

Well, hello and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We're having a conversation about the word of the Lord as it was preached to us on Sundays, as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

My name is Jack, and pondering with me today are Ben, Jono and Tristan. You guys had a good weekend?

Great weekend. Very good.

Yeah, good.

What about you, Jack? No one ever asks.

That's true, that's true, that's true. I had a great weekend, I went ice skating. I was very bad, so.

But let's hop into it. Today, we are reflecting on Jono's sermon on The Cost of Blessing.

SERMON RECAP

Jono, do you want to give us a quick recap?

Yeah, sure. It's a very important part of our series, I think. We've talked about the plan of blessing.

God's heart is to bless, that is to speak good over a person's life and do whatever you can to bring that good into the future of that person.

And then, Ben spoke last week on the conduit of blessing, this idea that God wants to channel that blessing through people.

And there's a sense of the hourglass idea of ultimately it comes through Christ, that He's the greatest conduit, and then the church.

But there's also this piece of the puzzle that is a challenge, and it's that typically those that are conduits are called to carry a cross. There's a cruciform shape to their life.

And so I honed in on, I think, apart from the story of the cross, the most amazing cost of blessing passage, which is Genesis 22, where Abraham is asked to offer the son that he loves, Isaac, in sacrifice, in fact, as worship on the altar of Mount

Moriah. And so we just unpacked that idea that there's a test involved in blessing. There is typically surrender that's required. There's an opportunity to experience the provision of God as we step out in obedience.

And it all ultimately tends to result in a multiplication of that blessing to even to the nations, as Genesis 22 tells us at the end of the passage.

Yeah, I thought it was such a great example, I think, of sometimes when we come to those difficult passages in the Bible.

I mean, I think the story of Abraham and sort of being called to sacrifice Isaac is one of those sort of dark stories that makes us uncomfortable. And yet, sometimes it's those stories that can be the most meaningful and that can really challenge us.

REFLECTING ON THE SERMON

Ben, Tristan, what sort of reflections did you have off the back of that sermon?

Yeah, for me, it's that question, or that statement really stood out to me, do you treasure the gift or the giver? That idea of holding on with a clenched fist to what God gives us versus open hands to receive from the giver himself.

I find that question quite challenging that Abraham faced, of would I cling to God's best blessing in my life, which is my wife and daughter, would I cling with clenched fist or with an open hand, give them to God? It's quite a challenging question.

It's so challenging. It's just, it's, you know, graduate Christianity, really.

Yeah, I think for me, it's two parts. The first one was in the first point where how Abraham obeys instruction without need for clarification, without need for reasoning. He's like, okay, I trust you, I obey you.

And I think it, for me, it's hard to get to that point so quickly when it comes to certain things. Like you mentioned, what do you grip most tightly to? It's those things where you look for compromise almost.

So, that was really eye-opening and encouraging. And I think I always love the picture of the church being a vehicle for blessing.

Because I feel like sometimes we see a church as, oh, we gather here every Sunday and we leave this place, but it operates seven days a week. It's a real cornerstone of a community.

And I just love that picture of a church being that vehicle for blessing.

HOW TO WE NOT GROW WEARY OF DOING GOOD?

Picking up on that idea of the church as a blessing.

And Jono, you talked about however, over your career and over your lifetime, you've seen some churches that were really on fire back in the day now sort of shrink.

And again, not that a small church is anything bad, but they've lost something sometimes. And you said part of it is we lose that fire, that passion.

So I guess a question coming out of that is, how do we prevent ourselves from, I guess to borrow words from Paul, growing weary from doing good?

It's a big question. I think of a paper I once read. I can't remember who wrote it, but it was called the almost inevitable ruin of every minister and how to avoid it.

And it was essentially staying in the harness of the Word of God and prayer. I mean, it was, we talk about spiritual disciplines a lot, but they're the basic ones. And even if there was one that was above the other, it was probably the Word of God.

Being in the Word of God and believing it. I think that's a fair start to answering the question.

Coming back to that idea of the river and the reservoir, if we're constantly giving out and not receiving, you run dry and you burn out and you grow weary. And so, maybe part of it is receiving from the Lord His grace as we give it away.

Because we're called to be rivers, not reservoirs, which means people who receive and who take in from God, who receive His blessing and then who pass it out, who pass it on.

And I think we get burned out when we're only giving out of an empty cup, and we start to strain in the flesh to squeeze something out, which is meant to flow freely from the presence of God in our lives.

In the context of the message, I was talking about an obedient response to embracing sacrifice, an obedient response to taking on the responsibility of your identity. And I think that's a big part of it. And that was what I was trying to say.

We were talking a lot about an offering, that we're having a pledge giving offering for 18 months. I think when churches stop believing that they carry a responsibility to be part of God's light for the world, that's a big part of it.

So as we said, you know, reading the Bible and looking after yourself with rest and good rhythms. So all that stuff keeps you from growing weary. But I said in the sermon, I think it's a sense of having a go and sort of counting the cost.

And Jesus says that, count the cost before you build the tower sort of thing. But churches actually stop believing that we're building something. And yeah, there are forces that are outside of our control in the local church.

Absolutely, really big forces. Some of them are spiritual. And God doesn't protect churches from decline.

But what can we do to fortify against that? Keep sharing vision, the vision of the gospel. And we started the whole series off by saying, a vision is a picture of the future that produces passion, a preferred picture.

And I think without a vision, the people perish and it's really important. Part of staying healthy, having a vision.

HOW DO WE FORM A CULTURE OF BLESSING OTHERS?

And so coming off that, I think, maybe I'll direct this question to you, Ben.

From the perspective of a congregant, how can we foster a culture within the church? I mean, it's great for Jono to be able to preach that, but also if the church doesn't get on board, it's not going to happen. So how can we create a culture?

How can I as a congregant help create a culture of having a go of being willing to get out there and be sacrificially obedient with the blessings God has given us?

Yeah, I mean, the obvious answer in this month of May is the Always Ready Thanksgiving Offering. It's a massive opportunity for us as a church to step up and provide for the next generation. We've spoken on this podcast before about serving as well.

There are so many jobs that have to be done on a Sunday morning, upstairs, downstairs, on the stage, behind the scenes, in the kitchen. The church is the body. It's the people, not the building.

And yet the building requires a lot of people. The body requires a lot of people to run. So there are so many ways that we can step up and be involved.

One that I think a lot about in a worship context is singing is a surprisingly important way of blessing the person next to you. Because every Sunday, we sing four or five songs.

It's a massive part of what the body of Christ has been doing for 2,000 years and even longer.

And when you show up and you have prepared your heart to worship God and you bring your authentic self and you bring your grateful praise and you bring your lament, you bring the life that you've lived, you bring your week before God and you sing

with passion and authenticity, it's a blessing to the person who's standing next to you. Because that person had a really terrible week, maybe, and they are struggling to believe that God is good right now.

And for them to hear their brother or sister standing right next to them, singing loudly, how great is your faithfulness? You've been so good to me. That's a blessing to the person next to you.

It's a blessing to me when I'm standing on stage, singing and playing guitar, to hear the voices coming back. The most important instrument in the whole room is the voice, is the voice of the congregation as they lift up their praise.

So I think that's quite an underrated way that we can bless each other in a church service.

HOW DO WE HELP OTHERS WHO HAVE LOST THEIR PASSION?

Would you say that in other areas, that sort of, we could also translate to bringing a sense of passion in the areas we serve so that when someone else is not feeling passionate about it, that gives a boost to them?

Or Tristan, if you know, what might be a way that looks like in other areas as well?

I got an example, actually. So before every Friday session that we have, we have a leaders meeting and I want to say, give us a rating of one to five and how you're feeling going into the session.

And sometimes you get one, sometimes you get zero, sometimes you get five, sometimes you get four. But the purpose of that is not to say like, oh, I'm acknowledging that I had a suckish week.

It's acknowledging that, oh, my fellow leader, I will support you more now.

Like there's a sense of like unity where we all have the same goal in sharing the gospel and how can we each support each other to the best of what we have to do this ministry correctly.

And to answer your previous question that you pointed out, Ben, my mom gave me a reflection on the previous episode. And she was out on some excursion with Barker.

And she said, in terms of being a blessing to others, she finds that people know that her joy comes from the Lord. And therefore, that gives her that extra boost of encouragement to say, my attitude is the blessing.

My attitude and my joy that I give off is my blessing to others.

Yeah, for sure.

So, yeah.

Go, Geraldine.

Yeah, so good.

HOW DO WE KEEP GOING WHEN LIFE IS ALL COST AND NO BLESSING?

So, let's zero in a bit on this idea of the cost of blessing, which is obviously the title of the sermon.

And I think sometimes there's a sense in which, I mean, you used that example of the missionary, William Borden, as a man who clearly had been blessed by God, and then set out and didn't really, seemingly didn't achieve anything with his life.

And that raised to my mind William Carey, another great missionary who, his life was, if you read into it, really hard. And I guess for many people, there are periods of life where it feels like it's all cost and no blessing.

How do we carry on in those circumstances? How do we respond to that?

Yeah, we need each other. I think we're designed to be part of a body, the body of Christ. And so to answer your question, how do you keep going when the cost is overwhelming?

The cost of life, it doesn't always feel like the cost of blessing, but just the plight of your human journey. Apart from calling out to God for mercy, it's to journey with people.

So look, the how of getting through enduring cost is to find some other people to help you and journey with you.

And for those that aren't suffering the cost, that's exactly what Tristan just said in the Youth Nights, just to find out, gee, if you're at a zero, I'm here for you.

And that's hard to do, get it really right, but I think that's probably part of the earlier question, what keeps churches healthy? You know, literally, the love for one another is a missional symbol, signal to the world.

It's what Jesus says, they'll know you're Christians. But it's also what keeps people together and keeps their heads above water, being there for one another.

Paul says in Galatians 6, in verse 2, carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Yeah, wow.

That's such a helpful image to have when you come to church on Sunday. He's thinking, how can I pick up the people around me? If I'm standing strong in this moment, how can I carry my brother's burdens?

Yeah, I think to bounce off that, there's something that I've always had, like this two-point model of discipleship, where there's one point where you can do a book together, and you can do a study together.

But the other one, which I found in my own experience, more effective, is just doing life together. Whether that means you go play tennis together, you go to gym together, you just be present with the person that you are on this journey with.

And I find that just being present and being committed to that is more than enough sometimes.

HOW DOES OUR BLESSING COST OTHERS?

Thinking about the story that you used in Genesis 22, where Abraham is called to sacrifice his son, and it's a pretty hardcore story in and of itself.

But it got me thinking sort of, like if someone said, God's calling me to sacrifice my son today, I mean, we'd probably call the police or something along those lines. And praise God that he doesn't.

But I think sometimes we do have blessings that come at the cost of harm to somebody else. Ben, you talked about when we go through suffering and how that can end up being a blessing because we can stand with others who are suffering.

I mean, I know someone who, the blessing and the suffering they went through was multiple members of their family getting cancer.

And that was a cost that they paid and they were actually blessed by that experience in the end and they've been able to help a lot of people.

But I guess I just wanted to pose the question, what happens or how do we deal with the idea that the cost of blessing might involve harm to someone else or someone we love, as it did to Abraham?

Yeah, it's one thing to affirm strongly that God uses all things for good, that he brings good out of costly, painful situations. It's another thing to say that we put other people into harm for the sake of blessing.

No one, God is not calling us, and you said this at the start, God is not calling you and me and us to sacrifice our son for the sake of blessing.

So I think we could tuck that away and say, God is not calling us to bring harm into the life of another for the sake of blessing. It's the truth of the end of Genesis. Joseph lived a really tough life.

He was sold into slavery, thrown down a well by his brothers, imprisoned multiple times, really tough life. And at the end of his story in Genesis chapter 50, I think, he says, what you intended for harm, God intended for good.

So this is the nature of our God, that he brings good out of harmful, painful situations. That doesn't mean that we pursue harm to each other or to ourselves for the sake of God's blessing to come.

But it means trusting in the Father that when harm does come to us, and it does in this broken world, cancer, sickness, all sorts of suffering, God will bring good out of that.

So to be very, very, very clear, God is not calling you or I or anyone to sacrifice their son for the sake of blessing. But it's a promise that God does bring good out of the harm and the suffering that we do go through.

It's a tricky question, but that's where I would begin to respond to it.

Yeah, it's very nuanced, I think, because you feel God is calling you to do something. It's only wise to consider all the people that that choice will affect.

I don't think wisdom is to have an overly brash sort of grab the calling, as it were, and run with it no matter what. And just to say it's bad luck, it's God's, God has spoken. Yeah, to answer the question, I don't think there's an easy answer to it.

What Ben said is absolutely true. But when you're talking about, I think I've heard God ask me to sacrifice something on the altar, that's a real threshold moment where you need wisdom.

And so I think, again, coming back to community, it's good to ask others about what they think and sort of weigh up the cost. We're talking about the cost of blessing, but to weigh it up and say, is God really asking me to do this?

Abraham seemed very sure, but most of us probably aren't on the first, we are, but we're not hearing as clearly as Abraham.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO OFFER OURSELVES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE?

Okay, we've just talked a little bit about, I guess, the possibility of sacrificing someone else.

But another part that you talked about is this idea of offering ourselves as living sacrifices. You quoted the Romans passage and you said, we don't have souls, we are souls. And this is such a big theme, I think, in Jesus' teachings.

Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. And I was reading CS. Lewis to Me Christianity Today, and he was really big on this point that if you're thinking about your own personality or your own self, you're not actually going to produce it.

It's only when you give it up that you become most truly yourself. And I was just reflecting on this feels really hard to do, to not be thinking about myself, to not be self-centered.

I mean, I personally find it very hard to sort of shift the camera perspective to God all the time. So how do we hold our blessings in ourselves lightly and be willing to give ourselves as a holy sacrifice to God?

In the context of the message that was directly an observation that Abraham said, we're going to go and worship. And we often think, have some prayers, hear a sermon, sing some songs. He was talking about an altar and an offering of one's life.

The takeaway for me is worship is a lot bigger than what happens inside the church. That's the takeaway for me. It's like, worship is obedience to the Spirit's prompting and God's will for my life at any point in my life.

And that's challenging and liberating, that we want to be offering our whole lives in worship. And worship is something that can happen just at any time. And that's so empowering.

I think when we look at our bodies as a living sacrifice, yes, there's multiple avenues you can take to action that.

Like we spoke about service, we spoke about other things. But I liked what you said, Jono, when you said confidence is not self-reliant, it's God-reliant.

And I related to that a lot because it's more recently, as I've come into ministry doing more talks at youth or speaking upfront, it's almost like I've had to put myself in a position where it's like, I'm the background dancer for this greater show

that is happening and that's life. And it's given me such a confidence in that to say, whatever I do, it's going to be used for the good of the kingdom. And that's just been such a weight that's like just gone.

But yes, Jack, it's definitely hard to have that freedom of self-forgetfulness all the time. To, yeah, just put God in the lens, like, filter everything through him.

What are your thoughts on it?

Well, I'm still struggling with it at the moment, like, I think it is...

I think that you go through seasons where it's easier, and where sort of God's really at work, and you can get really focused on him, and then you go through seasons where your own concerns sort of cloud your vision a bit.

And I think that sometimes that's really... Yeah, I think it does prompt an awareness. I guess the more I've been reading and thinking about this, it prompts an awareness of my own self-centeredness.

And all you can do is throw yourself at the mercy of the cross, really, and realize how dependent you are on that grace, and try to do better.

Yeah, it's funny. The context of the message is sort of a bit of a rah-rah, you know, let's go, let's storm the hill vibe. No regrets, no reserves, no retreats.

That reminds me of being an early 20-year-old and reading David Brainard and these different gung ho, Keith Green, All or Nothing. And I think as you get older, you realize it's a really long haul life.

And, you know, the Bible says, make it your ambition to live a quiet life and serve Jesus and love people, sort of give glory to God. So there's a lot of the mundane.

And I guess I would just say that, you know, offer your body as a living sacrifice in the mundane of everyday life. And that's the answer.

It's like to live a life that is prayerful, and joyful, and filled with gratitude, and open to the opportunities that constantly arise.

And I think too, avoiding the traps that the devil sets, so the little bear traps everywhere, of self-condemnation. And if he can get you to go down that path, he'll get us with lots of other snares too.

But, you know, there's a sense of practicing the presence in the everyday, is very much what offering your body as a living sacrifice is all about. And then that peaks every now and then, like normal stuff in life, in any adventure, any journey.

There's a challenge, you know, you've got to step up. And I guess that's my take on this month, as I was just saying to the church, we don't always ask for sacrificial giving, but we are now. And a lot of other times, it's a bit more mundane.

And I think Jesus' life actually perfectly shows that. What did He do for 30 years?

Just live life.

Yeah, live life. Day in, day out. He never sinned.

FAVOURITE RAINY DAY ACTIVITIES

Well, that seems a good as place as any to transition to our sort of palate cleanser question.

So it's a pretty rainy day here today on Monday. So I was wondering, what do you guys like to watch or do on a rainy day at home?

Perfect rainy activity for me is reading a book with a blanket and a cup of coffee. There's almost, there's few things better in life than that trio right there.

Yeah, classic.

I would say basically doing anything with my wife hanging out. But if she wasn't available, my next happy place would be the garage. I would be doing some exercise or lifting weights, or come out with some hack for my garage gym.

Mine's going to be weird.

Okay.

That's my disclaimer.

Weirder than working out in your garage.

I like to be in the rain sometimes.

And sometimes I would like to golf in the rain. Oh. If they allow me to, if there's no lightning.

But if it's, I'll give the normal answer, which happens most of the time. I just have tea and watch a movie or something.

But wait, what's the appeal of playing golf in the rain?

What's the appeal of playing golf?

Golf is a sport that humbles you. And it is a discipline rather than enjoyment.

Ha ha ha. Fair enough.

What about you, Jack?

For me, it's, well, actually, I love a good walk in the rain. But if I'm not out getting wet, then I love to watch a travel video at home, like someone go, especially like traveling on trains through a country or something like that. That's my go-to.

All right.

Well, with that, we'll conclude.

Thank you guys for coming on the pod. Thank you all for listening and we will catch you next week.