

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: “It’s Morphing Time”

SERIES: Practicing Virtue

SCRIPTURES:

SPEAKER: Shaun Kipe

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**Credit to Gary Thomas, John Ortberg, Richard Foster*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church. It is so good to worship with you today, everybody here in the room and also to those of you tuning in to the livestream.

If you have your Bible with you today, please turn to Matthew 16. We’ll get there in just a few minutes. But before we do, just a little bit of background to the series we’re starting today.

Back many years ago, when I was still in elementary school, there was a popular television show called the “**Mighty Morphin Power Rangers.**” To be perfectly honest it was kind of a corny show. It was created in Japan and then badly dubbed into English.

And the basic storyline of the show was a group of ordinary teenagers, who had the ability to “morph.” They could access a power beyond themselves to become martial arts heroes for justice. And they were most famous for saying, “**It’s morphing time**” and they would be transformed from ordinary teens into superheroes.

That’s what morphing means, it means to change, to become something new. The process of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly is metamorphosis.

Of course it's not just 8 year old kids and caterpillars who want to morph.

The desire for transformation lies deep in every human heart.

This is why so many people start the year by making New Years Resolutions, join fitness centers, purchase fit-bits, starting a new diet plan, a commitment to get things done around the house. Deep down every single one of us, we know we need to change and in fact, we want to change.

You have felt this before. *“I am not completely the person I want to be. I don't always treat other people the way I want to. I don't always speak to people the way I know I should. I don't always think the way I know I should. I am not completely the person I want to be.”*

(Illustration adapted from “The Life I've Always Wanted”, Ortberg)

The beginning of each year is always a good opportunity to consider the kind of morphing we desire for our lives. “What kind of person am I and what kind of person am I becoming?”

Interestingly enough, the Power Rangers probably didn't know this, but this word, morph, finds its roots in the New Testament of your Bible. It's a Greek word, **“morphow”** that means, **“the inward and real formation of the essential nature of a person.”** In other words, what kind of person are you deep down in your soul. Paul, for example talks a lot about this idea.

(Ortberg pg. 230)

Galatians 4:19 – ¹⁹ My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

Romans 12:2 - ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

So what kind of morphing are we after in 2024?

William Law was an 18 century Anglican writer. He once remarked that people should **“earnestly pursue humility, patience, generosity, faith, compassion, courage, kindness and forgiveness with the same intensity that those in the world pursue wealth, fame, worldly achievement, and physical beauty.”**

(Thomas)

I began to think, wow that’s a powerful statement. What if we lived in a world where instead of chasing physical beauty or wealth or fame people were chasing the character of Jesus. What would that kind of world look like? What your life look like?

Scripture teaches us, that as we put our faith in Jesus and walk with him, he changes us, on the inside. Who we are, our character. The rallying cry of followers of Jesus might also be: *“It’s morphing time...”*

So, we are going to spend the next five weeks in a series called: **Practicing virtue (SERIES GRAPHIC)**...talking about how we morph into the character of Jesus.

And I know, the word virtue probably does not conjure up the most positive of feelings. If you mention virtue today many people begin to assume all kinds of things...usually that there are all these things that you think you’d really enjoying doing in life but because you’re supposed to be virtuous you’re not allowed to.

So, just important to clarify...virtues as we are talking about them means:

...the inner orientation and behaviors evidenced in the life of Jesus while he walked on the earth. (Thomas pg 8) In other words, we morph into the character of Jesus by arranging our lives around the practices that Jesus himself practiced.

You see, there is an ancient and biblical process, by which character morphing takes place within us. Today we often call it spiritual formation. But for hundreds of years Christian teachers have spoken about **“the practice of the virtues of Christ”**.

So to help narrow our focus, we’ll be talking about the five following virtues:

Surrender, Prudence, Courage, Confession, Love.

With the rest of our time this morning, we just want to spend a few minutes talking about practicing the virtue of...

II. Surrender

And I’ll acknowledge right off the bat, that surrender is a hard word to accept in our culture. Usually, you surrender, because you know you lost. We call it waving the white flag. Surrender, carries the idea of softness and weakness. If I surrender, then it means someone else has power or control over me.

And that doesn’t sound like a very virtuous trait to live by. So why is this word so important and what does it have to do with morphing into the character of Jesus?

Well, everything. In fact, the very heart of Christianity revolves around this word. In some ways this virtue is the foundation of all Christian virtues. If you don’t get this one, you won’t get the others.

So if you have your Bible turn to Matthew 16. The foundational passage related to the virtue of surrender...

Just to kind of set the scene for you here. Jesus is traveling with his disciples and he wants to begin preparing them for his coming death. Because, in Jewish theology, kind of like the litmus test for a true Messiah is “not dying.” There were a lot people claiming to be the Messiah in the first century. And they all ended up dead. And so the expectation of the true Messiah was a conquering warrior king, who would

overthrow the Roman Empire. And I suspect the disciples were expecting a pretty comfortable ride to the top of the “food chain.” Perhaps in their minds disciple of the Messiah, meant waving the victory flag not the white flag. And so Jesus has to clarify for his disciples, what it really means to be his disciple. What is at the heart or the foundation of choosing to give your life to Jesus. And here’s what Jesus has to say...

Matthew 16:24-25 - “Whoever wants to become my disciple must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me, will find it.”

Do you follow what Jesus is saying here? To become a disciple means to deny yourself...lose your life for my sake...Jesus is talking about the virtue of surrender. That your desires are no longer your ultimate goal in life. I’m willing to give up what I want, to do what Jesus wants.

See all human beings have what we call a will. It’s like your decision-making center.

When we talk about a strong-willed child. We mean a child who is bound and determined to get their way. My will be done.

When our daughter **Adalyn was younger (PIC)**, she was one of these strong-willed children. I remember one night, Jenny and I were weaning her off of her binkie. It was time for her to leave that babyish crutch behind. And she was determined to not let that happen. And she was screaming and crying relentlessly. And this is when she was young and she had trouble using correct grammar, but in midst of her pitiful sobs she kept saying “My want my binkie”.

And Jenny was doing her best trying to calm her down. And I thought, I have a way with words. I’ll just shmooze this little girl into a relaxed sleep. So I started rubbing her back and said, “Daddy loves you. You are such a sweetie pie. You are such a cute little girl.”

She looked right at me with eyes of disgust, this sweet little girl, looked at me and screamed at the top of her lungs ***“My not cute girl!! My not sweetie pie! My want my binkie!”***

And you see every single human being lives with that same mentality about our lives. “I want my way, my will, my life.”

To deny yourself is to surrender to your life, your will, your ways to Jesus. That’s discipleship in Jesus Kingdom. It’s the beginning of practicing virtue and finding change in your life.

And, just in case you think this is an “off-handed” comment in Matthew’s Gospel. I’ll just show you how central this teaching was to Jesus and his followers. Mark, also thought this was important because he wrote it down in his Gospel. In case you missed it when Matthew said it.

Mark 8:34-36 - “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross...³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^a will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me...will save it.

But it’s not just Mark. Turn to **Luke 9 - “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily...²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.**

Even John, the fourth Gospel writer, whose Gospel is most unique of the four, right? The other three Gospels are called the synoptic gospels, because they use much of the same language. But even John, picks up on the connection between surrender and discipleship to Jesus.

John 12 - ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

To surrender to Jesus means to wave the white flag of independence and autonomy and give Jesus control over your life, your will, your decision-making center, your mind, your words, your thoughts your actions. Jesus lived his life by this motto.

John 6:38 - ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

The Apostle Paul said it like this, **“I have been crucified with Christ and no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”**

So are you starting to understand this most significant connection. The first step in discipleship, the first step in practicing virtue...is to surrender to Jesus.

Now perhaps the clearest declaration of this surrender mindset is found in Jesus most famous prayer. Short little phrase, only four words, but one of the easiest and most practical ways to begin practicing surrender. So listen carefully, most practical part of the sermon today. Learn, memorize and recite these four words over and over again this week. It will morph the way you behave.

A. Your Will Be Done

Matthew 6 - ⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Those four words are the heart of the virtue of surrender. God, your will be done. Now, part of our problem with surrender is that we like to be in control. We like to make our own decisions. We want to do, what we want to do, when we want to do it

and we don't want anyone else controlling us. I want my will to be done. But there are two problems with that.

First, as in control as we like to be and as we think we are:

1. Life has a way of reminding us that we actually are not in control anyway.

When you're frustrated because you're stuck in traffic, because you can't control the traffic.

When the internet is down when you're work. You can't control that.

When you didn't get the job or promotion you wanted.

When you're worried about one of your kids, because you can't control them.

When you're mad at your spouse because you can't control them.

When you don't get into the school that you want to be accepted into.

When your worried about money.

When your physical body starts to let you down.

Life has a way of reminding you that you are often not in control. And how do you behave in those circumstances? What is your attitude like?

So this week, here's the practice...in all of those out of control life circumstances.

You pray Jesus' prayer. "God, your will be done." Your will be done in this circumstance. Your will be done with my attitude.

But there's a second problem.

2. Even in the areas of our lives that we do have control over. Where we do have the power of the will to make decisions...truth is **most of us struggle to make good decisions.** With my attitude, diet, my spending, my entertainment choices.

Apostle Paul said it like this in a famous passage in [Romans 7:15](#) - **¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.**

Can anybody else relate to Paul? There's something you don't want to do, but you do it. You don't have the individual will-power to make a good choice. Or there's something you do want to do, but you don't do it.

I say don't eat that and I eat that. Don't drink that and I drink it. Don't yell at the kids and I yell at the kids. Don't look at that site. Don't procrastinate. Don't brag. Don't envy. Don't be greedy. Don't lose your temper.

My will, my decision-making center, doesn't do the good I know I should. We see this in ourselves and we see it others. What's the answer?

And often the standard answer in our society, and even among church people, to those kinds of behavioral failures is just try harder. Try harder to be like Jesus. Try harder to obey God. Try harder to be a good person.

But eventually all of us are faced with the reality that just trying harder isn't working. Do you know what the answer is, when your will isn't choosing the good you know it should? It isn't try harder? It's surrender.

I remember hearing John Ortberg talk about this one time and he said, that one of the first groups that caught on to the power of surrender leading to change and transformation in your life was AA...Alcoholics Anonymous. The 12 step program for helping someone overcome the alcohol addiction, the control that alcohol has over them. I can't just overcome alcoholism and make the right choice by sheer will-power. Did you know this? First three steps of AA have nothing do with just trying harder.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

How do you overcome alcohol addiction? It's not by trying harder it's by surrendering your life to a higher power.

And these steps are often summed in three great phrases.

I can't. God can. I think I'll let him.

I can't overcome addictions on my own. I can't fix myself. I can't fix my temper. I can't fix my own greed. I can't fix my own envy. I can't fix my lust. I can't fix my alcoholism or workaholism. I can't be the husband, father, friend, pastor I know I should be. I can't control my worry or my eating... I can't fix the people around me. I can't control my circumstances.

I can't. But God can. I think I'll let him. That's the definition of surrender. That's the first step in discipleship.

So I just want to encourage you this week. Whatever it is that comes your way...start by reciting the words in Jesus' prayer. "God, in this situation, **your will be done.**" Your will be done in what I say, think, speak, how I act.

Don't try harder this week, instead surrender to Jesus.

And if you start there, I think you'll start to find one of the great gifts of practicing the virtue of surrender and that is that...

B. Surrender leads to true freedom and power.

It's kind of like an oxymoron, right? The more you surrender your will to Jesus the more freedom and power you begin to experience in life. This is what Jesus teaches us.

“whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me, will find it.”

This is not true of anything else in life. If you surrender your will to alcohol, alcohol will control you. If you surrender to greed. Materialism and discontent will control you. If you surrender to the approval of others, timidity and uncertainty will control you.

Many have mistakenly thought, if we surrender to God, then he'll take all my fun away. He'll turn me into a nun or monk or a missionary or a pastor...I'll live a life of depravation. But it actually works the other way around.

When I surrender my life to God, I'm no longer dependent on myself...I'm no longer dependent on my limited abilities, attitudes, my wisdom and my resources and my desires.

Instead, I become dependent on an infinite God. Infinite in knowledge and wisdom and beauty.

Kind of a fascinating story about this. **(Rowland Hazard PIC)** Do you know who this is? He is best known as “Rowland H.” True story about his life. About 120 years ago. He was born into wealth and himself graduated from Yale as a gifted business man. But he was also secretly a hopeless drunk. His will surrendered to his alcohol addiction. It was controlling his life and it was going to ruin him. Classic example of Paul's words, “I do what I do not want to do”. He ended up going to jail several

times. But always had the money to bail himself out. He knew he could not continue like this.

He was so desperate, he went seeking the help of world renowned psychiatrist Carl Jung, over in Europe, who specialized in helping addicts. Written all kinds of books. Many of his texts and much of his research still used at the highest levels of education today. Rowland went to find help from Jung and he did. When he finished his time with Jung, he was finally sober and fully convinced that now he had trained his self-will enough he had overcome his addiction. But, so the story goes, he got drunk before he reached the boat to go back home. He returned to Jung broken and Jung said to him, *“You have the mind of a chronic alcoholic. I have never seen one single case recover, if it’s as bad as you. There’s nothing I can do for you, except take your money and I don’t want to do that.”*

Rowland said it was like the gates of hell clanged shut on him. And he said, *“Is there no exception? Is there no hope? Is there no other way?”*

Carl said, *“Yes, one. Here and there alcoholics have what are called ‘vital spiritual experiences.’ They find God. Hope for you will be found there, if it will be found at all.”*

The power to change will not be found in yourself. It will be found in surrender to God. And Rowland found God. Had a vital spiritual experience. In little fellowship of disciples, followers of Jesus, called the Oxford Group...and it was members of this very group that would eventually found the group Alcoholics Anonymous. The true power to change, to be the person you want to be, the person you know you were created to be...will not be found in your own will power. It will be found in those 4 important words: **“Your will be done.”**

It’s one of the reasons that Scripture can be so powerful for us, in Scripture we find story after story of people, just like us, who did not have the power to change themselves, but who were changed by the power of surrendering their lives to God.

A fearful, denying fisherman named Peter surrendered his life to Jesus and became a bold follower, leading the early church community. A greedy tax collector Zacchaeus surrender his heart to Jesus and gave all of his money away. A murdering Pharisee named Saul surrendered his heart to Jesus and gave his life to taking the message of that Jesus all over the ancient Mediterranean world.

And it's because, the more you surrender your will to Jesus the more freedom and power you begin to experience in life.

Ok, one final thought related to practicing surrender. Did you notice this important little word, when I read our key passages earlier? Luke adds this word that the other Gospel writers don't, did you notice that? He says...

C. Daily

Luke 9 - "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

It's so important to get this. Because often in our understanding of Christianity we tend to emphasize The Decision, right? Have you made a decision for Jesus? Did you pray the sinners pray? And it's true, an intentional decision is good and important. But it's only a part.

Luke says, you must daily surrender your will.

It's because every time I turn my will over to God, my selfish human nature fights back. I want to take back control.

This is the story of human nature, in the very first book in your Bible. Adam and Eve lived in unity and harmony with God, according to God's will. But every day that little

tree at the center of the garden kept whispering to them, yeah but don't you want to do things your own way. It's a picture of your life and my life.

Some days I sit in a church service and I'm inspired, with the best of intentions... "God I'm surrendering to you. I'm giving you my life. My relationships, my money, my time, your will be done, have it all, I am fully surrendered to you."

And then Jenny walks in and says, "Hey would you mind taking care of the dishes for me today." And all of a sudden something inside of me says, "No, stop interrupting me, I'm surrendering my life to Jesus and your disrupting this moment and I don't want to do what you want me to do. I want to do what I want to do."

See how that happens. I think I've surrendered my attitude to Jesus or my time or money or my circumstances...and then my will keeps trying to take back control. So this week, it must be daily, "God your will be done."

It will not be easy this week. Your will, will fight back. In fact, look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, before his crucifixion.

Luke 22 - ⁴² "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me;

It's fascinating, isn't it? If you could name one person, more in tune with God's will than anyone ever, it would be Jesus. Jesus is the one who said, "I have come down to do the will of him who sent me." And who taught us to say those words, "God your will be done." But, now, here in this garden at this moment, Jesus finds Himself in that battle of wills. Jesus does not want what God wants. And he will have to choose God's will or his own. And you will face that same battle this week. And when you do...you will look to the example of Jesus. Jesus made his choice... **"yet not my will, but yours be done."**

And then, it's actually really interesting, have you ever noticed this before? Look at the very next verse... **43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.**

He surrenders his will to God's and in that moment God strengthens him.

And that same power is available to you. If you would be willing to surrender your will to Jesus. If you've never fully and intentionally made that choice before, you can do that right here this morning today. Surrender your life to Jesus. And if you want to do that, and you don't know how. Come and talk to me. We'll do that together. And if you've already done that then you know, you can be prepared this week, that each day, you'll need to wake up and surrender again. Daily.

So here we go Five Forks, it's our desire to morph, more and more into the character of Jesus. We will do that by practicing virtue. And the first virtue is surrender.

“God, **your will be done.**”

Would you pray with me?