

- I. Rose, Bud, Thorn and my kids
  - A. **Anyone who's joined our family for dinner knows we have a dinnertime conversation ritual.** Dinners in our home almost always follow the same pattern, regardless of what's on the menu. Pray thanks for our day and for the food, and then as we begin to eat go around in a circle and share something called our "Rose", "Bud" and "Thorn".
  - B. Our kids love this game. Here's how they explain it. (**Show video**, 1:17 long)
  - C. **We didn't always do the Rose, Bud, Thorn thing.** Initially, I heard about it on NPR a few months before we were getting ready to move to California. **I know this would be a traumatic experience for the kids and I wanted to give them a way to talk about their feelings** and process what was happening. It did provide format for that.
    - 1. As we got close to the move, they would talk about looking forward to going on a plane. They would talk about feeling sad saying goodbye to their friends. They would talk about seeing their grandparents, who live in California, more.
    - 2. After the move, it gave them space to reflect what was hard and what was good about their new environment. It helped Jason and I hear how they were doing; and encouragingly, they adapted more smoothly than we had expected. Rose Bud and Thorn was a helpful way to gauge that.
  - D. While our kids are no longer processing our move to California, this is still the primary way they process with us. **It's a way we stay current with each other.** Life gets busy; it's easy to miss how we all are doing; what we're thinking about; what is frustrating to us, and I have found the question, "How was school?" doesn't tend to yield much fruitful information. We're hoping they learn how to be reflective about themselves and their experience of life; how to balance their negative experiences with positive. Ultimately, Rose Bud and Thorn not only connects us socially with one another, it helps us connect with ourselves.
- II. **Today we're beginning a New series: "Cultivate"**
  - A. Imagine the best version of yourself; the version you'd like to believe you could actually be, or maybe are on your best day. Likely there are a number of positive characteristics you'd list that ideally you would have.
  - B. things we'd like to grow in ourselves and learning spiritual practices that might help. Develop habits (like Rose, Bud, Thorn) that help us grow in the things we want grow in
  - C. **Today's topic: Self-Awareness**
    - 1. dictionary definition: *"conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires"*
- III. **Why does self-awareness matter?**
  - A. **Starting place for cultivating anything positive:** how do we know what on our list we even need if we're not self-aware?
  - B. **Greek philosophy - "Know Thyself"** one of the maxims ascribed on the Greek temple at Delphi, seems to have predated Plato and Socrates, but was drawn upon by both as important wisdom
  - C. **Psychologists**
    - 1. **Daniel Goleman** - psychologist, science journalist, best-selling author of *Emotional Intelligence*, —calls self-awareness keystone of emotional intelligence. If we aren't able to monitor our thoughts and feelings, they end up controlling us.
    - 2. In the world of recovery, this is an important component. **Step 4 of the 12 Steps** is to make *"a searching and fearless moral inventory of oneself"*. It's incumbent on the person who wants to deal with their addiction that they get honest about what's really going on within them; the good, the bad, and the ugly. They need to become as self-aware as possible.

D. **Business world** - often acknowledged as an important asset in achieving success.

1. In a study undertaken by the Investment firm Green Peak Partners and Cornell University, they examined 72 executives at public and private companies with revenues from \$50 million to \$5 billion, and found that “a high self-awareness score was the strongest predictor of overall success”.

E. **Bible seems to care, too**

1. A number of Scriptures that point us toward the concept of self-awareness. Some examples:

- a) Tell me, what have I done wrong?

Show me my rebellion and my sin. (Job 13:23)

- b) let us test and examine our ways.

Let us turn back to the Lord. (Lamentations 3:40)

- c) “Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.” (Romans 12:3)

- d) From David (Psalm 139): “23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

24 Point out anything in me that offends you,  
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”

2. **Perhaps most pointedly, Jesus himself (Matthew 7)**

- a) “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your neighbor. ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? 5 **You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.**”

- b) how often do we hear this and think it’s only about not judging others? **Do we ever go to the trouble of noticing the logs in our eyes and removing them?**

3. Yet for all of this - **let’s acknowledge self examination can be hard.** It can be uncomfortable. It’s why Jesus has to prod people to do it. It’s much more comfortable to focus on someone else’s eyeball than our own.

- a) **Recent episode of the Mindy Show with Mindy Kaling**; she’s an accomplished doctor and single mom, but when it comes to money, she doesn’t want to have anything to do with managing her finances. She’s always let men in her life handle it, but after a break up, she asks a woman friend to take it over. When her friend confronts her about why she won’t manage it herself. Asks her, “Are you just that lazy?” Mindy responds:

- (1) *“I love bear claws...I know that the minute I log in to my bank account I am going to see that every day I spend \$5 on a coffee and bear claw... when I know that I could just have a packet of oatmeal and that would be much cheaper. And all of that money on bear claws could be better spent on my son’s education or my retirement. So, yeah...I don’t want to look at it, ‘cause it reminds me that every single decision I make is as a single mom, and this isn’t what I planned.”* (Her friend reminds her she has 2 bear claws every morning.)

- (2) We probably all have habits like Mindy we’d rather not look at, but as we’ve learned from the recovery world, the only way to freedom from that which controls us, is through seeing things as they really are.

F. **How do we do it? Undergoing self-examination consistently. If we’re trying to follow Jesus, makes sense to do that in concert with Him.**

1. **First: foundational principles:**

- a) **God totally loves** us fully, freely, unconditionally
    - (1) In the words of Paul: “may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. 19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.” (Ephesians 3:18-19)
  - b) **We are broken and imperfect.** We miss the mark. This is what the Bible called in Greek *hamartia* - “missing the mark” - translated “sin”.
    - (1) Also in Paul’s words: “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” (Romans 3:23)
2. **Practice: Examination of Consciousness** (or simply “the Examen”) by **Ignatius of Loyola**, founder of the Jesuits
- a) Ignatius lived in Spain in the 16th century; he was a knight and had dreams as a young man of military glory, but in battle he was severely injured, and forced into convalescence. As he recovered, the place he was recovering had only 2 books: the life of Jesus, and the lives of Saints. Became stirred reading them, and over time, resolved to give his life to Jesus and to work to transform himself and others who followed him. Founded the Society of Friends, the order of Jesuits.
  - b) Developed Spiritual Exercises based on his own experiences of growing in faith. Used imagination and memory. Most enduring and accessible, foundational practice was the Prayer of Examen.
  - c) process, always has 5 steps. To be done at least once a day.
    - (1) **Gratitude.** Always start by recognizing the goodness of God’s presence and all you’ve been given.
      - (a) Ignatius: ““We will much sooner tire of receiving his gifts than he of giving them.”
    - (2) **Invite** God to give you insight into your day.
    - (3) **Review the day.** Notice moments of “consolation” and “desolation”.
      - (a) A **consolation** is an experience that causes you to feel fully alive, at peace, joyful, happy, comforted, whole, connected, your best self, etc. and could be understood as an experience in which you feel close to God.
      - (b) A **desolation** is an experience that causes you to feel drained of energy, frustrated, irritated, angry, sad, sorrowful, alone, isolated, unaccepted, fragmented, less than your best self, etc. and could be understood as an experience in which you feel far away from God.
    - (4) **Thank God for consolations and choose a Desolation to pray into.**
      - (a) The tricky thing about desolation is that even though it is an uncomfortable and sometimes distressing experience and we may feel as if God is far away, God is still very near. So the gift is praying with the desolation, telling God about your experience and asking for God’s grace in the experience. God shows up in desolations AND consolations. It’s just that it’s easier to “experience” God in consolations and we often move away from God in desolations.
      - (b) Name to God any sin you’ve become aware of, and take a moment to receive and experience God’s forgiveness. Allow God to be close to you, and remind you of His unfailing, unconditional love.
    - (5) **Resolution.** End looking ahead with new hope for tomorrow.
      - (a) Invite God’s presence for the day to come, and ask for His help to move forward with greater awareness and a desire to be more connected to Him.
3. **Benefits gained of practicing self-examination regularly**

- a) **Greater self-awareness:** awareness of motives, of frustrations, of longings, of what brings us joy and satisfaction
- b) **Greater humility** - we're forced to look at ourselves more critically and acknowledge our imperfections
  - (1) I have friends who also have a number of kids and we've talked about with Jason and I and this other couple how God seems to use the process of parenting to reveal how broken we are and in need of help - Contrast to one of my friend's brothers who was single and fairly religious and one day told his family - "I don't really struggle with sin". We laughed because (first of all: pride) he had no kids, no consistent opportunity to be reminded what a jerk he can be.
  - (2) In my own life: **Motherhood is the place I can discover my best self** - the self that is most self-sacrificing, most affectionate toward my kids, most in love with them, **and also my worst self** - my self that is short tempered, that doesn't keep my emotions in check, that gets frustrated when things don't go my way, or the kids aren't listening, or they're really loud, and I don't always manage that frustration in the ways I'd like. Some times I speak to the kids with a harder tone than I should. Sometimes I raise my voice. And it grieves me to know this. It doesn't feel good when it happens. This can be like Mindy and the Bear Claws for me. But I want to be aware. I want to have more control over my emotions, and that starts with acknowledging the places I've fallen short.
  - (3) When I do acknowledge those with God, it also gives me the chance to receive his grace, love, forgiveness. That grace, love, forgiveness unconditionally offered to me inspires me as a parent to be more gracious, loving, and forgiving of my kids
- c) **Greater compassion**
  - (1) Our humility leads us to extend grace and compassion to others; to feel less entitled; recognize how fallible we all are
  - (2) **Parable of the unforgiving debtor; unmerciful steward (Matthew 18)** - a King's servant is forgiven a huge sum, equivalent of millions of dollars, by the King, and then goes and throws a creditor of his into prison for owing him a few thousand. And when the King finds out, he punishes the servant because he couldn't extend the kind of grace he'd received to others
  - (3) Pope Francis is a Jesuit; perhaps this is why he is so strikingly humble and compassionate towards others. He's regularly aware of where he messes up, and experiences God's love and forgiveness, and so he has lots of that love and forgiveness to give away.
- d) **Greater sensitivity to God's presence in our lives**
  - (1) as we become more aware of where God has been close to us in surprising ways, we are more attuned to recognize Him not only after the fact but in the moment. And even when we miss it in the moment, we grow closer to God as we realize all the ways he is present with us thought the mundane day to day of our lives.

**G. Let's not just talk about it; let's take the time to try this now.** (Take 5- 10 minutes to walk through, transition to communion and worship.)

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- (2) **Invite** God to give you insight to your day.
- (3) **Review the day.** Notice moments of "consolation" and "desolation".

- (a) A **consolation** is an experience that causes you to feel fully alive, at peace, joyful, happy, comforted, whole, connected, your best self, etc. and could be understood as an experience in which you feel close to God.
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- (4) Thank God for consolations and choose a Desolation to pray into.**
- (a) Name to God any sin you've become aware of, and take a moment to receive and experience God's forgiveness. Allow God to be close to you, and remind you of His unfailing, unconditional love.
- (5) Resolution.** End looking ahead with new hope for tomorrow.
- (a) Invite God's presence for the day to come, and ask for His help to move forward with greater awareness and a desire to be more connected to Him