



Week 1 Preaching Resources: Soul Reset

Scripture Passage:

Luke 3:21-23

Focus Statement:

Resetting your soul begins with remembering who you are. In baptism, God calls us beloved.

ME:

Tell a story about a nickname your family has for you that doesn't quite fit or a story about feeling off-center after the holidays.

WE:

Sometimes we don't feel like ourselves, or others' perceptions of us just don't seem to fit. As we reset for a new year, overcoming the stress and busyness or loneliness of the holiday season, it's important that we remember our baptism and what God says about us. You may want to note somewhere in the sermon that God sees all of us through the eyes of grace and love; you do not have to be baptized to do a "soul reset" in God's love.

GOD:

In this passage, God says to Jesus, "You are my Son." Verse 23 says it "was thought" that Jesus was the son of Joseph. Explore the ways in which Jesus is God's son and the ways in which Jesus is Joseph's son. Before Jesus was Joseph's son, Jesus was always God's son. This is true for all of us – we belong to God first, before any of our earthly relationships or roles. Think about the different ways that this is "good news" for different people in your community. This "belonging" to God is not possessive, it is an expression of God's freely given love and grace. Jesus is God's son "the Beloved." Before Jesus has even begun his ministry, God calls Jesus "the Beloved, with [whom he is] well pleased." (Note: in the NRSV, "Beloved" is capitalized like a name or title!). Likewise for us, God's love does not need to be earned. It is who we are.

Why was Jesus baptized? Jesus was baptized to identify with us (verse 21 shows Jesus was baptized along with others). By faith, we identify with him.

In baptism, we are affirmed in God's love for us and our adoption into God's family, by grace, is proclaimed. The principal actor is God. God offers grace, regardless of our past, our sins, and our actions. There can be no doubt, you always belong and are beloved in the family of God. You may consider talking about some of the language in the baptismal covenant (*United Methodist Book of Worship* or *United Methodist Hymnal*).



YOU:

Does your perception of yourself fit the reality of how God sees you? Do you see yourself the way God sees you? The world puts conditions on our value. It tells us we are beloved or worthy if we do certain things or are certain things. Describe some of the pressures faced by people in your communities or the roles, activities, characteristics that they might feel define them more than being loved by God. However, before Jesus has done anything, God says he is beloved. God says we are beloved. Give suggestions of ways individuals can remember their baptism and/or that God loves them no matter what. How can we “reset” how we see ourselves as God sees us?

WE:

Once we reset how we look at ourselves, we will also be in a better place to look at others through God’s eyes. How can we look at the world, not for what it says that it is, but through God’s eyes? How does our baptism invite us to see others and the world? Invite the congregation to remember their baptism or consider issuing an invitation to baptism.



Week 2 Preaching Resources: Reset Purpose

Scripture Passage:

Mark 1:32-39

Focus Statement:

Spending time with God enables us to start our year with intention. Centered living comes from understanding God's purpose in this season.

ME:

In Junius Dotson's book, *Soul Reset*, he shares the importance of touching the bag at first base when playing baseball. If a player gets a hit and runs all the bases, but misses the bag at first base, it doesn't count. Nothing else matters. Dotson says the same is true for the Christian life. Staying close to Jesus is the first bag, the most important step. We can do everything else but if we miss the first bag, we have not gotten anywhere.

Share a story of a time when you missed the "first bag," when you did not spend time on your relationship with Jesus or you drifted apart and experienced the consequences.

WE:

We all get caught up in our work, family life and other pressures. Sometimes, we forget our main purpose, or maybe we never stopped long enough to figure it out in the first place. Jesus himself shows us the importance of pausing to spend time with God and rediscover our current purpose.

GOD:

Understanding God's purpose for us, our "why," comes from time in prayer and enables us to grow in our trust of God. In this story, we see Jesus working really hard at serving those around him (see verses 32-34).

Then, in verse 35, we see Jesus take time away from his disciples and the crowd to rest and to pray. He dedicates this time to being with God. Jesus does this several times throughout the gospels – it is not an isolated event!

In verse 36, we learn that Simon and his companions looked for Jesus while he was away praying. Consider how different translations of the Bible phrase this (for example, in the NRSV they "hunted for him," in the Amplified Bible, they "searched everywhere, looking anxiously for Him," in the CEB they "tracked him down"). You may describe how the pressures we face sometimes make it feel like we are being hunted or tracked down and it is hard to set apart time just for God.



When Simon and his companions find Jesus and begin to make demands on him (verse 37), Jesus sets clear boundaries about what he will or will not do. Because Jesus has taken that time apart to pray, he is able to live intentionally with the purpose God has given him and trusts God to handle the rest. God gives us a purpose in each season of our lives. We're not called to do it all, but we are called to live with purpose.

Jesus knows what his main purpose is and that gives him the discernment and courage to say "no" to the disciples'/crowd's expectations and to say "yes" to God. Note that what the disciples were asking Jesus to do was a "good" thing (keep healing the people of Capernaum), but Jesus knew it was not what he was meant to be doing any longer. We can often be busy doing good and worthwhile things too and still miss our purpose because we are not taking time to reset and recenter on God. By taking time for prayer, Jesus "resets" his purpose to keep the big picture in mind (proclaiming the message to the neighboring towns, too).

YOU:

Jesus knows his main purpose. Invite people to reflect on their own main purpose and what the priorities are in this season of their lives. Is there a balance between time set apart for God and time spent "doing"? Offer some suggestions about how people might set aside time for God, create balance, and discern God's current purpose for them. Emphasize the importance of listening for God amidst the voices of the world around us that place demands on our time and energy.

WE:

When we understand our purpose, it's easier to establish and maintain boundaries. We have a calling and purpose God has given us to address the world's grief, but we don't need to do it all. Consider talking about the purpose and reason for various ministries in your church. Are your church's current practices advancing the mission? When was the last time you "checked in" with God?



Week 3 Preaching Resources: Reset Values

Scripture Passage:

Galatians 5:24-6:10

Focus Statement:

What does it mean to live by God's Spirit and not our own, to live according to God's values and not those of the world?

ME:

Share a time when your values were tested or when you thought you were valuing one thing, but you were actually valuing something else. You may want to share a time when the Spirit led you in a different direction than you were going.

WE:

We may aspire to live by good values but they are not always the values of the Holy Spirit. For example, we may care more about scoring points against someone than maintaining a relationship with them, or we may "do good" for recognition rather than from love or a desire to help. Sometimes we can justify our actions but we were not following godly values in doing them.

GOD:

Background: The churches of Galatia struggled with whether or not Gentile Christians were required to get circumcised to become part of the family of faith. Paul emphasizes that everyone is brought to faith through Jesus Christ and to force circumcision on Gentile Christians, or for them to seek it, is to try to justify themselves under the law, rather than relying on Jesus' grace through faith.

Galatians 5:24-25 underpins the rest of this passage. In coming to faith, we die to ourselves (our own values, ways, desires, justification), just as Jesus died for us. And just as Jesus was raised for us, when we come to faith we come alive in a new way, by the Holy Spirit. We are no longer to be guided by our own values or ways, but by those of the Holy Spirit.

1) What does it mean to be guided by the Spirit?

- It is one thing to recognize that we only live by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It is another to allow the Spirit to guide and shape our lives. How do we see Jesus putting this into practice? Name some examples.
- Fruits of the Spirit are listed in Galatians 5:22, but this list of values can seem abstract on its own. So, in Galatians 6:1-10 Paul offers a description of what living with the fruits of Spirit looks like, or living "guided by the Spirit." He gives practical applications. For example: Gentleness is not just a character trait of the Christian. It is how a person living by the spirit confronts and restores an offender. (6:1)
- Verse 8 contrasts living according to "your own flesh" and "according to "the Spirit." Are there times when, like the Gentile Christians of Galatia wanting to be circumcised, we think we are "sowing to the



Spirit” but we are really sowing to the flesh? (Paul preaches against the division caused by this debate and paints a picture of unity and serving one another in the family of faith.)

2) Values in the passage

- If you think it is helpful, identify a practice/idea your congregation is struggling with in this passage. For example, restoring offenders (v.1), carrying others’ burdens (v.2), comparing self to others (v.4), sharing good things with your teachers (v.6), perseverance (v.9), etc.

YOU:

Where in your life do you see yourself here? What are some of your values that may not necessarily be God’s values? All of us need to have our values reset from time to time. Offer some ways that people in your congregation might assess if their values are aligned with God’s and how they might get back in touch with the Holy Spirit to lead “Spirit-led lives”?

WE:

If we were to all live guided by the Spirit, how would our relationships with one another and the world change? What might your community and its witness look like if you did a reset on our values and were led by the Spirit?



Week 4 Preaching Resources: Reset Direction

Scripture Passage:

Acts 9:1-15

Focus Statement:

Whether we've been in the church for a long time or are exploring the faith, Jesus sometimes calls us to move in a new direction, even when we think we are already heading in the right direction.

ME:

Share a story of a time you were traveling and thought you knew where you were going but found yourself needing directions. Or share about a time you got into an argument with your "back seat driver" because they wanted to go in a different direction.

WE:

It can be easy to imagine Jesus calling us to make a change when we first enter the faith, but it's harder to picture Jesus calling us to move in a new direction when we are not new to the Christian faith. We may be convinced that the way we are going is the "right way," but we may not be aligned with the direction in which Jesus is calling us.

GOD:

This passage is likely familiar to people who have spent a lot of time in church. This is an opportunity to look at this passage with fresh eyes.

Jesus calls both Saul and Ananias to follow him but calls differently to each. He meets Saul violently. He meets Ananias in a vision. Jesus tells Ananias to go heal Saul, but Ananias protests. Jesus tells both a long-time follower and a non-believer to follow him. Both must make a change and move in a new direction. For Saul, that new direction is to stop persecuting Christians and to not only become one himself, but also to become a proclaimer of the gospel. For Ananias, the new direction is to drop his own beliefs about who Saul is and instead approach Saul from a place of grace and of trust in Jesus. Following Jesus means moving in a new direction (even for the long-time follower). As we continue to grow and experience, more is revealed and changes in our lives.

Saul thought he could see but was blind. Saul was a Pharisee trying to stop what he saw as a heresy. Ananias had a vision but could not see God's purpose with Saul. He was blind to God's intentions. Ananias was, rightfully, afraid of Saul's history of persecuting Christians. Both Saul and Ananias are out of alignment with God's purposes and need to move in a new direction for God's purposes to be realized in their lives and in the world around them. They both miss the point and think they are doing what they should be doing until they are interrupted and given a new direction by Jesus.



YOU:

Invite your congregation to think of what change God is asking them to make in their own lives. Provide a brief recap of the series in addressing this. Provide examples to help your congregation think through this question. For example: being more intentional in listening to God, working on a fruit of the spirit, living into your direction/purpose in this season, living confidently in God's grace, etc. Having recentered ourselves in our identity, pause to listen for God's purpose for us. Having reset our values by the spirit, what new direction is God calling you to move in this season?

WE:

As the new year begins, what is a direction that you feel God may be leading your congregation? Could it be that a new direction unites your congregation in identity, purpose, values and direction? Paul and Ananias were united in purpose for the church. How might your congregation unite for the sake of God's mission?