



# The Christian Life Institute

Wednesday, April 29

Thank you for joining us today, as we continue our series, at the Christian Life Institute, presented through 15-minute encouraging messages three times per week, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 12:45 Central time, on practical ways to grow forward in Christ in uncertainty, unpredictability, and upheaval.

This message is entitled: The Importance of Intentionality

On Monday, we shared about the danger of distractions which had me think about a message I read by Sharon Jaynes, entitled *'Knee Jerk Reactions'* which prompted me to think about the importance of intentionality. As a psychologist many of my conversations are framed around learning to shift up from the limbic system, the primitive part of our brain which includes the amygdala – know for its emotional/anger/primitive response systems, to the pre-frontal cortex where we find the higher level cognitive functions and the executive functions, such as planning, initiating, organizing, among others. In simpler terms I help people learn how to not be controlled by our first reactors, base emotions, such as anger and frustrations, but how to shift up into our reasonable responders, such as awareness, thinking, intentionality that facilitate our ability to plan, organize, and implement well.

So, what is intentionality and why is it important? Intentionality has many different definitions depending on the frame – philosophical, psychological, etc. For our purposes, we will use my definition: intentionality is the art of acting with intent – with purpose – with clarity, insight, and wisdom. In Sharon Jaynes' message she shared of driving a car and losing control and hearing in her head the voice of her driving instructor which was to not 'grab the wheel and try and turn away' but to 'slow down and stop.' What did she do, she jerked the wheel and ended up flipping the vehicle, 'she was unscathed – a miracle as you referred to this saving act of grace – literally!

Now take a moment and ask yourself, what do I do when I am scared, fearful, uncertain, we often react from the limbic system rather than respond from the prefrontal cortex. We grab for the wheel of control rather than let go (yes, the song by Carrie Underwood, Jesus take the wheel is coursing through my head)

and shift into the prefrontal cortex. Paul shared in Romans 7:15 “for I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” Paul was expressing the very real human trait of reaction and highlighting the power of the flesh. For those of you who are familiar with the Christian Life Institute we have developed a model of spiritual formation – growth in Christ for a rich, deep, intimate relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – based on Pauline theology, using many of Paul’s metaphors, and evidence-based psychological precepts and constructs.

Paul was a man who was zealous in all his pursuits. Prior to his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, in Acts 9:3-6, Saul persecuted Christ-followers, those belonging to the Way. Immediately preceding his salvific moment, his conversion, his encounter with the Way, Himself, we read in Acts 9:1, “but Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Upon conversion, his zeal did not cease in fact it was re-directed by and to the Lord – as Paul become zealous for Christ. Paul experienced a circumcision of the heart as described in Ezekiel 36:26, “and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” and recognized that the battle was on – not only a battle to save those who were lost – but a battle between flesh and spirit – the life in Christ and the ways of the world. Paul learned that his flesh would be a constant battleground and that his exhortative messages and the testimony of his own life would need to be the cry that “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

You have I, as Christ-followers, have been crucified in Christ. It is not you and I who live (metaphorically speaking) but Christ who lives in us. We probably have heard these words too many times. We are probably too familiar with 2 Corinthians 5:17, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come;” yet, we share at the Christian Life Institute it is not our head knowledge of Scripture that transforms us it is the transforming work of the Holy Spirit as we digest the truth of God’s Word and allow it to seep into the crevices of every part of our heart, mind, and soul. Our

Second Module, at the Christian Life Institute is infusion – taking in through the ingestion (intentional, prayerful reading) of God’s Word and Biblical foundational truths (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Learning how to build spiritual core stability through gleaning from God's transforming truths. Our Third Module is Digestion - moving head knowledge of God and the Bible into the heart to promote healthy digestion of the Truth of God’s character and His Word (2 Timothy 2:15). To move the intellectual knowledge of His Word and truths into the heart where they can grow and flourish as you deeply internalize them for application and living Christ in a fallen world. Learning how to appropriate and apply the truths of the Bible in all aspects of life - in but not of the world. It is with the infusion and digestion of God’s Truth – the Powerful, Living, Transforming Word that we can learn to live in intentionality.

We have shared in these many messages over the last 4 weeks the importance of viewing the Christian life as a lifestyle. We have shared, as recently as Monday and Friday of last week that we are faced with **with choices every day**. Many of these choices are between the important things of the Lord and the distractions of the world. Distractions are more tempting and we are more susceptible when we are discontent which provokes our flesh and causes us to find something to distract us, which draws us away from the Lord because we desire to fill a need, provide momentary relief, change the feelings, the environment – the externalities. The challenge with the need to seek a distraction is that as Tozer writes “we become so immersed in our difficulties that we see nothing else;” we forget our direction and then become lost in the distraction. Distraction literally means to draw apart; to pull in different directions, separate, and to throw into confusion.

We are reminded that God delights in our obedience and desires intimacy of relationship with us. In 1 Chronicles 29:17, we read “since I know, O my God, that You try the heart and delight in uprightness, I, in the integrity of my heart, have willingly offered all these things; so now with joy I have seen Your people, who are present here, make their offerings willingly to You.” He desires that we choose to step in and draw near rather than to move away. It requires intentionality to draw near. The pull of our flesh, the power of distractions, produce a double mindedness. They pull us away and provide a false sense of fulfillment - a transient and temporary relief. Distractions can cause us to doubt our faith as they fulfill the desires of the flesh and not the Spirit. To implement we need intentionality. It is imperative that when we are triggered by an externality – a person’s unkind words, a defensive self-rationalization, a flaw or failure, an unfairness or injustice that we pause and

shift into intentionality. In order to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22) we must make a choice to draw near and a choice requires, as we refer to it at the Christian Life Institute and therapeutically, knowing what we are doing and why we are doing it.

If we are not intentional, we will default to our conditioned ways of thinking and reacting. Our conditioned rhythms, ways of doing, acting, thinking, become more entrenched every time we step into them and this propels a craving and desire for our old habits which then become more intensely instilled within us. As we shared on Monday, it is ever so important, in any season, to be mindful, intentional, purposeful, deliberate of one’s choices. To learn to identify one’s triggers, susceptibilities (such as impatience, impulsivity, quick-temperedness, neediness) and to make different choices, through and in the power of the Holy Spirit in the moment. We are to “keep [our] heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23). In Romans 12:12 we read, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Cultivating intentionality is a spiritual and therapeutic discipline. We must learn to pause, identify what we are about to say or do and why? We must choose to identify intent and motive and allow the Holy Spirit to constrain and restrain our choices so as to not fall into the problematic statement declared by Paul at the beginning of this message, for I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” In every moment, you and I can choose to dive deep into the depths of Christ and not allow our limbic system – our emotions, feelings – to be our decision-maker. In every moment, you and I can choose to standfast in the Way which the Lord has paved and not allow our limbic system – our emotions, feelings – to turn us into our own way?

The life in Christ is an intentional life. Cultivating intentionality requires a commitment to Christ and a relinquishment to the power of the Holy Spirit within – as He is our Helper, our Guide, our Truth (See, John 14). He will make your way and my way as we seek to follow Him. We must first remember to align ourselves vertically in the Truth and Hope, who is Christ. We then pause, breathe and remind ourselves that our limbic system is not our master but rather He who is in us has equipped us with the ability to turn into and rest in Him who is exceedingly abundantly able to do more than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us (Ephesians 3:20).

As we shared on Monday, The Christian Life Institute exists to spread a passion for growth in Christ and the cultivation of a deep, rich, and intimate relationship that stems from one's commitment to one's personal, spiritual formation. As we end this series of messages this week, as Friday, May 1 will be the last of our 15-minute encouraging messages on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, we invite you to pray about your support of the Christian Life Institute. There are numerous free resources on the website and many to come, Lord willing, as we are in our infancy. We pray that you would choose during disruption, discontent, upheaval, unpredictability – in every circumstance and season to live more intentionally of placing God in His place of honor and of power and to have a confident expectation of His saving power and life-changing grace. Let us choose to have our whole heart turned toward God and draw away from reactions and distractions which so easily entangle, corrupt, and become idols in our lives. Pray for intimacy with your Savior. Pray for His transforming work and growth in Him. Find community (even when virtual) so you can grow hand-in-hand with another, as “we are members of His body.” Pray the Lord provide you with an intentional heart and pray for the courage to step into the fullness of Him who loves you beyond all measure.

In this season, and life which is a journey of seasons, we as Christ-followers, have opportunities to, through His strength and His power reflect Him to a broken and hurting world – so, let us persevere and come together, even when technology weary. Let us agree together to:

“Walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Thank you for joining us for Live Streaming on YouTube. Please join us again on Wednesday, April 29th at 12:45 CST. Please check out our other videos on YouTube and please subscribe to us on YouTube as we need 100 subscribers for our own YouTube channel. Please visit our website at [www.christianlifeinstitute.com](http://www.christianlifeinstitute.com) and join our mailing list, consider contributing to support these resources, and please pray for us.