

The Desert of Self

Jeremiah 17:9-10 | Ecclesiastes 5:10 | 1 Timothy 6:9-10 | Matthew 16:25 | Mark 8:35 | Luke 9:24 | John 12:24-26

Welcome everyone and thank them for being at the community group. Remind them that we are created for community and you appreciate the opportunity to host and facilitate.

Direct your group to think through the last few sermons in this series (*Getting over and through the rivers of pain and guilt in life and through the swamps of failure and unforgiveness*) and then allow time for the group to share anything that has been meaningful to them throughout this series.

Say, This week we are going to discuss the Desert of Self.

Ask, What are some mirages that people chase after in life? (using the metaphor of life as a desert)

Ask the group to respond to this statement. - What you try to center on in your life will rule your life. (Allow for the group to respond with some personal testimony.)

Say, Let's take a look at Jeremiah 17:9-10 which gives us a biblical understanding of the real condition of our heart. *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.""*
Jeremiah 17:9-10 ESV

Say, We have to be careful not to trust our own heart in matters that come our way. Our default is to land on experience, knowledge and wisdom and fail to trust God is making shaping us into His Son's image.

Michael's first point was the mirage of independence.

Say, Our culture stresses the importance of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps and **making it happen! And do to it on our own.**

Read - *Genesis 2:18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone;"*

- **and this is not just in a marital relationship context.** We are created to need others/community. That is one of the beauties of the family of God and gathering in community group and church services.

Here are a few things to point out related to this sermon point -

- Hebrews 10:24-25 - *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* - We need others to help us to love and do good.
- Saying you can do life without others is a mirage.
- The desert of self is lonely. Many can be lonely even in your group. Just showing up does not mean that someone is engaged. Be sensitive to those who may be "isolated but sitting right there."

Say, The Second point Michael made centered on **The mirage of security.**

Selfishness commonly presents itself when money and possessions come into play. Greed is defined *as a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed.* - Merriam-Webster

Read Ecclesiastes 5:10 - *"He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity."*

Summarize - The love of money is a mirage in the desert of self. Many joke that they would love to have God “trust them” with more money just to see if they could handle it and not become greedy. The Apostle Paul writes to young Timothy and says, *1 Timothy 6:9-10* “*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*”

Say, Money can easily become the most addictive “substance” in many lives. Placing our security in something that seems permanent but actually is fleeting and leads to more and more insecurity. The desert of self is insecure by nature.

The third point can be very subtle and sound good but not be true. - The mirage of religion

Review.

- The religion of nostalgia/sameness/ commonality- hold on to what has worked for so long (methods) and be the church of no change.
- The religion of the new - let go of anything old and actually fearing tradition. If it has been around a little while then it “has to go!”
- The religion of you/me – This one is so insidious and sneaky and destructive. It places you/me at the center of it all.

Summarize - It is important to remember that the focus/center of scripture is not you and me. We are not the hero of our story - Christ is. Christ came to be a better Adam; a better David; and a better you is really not you at all, but Christ alive in you.

Say, The desert of self is idolatry - we place ourselves at the center/ on the throne. Actually, our rightful place is under the lordship of Christ who is worthy to be worshiped and praised.

Say, The last point that Michael made was **The Desert of Self is unsurvivable.**

Summarize - You cannot control yourself. You can be pretty good some of the time but eventually your “goodness” is not enough. In fact, it has never been enough. The you at the center of your faith can never save you. Most religions will place their “**salvation on what you do.**” Since the heart is deceitful – Jeremiah 17 there is no way you and I can make that work to perfection.

In all of the four gospels, the writers convey this same truth in their own words – it is great paradox in scripture.

Assign these four passages and allow them to be read out loud.

Matthew 10:39; 16:25 | Mark 8:35 | Luke 9:24 | John 12:24-26

Make sure this gets conveyed - Losing your life for his sake actually leads to finding life in Christ.

A grain of wheat must die to bear fruit.

Summarize these statements. –

- One has to die to self, not dying leads to loneliness.
- Christ accepts us only after we die to ourselves.
- Death to self-interest is the great escape. This can be a very painful and prolonged death, but the only way to escape the desert of self is through death.
- Dying to self is a joyous and freeing solution.

Much to chew on this week. Allow some uncomfortableness to linger if needed. The caution here is try to fix some in your group. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to be the One who leads all of us into His truth. Give people time to share prayer requests and then allow time to pray for one another.