

Reset

Part 2: How are we responding to this opportunity to reset?

Thesis: This pandemic is an opportunity to reset, to put first things first. This opportunity to reset is one of the redemptive purposes of the Lord in this season.

Last week, I invited you to spend time reflecting on this question: **How are you responding to this opportunity to reset?**

Review:

Reset is one of the redemptive assignments for responding to this season when COVID-19, racial unrest and injustice, political divisiveness, fear, and anger have knocked so many people off their center and game.

We, the church in the USA, are all over the map in our response to the season in which we find ourselves. There are so many divergent opinions, perspectives, and declarations from the body of Christ.

We hoped this global interruption would be short-lived, like for a few weeks. Now the days have become weeks and the weeks have become months.

However, there is one thing that I have heard consistently in the midst of COVID. Several church leaders, apostolic ministries, and prophetic voices say that this pandemic is an opportunity to reset, to put first things first. **This opportunity to reset is one of the redemptive purposes of the Lord in this season.**

The Lord has spoken to us about pursuing deep intimacy and full partnership with Jesus for 2020 (*Draw me after your heart and let me run with you, Song of Songs 1:4*). Our journey began with a time of returning to our first love from August – December of 2019-- *First Love: Remember. Repent. Renew (Revelation 2:1-7)*. Then, we began 2020 with a *21-Day First Love Fast*. And bam! COVID hit. It was a global reset.

In the message from last week, ***Reset Part 1: Remember and Take Courage*** (Part 1 of a 5-week sermon series), we looked back at our journey over the past few years and at what the Lord has been saying to us.

I believe that the Lord has at least 2 purposes in rehearsing our story.

1. May the Lord use this time to release hope and encouragement that we are hearing from God.
2. And, may we refocus on the vision and calling to pursue deep intimacy and full partnership with Jesus.

The Lord gave us a word for 2019: *more*. The Lord gave us a declaration for 2019: *This is the year of the Lord*. And, the Lord called us to *return to our first love*. We looked in detail last week at what the Lord said and did in us.

Then, we looked at what the Lord was doing and saying at the end of 2019 and into 2020.

Returning to our First Love and our 21-Day First Love Fast were about putting first things first.

Here is what the Lord has been doing in our lives over the past two years. The Lord graciously and strategically positioned us to weather the storm of a pandemic, lockdown, racial unrest, racial injustice, political divisiveness, fear, and hatred... and not just to survive, but to thrive as we pursued deep intimacy and full partnership with Jesus. As we followed the Lord and his leadership, none of us imagined what that pursuit would look like in 2020. But, here we are.

Catch this understanding: The Lord was preparing us to see this time of crisis and shaking as an opportunity to continue our reset, to continue returning to our first love, to continue putting first things first. We heard from the Lord. In our hearing, God was preparing us for this season.

In this season of reset, we can **be encouraged** because we have been hearing from the Lord. We can **have hope** because our God is leading us into his purposes and future. And, we can **have faith** that we can face anything because of our intimate relationship with God. He is the source of our wisdom, strength, and grace.

Now, let's look to the message for today.

Title: Reset Part 2: How are we doing with the reset?

1. How are we responding to this opportunity of reset?
2. How are we doing with this opportunity to develop new muscles to deal with crisis?
3. How are we doing with the chance to live into faith, hope, and love, instead of living out of fear and hatred?

4. How we respond to grief, stress, anxiety, and crisis are opportunities to learn, change, and grow.

Dealing with this season of pandemic, lockdown, racial unrest, racial injustice, political divisiveness, fear, and hatred is emotionally, mentally, and spiritually taxing.

How are you responding to grief, stress, anxiety, and crisis? These experiences are opportunities to learn, change, and grow.

Many of us have experienced grief and loss in this season.

1. **Become aware of what you are experiencing and feeling.**

It helps to name it: grief.

People today are feeling a number of different griefs. We feel the world has changed, and it has. We know this is temporary, but it doesn't feel that way. Going to the airport changed from how it was before 9/11. We are struggling with what has changed, what will change, and what will forever change. This season is the point at which they changed: the loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. This change is hitting us and we're grieving. We are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air.

We're also feeling anticipatory grief. Anticipatory grief is that feeling we get about what the future holds when we're uncertain. Usually it centers on death. We feel it when someone gets a dire diagnosis or when we have the normal thought that we'll lose a parent someday. Anticipatory grief is also more broadly imagined futures. There is a storm coming. There's something bad out there. With a virus, this kind of grief is so confusing for people. Our primitive mind knows something bad is happening, but you can't see it. This breaks our sense of safety. We're feeling that loss of safety. We have collectively lost our sense of general safety. Through the years, individually or as smaller groups, people have felt this loss of general safety. But experiencing this loss of safety all together is new experience. We are grieving on a micro and a macro level.

It is helpful to become aware of and to name what you are experiencing and feeling: grief.

2. **Give yourself and others permission to grieve.**

Grief is our response to loss. Grief has stages. It is helpful to understand the stages of grief and the stages through which we move. It is important not to get stuck in the process.

Whenever we talk about the stages of grief, try to remember that the stages aren't linear and may not happen in this order. This understanding of the stages of grief is not a map, but it provides some scaffolding for what we experience.

- a. **Denial** (which we say a lot of early on): *This virus won't affect us. This is no big deal.*
- b. **Anger**: *You're making me stay home and taking away my activities.*
- c. **Bargaining**: *Okay, if I social distance for two weeks everything will be better, right?*
- d. **Sadness**: *I don't know when this will end.*
- e. **Acceptance**. *This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed.*
 - i. Acceptance is the place of change and moving forward. *I can wash my hands. I can keep a safe distance. I can learn how to work virtually. I can make adjustments.*

3. **Learn to see how you and how others respond to grief and anxiety.**

Then, you can focus on being a less anxious presence.

In the grief process, people sometimes deal with unhealthy anticipatory grief, which is really anxiety. It is thinking about the worst that can happen, or it is coming up with ideas of all that can or could go wrong.

Anticipatory grief is a lot like chronic anxiety, which is that background noise that we live with. Acute anxiety is when there is a real threat. Chronic anxiety is a feeling of being threatened or is a feeling of being triggered, and we haven't determined the threat or the reason why we feel anxious.

When anxiety is present, whether it is acute or chronic, the brain reacts in predictable ways. The part of your brain that allows you to make a reasoned, thoughtful response begins to shut down. Then the part of your brain that empowers you to react without thinking kicks into overdrive. That is a good thing when the anxiety is acute. Imagine if you saw your child in the street, and you had to stop and think, "What's happening here? Is there danger? How should I respond?" In that case, you need to be able to respond quickly and automatically.

However, when chronic anxiety is present, you need to be able to think through the situation and make well-reasoned, principle-based choices. Chronic anxiety is not triggered by the possibility of actual physical danger; it is triggered by something that subconsciously reminds you of the painful experiences that led to your vows or to the ways you self-protect as you have grown up. Very often, it is present in your most important relationships, so it's crucial that you learn to respond thoughtfully rather than reacting instinctively. This is no easy task! These responses have been hard-wired into your nervous system, so unlearning them takes courage and lots of practice. But if you're willing to take on the challenge, it is actually possible to grow into the kind of person who can choose thoughtful responses based on your core beliefs and values, even in the face of anxiety.

As you learn to see anxiety in yourself and others, you can begin to take steps that diminish its intensity, so that you can respond in a clear, thoughtful, value-driven manner. This minimizes the negative impact of anxiety on you and the systems in which you participate. This requires a lifetime of learning, but here is a primer that can help you get started.

- a. **Learn to see your own anxiety.** Pay attention to what's happening in your body. Heart racing? Palms sweating? Knot in the pit of your stomach? Face flushed? Sensation of needing to get away or escape? What are you feeling—mad, sad, glad or scared? Notice it. Name it. Step back and examine it.
- b. **Release your anxiety by venting with a safe person** (usually outside of the system). Say what there is to say—don't judge yourself in the venting process. Journaling, prayer, and meditation are other practices that help alleviate anxiety. Good eating habits, getting enough sleep, and a regular exercise program are also helpful in keeping chronic anxiety from building up.
- c. **When you are calm (or calmer), ask yourself**, "What do I believe is the right thing to do in this circumstance? What are my core convictions and guiding principles? What do I value? Is there any place that my guiding principles are in conflict?"

When you are anxious, you'll be caught up in making up a story about the situation, about the motives of others, and about what it all means. The more anxious you are, the less realistic this story will be. When you calm down, however, you can look for the facts and begin to think about your beliefs and values. For instance, imagine that your

friend lied to you about something, and you discover the lie in a casual conversation with another person. At first, you may be tempted to obsess about the lie, to make it mean something, to place most of your attention on your friend and what he or she has done. As you calm yourself, however, you will draw your attention back to yourself and focus on your own ability to respond consistently with your beliefs and values. You will ask yourself, “What do I believe is the right thing to do in this circumstance?” Getting to this question is crucial, so stay with it until you get clarity.

- d. **Once your core convictions and guiding principles are clearer**, imagine what it would look like to live these principles with integrity. Consider talking through this vision with a spiritual mentor, director, or coach. Rehearse this way of showing up in your thinking several times, and then go back to the setting that triggered the anxiety and practice living out of your principles.
- e. **Share this process with others in your system.** As anxiety becomes less intense and less likely to become transmitted throughout the group, the processes of thinking, believing and valuing become clearer. Eventually, the emotional maturity of the whole group increases.

Learn to see how you and how others respond to grief and anxiety. Then, you can focus on being a less anxious presence.

- 4. **Learn to let go of what you cannot control and to lay hold of God** (1 Timothy 6:12; Philippians 3:12-14).

Consider how to let go of what you can't control. You are responsible **to** others, but not **for** others. You are responsible to love others, to care for others, to encourage others, and to share with others what you think, feel, and believe. But you are not responsible for their choices, their beliefs, or their actions.

What your neighbor is doing is out of your control. What is in your control is staying six feet away from them and washing your hands. Focus on what you can do.

What the political parties are doing is out of your control. What is in your control is to get informed, pray for your leaders, and vote as the Lord leads you. Focus on what you can do.

What our culture is doing in deconstruction is out of your control. What is in your control is how you choose to show up in love, in grace, and in mercy. What is in your control is how you serve, care, and help. Focus on what you can do. Learn to let go of what you cannot control and to lay hold of God.

5. **Practice growing your capacity to have compassion for yourself and others.**

In this season, everyone has different levels of fear and grief, and it manifests in different ways. A coworker may get snarky with you. Someone may bite your head off. That's not usually like them. Begin to wonder: how are they doing in dealing with this pandemic? What you are seeing could be a response of fear and anxiety. So be patient. Be kind. Be compassionate. Think about who someone usually is and not who they seem to be in this moment.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy (Matthew 5:7 ESV).

Let's be grace-full, mercy-full, and thought-full to ourselves and others in this season. Let's give the benefit of the doubt. Let love cover a multitude of sins. Let's be patient and kind. Let's have compassion for ourselves and others.

6. **Seek to find meaning in crisis by drawing near to the Lord to find out what God is saying and doing in midst of this season.**

Remember: we want to develop new spiritual muscles because crisis is the context for the finish. The Lord won't answer all of our questions. He will answer some of our questions. But more important than answers is a relationship with the Lord who sustains us, enables us, and empowers our lives with courage and hope.

Listen to what one author wrote back in March about finding meaning ([That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief](#), Harvard Business Review, by Scott Berinato, March 23, 2020).

And, I believe we will **find meaning in it**. I've been honored that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's family has given me permission to add a **sixth stage to grief: Meaning**. I had talked to Elisabeth quite a bit about what came after acceptance. I did not want to stop at acceptance when I experienced some personal grief. **I wanted meaning in those darkest hours. And I do believe we find light in those times. Even now people are realizing they can connect through technology. They are not as remote as they thought. They are realizing they can use their phones for**

long conversations. They're appreciating walks. I believe we will continue to find meaning now and when this is over.

What is our meaning in the midst of grief and crisis as Christians? As followers of Jesus, we believe that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). God is with us; he is Immanuel (Mathew 1:23). Jesus said that he and the Father are at work in this world (John 5:17). God can take everything that people do, everything that the enemy does, and everything in this broken world, and he is still working to sum everything up in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-10; Romans 8:28-29). Seek to find meaning in crisis by drawing near to the Lord to find out what God is saying and doing in midst of this season.

7. **Spend time reflecting with the Lord and others what you think, feel, and believe.**

It is so important to keep sharing and connecting with God and others about what you think, feel, and believe (1 John 1:7; James 5:16). We need to pour out our hearts to the Lord. And, I pray that you will find others with whom you can share your heart.

I have been encouraged as I have heard people opening up about what they are feeling and experiencing. I am encouraged that people are growing in awareness of the loss and grief that they have experienced. And, I am glad that when we share, we are opening the door to new courage, strength, and hope.

Emotions need motion. It's important we acknowledge what we go through.... If we allow the feelings to happen, they'll happen in an orderly way, and it empowers us. Then we're not victims ([*That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief*](#), Harvard Business Review, by Scott Berinato, March 23, 2020).

Spend time reflecting with the Lord and others what you think, feel, and believe.

How are you responding to grief, stress, anxiety, and crisis? These experiences are opportunities to learn, change, and grow.

There are forces that want to rob you of your faith, hope, and love. They want you full of fear and hatred.

1. Media
2. Culture

3. Politics
4. Principalities, powers, and world forces of darkness

How do we respond to forces that want to fill us with fear and hatred?

1. **Seek to find out how the Lord wants you to show up.**
 - a. Spend time talking with the Lord and listening to his voice. He is the Good Shepherd.
 - b. For example, I believe that the Lord wants me to grow in my capacity for faith, hope, and love.
 - c. That is one of my guiding principles in this hour.
 - i. **I choose to show up in faith, hope, and love, rather than in fear and hatred.**
 - ii. Every one of those words mean something to me.
 - d. **A guiding principle is an attempt to define how you want to show up as your best self.**
 - i. **Access:** I write down my guiding principles in my phone so that I can access them when I get anxious or triggered.
 - ii. **Declaration:** I declare those guiding principles over my life and my situation.
 - iii. **Prayer:** And, I turn my guiding principle into a prayer. "With the Lord helping me, I choose to show up in faith, hope, and love, and not fear and hatred."
 - e. **What is the Lord saying to you?**
2. **Engage in spiritual practices like devotional Scripture reading, reflection, and prayer, which help to empower the transformation in the Lord which we seek.**
 - a. For example, feed your soul on Philippians 4:8.
 - b. *Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse (Philippians 4:8 MSG).*
3. **Fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12).**
 - a. We are at war, not with the flesh, but *against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12 ESV).*
 - b. *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world*

*and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13
Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil
comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done
everything, to stand (Ephesians 6:10-13 NIV).*

How are you responding to grief, stress, anxiety, and crisis? These experiences are opportunities to learn, change, and grow.

Here are some truths to live into:

1. **Workability:** Is what you are doing working? Is there fruit? Look at where you are compared to where you were.
 - a. **What doesn't work:**
 - i. **Hiding or covering up your pain and hurts** with busyness, binge watching, video games, social media, alcohol, drugs, or other things.
 - ii. **Denial:** pretending that nothing is wrong.
 - iii. **Coping:** some people just seek to find coping mechanisms, but don't really deal with the root issues.
 - iv. **Avoidance:** ignoring it and hoping it goes away.
 - v. **Blaming** someone or something else for what you are feeling, thinking, and doing.
 - vi. **Cutting off:** get a new marriage, a new car, a new game, a new church, a new job; move to a new city; etc.
 - b. **What works:**
 - i. **Reflective life:** pursuing deep intimacy with the Lord; growing in the grace of **awareness**.
 - ii. **Authentic community:** walking in the light, sharing with others what you think, feel, and believe, and listen (trusting the process); growing in the capacity to be **authentic** (open and honest about what you think, feel, and believe).
 - iii. **Radical alignment (obedience):** pursuing full partnership with Jesus in what he is doing in your spheres of influence, in your responsibilities and relationships; **alignment** (radical obedience).
 - iv. **Application:** Find some individual and corporate spiritual practices that help you connect with the Lord and with one another. Try them on and see what works for you, what helps you access your courage and the Lord's grace, or what helps you get a breakthrough.

1. Next week, Pastor Steve will talk about some individual spiritual practices you can try on.
 2. Then on the following week, I will talk about some corporate spiritual practices that can help produce the fruit in our lives that we want to see.
2. **Positive declaration:** Our places of breakdown are opportunities to learn and change.
 - a. Our breakdowns or mess ups don't have to be failures; they don't have to define us; rather, they can be learning experiences.
 - b. Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes progress. Progress is made in public. And public progress is messy.
 3. **Invitation:** We can respond to the Lord's invitation to pursue deep intimacy and full partnership with Jesus, even in the midst of this tumultuous season.
 - a. *"Draw me after your heart and let me run with you!" (Song of Songs 1:4).*
 - b. May this be the prayer and intention of each of us in this season.

Summary:

1. How are you responding to this opportunity of reset?
2. Dealing with this season of pandemic, lockdown, racial unrest, racial injustice, political divisiveness, fear, and hatred is emotionally, mentally, and spiritually taxing.
3. How you respond to grief, stress, anxiety, and crisis are opportunities to learn, change, and grow.