

Day 2

THE BEAUTY OF RITUALS



I have a faith mixed with total confusion. It is enough, personal, and real. It causes Jesus' heart to break, too. This honesty creates a knowing deep inside that stays with me no matter how life smashes my heart.

The truth is that asking where Jesus is, being angry at God, and complaining to God is still faith. I am still believing in the saving power of grace while I am angry at God.

This is why my faith is not shaken when my heart is smashed, because I know that I can be angry at God and Jesus hears me. This kind of relationship allows me to wait for his supernatural action and believe he is still for me in the waiting. I believe that I am not abandoned and have his attention all the more dearly.

Do you really think you will shock Jesus if you tell him how you really feel? Are you doing your soul any good by pretending, "I am okay?" Seriously, friends. Why are you trying to pretend with Jesus?

Maybe because you think God is cruel?

Read John 5:1-9.

Who are the kind of people that gathered at the Pool of Bethesda?

In your best imagination, who would have been the other people who had gathered at the Pool of Bethesda? Would anyone else have been there?

How long was the man in our story waiting by the Pool of Bethesda?

In your best imagination, what are this man's feelings prior to seeing Jesus?

Do you think he had trust issues with God? What could they be?

Knowing your trust issues, how would you have responded when Jesus approached you and asked, "Would you like to get well?"

How did the man respond?

Was this excuse-making or the truth? What is the difference between excuse-making and the truth?

Excuse-making pushes the blame of our situation onto someone else. Excuse-making keeps you small and a victim of your situation. Excuse-making is an attempt to feel some power in the situation but really only keeps you stuck.

Notice that this man showed up every day for 38 years. 38 years! For 38 years he kept showing up and hoping that today could be the day. That maybe today someone would help him. Showing up was being vulnerable. Every day he showed up he risked being disappointed. Again. But he showed up. He risked. He risked disappointment.

How does he keep this tenacity of trust that something good could eventually happen to him after 38 years?

This man had fallen into a ritual and it turned out to be a good thing.

We make certain judgments about rituals, generally they are negative judgments. It turns out ritual has science-based research to explain why we need it.

So much of life is out of your control. There's economic, political, and social forces at play that affect your life. There are relationships with people you love—or feel you have to love—that you wish you had more control over or try to have more control over.

When life has smashed you, these forces are a part of it. One part of your life where you can actually create some control is through ritual.

We have our big-R rituals such as holidays and traditions. But the powerful ones are the little-r rituals that happen as a part of your routine of life.

What is a ritual? I'll let an expert tell you. "A 'ritual' comes into being when ordinary behavior is repeated until it begins to harden into recognizable action patterns we call 'routines.' Routines are efficient ways of getting jobs done by creating sets of automated, repeatable actions. Routines simplify our lives by offloading complex actions from working memory, so we do them without much cognitive effort. ... Routines are behavior on automatic pilot. But once our acts have crystallized into a fixed routine, they may keep evolving, taking on symbolic significance and adding layers of meaning to our actions--this is called 'ritualization.'" —Bradd Shore, <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/the-hidden-powers-of-everyday-rituals>

Consider the power of an evening cup of tea enjoyed in a favorite teacup. Or that walk under trees with your dog. Our Christian faith has harnessed this power of ritual for thousands of years. We meet together for church. For some of you, that meeting together for church includes a coffee and donut at the same chairs every week. Each church has a ritual rhythm, sometimes called a liturgy. We celebrate the Lord's supper together as a practiced ritual. We try some sort of quiet time. Growing Christians embrace these rituals and do see growth in their faith.

People are involved in the ritual of our Christian faith. People may betray you, but still, please choose people over isolation.

What rituals do you have in your life?

I'm sure you gave up some of your rituals when life smashed you. You stopped reading your Bible. You stopped attending church. You lost the friendship with the person you ate that donut with.

What rituals are you no longer practicing?

Life became uncontrollable so you ditched the one part of your life you do have control over.

These little-r rituals reduce anxiety, find meaning every day, provide a rhythm, connect you to transcendence. They give a surprising peace and comfort in the midst of sorrow, loneliness, or stress. All things you need when life has smashed you.

What rituals can you return to?

What new ritual do you want to create during this smashed heart season?

May this Bible study become a 4-week ritual for you. Whether you are completing it alone or with a group, this is long enough for it to become a ritual. **It is one thing you can do to gain some control over your life when you feel so powerless now.**

Re-read this Bible story about the man at the pool of Bethesda again with this context. Do you now see this man differently? Do you see the ritual which gave him some control? Do you see a sense of worthiness in him? When Jesus gave him the command to "stand up, pick up your mat and walk" he believed he was worthy enough to stand up.

"Ritualization is a potent stabilizing agent, a simple salve for a stressful time if only we are mindful of how we use its powers." – Bradd Shore

How do your trust issues with God affect your feelings of worthiness?

How small is your view of God?

WEEK ONE

Protecting my heart before the larger story unfolds involves jumping to conclusions, making assumptions, and defining God by my “supposed-to’s.” A “supposed-to” is God is supposed to heal when the water stirs. God is supposed to not give me cancer. God is supposed to help me get a job by the end of the month.

You may or may not even be aware of your expectations or your “supposed-to’s” until someone breaks those expectations. Now you are hurt and have broken relationships. The end result is a loss of trust.

I trust God for the larger story. My hope is you will too by the end of our honest journey together.

This story of this healed man in Mark 5 has a small view of God twist to it. The legend of the Pool of Bethesda is you have to wait for an angel to stir the water and then only one person can be healed. So you have paralytics beating out other paralytics to get ONE touch from God. This is a terribly cruel system.

The truth is there is enough of God for you and me. Your healing can happen in ways you haven’t thought of yet. You are not stuck with your “supposed to.” You have hope for a larger story.