



Slower Living

Week 3: Invest in What Matters

Brian Mattson - 06/21/2026

Back in April when we were trying to figure out what scripture or topic we wanted to cover after Genesis, Heather had the idea for this series—*Slower Living*. We all thought it sounded perfect. Just the right kick-off to the summer season. A call for all of us to slow down. A chance to find some peace and quiet in a hectic world. That's what summer is all about, right? Warm summer nights chasing fireflies. Long days at the pool. Vacations and road trips. Those are some of my fondest memories from summers gone by.

I'm lucky to live in a house still dominated by the school calendar. Jessica is a high school English teacher and both kids follow a similar schedule, so my routines change in the summer season. I don't wake up at 5:30am to start making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and there's no rush to get to school by 7:20am. But for some reason, it doesn't feel like the rest of life slows down. It turns out I'm usually the reason why things don't slow down. Let me take this moment to be honest and admit a character flaw. Hello. My name is Brian and I like doing things. Anything. Everything. It's my default position as an Enneagram 7. Whatever the next thing is becomes my favorite thing. The next thing to do, the next person to meet, the next adventure to pursue.

So when we were coming up with the topics to discuss each week, I started getting a little hot under the collar. Heather said she wanted to talk about

slowing down and taking a breath. Choosing rest. Gulp. The next week, we decided to talk about clearing out the clutter. Double gulp. I love clutter. I hate slowing down and taking a rest. Was the staff secretly planning this series to tell me something? Was I reading too much into this?

And then at Annual Conference meetings for our denomination, I was sitting in the main convention hall doing some prep work for this series when one of the conference staff came over to say hello. He mentioned how he had been hearing good things about our church. I thanked him for the kind words and mentioned that I was learning everyday how to be a better pastor, preacher, and listener. And then, in an effort to impress him (I guess?), I said I was actually skipping lunch to do some research for the next sermon. I told him about the series and it felt like it was a set of sermons that would be good for me to actually listen to and put into practice. He then winked at me and said, "They all are."

So today, as we talk about investing in what really matters in life, I'm speaking to myself more than any of you. I'm serious. I want you all to ask me how I'm doing with the challenges that I lift for all of us today because these are the things that really matter. I don't want to look back and see my life as an inch deep and a mile wide. I started listening to the book, *Love Does*, by Bob Goff recently and I was challenged by something he said:

"I used to be afraid of failing at something that really mattered to me, but now I'm more afraid of succeeding at things that don't matter."

- Bob Goff

We all fear that, don't we? Spending our precious minutes, hours, and days on the stuff that doesn't really matter. The problem is we might not know which stuff really mattered until we can look back in five or ten or twenty years. There will always be things that don't necessarily matter all that much, but we have to do them anyway. Things like taking out the trash, going to so

many meetings at work, or doing our taxes. We've got to do them, or else face some stinky or not-fun consequences, but they shouldn't define our lives or dominate our time. Rather, I believe Jesus showed us the things that *should* define our lives.

That's kind of what we're really after when we come to church, right? Living lives that look a little more like Jesus's over time? Jesus, who the author of Hebrews calls, "the pioneer and perfecter of faith," is our ultimate model for living a Godly life; an eternal life. The first two weeks we talked about taking a breath; a pause. Last week, we began to organize our minds to clear out the clutter. Today, we are going to look at some of the patterns we see in Jesus's life to better understand where we should be investing our time and energy. I would argue that if we step back and look at his life and ministry, we can see that Jesus invested the most time in relationship building. Relationships with people and his relationship with God the father. Strong relationships are investments that will pay dividends for a long, long time.

I remember when I first started thinking about investing for retirement. I downloaded an app and used \$10,000 dollars of pretend money and picked some stocks to "invest" in. I picked a few companies that seemed like no-brainers: AT&T, Microsoft, and Google. Then I picked a few stocks of brands that made products I used: the Ball Canning Company, Adobe, and Activision Blizzard Gaming Company. And finally, I picked a couple companies that piqued my interest in renewable energy: Tesla and Solar City. After a few months, my \$10,000 turned into \$15,000, so I figured I was the next Warren Buffet. This investing stuff is easy!

A few more months passed with another uptick in my investments and I determined I was ready to use real money. I quickly found out that \$10,000 dollars is hard to come by when you're 26, so I scraped together \$400 out of our family budget and picked a stock that I figured was set to soar. I couldn't really afford those stocks I was buying with pretend money, so I had to find something affordable that was primed for growth. I did some research and

made my choice, and it turns out I was *not* another Oracle of Omaha. I was more like the Springfield Squanderer. Those \$400 turned into \$200 then \$100, and now I think it's worth about \$8. It's still there in my Fidelity account to remind me that investing, whether that's in stocks, education, or relationships, usually takes time, patience, and skill. There are rarely shortcuts in life. Get-rich-quick schemes usually don't pan out. But by becoming an investor in something, we aren't on the sidelines anymore. We become owners, and owners are there for the long run. Bob Goff says:

Something happens when you feel ownership. You no longer act like a spectator or consumer, because you're an owner. Faith is at its best when it's that way too. It's best lived when owned.

- Bob Goff

So now the question is: How do we become owners of our faith? Who amongst us doesn't wish our faith was stronger, more real and more active? Perhaps the secret to that kind of faith is to take more ownership in how we build it up. And, again, with Jesus as our model, we can see that relationships were the things he invested his time and energy into. Relationships were what helped build the faith of his closest followers.

If we zoom out and look at Jesus's ministry from a distance, we can make out a few concentric circles of focus. Jesus spent time and ministered to crowds and individuals on the fringes of society. The next circle in was where he interacted with the disciples, and even more so with Peter, James, and John, his inner circle. And then at the very center were the times Jesus found moments of solitude to be alone in conversation and relationship with God. Prayer and reflection apart from others. I think this is a great model as we figure out how to invest our time and energy in relationships.

Let's start with the universal truth that people can wear us out. I'm not saying that people wore Jesus out, but I think it's a fairly safe assumption. That doesn't mean he quit interacting with people. I think he just shrunk the circle.

Some of Jesus's wisest words and most challenging teaching came in front of crowds. Strangers lined up to hear this rabbi preach. And as Jesus told parables to explain moral truths or laid out his vision for an upside down economy, the people crowded around more and more. Jesus did what would be normal to any of us. He took a break. But he didn't stop investing in relationships.

When he stepped back from his public preaching, he very often retreated into the cozy confines of his closest relationships. It was there he found rest, comfort, and trust. He used that time to not only go deeper into the meaning of his teachings, further explaining their significance, but he was also re-energized and provided for. The disciples who traveled with him didn't just grow and learn from Jesus, but they also cared for him. They arranged meals and lodging, travel and protection. This is the epitome of healthy, meaningful relationships. Jesus was showing the disciples what it looked like to be fully engaged with other people. He was setting the disciples up to carry on these practices after he was gone, pouring into others and also receiving love back. We can't be all takers and it's impossible to be only givers.

Jesus re-defined what healthy relationships look like. They aren't built on power or leverage. They are powerful and change lives because they are reciprocal. They give and they take. Yes, they can be work, but they have the added benefit of lightening our load in life. This is the kind of work that revives us, gives us a chance to catch our breath. When we make it a point to keep those relationships strong, we leave the encounters with a pep in our step and a smile on our face. They are built on trust, kindness, and most of all sacrificial love.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you

friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.
- John 15:12-17

This section of scripture is from what's known as the Farewell Discourse; Jesus's lengthy last speech to his disciples. It's here where Jesus reiterates to the disciples the importance of relationships grounded in love. Those kinds of relationships transform acquaintances into friends. A smaller circle, but deeper roots.

The smallest circle in our diagram was Jesus's relationship with God. Quite often, we find Jesus retreating to quiet and solitary spaces to spend time in prayer and communion with God. It happened after busy days with the crowds, in preparation for major events, following miracles, and in times of grief or sadness. Jesus experienced the gamut of emotions and feelings in his human journey, just like us. It was during these times, moments of exhaustion, feelings of isolation, that he sought out the comfort of his faith in God. Through prayer, meditation, and quiet, Jesus was renewed. His faith was strengthened. His resolve to continue building relationships was restored.

It's like that with us. Sometimes it can feel like all we have left is faith. When the world around us seems to be crumbling or we feel left out or all alone. Sometimes our sadness feels too big and our power too small. In those moments, Jesus modeled what it looks like to fall back on our faith in God. To fall back on our trust in what God says and promises. And it doesn't only happen in moments of crisis. It should be part of our regular rhythms of faith. Because here's the thing—if you don't ever spend time building that relationship with God it can feel harder to feel comfortable with that routine.

In our Methodist tradition, we have a term called “means of grace.” These are the vital practices we participate in through our daily lives. The means of grace are intended to strengthen our relationship with God and with others. We typically divide these into two groups: works of piety and works of mercy. Essentially the works of piety draw us closer to God and the works of mercy draw us closer to each other. John Wesley didn’t just develop these practices out of thin air. They were modeled after Jesus’s lifestyle.

Both the works of piety and mercy have an individual component and a communal component. The individual works of mercy—those connecting us to other people—are doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others. The works of mercy we do with other people are fighting injustice, oppression, and discrimination. The individual works of piety—those connecting us to God—are reading scripture, praying, and fasting. The communal works of piety or attending church regularly, Bible study, and being accountable to a small group. Just like the disciples and Jesus.

For the rest of summer, or even this week, give some of these a try, by yourself *and* with other people. When you could be laying on the couch scrolling social media, reading worthless BuzzFeed articles, or watching videos—remember, I’m talking to myself here—prioritize your relationships. Don’t stand on the sideline. Become an investor. An owner. Maybe even spark up a new relationship—a relationship entrepreneur. Who knows...it could be the start of a lifelong friendship.

Relationships are at the very heart of life. Some are more important or meaningful than others, but if we don’t slow down to take a breath or we haven’t let go of the things that clutter our minds, sometimes those relationships suffer. Jesus wanted us to be in relationships. And I can’t think of anything more faith-building than being in relationships with people who are after the same goals many of us are: seeking out and knowing God more deeply.

Plan a summer hang. Visit one of our regular Sunday morning groups. Call an old friend and go get coffee. Get breakfast with the guys at Steak 'N Shake the first Tuesday of each month. Read a novel with the women's book group. These are investments that matter. It's easy to be successful at doing nothing. It's harder to be successful at things that matter. So I'm leading the charge. Here's to finding success better knowing God and other people instead of spending my precious minutes, hours, and days and just barely scratching the surface.