. Our world is more and more being divided into ideologically pure camps. Where we have no room for nuanced gray areas and conversation, but rather, we're witnessing the theories about the human condition that become almost quasi-religions. They're developing into these ideological idols of both the right and the left. And the effect has been this increasing segregation and division where we're becoming experts at demarcating people based on ethnic, political, religious, and class differences.

These ideologies that hover beneath the surface all challenge our allegiance to Jesus. The problem with a secular ideology is, simply, no matter how well-intentioned or hopeful, which most of them are, they're all secular attempts to build the kingdom without the king. And we firmly believe, I'm convinced more and more than ever, that the way of Jesus, the kingdom of God, is simply one that is a better alternative narrative and story to that which is being told by our culture. You mix this ideological idolatry with the moral relativism in which our culture doesn't have a coherent story of the right and the wrong.

The only thing that really holds our ethical dialogue together is maybe some concept of "Do no harm." But the problem with doing no harm is if you are to not harm someone, you have to have a shared consensus as to what harm is or what harm isn't. You have to have a shared understanding of good or evil. And so, in many ways, this rampant kind of ideological warfare crumbles on itself because we don't have a shared story. That, in turn, fuels this ambient anxiety because we're constantly wrestling with these differing opinions, and the heightened hostility just really exhausts us.

The third challenge we face is rampant individualism and this rising epidemic of loneliness. I believe we're living through the hollowing out of American society. We're watching thick relationships and webs of relationships slowly eroding away. Think of the decline of something like the Elks Club, the bowling leagues, or the PTAs. We no longer have these thick webs of connection because we're slowly buying the myth or the belief of—to be true to yourself, you do you, or speak your truth—is a coherent story. So we're slowly growing this corrosive, divisive tribalism

that masquerades as community. You can find people who hate like you, but it's really hard to find people who live through the nuances of everyday living.

As humans, we ache for loving relationships and community. We ache for this deep connection that moves beyond just the exterior but really goes from the inside out. And I believe that the church has an alternative way that we can hold community and offer a different story. But how, in a culture of transactional relationships where human connection is cheapened into a few swipes left or right, do we actually hold together as a community, loving one another across differences?

Loneliness is on the rise. Recent statistics said that 40 percent of Americans have one-to-zero close confidants, meaning nearly half of Americans have no one to share their pain with and have no one to navigate the challenges of life with. Rampant individualism and its twin, loneliness, is something on the horizon that will erode who we are as people.

The fourth challenge we face is workaholism or compulsive consumption. With all of this pain hovering beneath the surface, we have the means in our modern world to numb it away with the next purchase, the next thing. Where we hop on that treadmill of work, earn, and consume, and we just play that over and over. Career becomes something more like a cult than it does an active contribution to the good of the world.

So what would it look like for a community to come together under the reality that we have been called with purpose and meaning to help spread God's shalom into the world around us? This is the time that we live in life balance, ideological division, rampant individualism, and workaholism. This is our time. These are the challenges that every generation of followers of Jesus has to navigate in their unique times.

Now, take a deep breath. I promise things will get a little better here, but what I want is for us to be clear-eyed. We look at our particular moment, and we say to Jesus, "Lord, how would you have us then live?" Lord, how do we live in light of this reality? If these are the tensions, the fissures that are growing in our culture, how do we offer a different story? How do we not succumb to these temptations but rather find a new way to live and follow Jesus that is actually quite ancient? We have a long tradition to lean into.

Turn to Romans 12. For the next three weeks, we're going to be in these two verses. We're going to dig deep into what Paul means by this idea of the renewal of your mind. This text really breaks down into three sections.

The first is that we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. We're going to talk about that one this morning. Next week, we're going to talk about this second verb or command that Paul gives, "*Do not conform to the patterns of this world.*" And then, in two weeks, we'll talk about this third thing where Paul says, "*but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" It's a fascinating idea of Paul's framework for spiritual formation. Because really, what you see in these two verses is Paul's summary statement of what the life of the follower of Jesus is like. How do we

follow Jesus in however these challenges come? First, we look at what it means to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Let's read that text. [Romans 12:1-2](#)

I learned early in seminary that anytime you see the word "therefore," you have to go back and see what it's there for! This therefore is in Paul's letter to the Romans, this linchpin of the whole letter where he's summarizing in light of the first eleven chapters "*Therefore this is how you live.*" The first eleven chapters are dense; they're theological, and they're laying out all these kinds of meticulous arguments.

But then Paul arrives at chapter 12 and says, "*Therefore, in light of all that, I urge you, brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy.*" "In view of God's mercy" is a key phrase. Remember, Paul is laying out here a framework for spiritual formation of how we grow and change in the way of Jesus. This phrase is where the whole of our spiritual life begins. It begins in view of God's mercy.

For as much as we would like to buy the myth that we're the authors of our own story to be true, that we are the ones who hold our destiny in our own hands, we do nothing outside the very mercy of God. The spiritual life begins not out of our own initiative but out of response to what God has done for us—in view of God's mercy, in light of who God is and what he has done for us—this is then how you are to live.

So what follows is all response. It's all that happens naturally after seeing God's mercy. Paul says to offer your body as a living sacrifice. The word body is the word *soma* in Greek. We have a tenuous relationship with this idea of the body, particularly when we think of something like spiritual formation, because we've divorced the idea of spirit and body. In the modern world, we view them as two different things. That's foreign to the New Testament, in which the body and spirit are one integrated person. This is what I would call the soul. The soul is the whole of who you are. It is not the immaterial part, like the cartoons where you crash, and then that little thing floats up. That shaped our imaginations more than we realized. And Paul says, offer your bodies, your soma, as a living sacrifice. He says to offer all of who you are, everything about you, body and spirit, before God.

This divide that we make between body and spirit tends to manifest like this: we think of our internal world as that which really matters; the body is just the tool that we have to drag around the world because it's where we have our five senses, which is how we encounter the world. But the inside, that's what really matters. But Paul challenges that. He says to offer your bodies—the whole of who you—are as a living sacrifice. It can be easy to over-spiritualize this, but it will require the whole of who we are.

Think of it as a practice. In a couple of weeks, we're going to start talking through the idea of fasting. Fasting is a way in which God uses your body to form your whole person, your soul, through something like an impulse of hunger, something there that God utilizes. We have a hard time with this. The path of discipleship is about getting what we understand in our minds of Jesus into our muscle memory. See, when Jesus says to turn the other cheek, the goal is that it is not a moment of supreme self-discipline, but rather the teaching and life of the Spirit of

God is so ingrained in us that it becomes our natural reaction to turn the other cheek. It's about getting that into our bodies. Dallas Willard, in his book *Renovation of the Heart*, writes of this verse.

...the only thing that makes any sense for a human being who trusts Christ, is to 'present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, very pleasing to God.' This total yielding of every part of our bodies to God, until the very tissues and muscles that make them up are inclined toward God and godliness and are vitalized in action by the powers of heaven, breaking all conformity with worldly life in this age and transforms us into conformity with the age to come by completing the renewal of our minds—our powers of thought and imaginations and judgment become deeply rooted in our bodies.
Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*

What he's saying is that the Holy Spirit is after transforming the very tissues and muscles of who you are to where everything about you comes to follow Jesus. He says, then your body will be a holy and pleasing sacrifice to God because you are finding your life in the very way of Jesus. What we do is bring our whole selves before God because right now, our whole selves are also in the city of man, to use Augustine's language. We are in those two places at once, those two frameworks. Our bodies are living in the city of man, living in a culture that's bent away from the things of Jesus. So they are actually being formed in that direction towards that love as well.

Think about the way you interact with your phone. Your phone is something that you pull out of your pocket, pull up Amazon, order whatever it is, and then click buy. The next day, it magically appears on your front door. That is shaping who you are and what you believe about the world. It's more than just a transaction. What it's actually communicating is that you hold the very possibility of anything you desire right there on your phone with one click. That is a way in which your body is interacting that's radically different, by the way, than ten or fifteen years ago. What does that do to us slowly over time? We can constantly achieve and satiate any desire we have within a few seconds, which shapes who we are at our core and how we understand the world around us. I'm not down on that. I had a lot of stuff delivered yesterday from Amazon. What I'm asking us to do, though, is to recognize what would it look like to offer that as a sacrifice. Do we recognize the ways in which that is forming who we are? Do we believe that maybe that story, that narrative, has a goal within it that's different and counter to the way of Jesus?

How do we offer our whole selves before God? Because it looks good on a church whiteboard or something to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. But how do we actually do that? Because for Paul, this is the first step towards spiritual formation. We have a long history of this in the church tradition where we don't lean on our own understanding, but rather, we can lean into what generations of followers of Jesus have done before us who have lived these things in unsettled times.

One of the ways, as you heard in that video, is by living according to something called a Rule of Life. I want to spend the next few minutes talking about this because when I say rule of life, you get nervous

because we're pretty antinomian in our world. We don't like rules. But notice also it's rule, not rules. We define a rule of life this way:

A rule of life is a set of habits that we seek to integrate personally and communally into the rhythm of our regular lives, to consciously organize our lives around the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. It's a set of habits, a set of ways in which our body exists in the world around us that push us or lean us towards the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

You have a rule of life. You have a set of daily rhythms, habits, and routines that are shaping and giving form to your life, whether you're aware of it or not. Spiritual formation is not a Christian thing; it's a human thing. To be human is to be formed, to adapt, to change, to be dynamic. You can think of anyone in history. They all had a formation.

So you have a rule of life. But how intentional are you with your rule of life, and is your rule of life designed in such a way that it opens up your life to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit? That's the task of the disciple. How do we present our bodies in our daily living before the Holy Spirit and allow the Spirit to transform us?

If we're to offer our bodies to God, that means every part of life matters because your body interacts with every part of the world. It's how you experience the world. This is Paul. Remember in Corinthians when he talks about *"Do everything for the glory of God."* Can you fold laundry to the glory of God? Can you make lunches for the glory of God? Can you help your kids with homework for the glory of God? Can you work and interact at the water cooler in your office for the glory of God? Paul would say, "Yes, do everything for the glory of God."

The idea of presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice means every corner of existence matters to God. Everything. We have this lie that we believe that God is only found in the mountaintops and in those high spiritual experiences. And when the band is just right and when all of this is going well, we think that's the space where God is and only is. But we have to begin to understand that God is just as much in the mundane things of life as he is in the big moments. Those have a role, the mountaintops, and the valleys. They all come before God in all of those places, inviting us to commune more and more with him.

I often hear this idea that I want to put God first in my life, and I love that. I get the impulse there, but saying that assumes that God also isn't second, third, fourth, and fifth. It differentiates God as this is in one part of your life but not in the other parts of life. However, God saturates all of that. When you come to faith, you are actually given a new lens in which you recognize the God-saturated world that we live in, who's both on Highway 101, stuck in traffic, as well as here in this sanctuary, in a worship set. God saturates all of that.

So then, how do we organize our lives to open ourselves up for that? That's what a rule of life is. It's built on the assumption that all of life matters to God, and so, therefore, how do I live in communion with God on Monday and Tuesday as I do on Saturday and Sunday?

There are three things I want us to understand about a rule of life. First, a rule of life flows from the gospel. Remember Paul's words "in view of God's mercy." A rule of life flows from this idea. Not that we are achieving our salvation by any stretch; God alone does that work. Paul spends eleven chapters detailing that very truth. This is not about being a good Christian or earning your salvation. It's about how do I recognize the tensions, the challenges, my unique way of life or moment in culture, and how do I counter those so I can open and live from my identity of what Jesus has done for us?

This is Paul in another place. It's a familiar text we read often at baptisms, and rightfully so. *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).* Now this is beautiful because it means in that very sense that when that person is baptized and brought to saving faith through the work of the Holy Spirit, they are made into a brand new being. And that is absolutely true. But there's more going on with what Paul says here because of this idea of the new creation. Here, we think of it as the individual, but the language actually doesn't have the article. It's just new creation. It's really, if anyone is in Christ, new creation. The life of the age to come, the future hope that we have when God restores all things percolates in that moment—new creation.

And what happens then is you, as a follower of Jesus, have eyes to see that new creation everywhere. But it's in tension with the old creation. It hasn't been fully brought here. You live in that overlap. What Paul would say is the present evil age that's passing away, and the age to come is here and now. It's Jesus, in Mark 1, who says, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It's here. You have the ability to live into that.

A rule of life recognizes that our mind, body, and everything about us is trained not to live in the age to come because we've been existing in the present age. So how then do we move from this way of life where Paul and other places would say to crucify the flesh, to kill off our old life so that we can live into the new?

The rule of life is flowing from the gospel that recognizes I need to undergo that whole transformation of unlearning the ways of this world and learning the ways of the kingdom of God because they're radically at tension. As Augustine would say, they're built on two different types of love—one the love of God and one the love of self. You can't just unlearn that in a second. Your whole life, the world in which we exist, is built to shape and center the individual. The gospel has a different story. So how, then, do we unlearn that old story and learn the new?

Something which we take seriously, like our habits, our rhythms of life to where we can open ourselves up more and more in everyday living in all moments of life with your relationship, your finances, your sexuality, your work life, your neighborhood, the changing of diapers, the folding of laundry, the worshiping on Sunday, the prayers before the sunrises. All those sorts of things are ways in which God is inviting us to have the Holy Spirit saturate those places. It's a rule of life that flows from the gospel.

Secondly, a rule of life is a trellis for your soul. This is why it's rule, not rules. By the way, this is not a list of to-dos. A Rule of Life comes from the Latin word *regula*, where there's a debate, but it seems like the word trellis was formed. A trellis is simply a structure, and the whole goal of the trellis is not the trellis itself. The trellis is a tool. Its purpose is to allow the vine to attach itself to the trellis, and the trellis helps lift the vine up off of the ground and allows it or aids it in its flourishing and its growth to eventually bear fruit.

A grapevine could lay on the ground, and it will grow. It will still produce some fruit but not nearly as much fruit as if it is placed onto a trellis, lifted up out of the shadows of the dirt, allowing the sunlight to hit it. Then it begins to flourish. In the same way that a trellis is to a grapevine, a rule of life is for your soul. If we look at those four challenges I listed above, those are deeply haunting challenges that saturate our world. How do we lift our lives up out of that so that the Holy Spirit can commune regularly with us so that we can bear fruit?

A rule of life helps lift our lives out of the chaos of the modern world and allows us to connect with God. The goal is never the trellis; it's a means to an end. And its end is communion with God to grow in Christ's likeness, to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That's why in any of these habits if they begin to actually start drawing me away from the way of Jesus, it's actually bogging me down. That's why I'm the first to say to just leave it behind. That's not the goal. The goal is for you to commune with God.

So, what are the ways in which you're organizing your life? What is the structure, the trellis in your life, that's bringing you before the Lord? I might ask that question, but the goal is not the trellis. The goal is to commune with the Holy Spirit so a rule of life flows from the gospel. A rule of life is a trellis for your soul.

And then lastly, a rule of life is a rule that bends. As I mentioned, this is not a list of to-dos. In all of these things, there are levels in which it will look different in our present day with different challenges. We talk a lot about this on Sabbath for many of us. For me, my Sabbath is on Saturdays, where I set aside that day, and it's largely free. But there are times in which, whether it's softball or theater rehearsals or whatever it is, my girls have things that interfere with that, and that becomes a moment where I need to bend the rule.

How do I create and adapt to my kind of living circumstances in a way that's still committed to following Jesus, which will necessitate sacrifice, but also doesn't lose the forest for the trees? That recognizes the complexity and says, "Okay, how do we interact and work with these things?" See, a rule of life is not a to-do list. It's not about checking things off. The goal of the Sabbath is not the Sabbath. The goal of fasting is not to fast. It's simply to bring and open up ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit. All of these habits are built on a long history within church tradition in which generations of followers of Jesus before us have found ways in which they're helpful for us to encounter the Holy Spirit. It isn't flippant. It isn't like we just threw a dart at the wall and said, "Let's do that." But rather, it's building out of a rich tradition. But that rule bends. It adapts

to our present moment. So a rule of life flows from the gospel, is a trellis for our souls, and bends.

Well, this all kind of leads up in some ways to what you got on your way in here. This is what we are calling CPC's Rule of Life. We deeply believe in what it means to follow Jesus. So much so that we want to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, which means it has to interact in all these different spaces of our lives. So a few years ago, through much prayer, much discernment, more conversations, and whiteboard sessions than you could imagine, we came to this idea, these four practices that we are reorganizing our life as a church around.

The first was we spent this past year with this idea of attentiveness, and we practiced that in contrast to a world of hurry and distraction for the past year. I hope that you're still integrating these habits of Silence and Solitude and Sabbath. I hope those are still working themselves out in your life because we believe that's one of the ways that we counter the challenges of our time.

Well, this morning, we're starting this new practice of Renewing the Mind that we practice in contrast to a world of noise, competing narratives, and addictions, and we will do so as has been said through the practice of fasting and scripture. These two practices are intentionally given broad attentiveness in renewing the mind because we recognize that it will look different for every single one of us here. But these two practices are designed to cultivate a life that's present to God. They both deal with how you spend your time and your attentiveness and focus.

All formation is counter formation. Every once in a while, I get the question, "Isn't this all just too much? Isn't it all just a lot?" It is a lot. But Jesus says, "If you want to follow me, take up your cross." He demands a lot. But this idea, this offer of a new life, of the kingdom of God, of salvation, or healing for your soul, I'm telling you, Jesus would say it is the life and life to the full, and counter to that is the enemy who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. There's a different way.

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was an exemplary disciple of Jesus in the past century who found a way, in a unique and challenging time, to remain faithful to Jesus. He lived and pastored, and he was a brilliant academic through the collapse of the German church as Hitler was rising to power and the Nazi party began to take over in 1933. The threat of Nazi power was growing so rapidly in Germany that many were looking to the church, but it was compromising its faithfulness to Jesus. The church was capitulating and cooperating with the Third Reich and was giving away their allegiance to Christ. Many sat by and thought and waited for the church to change, but the compromise was near total.

In 1934, a Senate gathering led to the establishment of what was called the Confessing Church, and Bonhoeffer signed this declaration, written by Karl Barth and called the Barmen Declaration. The declaration was a repudiation of Nazism and a call to loyalty to Christ alone in the midst of a compromising church. So Bonhoeffer and a few other pastors signed it but were still disheartened by the way in which followers of Jesus were walking away from their faith, particularly pastors and church leaders.

Bonhoeffer said that they needed to do something about it. He went to this small town called Fenwal and started this underground seminary in which this community of pastors he would bring in would enter into this strenuous study and common life together. If you've read his book, *Life Together*, that's the description of life at Fenwal. It says their life was focused on prayer, scripture, and confession. Simply put, they came under a Rule of Life. Bonhoeffer's vision was a commitment to this kind of living. This Rule of Life would create a way in which they could counter form the powerful influence of Nazi Germany.

This vision was tested as the Gestapo arrested dozens of the students at Fenwal. Friends and colleagues of Bonhoeffer began to ask questions. They asked if it was over-spiritualized. How is this coming into this rising up to this moment of tension? Was it really needed? Wouldn't this just lead to burnout for these pastors? Wouldn't it be just too extreme, and they'd lose positions of leadership?

Eventually, one particular friend named Wilhelm Niesel came to Bonhoeffer. He was a historian and was suspicious of over-spiritualization at Fenwal. One author describes it this way. When Niesel had come, he was a rower. So they went out on this lake, and here's where the story picks up. It says,

When the two rowers reached the far shore, Bonhoeffer led Niesel up a small hill to a clearing from which they could see in the distance a vast field and the runways of a nearby squadron. German fighter planes were taking off and landing, and soldiers were moving hurriedly in purposeful patterns like so many ants. Bonhoeffer spoke of a new generation of Germans in training whose disciplines formed for a kingdom of hardness and cruelty. It would be necessary, he explained, to propose a superior discipline if the Nazis were to be defeated. You have to be stronger than these tormentors that you find everywhere today.

Bonhoeffer saw the formative power of something like the Nazis or Hitler's youth camps and said they had to have a stronger formation than that. What we do has to have a stronger formative power than the world around us. Now, I am not equating our moment to 1930s Germany by any stretch, but what I am suggesting is that the formative power of the world around us will shape us into a particular kind of person. And our formation here must be stronger than the formation there. If we are to find a way to be faithful in this moment, our formation into the way of Jesus must be stronger than the formation of a secular world, and therefore, necessitates offering our whole selves to God because if we don't do that, we will slowly drift away from the way of Jesus.

As Paul would say, "Church, therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God because

this is your true and proper worship church." This is our time; this is our moment to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, and we are not without example. Hear these familiar words. [1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#)

We don't bring salvation to people, but we offer ourselves back to God, and we give our lives over to him. We do so as a declaration to offer ourselves back to God in both gratitude and love for God.

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

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