

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Submit to the Process

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A few weeks ago I announced on Instagram because I guess that's where you make announcements these days that the Symonette family was growing. Someone said, Oh! There's so much love to go around in our family and we have nothing else to do with there being six of us so we thought we would add a seventh. But it's a puppy, it's a puppy, we're not doing any more little humans. Not that that's bad, but we've had our share. We're done with that. So my daughters, my older daughter's, I've four kids, my older daughters have been asking us for a little puppy for a long time. We've got a little French Pointer named Milo. And so they've been asking about him or about, you know, getting a, a puppy. So the timing just wasn't right for us. You know, we needed the girls kind of grow up a little bit, you know, mature a little bit. Cause you know, they got to participate in the process of, you know of taking care of him. So, you know, we thought, hey, you know what, we're moving our family to Baltimore, it's a, you know, drastic change for us and there's a lot of stuff going on. This is the right time. Let's add a puppy now, you know, like in the middle of all of this. And so we did and we got this little guy. And so, but a year prior I've been telling the girls like, Hey, listen, all right, you guys are, you know, excited about this and this is cool. And you're thinking about petting him and playing with him. You're enamored with the cuteness and, and just all of this cuddling and that sort of stuff. But you know, as parents do, you know, our job is to bring the reality check, you know, so I'm like, yeah, in addition, there's early morning walks, you know, and there's picking up poop, you know, regularly. And there's training and all of those sorts of things. Yeah, Dad, we know, we know. Yeah. Yeah, Dad. Well, so let me tell you, we're, four weeks in now. So let me give you, let me give you an update, right? So my two year old is still screaming because she just doesn't know what this little animal is in our house and she's trying to figure, so she's still screaming four weeks in. Now my four year old who proclaimed that it was his dog now it's only a... he's got this love, hate relationship with him, you know; love only when he's on the leash. And then my 15 and 12 year old, they're over the whining already. They're over the, all of this stuff that you got to do with the nipping and the training and all that stuff, they're just, they're just over it. And I keep telling them like, hey, we're only four weeks in. You know, it's a part of the process and that's actually what I want to talk about in this last Sunday of the year as we prepare to enter into a 2020.

I suspect that no matter how good your 2019 was or has been or how bad it was or has been, I suspect that as you enter into 2020 you've got some expectations, you've got some hopes, you've got some plans, you've got some goals, some resolutions and some things that you want to explore and all of that stuff is good, it's all good. But the question I have for us today is what do you do when you've got these plans and these hopes and these desires and these goals and these dreams and these expectations, like what do you do when those plans go left? What do you do when these plans get interrupted they get canceled or they never actually get off the ground.

As we close this series that we've been in called 'Unwrapped'. I want to zoom in on Matthew one. So if you have a Bible, you can meet me there in just a minute. And let me just give you a quick

little intro, quick little backdrop. I know Christmas was last and so you know, Christmas is kinda behind. Some of us were already anticipating you know, the New Year and we've already moved past Christmas. But, in this Christmas story that we find in Matthew one, I want to have zoom in on this unheralded unsung guy named Joseph. I mean, my man, Joseph gets no love y'all. I mean, we're talking about Mary and you know the immaculate conception and we're talking about the wise men and all of these... even the shepherds, you know, we were talking about them. But nobody is talking about my man, Joe. I mean, he's getting no love at all.

But I think Joseph models for us what we do when the plan goes left because he here's the thing. For those of you who are unfamiliar, Joseph becomes Jesus's earthly father, not biologically, but he becomes Jesus' father. And before Jesus comes Joseph is engaged to be married to Mary, who is going to be Jesus' mother. And our Catholic friends call Mary's conception the Immaculate Conception because it was told by an angel that she was going to conceive of this child by the Holy Spirit. So before Joseph can officially marry her, she's pregnant. Now, I don't know about y'all, but this is a little bit of a problem. There's a little bit of an issue. Now, I know we just read past that, you know, but can you imagine like how crushed Joseph probably was when he got this news, how dramatic this was for him. Now it probably wasn't as dramatic as Maury Povich saying, you are not the father, Joseph, in front of a live audience to be broadcast around the world. It probably wasn't that dramatic. But I'm sure it was somewhat crushing, right?

No doubt this was a left turn in the plan. And I think in most instances, this'll be a cancellation of the plan all together. Culturally, you have to understand that Mary would have been ridiculed. She would have been a public disgrace. She would have been humiliated. But Joseph was known as a righteous man. And because of that, he was just gonna walk away quietly. And here we pick up the story in verse 20 of Matthew one it says,

²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

For the rest of our time. today I want to drill down on just a little simple message with this theme; 'Submit to the Process', 'Submit to the Process' and the mere fact that you didn't really respond to that. I know that's not an exciting title. I know that's not what you were anticipating going into 2020 with like, I know you were struggling and we go to church and, we going to get yes, get ready for '20 and then I told you submit to the process. I know words like summit are not very popular these days. It's not something that we enjoy because we built our entire lives on control and comfort and convenience. And the current cultural stream is how fast can I get it done? Can I avoid hiccups along the way? We might have one or two, but just let it be one or two. And can I do it on my terms? And anxiety will set in really, really quick when we don't have things on our terms, when we are not in control.

So here we have Joseph who has this plan that he's going to marry this woman and all of a sudden there's a left turn and she's pregnant and it's by the Holy Spirit and I'm still supposed to be with her. So, how then do we get to a place where we respond like Joseph, when the plan goes left? And it said he did what the angel, the Lord commanded him.

Now, no doubt this was going against the grain of the culture even a typical human response. Because here's the thing, nobody would blame Joseph for walking away. Nobody would be like, you sure you want to do that? They'd be like, man, I feel you bro. I feel you..., yeah, I totally understand it. No one would push him away or ridicule him for that response. But how do you respond when you unwrap these things in your life that you were excited about and it turned into something different? How do you take your plans, your goals, and your ideas and the things that you, how do you hold them with an open hand as opposed to a closed hand?

Now I know we like formulas and I know we like specific answers and so I really can't give you a formula or a specific answer because every situation is a little bit different and we're all individuals and God is actively working in all of our lives. But, what I can offer to you is what submitting to the process involves. And I think there are a few angles we can take as relates to submission, but let me just give you a couple for you to think about as we are thinking about entering into a new decade. Two things that I want to give you two things that I think we have to keep working on and we have to keep coming back to.

Number one is desire. And you might ask like, okay, so what does submission has to do with desire? Well, I think a lot because our motivations are based on some sort of internal desire. It could be positive, it could be a negative motivation, but these intrinsic motivations drive us to win. They us to please or they drive us to live and be safe or to not be retaliated against. Like we have these internal motivations, these desires.

In the case of Joseph Matthew records that he was a righteous man. Now this meant that ultimately his desire was to do the right thing, to do things the right way. And the right way would have been for Joseph to remain holy before God, that's what he wanted to do. And love Mary, which is even while he contemplated doing what he was going to do, the way that he was going to do it because he loved Mary he thought that that was the right thing to do.

So his motivation was pure and his desire was righteous. But guess what? It still wasn't the way that God wanted him to go. Which says to us that our desire can be pure and still be outside of God's plan. We can have the right way of thinking, we can have the right idea and it still is outside of what God desires for us to do. This is why the Holy Spirit is so key in our lives because one of the Holy Spirit's job is to lead us and guide us. So because Joseph's desire was to be righteous and ultimately do what was required of him, I believe that this is what helped him to submit because ultimately his desire wasn't a selfish one. If he wanted to be selfish, he would have walked away and said peace out man. I love you Boo, but I gotta roll. I catch you on another side. But, his motivation was not selfish. And listen, if we're being honest, a lot of the motivations that we have are completely selfish. We dress them up, you know, we talk about them well, you know, but it's really selfish. And if that thing doesn't go like we want, we're

having a fit, a complete fit. And here's the thing, so much of what we are pursuing we say is God's will, but it's actually our will that we ask God to be a part of. If we're telling the truth it's things we presented to God and, and we invite God to come along and bless it and be a part of it. So it's really our will but it's not his own.

But here's the thing, it is our desires that need to line up with God's will. It's not God, here's my lists. Let me just read it for you. Let me give you the details. Let me give you the instructions. And you just, you know, you follow suit, you know, just follow the plan. It's a completely different thing to say, God actually, here's my list. I'm going to give you complete editorial control. That's a little dangerous because if we turn around, sometimes the stuff that we put on the list just completed this and be like, Whoa, Whoa, Whoa. What happened to that thing right there? It's a completely different thing to give God our desires or our lists, our plans and our ideas and say you have complete control to edit.

But let me just tell you this, the best way to cultivate desire, so this idea of our desires lining up with God's desire is called intimacy. That's the best way and intimacy stirs in our hearts and then and in our hearts fuels our desires but when our desires align with God's will, that's the trajectory that we want to be on. When our desires line up with God and you can only do that by cultivating an intimate relationship with God. Listen, I want us at 2020 to move from just attending church to being the church and how we move from attending to being is an intimate relationship with God, which has nothing to do with whether we come here or not. Are we spending time with him? Our desires become his because we are in his presence, we are seeking him. We are being with him.

Number two very closely related to desire is discipline. Now I know that's another bad word right there. Y'all forgive me for all these bad words. But I listen, I don't believe that you can stay disciplined or committed without desire, I don't. But, I don't think that desire alone will get you where you need to go. Listen, Matthew says that Joseph was faithful to the law. So this speaks to his commitment to follow through. His life was dedicated to following through, following the law, which was not an easy thing to do.

You know, one of the things that I enjoy doing right now is I enjoy mentoring. I've got a young man that I've been with for three years, Hayfield high school out in Alexandria. And even though I moved to Baltimore and it's 60 miles away I'm still committed to him weekly. And I love this guy. This is my third year being with him. But I'm trying to help him grasp what a commitment to discipline looks like. He just turned 16 y'all so he's still trying to get his life together. But see, he loves the idea of doing what I did, which is play football in college and potentially play pro and he's got the potential to do it, but he has no idea of what kind of discipline he needs to get there. And he doesn't understand it if he doesn't start developing these habits right now, he won't get there and even if he does get an opportunity, he won't maximize it to the fullest extent.

Here's the thing, I think the same is true when it comes to our faith. We often have this very surface level idea of what it means to be submitted fully to God, submitted fully to his process. We think we know and we got this surface level. But here's the thing, our conditioning, our

investment and our commitment really shows when the plan starts going left. Listen, when stuff started happening in your life when stuff not going the way it's supposed to go that's when you're going to really find out where you are. That's when you're going to really find... It's like running a marathon and you haven't really trained well. That wall is coming at some point to tell you exactly where you are in your conditioning and if you are where you need to be.

The same is true in our lives when it comes to faith, but here's the thing that I love about discipline. See, discipline gives us receipts. You know when you go and purchase something you have proof of purchase. See, discipline is the same way in our lives. When we are disciplined and we are getting ourselves to a certain place. You have receipts where you have been able to push through. You've been able to keep going. You have not let stuff stop you because you have been disciplined. So when that next thing comes, you're like, oh, I did that already. I've been here before. I pushed through this before. That's what discipline does. It gives us receipts. So over time we can see how or we have a point of reference for how we can stay the course.

So when Joseph hears, when Joseph hears from the Holy Spirit in a dream, I think the fact that he's already been a committed follower, he's already been disciplined, he's already been committed to the, it makes it easier for him to trust the process because he's already been in it. He's already been a committed follower. Because listen, being disciplined in the way that Joseph was in this time to live according to the law, there was a whole lot of stuff you had to do to live according to law. It was completely inconvenient, completely inconvenient the stuff you had to do, what you had to eat, the dietary restriction, where you could go, when you go, how you could do it, who you could talk to, who you couldn't talk to. It's completely inconvenient, but it was creating a level of discipline in his life. So when the plan changed, I believe that this helped him go along with the process.

Listen, the only point that I want to make here is nobody really loves discipline. Come on y'all. Nobody really loves that. But we love the fruit it produces. We love that. We love the end result, but we don't like the process. But, listen; you can't have the end result without the process, that's the whole point of the message. And see, here's the thing if Joseph, if he aborts or the plan goes left, he completely cuts himself out of God's will for his life. This thing that he has been believing, that he has known about, this prophecy that the Messiah is coming he cuts himself completely out of helping that to come or be a part of that because it's inconvenient or because he don't know how this whole thing is gonna come together. I believe that it was discipline as a follower that kept him in God's will and he had already been conditioned to do hard things.

Let me see if I can end this message this way. Here's the bottom line in the synopsis of this whole thing. Now listen, I know what I'm about to say is very cliché for some of us if you've been in church world for any length of time, or you've been following Jesus for a while or you've heard this before. And so it's going to sound cliché, but maybe there's some people in this room who never heard this before and maybe you came this weekend because you needed to hear this. God has a plan for your life. Like, yeah, like you, like, like you just take your finger and do like this, like you. God has a plan for your life, an individual plan for your life.

The problem is we just ain't always in on those plans. I mean, we just don't, and then, I mean, just stuff ain't making sense. Okay. I'm, doing this and I'm showing up here and I'm investing here, the math is not adding up and this is crazy. But that's a part of how God works in our lives. It doesn't always make sense. And if we zoom out, if we zoom out and we take a moment to look at the full context of the Bible story. There's a direct correlation to submitting to God's process and the fruit that it produces and fruit that couldn't otherwise be produced if you were doing it yourself. You know why? Because the math don't add up. You know why? Because it just doesn't make sense. You know why? Because I just can't see how those things come together. Well, the reason it came together is because you submitted to God's process. We often get frustrated in the process because it ain't working and it ain't that it ain't working, we just couldn't see that it was working. Like we trust all other sorts of processes, we got phones and computers and we know stuff's supposed to be working, but we can't see it working but it's working.

And this was the case throughout scripture. In Genesis, it was Joseph; in Exodus it was Moses, in Numbers it was Joshua and Caleb; in Judges it was Gideon, and then on and on in Ruth and Esther and Jehosaphat and David all the way to Joseph and Mary, average people, everyday people who trusted God's process and looked crazy in the middle of it. Like I know those people lost their mind, I know they are crazy. I don't know what in the world Joseph is thinking about, but somehow, some way it worked out even though they looked crazy in the middle of it.

But see, here's the thing, often our plans as I stated before, equal wanting God to do great things for us. But guess what God is in the business of doing? He is in the business of doing great things in us and through us. That's a little bit different we want God to do great things for us. So we present these things to him, these lists and these ideas because we want him to do these great things for us. But God, no, listen actually, what I want to do is do great things in you and through you. And that doesn't always feel good. It doesn't always look good and it don't even seem like it's going to be good.

Here's the thing, just because it's hard, it's not working or it looks totally different than you plan. This is all I'm asking you to consider as we close out 2019. I'm just asking you to consider focus on cultivating your desire for God through your relationship with him and then your discipline to follow him that means literally one step at a time. I don't know about this but I'm going to just take a little step. I don't know about this but I'm going to just take a little step. And the more steps you take, the more receipts you're getting, the more evidence that you're getting, the more conditioning that you're getting. And here's the thing, once you do that, the process and the outcome, it takes care of itself. It takes care of itself. And it's not that the process actually gets easier, but your conditioning gets better.

Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for who you are. Thank you for how you have reminded us through our brother Joseph, who really, is not getting any love in the scriptures, really not a central figure in the Christmas story. But Joseph shows us and teaches us how to submit to your process even when it doesn't make sense, even when it's completely unconventional. God help us as we enter into 2020 that as we make our plans that central to our plans would be cultivating our desire for you, your word, seeking you, being with you, and then also taking the action steps of

following you. Even if it makes us look crazy. And God, I just believe that you're going to validate us. You're going to affirm us. You're going to give us the confidence we need in the moments when we need it the most, in the moments when we don't feel like going, in the moments when it just seems like this, why would I continue doing this? God, you are faithful and when we sing these songs like, Come All Ye Faithful you're calling us to you to submit our will and follow you. And God help us to build our lives on your faithfulness which we can see based on the receipts that we get as we are disciplined in our pursuit of you. These things we ask your son Jesus' name. Amen.