

Unhindered: Living in the New Normal
10.16.2022

Good morning, Church

It's great to be with you all today as we wrap up the Unhindered series, we have been in for the past several weeks.

As we investigate today's topic which is "Living in the New Normal"

Let me be honest

I was a bit confused why Andy decided to go on his sabbatical with this weekend being his first out of the pulpit.

Why would he have me finish a series he has put so much work and weeks into?

Why wouldn't he finish this out so that I would start fresh on something new?

On paper, in my opinion, it didn't make much sense.

As I dove into this message and prepared it became overwhelmingly evident why this happened the way it did.

Hear me, I am not saying Andy planned it this way or not, but I will say that he tends to think through and understand the bigger picture of things more often or more quickly than I do. More than that, even if Andy didn't align the times and sabbatical with this thinking in mind, it once again proves that God's ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours, and no matter whose plan it may have been it is certainly in the Lord's plan and perfect timing.

Here is why I believe the timing and importance of today's message is so valuable- It's like I, and probably many of you, have heard Andy say before- Now is not a time to pull back, but a time to push forward.

Now is not a time to pull back, but a time to push forward.

Now is a not a time to run, but to rise.

Now is a time to flee, but to fight.

I do not believe for a moment that is coincidence that as we look at this subject of "Living in the new normal" the same week things begin to look different around WellSpring than they usually do. Now let me be clear, Andy is coming back, and this isn't as much a new normal as a short season for WellSpring, but still considering anything "New" a lot of us tend to shrink back.

But just as Andy said last week:

“You and I need to fight our battles, but we do not need to fear.

We need to fight a battle but not despair

not give up

not step down,

we need to fight a battle by not allowing anything: no claim, no reason, no thought to keep us from fully knowing God.”

As a young leader in the church, and someone who has, hopefully, a long life of ministry ahead of him, I want you all to know the unique perspective I have towards Andy’s choices and vulnerability over these past few months.

When I was the worship minister something I said often to the team that I had heard from a mentor of mine is that we are permission givers when we are leading worship. When we sing, we give others an unspoken permission to sing. When we dance and smile, we give other permissions to do that as well comfortably.

I have seen this idea trickle into every crevice and aspect of leadership since then.

What Andy has done for me, a young leader, is given me permission to be real and authentic with how I am doing. His

example has given me permission to have bad, sad, hard, hill climbing days, and still be right where I am supposed to be.

I am thankful for the leadership that Andy brings to the staff and to our church, because the leadership he has brought, especially in this season where he is on sabbatical, is a direct reflection of Christ's leadership in scripture, and as much as I love Andy, we follow Christ first.

There is a moment in scripture where Jesus' disciples have been out doing ministry in Jesus' name and they come back to him, and Jesus sees the people coming and going and so he says this to the disciples in Mark 6:31:

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Mark 6:31

Jesus instructed the disciples to go alone with him to rest. I believe that is what Andy is doing now, and I am grateful for his leadership in that.

The reality though is this, Jesus gives us permission to rest, to be honest about how we feel, and even to recharge, but Jesus never gives us permission to step back from the mission. Jesus never says to run away. Braking is inevitable, but to stop entirely is not a part of the plan.

When you are driving down the road, your car will run out of gas and you will need to stop and fill it up, but that doesn't mean you are not still on your way to your destination. Stopping to fuel and rest is a part of the journey, never the end.

Jesus even says this in **Matthew 11:28-30**

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me— watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

In that same story out of Mark 6, where Jesus tells them to rest, Jesus then, along with the disciples, feed the 5000.

The work, the mission doesn't stop, even when our posture does.

So, what is our job as we assess the new normal in our lives?

We are wrapping up our journey through unhindered and now we look forward to what life looks like after that or considering that journey.

My hope is that you have been motivated, challenged, and encouraged by this series and its truth about God and us, but insight and knowledge are only valuable with opportunity. And

friend today and every day is a new opportunity for us to live out this unhindered life, but it is going to take work.

As we look forward to where we are now as individuals, as a family, and as a Church, what is our goal?

Mark Christian, a minister from Joplin, MO says it this way which I love:

“If you give God a shot at your heart, we serve a God who will not miss.”

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So, our responsibility as unhindered believers, living in a new normal, is to consistently posture ourselves in such a way that God always has a shot at our hearts.

When we are discouraged, when we are glad, when we are mourning, when we are celebrating, in all seasons and situations we are to give God a shot at our hearts, to know him more fully, because we serve a God who will not miss.

In this new normal,

In the New unhindered life, we all will fight to maintain

We must continue to give God a shot at our hearts so we can know Him more fully in every season.

The real question is how?

How do we posture ourselves in all seasons to know God?

Open your bibles to the book of Micah and turn to chapter 6

David Guzik, an author I enjoy, explains this passage in a cool way that helped me understand, and I want to share that with you today as well.

If Micah 6 was a courtroom, here is how the different parties would be sectioned off:

Micah 6:1-2

Listen to what the Lord says:

**“Stand up, plead my case before the mountains;
let the hills hear what you have to say.**

**² “Hear, your mountains, the Lord’s accusation;
listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth.**

**For the Lord has a case against his people;
he is lodging a charge against Israel.**

Defendant: Israel

Prosecutor: God

Witnesses: Mountains, Hills, Foundations of the earth. –

(SLIDE I'LL MAKE)

Micah 6:3-5

“My people, what have I done to you?

How have I burdened you? Answer me.

⁴ I brought you up out of Egypt

and redeemed you from the land of slavery.

I sent Moses to lead you,

also Aaron and Miriam.

⁵ My people, remember

what Balak king of Moab plotted

and what Balaam son of Beor answered.

Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal,

that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord.”

God here is telling Israel before all His creation: Here is what I have done for you!

- Lead you out of Egypt
- Gave you strong leaders
- Delivered you time and time again

And yet – you turn from me, and run from me, and avoid me, your God

I have been the student minister at WellSpring for over a year now, and while I do not have children of my own, in some ways I feel like I have 140 pre-teens and teenagers.

And let me tell you, Israel's response to God's accusation here in Micah 6, sounds like a whiney teenager. Here is what Israel says:

Micah 6:6-7

With what shall I come before the Lord
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

Israel come before God with attitudes and brokenness and make a bold claim to their father. We often make this bold claim to our father too:

You ask too much of us.

As we look at the new normal and the unhindered life, I think many of us look at the things God has called us to walk in and we say with our response, laziness, and ignorance "God asks too much of me".

I imagine some of the parents in here can think to a time they asked their child to do something and said "It's not that hard!

Just clean it up! Just pick up your room! Just do your homework!”

We often look at the things an unhindered life can bring us and are overjoyed at God’s goodness, but when it comes time for us to act out that life and make tough choices and rise to that gift of an unhindered life, we say “God you’re asking too much”

The Prophet Micah snaps at Israel’s words here, in a way that silences us who excuse ourselves from God’s call.

Micah 6:8 says:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
 And what does the Lord require of you?
 To act justly and to love mercy
 and to walk humbly^[a] with your God.

(This will be a list of 3 things I flesh out)

- Act Justly

- “Treat others the way you want to be treated”

To act Justly or as other translations say it to “do” justice

May sound like a tall order, but what is God honestly expecting of us with these 2 worded commands?

He is expecting us to care for all.

When something is out of order, wrong, or broken, Christ as empowered us to bring that to light and fix it. We are not the judge, jury, and executioner in this world, but we are given a spirit that knows right from wrong.

We are called to act justly, to give to those what they are do. Not what we decide they are do, but what God has exemplified in scripture and his son that they deserve.

None of us deserve salvation or Jesus or a New Normal in the first place, but to act justly is to look at the broken world through our broken selves and point to the God who can make all things new. Not just for us but for others.

I love the way the Jesus Film Project put it:

God's sense of equity extends to all. He doesn't show preference to good people and allow bad people to suffer. He sends the warming sun and the refreshing rain to them all. And He wants us to show the same kind of impartiality.

To act Justly is to be impartial with our love. Maybe in your new normal that's what you need to work on most.

Love Mercy

a Japanese Zen master, forgave a thief for stealing in the most inspiring way. He once went into seclusion for weeks, and people from all over Japan came to learn from him and take part in the seclusion.

But soon, they noticed that someone was stealing things in this gathering.

They immediately informed Bankei, but he was not willing to take any action against the thief.

This incident happened the next day, too; the pupils caught the man stealing again and told Bankei about it. Once again, Bankei ignored the whole incident and did not do anything to the thief.

Finally, people objected that they could not go on with the seclusion and meditation when they knew a thief was among them.

Everyone asked Bankei to take the matter into his hands and expel the thief. No one was willing to stay unless the thief went away.

“Brothers, you are wise. You know what is right and what is wrong. This brother of ours, does not know right from wrong like you. If I do not teach him, then who will? I am not going to expel him. Even if it means that you all will leave, I am going to keep him beside me.”

I love that God doesn't just say here to show mercy. Showing mercy isn't one of our responsibilities, it's even deeper than that. We are called to LOVE mercy.

We are supposed to find so much joy in forgiving and releasing other from emotional bondage that it drives us to do it that much more.

God doesn't show us mercy because we deserve it, but because he loves to have us closer to Him. Think of the hinderances that you have had in your walk with Christ up until this point, now imagine if those broken relationships were restored?

It is not always that easy, but sometimes it can be as simple as removing the burden from yourself.

A lack of mercy is like putting yourself in prison for something someone else did. It doesn't make sense, it's not God's intention for our lives. So instead, don't just show mercy, anyone can tell you that is the right thing to do, instead LOVE mercy. Learn to see who God is when you are merciful to others and yourself.

- Walk Humbly with your God.

It is amazing to me how this third point, walk humbly with your God, if done correctly will allow us to more accurately Act Justly and Love Mercy

If we can acknowledge our God every single step of our journey, every day and moment in this new normal, won't He provide for our needs and guide our steps?

He is not asking the world of us; He is asking us to humble ourselves. He wants us to humble ourselves for 2 reasons:

1. Because We are not God.
2. Because He is God

It's important to note that God's instructions through Micah to us are not to walk in front of him, but to instead humble ourselves to walk back to where He is. And the instructions are also not to walk behind him, even though that imagery makes more sense to us, but God has shown us humility by inviting us to walk next to him.

There is a line from one of my favorite songs by John Mark McMillian, the song is called "The Roads, the Rocks, and the Weeds" and John says:

"I've got no answers for heartbreaks and cancers, but a savior who suffers them with me."

Our savior, our God, is with us in all the good and bad. Not just before us or behind us, but next to us.

Some of us have experienced the hindered faith or the hindered life because we have tried to face this world on our

own, but we have a savior who wants to suffer with us just as we want to rise with Him.

If you have been, until this point, trying to lead God's steps in the direction you want them, or exhausting yourself trying to keep up with God's perfection, then you are doomed to be hindered in your faith. But the unhindered life is one that accepts dependency on Christ and the invitation to walk with him.

Look back to Jesus words we looked at earlier in Matthew 11:

Matthew 11:28-30

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me— watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.

- Act Justly
- Love Mercy
- Walk humbly with your God

The unhindered life is one that says no matter what stage I'm in, situation I am in, or hurt I am in, I am going to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with my God, because in that posture,

every. Single. Day. He has a shot at my heart. Friends our God doesn't miss an open shot.

But we must be consistently moving with him to keep that relationship and path open.

And in Christ's victory we can rise.
We cannot shrink back but instead push forward.

In the new normal, we walk with Christ and remain unhindered in our faith.

In all season, we give God a shot at our hearts, no matter the hurt or brokenness of that heart, and we serve a just God who doesn't ask for too much from us, who will never miss our hearts when we seek His first.

Call to baptism and prayer