

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflections
Life Reimagined: Faith in Life
5 and 6 November 2022
Pastor Ashley Watson, Director of Youth Ministry

Scripture Text: Genesis 50: 19-21

Listen up: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zc0RrEMCeIQ>

Sermon Preamble

Our Director of Youth Ministry Pastor Ashley Watson continues our series on Life Reimagined with a personal story from her experience as a basketball trainer for an after school program for elementary and middle school students. One of her students shoots the basketball with an unconventional underhanded shot, while still following the basic mechanics essential to basketball shooting. This is an example of how individuals even on their spiritual journey, have different ways to exercise their faith, different trials they go through, and different decisions they make. As a result, the journey towards realizing God's calling on each of our lives is often different. There are some instances where you need to let a person live their life the way they need to and trust that God is still directing their path even though you may not like it. We need to trust God in the different processes God has for us.

The Kobe Bryant Mamba Mentality, like a spiritual journey, is to be the best version of self

Kobe Bryant dubbed the Mamba Mentality as the constant quest to be the best version of self. He was on this natural progression of growing to understand the game, his teammates, and himself. He spent countless hours in the gym shooting, lifting weights, watching game films, eating properly, taking care of his body, and talking to sports psychologists to help with his mental game. Sure he had his highs and lows, his wins and losses, his injuries. But he never stopped improving; he never stopped learning; he never stopped studying. He was on this constant quest, essentially for a lifetime.

Biblically speaking, a spiritual journey is this road that we take to be the best version of ourselves that God has called us to be. It's a natural progression of a person as they grow to understand God, the world, and themselves. It's an intentional lifestyle to grow deeper in knowledge and in wisdom. We all are working towards growing deeper in our relationship and developing in our faith, but not everybody's journey to do this looks the same. The path that God has me on doesn't look the same as others, but we are all on the same road working towards the same goal.

Spiritual Journey: New Age Perspective vs. Biblical Perspective

A hot topic in our society is people claiming to be spiritual, but with no belief in God or Jesus Christ. They claim they are spiritual because they believe in a higher power or living as one with the universe.

The new age perspective says to chant mantras to bring on positive vibrations. You've seen the t-shirts and the posts on social media that say "Good vibes only." But the Bible says to have daily conversations with God through prayer. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Never stop praying."

The new age perspective says your spiritual journey will result in harmony with the universe, but the Bible says there is war in the universe. "We are not fighting against flesh and blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

The new age perspective says to manifest your own destiny. Choose your destiny, choose who you want to be and make it happen for yourself. But the Bible says that before we were even born, God knew God's plan for us. We all have a plan laid out for our lives. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for evil to give you a future and a hope'" (Jeremiah 29:11). Our destiny is already set for how God wants us to live. There is a lot of buzz on manifesting

that plan on your own. There's no doubt that you have to put in some work to live into the calling God has for you, but know that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that these plans will be manifested and not from our own power. It's not a coincidence that you've got that job you've been longing for; it's not a coincidence that you closed on a huge real estate deal; it's not the universe at work for you that you've been accepted into your dream university. That is the power of God at work in the background manifesting the plans God has for you.

The Christian Spiritual Journey from Searchers to Followers

The Christian spiritual journey can be anywhere in your journey along a wide spectrum with the two extremes being the searchers on one end and the followers on the other end. Among the searchers are those who are not interested, curiously seeking, or searching assertively. You transition to a follower once you give your life to Christ. Within the followers are more stages that outline our spiritual journey with those stages being: Lordship Decision, Natural Promotion, Valley of Dependence, Preparation, Valley of Wholeness, Releasing, Valley of Identity, and Fulfillment.

We have all been in the Searching Position

Whether you grew up in the church or not, we all have been in a searching position at some point in our life. You may have been aware of Christianity but are not all interested for a variety of reasons. You may have had misconceptions of Christianity or a negative view on it because of your own personal experience or hearing negative experiences from others.

Maybe you were questioning or curiously seeking. You realized there is more to life than what you see. You attended church events or Sunday worship service out of continued curiosity, but not because you felt the NEED to.

Those who are searching assertively may intellectually believe in God, but struggle with their faith as a whole. They may say they know there's a higher power, and they believe it is God, but their life doesn't reflect that they worship or depend on God. They are actively taking steps to find the answers to their questions, which may look like joining a small group, studying the Bible, listening to various preachers, and then prayerfully getting the answers they need to make a commitment to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Stages of a Follower: the Lordship Decision

In your Lordship Decision, you are deciding to take your faith to another level of commitment, sacrifice, and discipline to live into who God has called you to be. Deciding to make this faith commitment says that you embrace you are not perfect, you recognize that you are a sinful human being, and wouldn't be here if it weren't for God's grace and mercy. You are now a follower and have begun your journey to be the best that God called you to be.

Your journey into living to be the best that God has called you to be, is your journey to living into your call. God calls each and every one of us whether that's in ministry, business, healthcare, education, or social justice. We are all called, but the calling is not the accomplishment. We don't reach a destination and say ok I'm done, and I've accomplished my call. As part of what is a "Calling Journey" model, your call is defined as you are embodying "a unique facet of Christ's character through the channel of your role or task." You are to "be" Jesus in a unique way. So in short, your life task or role, which is what you do, is a channel through which the Gospel impacts others. Our spiritual journey is life's ups and downs of us following Jesus in a unique way.

To help give you a visual of each stage in our journey, we will be looking at the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. In Joseph's teenage years, he fully embraced his call and is launched into the next stage of the journey which is the Natural Promotion.

Stages of a Follower: Natural Promotion

In the Natural Promotion stage we have innate abilities for our call but not the character. We have certain gifts and abilities, but we are not sure how we would even use them. Joseph is then put in a position of watching over his brothers when one day he realizes his gift of having prophetic dreams. He begins telling his brothers and father about them and sharing the prophetic dreams. This natural promotion stage is like a honeymoon phase. You're in the honeymoon phase where you're excited that you've finally made that decision to intentionally follow God's plan. Everything seems to be going your way and you're feeling good about how you're developing. You're sharing with others the gift that God has given you, and your plans to use that gift. You see God clearly moving in your life.

Stages of a Follower: Valley of Dependence

Then suddenly things are not going so great. Joseph's brothers plot to kill him, but Joseph is eventually sold to some traders who then sell him to Potiphar in Egypt to become a slave. It was Joseph's arrogance and youthful pride that caused him to plummet into this valley. But it can also very well be external events out of our control, such as unemployment, loss of a friend, or divorce. Any of these can cause us to drop into this valley. In the Valley of Dependence, we are taught to rely on God instead of our own natural abilities. In the Natural Promotion Stage, we discover we can do anything **WITH** God. In the Valley of Dependence, we learn we can't do anything **WITHOUT** God.

At this point, Joseph has been gracefully broken. One must be torn down to be built back up again. In what areas of your life are you holding so tight onto them that you can't let go and let God be in control? Joseph, while in slavery, had to let go of his arrogance and pride. When you get to that point of being able to let go it shows we are mature enough to release some things from our life in order to grow. Then we move into the next stage of Preparation.

Stages of a Follower: Preparation

This stage in the process is very important because this is where you focus on growing your abilities and refining your strengths. Experience and skills needed for your destiny role are gained during this stage. You sense something greater is coming for you. You have this tension that I know I have a call, but question when will I be released to fulfill it. So now it is time for Joseph to prepare and build those skills needed to fully live into his calling. Joseph is working in Potiphar's house and eventually gains a position to manage the entire household. This promotion sets him back on track moving upward. It is during this period that Joseph is learning to lead and is working on developing his skills that will someday be crucial to his destiny.

Stages of a Follower: Valley of Wholeness

Remember during Preparation we are still in this valley and have just slightly risen and plateaued in the Preparation Stage. You are then ushered into another valley called the "Valley of Wholeness." Some things that can usher you into this valley are family issues, unbalanced life, hidden sins, or relationship issues. For Joseph, this Valley of Wholeness was when the chief cup-bearer forgot to mention to Pharaoh about Joseph interpreting dreams. In Genesis chapter 40, the chief cup-bearer had a dream and Joseph interpreted it for him. After he interprets the dream, he tells the cup-bearer in verse 14 "And please remember me and do me a favor when things go well for you. Mention me to

Pharaoh, so he might let me out of this place.” The dream came true just as Joseph had interpreted. The cup-bearer was restored back to his position, but he completely forgot about Joseph.

Stages of a Follower: Release

Two years later, Pharaoh had two dreams that nobody could interpret, and finally the chief cup-bearer steps up to mention about Joseph interpreting his dreams. This moment is the Day of Release for Joseph where he is suddenly catapulted into this big promotion. I’m sure he was elated to finally be recruited into the kind of position or role that he was made for. The Pharaoh declared, “Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than you” (Genesis 41:40). Joseph was Pharaoh’s right-hand man for 9 years. He led Egypt through the 7 years of famine where he reconciled with his brothers and transitioned into yet another valley, the Valley of Identity.

Stages of a Follower: Valley of Identity

The Valley of Identity Stage really transforms who we are from one who is being prepared to one who actually is prepared. The person who we were born to be is fully formed in this stage. You not only find success in your own accomplishments, but you also look for success in the accomplishments of others. For Joseph, he had to come to terms with his past and let go of the betrayal that he experienced with his brothers. His Life message is revealed in Genesis 45:4-8: “And he said again, ‘I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you!’” Joseph noticed it wasn’t his brother’s fault that he went through those trials. It was God that put him in that position, so that God’s promises could be fulfilled. Joseph is now in the fulfillment stage.

Stages of a Follower: Fulfillment

Genesis 50:19-21 “But Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.” Notice how throughout this journey there are a series of tests and valleys created to strengthen our inward qualities. Joseph endured many challenges, and through his reactions, he demonstrated his potential and maturity. Our growth happens in our reaction to life’s events and tests. One may think that Joseph’s journey was not ideal. We would not want to endure the trials Joseph experienced. In the end, Joseph still lived a fulfilled life ultimately preserving his family. He needed to go through the things he did to learn how he could live into his call and demonstrate being filled by the Spirit of God to others. He impacted many people such as other prisoners, workers in Potiphar’s house, Pharaoh, and many generations after him. What does this mean for us in our journey? How do we help others through their journey?

Three Action Steps

The first step is to look inwardly. Then reflect on where you started and map out your own journey to identify where you are now.

The second step is to find somebody to go alongside you. An African proverb says “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, then go together”. It doesn’t matter where you are in your journey, it’ll be helpful to have somebody alongside you to talk to and figure things out together. It’s

all a part of discipleship. We should be doing all that we can to support one another across generations as one body in Christ. Studies have shown that the number one reason that Millennials stayed connected to the church after high school was a meaningful relationship with an adult. This statistic will still apply for Generation Z, so ministries establishing relationships across generations are important for the future of the Church.

The third step is to have empathy for others and where they are in their journey. No matter what you choose to do know that we are all working towards the same goal. Some may move fast, some move slow, but we are all on the same road to fulfill God's calling on our lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDING FOR USE IN FAMILY GROUPS

Sermon Preamble

-When did someone disagree with how you follow God on your spiritual journey?

The Kobe Bryant Mamba Mentality, like a spiritual journey, to be the best version of oneself

-What resonates most with you as an important lesson in applying the Mamba Mentality to your spiritual journey to be the best version of yourself?

Spiritual Journey: New Age Perspective vs. Biblical Perspective

-In what ways has the power of God manifested in your life? When have you used your own power, to accomplish God's plan (Ouch!)?

The Searching Position where we have all been

-When you were in the Searching Position, or perhaps are now in the Searching Position, how would you describe that position of searching? Was it disinterest? Was it curiously seeking? Was it searching assertively in taking steps to answer questions?

Stages of a Follower: the Lordship decision

-How does knowing these stages help you during the ups and downs of life?

-In what ways does our calling in our spiritual journey include down times of suffering as a Christian?

Stages of a Follower: Natural Promotion

-In what circumstances have your innate abilities required character to apply those innate abilities for the glory of God?

Stages of a Follower: Valley of Dependence

-In what circumstances have you been in the Valley of Dependence? How did you learn to rely on God, instead of your own natural abilities?

Stages of a Follower: Preparation

-How does growing your abilities and refining your strengths help you develop skills you will need in later stages of being a follower?

Stages of a Follower: Valley of Wholeness

-After you have gone through a period of preparation in growing your abilities, what issues external to your inward self may usher you into another valley, known as the Valley of Wholeness?

Stages of a Follower: Release

-When the external issues are resolved, you are released into the position for which God created you. -- What is that role in God's mission for which God has created you?

Stages of a Follower: Valley of Identity

-In what circumstances of the Valley of Identity do you find success not in your own accomplishments, but in the accomplishments of others?

Stages of a Follower: Fulfillment

The stage of Fulfillment is, "others intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good to save the lives of many people" (Genesis 50: 19-21). In what circumstances have you or would you experience the stage of Fulfillment, similar to Joseph?

Three action steps

Which of the three action steps, most resonate with you? Why?