

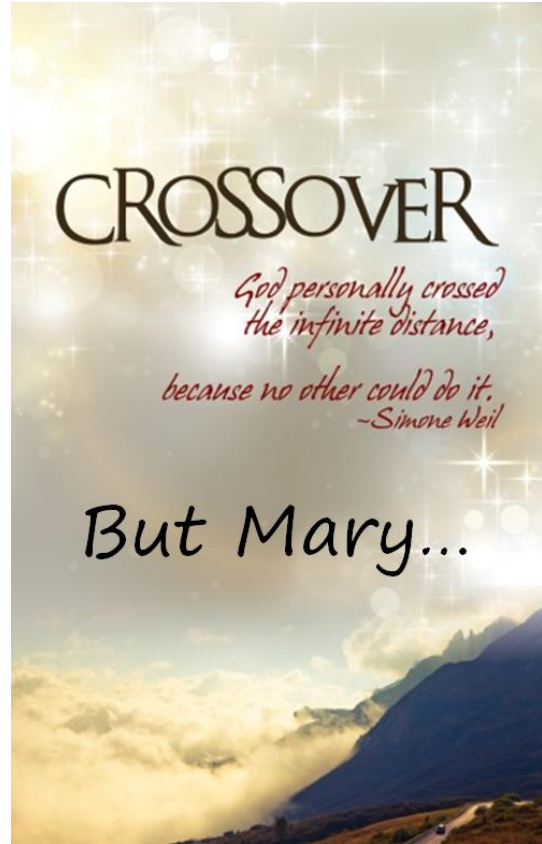
But Mary

Scripture Luke 2:8-20

⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.



Good morning. We are in the last week of our 5 part series entitled Crossover. We have been looking at the Christmas story while keeping in mind how God crossed over the immense gap between us – to become one of us – to become God with us. I hope that you have been able to take home and apply some of these truths in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the busyness of Christmas. I know that often after Christmas I look back and think about how fast it went. How many events and people and even encounters with God and His word that passed me by without me even taking so much as a minute to reflect on the significance of it. I wish I could have savored more events and people and God times. And if you are like me, we cram so much into Christmas that it is easy to live just on the surface of the events in our lives; live superficially with the people in our lives; and not really take in the significance or even notice those times when God has come to live with us. For most of us the pace of life has imperceptibly quickened to become almost relentless.

As we are facing a new year, it is a good time to ask the question: Is that what I really want. To race through life – missing the significance of those events and people and even God’s presence? I think most of us don’t want to miss this. But how?

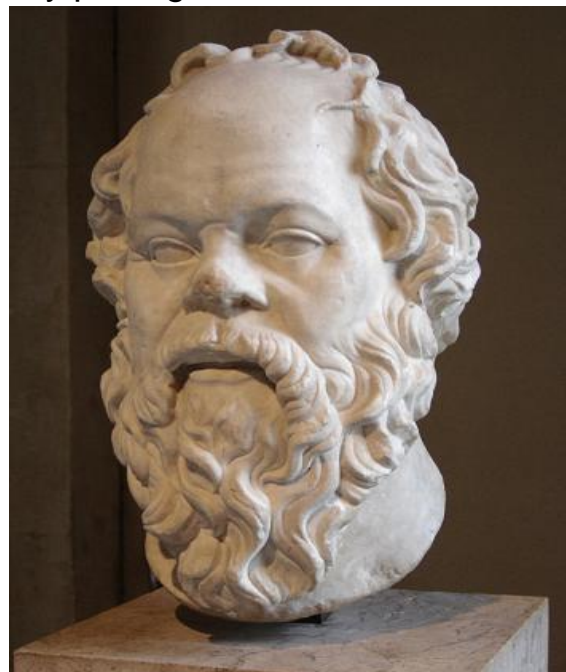
This week we are going to look at an unlikely pairing of instructors who will show us. One is an ancient philosopher and the other a 13 year old peasant girl. Let’s pray and ask for God’s help

[Prayer]

Socrates

What do we know about Socrates?
Can someone tell me a little bit of what we know about him? [Cong. Interaction]

He was a brilliant man and greatly influenced western culture – even today. Does anyone remember



anything he said? Any famous quotes or ideas that came from Socrates?
[Cong. Interaction]

One of his most famous sayings goes like this:

The unexamined life is not worth living

Whoa! Bob, I thought you said this man was brilliant. That's pretty extreme. Maybe the examined life contributes to human flourishing. Or the unexamined life will cause us to miss the significance of people and events in our lives. But "not worth living?" Come on.

Before we go too far off on this, we need to understand the context. Socrates said this during his trial when he was offered the choice of death or a life in exile where he would be prevented from continuing to explore the meaning and significance of people and places in the community of others. For Socrates, the examined life was what he lived – continually interacting in his community and exploring the world around him, the relationships, the purpose of life and even the role of God. To the end that he would grow in wisdom. To abandon that made life not worth living.

Is this statement a timeless truth confirmed in God's word?

So maybe the statement is a little extreme, but is it God's heart that we live an "examined life." A life where we take time to reflect upon the meaning of events and people and God encounters? One way we can know that something is God's heart for us is to look at the lives of some of the people recorded in the Bible. The lives of those men and women who sought God and were sought by God are recorded for us to learn about God's heart. Did they think that "An examined life" is important to us? Let's look at just three – but there are many more examples.

Let's start with Solomon. Solomon asked God for wisdom and God told him that He would give him a wise and discerning heart more than anyone before or anyone after him.¹ That means that Solomon was the wisest man

¹ 1 Kings 3:12 . Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.

who has ever lived on the face of the earth. Solomon's life also shows the limits of wisdom without application. But that is subject of another sermon. Let's listen into some of that wisdom

..., if you call out for insight
and raise your voice for understanding,
⁴ if you seek it like silver
and search for it as for hidden treasures,
⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.²

Solomon uses very strong words in his advice to us – we are to seek insight and understanding as hard as we would search for money or hidden treasure. And if we do that, we would understand the “fear of the Lord” which for Solomon was the starting point for wisdom and knowledge of God.

So I think Solomon would agree with Socrates – that the examined life – a life where we seek insight and understanding in the events and people and God encounters – is part of God's heart for us.

Paul

What about the apostle Paul? He is certainly a man for us to model our faith after – He himself said that we were to follow him as he follows Jesus. Let's listen in on some advice that he gave Timothy, one of his spiritual sons.

⁷ Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.³

The word that Paul uses translated here in the ESV as “think over” is translated “reflect on” in the NIV and “consider” in the NASB. We could translate it: Examine what I say and in so doing the Lord will give you understanding in everything. So I think Paul would agree with Socrates – that the examined life is part of God's heart for His people.

² Proverbs 2:3-5

³ 2 Timothy 2:7

Jesus

What about Jesus? Did he call his disciples to a life of examining the events and people and God encounters? One unexpected place we see this is what Jesus did with the Shema. Does anyone know what that is? [Cong. Interaction]

Love the Lord Your God with all your heart all your soul and all your might

Yes, let's hear it in Hebrew as Jesus heard it and as it is still heard in synagogues today.

[Laura Donna 1st Service / Karen Baker second recite Shema in Hebrew]

This was and still is a core part of the belief and practice of the Jewish people. These are sacred words. Yet I want you to notice something. In Mark's Gospel which we will be looking at more in depth in the new year, Jesus did the unthinkable. He added something to the Shema.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.⁴

⁴ Mark 12:30

Jesus added that we were to love God not just in our hearts; not just with all of our strength; not just with our whole being; but he added that we were to love Him with our whole mind. In one of the gospels, Jesus challenged the superficiality of the Pharisees and Sadducees because they didn't take time to reflect on their circumstances around them and as a result missed the significance of the events around them and what God was doing.⁵

Another indication that Jesus encourages us to live an "examined life" is that 10 times in the Gospels Jesus uses the word – Beware – when talking with disciples. Beware carries with it the meaning – turn one's mind to / to be attentive to. In English "beware" is just a shortened version of "Be aware." So ten times Jesus tells his disciples to live an examined life. So I think we can say that Jesus would have agreed with Socrates, that it was God's heart for His people to live an examined life – where we become aware of the meaning and significance of events and people and God encounters in our lives.

But Mary

If this way of living / the examined life / is part of God's heart for us / a way of life that will contribute to human flourishing / What can Mary, the mother of Jesus teach us concerning "how" to do it.

Mary approaches these amazing events of the first Christmas in a very different way than everyone else. Listen to what Luke says:

all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

I think that captures where most of us live. We live in complicated times. We encounter and live with people of immense complexity. God is complex and enigmatic. For most of us, we wonder about this complexity and then move on.

Luke wants to show us through Mary a better way. Notice in the text, "all wondered ... but Mary." Luke is setting up a contrast. By example he is

⁵ Matt 16:3 You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

showing us a better way – Mary’s way of dealing with life’s circumstances and people that come into our life.

But Mary, treasured and pondered all these things in her heart.

Mary handled all of these events in a different way. How can we be like Mary? One thing we see is that she treasured – valued – held in high esteem – protected the events and people and encounters with God. Mary took all of these events and people and God’s word and treasured them / valued them. They were given a high priority in her life.

But Mary, didn’t stop there. Luke also tells us that she pondered - she didn’t just put them away in a safe and protected treasure chest – she took time thinking about them. Spent time reflecting on them. Took time praying about them.

How can we treasure and ponder?

We know what it means to treasure something. We even know what it means to ponder something. To think about the people and events in our lives. We know how to live the examined life. But Mary is actually doing it. And the operative word for Mary is – time. It takes time to treasure and ponder. Luke wants us to know that others wondered – but Mary took the time to treasure and ponder.

At the Center for Renewal, we have learned that we have to “make time to take time.” It won’t just happen on its own. You have to schedule it. You know we really cannot “Make time.” The only way we get time is to take it away from something else. In order to make time, we need to regularly push the Pause button in our life. When we push the Pause button we make time to take time to treasure and ponder.

In order to treasure and ponder, you need to:

Make time to take time

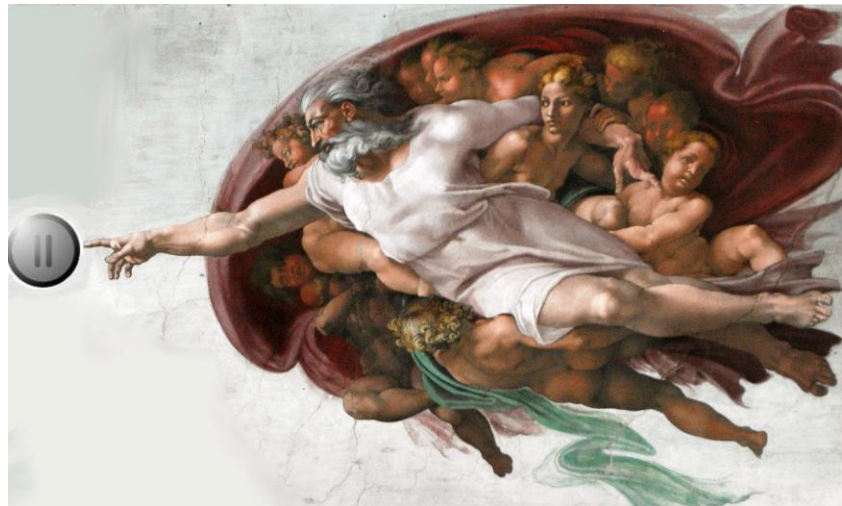


I believe that learning to push the Pause button is something that God has wanted His people to do from the beginning. Think about how God trained up the nation of Israel to push the pause



button. God knew that left on our own, His people would never push the Pause button. So He built it into the life cycle of His people. He

commanded them to do it. In effect, God pressed the pause button for His people. He told them once in every seven days, press the pause button and reflect and examine – treasure and ponder. But not just



one day in seven, but several times every year He set apart days through the annual feasts to be together in community to hear God's word and reflect upon certain aspects of their life both individually and corporately. To pause, treasure and ponder. We don't have these feasts on our calendars but we should learn from this regular pattern of making time to take time. Regular cycles to pause and learn to live the examined life.

Is this possible? Can we build these Pause button's into our life. Not just one time events but regularly schedules times to treasure and ponder? Here at the BARN we have a wonderful resource in the Center for Renewal

– a place to push the Pause button. A place to treasure and ponder. A couple months ago, Matt encouraged all of us to schedule a private retreat. Should I tell Matt how many of us took him up on that challenge? What about for 2015? Will this year be different? Will we make time to take time apart – to press the pause button – to treasure the people / the events / God’s word to you. Either alone or in community. Have you ever considered taking your family on a one day retreat. What about you and your husband or you and your wife, getting away for one day and one night to pause, treasure and ponder. Perhaps you are facing some new challenges and choices in 2015. There were some challenging things going on that first Christmas. All wondered, but Mary paused, treasured and pondered. Is God calling you to press the Pause button for 2015? The CFR team would help you plan it.

If you are a young person – Mary was probably only 13 years old when she was treasuring and pondering. The rest of the world wondered about the events and people “But Mary” treasured and pondered. All of your friends race through life wondering – but what about you? Will anyone say about you. “But Charlie...” “But Santiago...” “But Lorna...” But Jimmy...”

Perhaps you are one who is considering becoming a follower of Jesus, this can apply to you as well. One of the biggest distractions that keeps us from considering the claims of Jesus is our busyness. In the Screwtape letters, C.S. Lewis records a series of letters from a senior demonic tempter to a protégé. In one letter he gives us one of the strategies of the enemy to keep us from becoming a follower of Jesus:

“It is funny how mortals always picture us [demons] as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.”

Perhaps it’s the things that the enemy is keeping out of your mind that is keeping you from becoming a follower of Jesus.

For the rest of us, maybe you are thinking – once I push the pause button what is there to treasure and ponder? One of the things Mary pondered were the words of the angel invoking “peace among those with whom he [God] is pleased!” The rest of the world wondered about it ... but Mary spent time pondering. Is it possible that I could “please God?” The angel said it was. What would it look like for me to please God. What must it be like to experience His pleasure? Haven’t I done too much wrong to ever please a perfect and holy God? This Crossover series tells us that because of Jesus we can please God. That is something to treasure and ponder.

Several weeks ago, I visited a Chinese church in West Hartford. It was the day when about 8 new followers of Jesus were baptized. One young man described in great detail how God led him to that point of baptism – from a period of total atheism to faith in Jesus. He made this very telling statement in the midst of this fairly dramatic encounter with God – “I know that there is more that the Holy Spirit was saying but I was too busy to pause and hear.” Are we too busy to take time to pause, treasure and ponder? Where can we push the pause button in 2015?

Let’s pray.