

## OUR LIVES, OUR MESSAGES:

*Are you living the way God intended?*

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Scripture: **John 8:1-11** (*New Living Translation*)

**Sermon Nugget:** As we struggle to answer the question, "Are we living the way God intended?" we first struggle with understanding the question. Ultimately, we end up trying to live as God has created us...to be alive, living freely without oppression and fear of failure. Like the adulterous woman, we are given second chances...thus we gain our freedom and regain our life.

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When I was first informed of the topic for this message today, the question, "**Are you living the way God intended?**", I was immediately stricken by the complexity and importance of the question. The more I pondered it, the more excited I became because I realized that this very question addresses some of the ideas and theology of the Garden which makes the Garden just a little different from some other churches. Now, don't get frightened by that statement...take a deep breath and come along with me today while we investigate a crucial element of faith and behavior.

For many people, to attempt to answer the question, "Are you living the way God intended?" conjures up unrest or the slight stirring of guilt, as though there is a clear understanding of certain rules or expectations that are posted somewhere that we all know and frequently read. If that were true, we would, of course, grade ourselves against the standard and answer the question pretty quickly.

If, for example, "Living the way God intends" means giving money to a church, reading my Bible, and being nice to people, I can measure my behaviors and answer the question. If living the way God intends means adhering to certain rules like don't drink, smoke, play cards, be gay, cheat, steal or kill. I can measure my behaviors and answer the question.

But what if the question means far more than rules and arbitrary judgments? Besides that, WHO can tell me if I am living the way God intends me to live? My pastor? My parents? My children? The Bible? You see....this is a very sticky issue...the more we ponder this, the more we realize that some of organized religion has done exactly this. Within certain organizations there is an implicit set of standards or expectations for "attendance" and "acceptance" that everyone is supposed to figure out. There is a language that we are supposed to learn and use, and then there is an interpretation of the Bible by the people who stand up front that you are supposed to buy and repeat. Then after awhile you can start judging whether those around you are living the way God intended, sort of like the video clip we saw earlier from WKRP. How many of you were incensed and angry that

someone would act that way? That clip was a prime example of the people who force others to agree with their perspective on God's Word.

And what about the opening clip where the young girl threw her Bible at the back of the other girl all the while saying, "I am filled with the love of Christ." I am sure that we have all encountered well-intentioned people who have specific beliefs and a strong desire to set the rest of us on the right path to understanding God, the Bible and exactly how to live. Today, instead of throwing the Bible at the back of you, I would instead like us to try to figure out together exactly what it means to live the way God intends.

I know of a young lady who recently graduated from Anderson College who has a simple, bold tattoo on her back. It reads Matthew 25. I asked her why she had a Bible chapter for a tattoo. She said it was because that was her favorite and in her opinion the most important part of the Bible, and the Christian faith to her. Matthew 25 is the passage in the Bible that explains that generous and caring behaviors such as giving water and food and shelter to anyone who needs it is the same as giving water and food and shelter and clothing to Jesus. This young lady wanted to have that on her skin as a reminder of what she believed was the most important guide for her behavior. For that young woman Matthew 25 is her standard for what it means to live the way God intends. She feels that when she helps the homeless, visits those in nursing homes, hospitals and prisons, she is living the way God intends her to live. What about you? What would you tattoo onto your back? What are the elements that help you to answer that question?

Out of all of the chapters in the Bible and all of the tenets and virtues of the Christian faith, I believe that the most important way that God intends for me to live is to forgive others. If I were bold enough to tattoo something on me, it would simply say, FORGIVE OTHERS. Of course, that is also a difficult task to perform at times. Isn't it funny how the thing we most wish to receive from others, we hold back on giving to others....

One Saturday, a few weeks ago, my son Luke, aged 6 and his best friend in the world, Nate, aged 7, spent several hours doing what has become a rite of passage for many children today, playing video games together. They were not playing against each other, though, they were instead working together to move through the levels of a Sponge Bob video game. As I peeked in on them throughout the day, I watched unfold before me a beautiful and simple example of this ability to offer forgiveness. All day long, Luke and Nate had played kindly and gently. They supported each other's success, they functioned as a team, and they didn't get mad at each other. At one point in the day, when Nate was out of the room, Luke

was playing and he messed up. This is what I heard from the other room. Luke said, "Nate, I messed up. I died in that level." I waited to hear what Nate would do. Would he yell? Would he be disappointed? In the split second before Nate replied, I thought of the scripture passage for today. It's printed in your program. It's that wonderfully popular story of the woman caught in adultery. It's a guide for living with sinners...people who mess up.

The pharisees brought the adulteress woman to Jesus, knowing that the custom was to stone her to death. Jesus was not to be trapped.

Jesus said, "All right, stone her. But let those who have never sinned throw the first stones!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to her, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

"No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more." John 8: 7-11

What I find comforting about this experience is that Jesus not only challenged those around to look within themselves and cast a stone only if they were without sin, but also, after everyone left, Jesus was just as gentle. He didn't wait until everyone was gone and then yell at her or berate her or stone her privately; he simply forgave her and gave her another chance.

So, back to the video game story....what would Nate do to Luke, the sinner...the one who messed up? Would he toss the stone? I listen for the reply. Evidently Nate remembers doing the same thing Luke just did. Nate didn't even pick the stone up. He simply said, "That's ok." Ah! Relief for Luke!!

Now, what does that mean for you and me? I think it means something very simple and powerful. God does for us all of the time, what Nate did for Luke. When we mess up....God says "well....that's ok....go on and try to not do it again. Try again." We have a second chance. Do you know that in your heart? Because if you do, if I do, then we can live the way God intends us to live....with the knowledge that our mistakes do not define us. Let me say that again. Our mistakes do not define us. We are not expected to be perfect. God loves us anyway...and so much that we get to try again....we will not be burned at the stake or stoned to death. We are given grace and forgiveness and another chance.

Ultimately, I believe that once we realize that God gives us second chances, we can more freely offer that same hope

to others around us. If we apply to our lives what Jesus said in that Bible passage, we will admit that we have all done our share of messing up, and we won't throw stones at each other. We will be better able to overlook the errors and failures in each other and offer second chances. Living with that hope of another chance is what I consider to be living the way God intends us to live. What do you think?

Close:

As we leave this place today, may we remember that God always invites us to put down our things and talk. And then, like the adulterous woman in the Bible passage, we are granted a second chance to go and live...the way God intends us to live. Go in peace. Amen.