

Good morning beautiful church family! I want you to know how much I love you. You are an awesome family. Kind, supportive, gracious, engaged and SO caring for one another. It is an honor to be part of this family – of God’s family.

For those of you who might be new, my name is Matt Chesney. I am the director of outreach and student ministries and occasionally I get the opportunity to speak up here and give Pastor Bill a break or mini-vacation and I love these opportunities. I get to share what God has been putting on my heart, share my life with you a bit, and provide some encouragement and love to all of you.

Especially today! This is a difficult time of year. It’s cold outside... everyone is celebrating holidays and happy.... And sometimes we just aren’t feeling it. More than that... sometimes we – or I’ll speak for myself – I am just NOT all about it. I don’t want to hear the Christmas music, I don’t want to look at lights, I don’t want to be happy... because... I’m just depressed! Probably not in a clinical sort of way... but yeah... depressed. Things suck! Lol I mean... in addition to the normal stresses of life and work (which can be enough all on their own), we throw COVID on top of that and have to watch friends and family get sick and in some cases not pull through... I’ve personally experienced loss because of this... someone I cared a lot about.... And then the fear that comes with all of that about my own health and safety and the safety of my family... ugh! So... I’m balancing work and home stress (the best I can),

balancing grief and loss (the best I can), balancing fear.... (the best I can), and you throw on top of all of that freezing temperatures and SNOW! UGH. And people wonder why I don't want to listen to happy Christmas music or look at lights! And then you see other people walking around smiling like they don't have a care in the world and you wonder... "What am I doing wrong!?"

Now, full disclosure... I'm usually the one walking around smiling, seemingly stress-free... and I have no doubt that this has annoyed others in a similar way... Because the truth is.... We are ALL going through this stuff. Life is hard! We live in a fallen and broken world and there is a lot of messed up stuff that happens here.

Not a very happy message today, is it...? Lol... and for those cynics out there... and I'm one of them... I know you know where I'm going with this and you're already rolling your eyes... because the solution is so simple, so basic, so talked about... that we DISMISS it so easily.... It's all about **giving it all to God** and letting him deal with the mess so all we have to worry about is following him.

See, there's this cycle we can fall into... a pretty typical one looks something like this:

I start to have **doubts** about my own performance, abilities, success, achievements and life in general....

Then, because of those doubts I start to **compare** my life and achievements and so on to others and their lives and achievements... Now, by the way... we are REALLY bad at comparing... because we always go in with an agenda to make ourselves feel worse... If I compared my life to a starving kid in Africa... or a single mom in India... or most of the world! I'd feel pretty good! But, I don't... I compare my life to that ONE guy/gal down the street that has a nicer house, a nicer car, a seemingly better marriage, job, etc, etc, etc. And then one of two things happens... I either get depressed because I'm not good enough.... Or I get angry and decide to do something about it!

This leads to the 3rd part of the cycle... **Self-reliance**... I decide to make a resolution... or a commitment... or a vow! I'm going to be better! I'm going to work out more and get in shape! Or... I'm going to read my Bible more often and be a better Christian! Or... I'm going to work harder at my job and get that promotion! Or... fill in your own "new year's resolution"... But the point is... YOU decide that YOU want to change something.... And then try to do it through YOUR own power... And some of us... we're REALLY good at this... we've got some awesome will power... or some extreme motivation... and WE make it happen. We lose that weight, or we read the whole Bible, or we get that promotion.... And we feel successful... for a

time... And some of us... aren't so good – in fact I would bet that *most* of us can't even name our previous resolutions let alone any that we actually did.

Then, because we fail at our self-determined goals... or even if we succeed... we start to doubt again that maybe we aren't good enough... and the cycle starts all over again.

So... I've already given you the "answer" – that simple, often preached about, often talked about in bible studies, often thrown in your face when things in life stink – answer... Just **Give it all to God!** But... How? I mean, that's great advice... but... how do we give it all to God when.... I just lost my spouse to cancer? Or my best friend died suddenly to COVID? Or... I lost my job... or... my marriage is falling apart... or... fill in the blank... Saying "Give it all to God" is great when things are going well.. but what about when it's not! How do we do that!?

Well, we practice... and we battle our enemy with scripture...

You see, that cycle of doubt, comparison and self-reliance... that's all from the enemy. Those are HIS tools to trick you into thinking you're not good enough for God's family and to turn away from him. He is trying to convince you that because you aren't "special" in your own eyes that God wouldn't want you. And that's just not true. He's lying to you. And he's lying to me. So, we need to create our own cycle... to battle that other cycle. So here's what I want you do:

Every time you start to have doubts attempt to battle it... to replace it with **assurance**. Remind yourself of who you are! Read scripture that describes exactly how God views you! And here's some scripture I want you to start with – but feel free to add to the list:

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

1 Peter 2:9 But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests,^[a] a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

Ephesians 1:4-5 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

Meditate on these, read these, know these, memorize these.... Any time you are feeling those doubts about your worth or that enemy whispers lies in your ears... battle him back with this Scripture.

And then when you find yourself comparing yourself to others... and coming up short... we need to replace that with **Love**. Instead of looking at others and comparing them to you... look at others and love them. They are God's workmanship too. They are God's handiwork. They may or may not be following his ways – but that doesn't matter.. he tells us to love them no matter what! So try these verses:

Philippians 2:3 ³ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

John 13:34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

Matthew 5:43-45 "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor'^[a] and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies!^[b] Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

And finally... instead of trusting in our own abilities and relying on ourselves to fix things or make things "better" (whatever OUR definition of better might be)... We need

to trust God and rely on HIM. So, when you get in that self-improvement "mood" and decide that YOU are going to fix things (which isn't always a bad thing)... stop and make sure that you're doing things for the right motivations and that it's Spirit-led... not YOU-led... If God convicts you to make a change in your life... BY ALL MEANS... DO IT! But you'll be doing it with his help... because he asked you to do it. But... if it's just something that you feel like YOU want.... Maybe pray about it... seek some guidance... and confirm that it is for the right reasons. Here is some guiding Scripture that can help:

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.

Psalm 37:4-6

Take delight in the LORD,

and he will give you your heart's desires.

⁵ Commit everything you do to the LORD.

Trust him, and he will help you.

⁶ He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn,
and the justice of your cause will shine like the
noonday sun

Philippians 4:6-7 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷ Then you will experience God's peace,

which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

And when we step into this cycle of Assurance, Loving others, and Trusting God.... And using Scripture as our weapon against the enemy... our attitude improves. Which changes everything. Remember, your attitude is more important than your situation.. and we need to have a Christ-like attitude. We need to know that we are loved... we need to love others... and trust that God has us in his hands.

There are no "steps of obedience" today... no directions to go out and make disciples... Today is about you! Today I want just want you to know that You are loved. I want you to know that God has a plan and a purpose for you and your life. And I want to tell you how much I love and appreciate you for being in my life.

Let's pray together and worship God.