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Heavenly Father, thank You that You have gone out and fetched us and brought us all in and adopted us into Your family and made us all brothers and sisters who love and care for one another. Thank You for making us a part of this wonderful family. I ask Your healing Holy Spirit and Your spirit of wisdom and guidance to be over all the doctors and caretakers who are looking after the injured and the infirmed among us. I ask that You give them wisdom and insight so that they can find and fix whatever is wrong and I ask now that You will please guide my words, help me to say just what needs to be said and help my friends here to only hear what You want them to hear. In Jesus' name, Amen. Well three days ago we celebrated our nation's independence and in light of that I thought that it was only fitting to celebrate the Christian's dependence on God as my message this morning. Now let me start by saying I'm not attacking independence or anything like that. In fact when I look out over all the governments of the world I am very thankful to live under this one. I praise God for a country where I can worship freely, speak freely about my beliefs. I'm thankful that I don't have to get government certification to be a preacher and that there isn't some government agent sitting at the back of the room monitoring what I say. I praise God that I can work and earn my money and donate it to His, to God's work and I'm thankful that this country is a place where so many good ministries launch out from into the rest of the world. So for all these freedoms I'm thankful. But I noticed that even as our founding fathers prepared to institutionalize all of these wonderful freedoms they recognized that such great freedom could only successfully persist amongst a people who were dependent upon God to guide them in the moral application of those freedoms. The founding fathers realized that in order to be free, so free and so independent that our people must be ever more dependent upon God to guide their conduct and their decisions. And so in honor of our independence as a nation I celebrate and champion everyone's need for dependence upon God. You see the Bible makes it clear that there is none righteous, no not one, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Without dependence on God everyone is damned for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Jesus is the only way of salvation and He said so Himself when He said, "I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except through me." We are dependent upon God but by the grace and mercy of God we can depend on Him because if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Now if you're a regular student of the Bible you probably recognize that I've been quoting a lot of scriptures up till now and if you disagree with anything I said your bulletin has those verses typed out and you can research them yourself. But the verses I really want to focus on today this morning are these. Acts 1728a, "For in Him we live and move and have our being." Corinthians 4.13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Second Corinthians 5.17, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new." In Him through Christ, in Christ. Christian life is found in Jesus. This is the one who strengthens us. We are new creations in Jesus. Or to put it in another way, apart from Jesus you are spiritually dead, apart from Jesus you are weak, and apart from Jesus you are still the old corrupt sinful creation. We are dependent as Christians upon Jesus for our life, our strength, and our regeneration. You need to grab onto this truth. If you find yourself apprehensive about completely giving up control of your life to Christ, about making all your decisions for Him and through Him, if that frightens you then you are still afflicted with the false belief that you are capable of goodness and righteousness on your own. But that is not true. John 15.5 Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in Him bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing." Nothing. We humans are only capable of operating by our flesh and our flesh is only capable of serving itself. Now you might say, "Hang on, that's nonsense. I do nice things all the time." But why do you do those nice things? It's to get something, isn't it? You're nice to that person because of what they can do for you. Or you give to that charity because it makes you feel warm and good inside. Or you don't do this and that because among your friends you have this reputation as the good one, the holy one. How many of us, don't raise your hands, are nicer to our friends than to strangers? How many of us do something good and then tell other people what we've done? We make our donation and then click share this on Facebook. How many of us like to work our good deeds into our conversations? "Oh, I'd love to hang out this weekend but I'm volunteering at the soup kitchen." Or, "I wish I could afford that but I sponsor so many kids through Compassion International." In these situations, and many others like them, we do what we do because of what we're getting out of it, the good feeling or the reputation. Jesus warns against this when he says in Matthew 6, 3 and 4, "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be done in secret and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly." There are lots of apparently nice, selfless people in the world. Other religions are full of them. But they are only nice because they get something out of it. Whether they're earning salvation or just trying to make themselves feel better, one way or another, they get something from it. Their flesh is being served. But the Christian is called to be complete in Christ. The hunger for the warm fuzzies and the recognition and the sense of forgiveness are all to be fed by Him. We are to find all of our peace and joy and purpose and identity in Christ. We are to be complete in Him. And from this state of completeness, we bless others. We don't give away in order to get something back. We give away simply because we are complete and have abundance. And the kicker is, because we don't need anything in return for our good works, we are able to do our good works indiscriminately. This is the hallmark of a Christian, indiscriminate love. The world is full of people who give in order to get. No one gives indiscriminately. No one can give indiscriminately because everyone has this insatiable spiritual hunger. But the Christian has been fed and filled, and that's how people should recognize that we are different. That's how they will know we've been transformed on the inside by God. John 13, 35 says, "By this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." Acts 5, 13, talking about the people around the early church, the people who weren't part of the early church. None of them dared join the church, but they esteemed the church highly. This indiscriminate love causes people to marvel at us. It is what makes us different from all the phony religions of the world, a truly transformed heart and life. Now, I understand some of you don't feel completely fed and filled. You don't feel transformed. So let me be clear on this. This transformation is not some magical switch that gets flipped the day you put your faith in Christ. So long as there is breath in your body, your sinful flesh still lives. The life of a Christian is one who daily comes to the Lord in prayer and asks to be fed and filled. Our physical bodies were designed by God to need to be fed every day. Do not marvel that your spiritual bodies need the same thing. The Christian daily comes to God for spiritual food that satisfies our deepest longings. We ask him to fill us with the love and the forgiveness that he commands we show to others. And we ask for the strength to say no to every desire and demand of our sinful flesh. Luke 9.23, "Then he," meaning Jesus, "said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" And John 15.4 says, "Abide in me and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine. Where can you, unless you abide in me?'" In our own power, we can only love those who are lovable, but God calls us to love the unlovable. In our own power, we can only forgive those who earn forgiveness from us, but God calls us to forgive everyone. In our own power, we can only give and serve those from whom we can get something in return, but God calls us to give to and serve those who can never repay. When there is a line you just can't cross with your love, you're operating to satisfy the flesh. If you can sponsor cute little Compassion International kids, but you can't bring yourself to show mercy to junkies, con artists, and pedophiles, then you're still operating in the flesh. Jesus died for all of these people. But when you start from a place of wholeness and completeness, and you look out across this dying, sinful world and your heart fills with compassion for everyone, this is when you are operating in Christ. Because in this life you will always have your flesh, you will always have a certain level of weakness and exhaustion from living the life to which you've been called. And I know that's not what you want to hear today. As I typed up this message, my mind kept saying, "That's not right. What happened to my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Well, it's still there. It's right next to, "If you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." And I affirm by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If you imagine yourself in a yoke, a big wooden harness that binds your neck to the neck of Jesus, you'll start to get it. When you are yoked together with Jesus, He does the heavy lifting, the heavy pulling, but you have to submit to walking with Him. So many churches out there promise sunshine and rainbows and your best life now, and they're a bunch of liars. The one we follow went to the cross. And if your life feels like a march towards a cross and towards death, then you're following in the right footsteps. The Christian walk will always feel like death to your flesh, to your spirit. It will feel like life. Your spirit will be fed and filled and more satisfied than anything in this world can offer you. But your flesh will suffer. I'm not saying God wants you to be miserable. The future blessings that He has in store for us prove that He doesn't want us miserable. But I'm saying that if you're living an obedient life, your flesh will be miserable, and so you must die to your flesh. If you don't find yourself driven to your knees in prayer, crying out for the strength and the resources to make it through each day, you're probably not doing enough. You can accomplish what you've been called to, but not in your own strength. Here's the real kicker, and it's the thing I didn't even know if I could come up and say today. If you don't feel that suffering, if you don't feel that pain in your flesh, you're not doing it right. If there's no pain in the amount of love you show, and in the amount of forgiveness you show, and in the amount of blessings you bestow, then you're not being obedient to your Lord. And if that's fine by you, then He's probably not really your Lord at all. And believe me when I say that I am being very convicted by my own words today. I am guilty of fleeing when the going gets tough. I am guilty of mentally checking out, and I'm guilty of choosing more sleep over devotion time. And I'm very guilty of sitting back and hoping someone else steps up so I don't have to. Volunteer for VBS. But every day I try to be better, and so should you. We cannot live the life to which we've been called unless we are dependent upon Christ. And He is dependable, and that is beautiful. How would you rate your dependence on Christ? How desperate are you to begin each day with prayer, or each task? We all have difficult people in our lives. Do you obey the command to love your enemies and pray for the ones who persecute you? Are you constantly in prayer for the strength and love and mercy and grace to represent Christ towards them? Or do you live by the motto, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Jesus would tell you, "If you don't have anything nice to say, come to me and I will give you something nice to say." Don't look at your life and say, "What areas do I have the strength to improve?" You have been called beyond your strength. Instead, look at your life and ask, "What does God expect of me?" It will be more than you can handle, so step two is get on your knees and pray for the strength and the strategy to accomplish His will. Die to yourself. Make your declaration of dependence on Jesus. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are terrified to the level that you have called us to, but we believe in faith and by experience that you are faithful and good and that you are there for us to give us the strength we need, the love and the forgiveness in our hearts to get through each day if we will just faithfully come to you and feed upon your goodness one day at a time. Help us to learn this and understand this. Help us to see all the people in our lives and all of our circumstances through your eyes. Help us to understand how you would have us change in those circumstances, how you would have us behave towards those people, and then give us the strength to carry that out and to do it. Thank you, thank you, that we can depend on you. In Jesus' name, amen.