

Limits. Yeah, we're talking about limits! That very word—*limits*—can be spontaneously annoying, prompting us to feel an unreasonable, irritating restraint is here or soon in coming. And why not? Much of our experience in life is experiencing the rules of others that seem to limit *us* in favor of *them*! But in the first episode in this series, we unpacked the reality of a condition many people seem to have—that of *a self-imposed mindset of settling for less*. Tackling that awareness and its inherent disappointments can change your life—hey, go back and review or download that teaching.

Today, we're going to take the opposite tack, uncovering the unique, extraordinary framework for an abundant life: that's the amazing journey of "settling for Christ!" *But what does that even mean—"settling for Christ?"* Well, it means "settling for God's best" ...truly "settling for more" than all other paths!

So, to address that, we first have to establish the necessary reality: every person apart from Christ is essentially leading a self-centered life. You know, *each is centered on what seems right in their own eyes*. That can even be the condition of people of God—after all, Judges 21:25 (ESV) reports that "in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." That's wisdom for today, too!

So, the real question for you and me this very moment is this: are *we ourselves* leading a significantly self-centered life rather than a truly "others-centric" life? A core point here is from when Jesus responded to a religious lawyer's question. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.'" (Matthew 22:36-39)

Do you get that? This laser-like focal point is *other-centric, God-centric*, yes, "loving God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Notice the "all" word here...totally centered on God! And that thread of truth is as relevant in our *better* New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6-8) as it was before the Cross!

That is liberating, this is true freedom—we no longer have to bow to the tyranny of our self-centered desires—Romans 6:14 says "sin will have no dominion over you." After all, we're *new creatures in Christ*. Remember the Jewish ruler Nicodemus? "This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.' Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:2-7) That's the amazing *settling for Christ!*

But sometimes it's really helpful to corral the meaning and fullness of something *by contrasting it with what it isn't*. And that's often what the Apostle Paul did in his epistles when it comes to the amazing settling for Christ! This is key: whenever someone discovers and rejects what certain "isn'ts" are, they are working more toward settling for the authentic Jesus! Here are some profiles of folks choosing poorly...

Those professing to follow Jesus but are not *born of the Spirit* or have no desire to be so. Jesus taught each *must be* born again to enter the Kingdom of God. Now, these folks may have "inherited" their faith from parents or may just be wrongly embracing the traditions of men (Mark 7:8). Such people have not gloriously settled for Christ, they've settled for something far less: human traditions and religious rituals.

Those performance-oriented folks, striving after and supposedly keeping the Mosaic Law—yes, the Apostle Paul assures us that believers are "not under the law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). And frankly, it's very common even today to see people claim God's grace for salvation yet then fall under the spell of various legalistic, churchy frameworks to measure their ongoing devotion to God—yeah, acting as if God's New Covenant economy requires each born-again believer to be justified by the law.

Those sincere born-again believers whose hearts are not nearly aligned with God's commands. Hey, the great commandment said to love God *with all our hearts!* And the second is to love our neighbors as ourselves. *And both of those are clearly manifested locally and worldwide by obeying the Great Commission!* But how many believers are truly working to be aligned to that by prayer, word, and deed?

These three profiles of people structure their lives around just three common stumbling blocks to their opportunity of settling for Christ, settling for more! But that's not God's intention, not in the least! Indeed, a life in Christ's sustaining grace and our faith response is unparalleled and unique in opportunity!

That is the amazing "*settling for Christ,*" the very best abundant life in Christ and Him crucified! And it's accessed as reported in Luke 9:23, which records Jesus's words: "And He said to all, 'If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" A tough road, you say? Well, that road can and does have rough patches—but God remains the Redeemer of it all. You see, Jesus promised that His yoke is easy...yes, we will find rest in our souls (Matthew 11:29-30). Instead, what's *actually, truly* hard is the yoke of self-centeredness and its constant dashing of human expectations!

Yes, in contrast to that yoke of self-centeredness, the amazing, faith-based journey of *settling for Jesus* is filled with peace and joy and fullness of expectation—a journey rightly-focused on Christ as the center of it all! You see, God is not the author of evil, as some would have it. Instead, when Christ's name is called upon, He is our Redeemer. But He won't always redeem us out of situations in the ways our self-centeredness and flesh might desire!

Here's the thing: *trust fully in Jesus!* Remember the often-quoted verse, Proverbs 3:5-6? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your paths." Yes, *trust in the Lord with all your heart!* After all, "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and He is working for believers' best interests in every situation, no matter the test or trial we're going through! God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us." (Ephesians 3:20)

That means that when we are serious Christ-followers, we can count on God! This *settling for Christ*, our God Who is working for us and interceding for us when the evil one attacks or temptation presses in—well, He still assures us that all things work together for good...yes, His being active according to His will!

But let's be frank: when it comes to making everyday decisions, we are tempted in our weakness, even if short-term—like impatience, fear, unbelief, ambition...you name it. The fact is, when embracing these kinds of weaknesses, many *don't settle for Christ*...instead, they veer off and actually limit God to *their* desires...to *their* shallow experiences...to *their* feeble beliefs...to *their* low expectations. It's in this way that even serious Christians settle for less. Even worse, some lapse into blaming God for their own choices.

That specific point raises the question as to "why" folks blame God. The truth is, deficient disciplers and teachers often work diligently to limit God! Yes, human leaders' imposing their limits on God is pathetically off-base! Yes, radical stuff like giving religious tradition equal status with God's Word. Like asserting God doesn't heal or do miracles today. Even like their small-minded limiting of God's sovereignty to His not permitting human free will! Of course, *that* belief would mean that believers don't have the choice to love God with a full heart, soul, and mind. *Really? God supposedly ordains a possibly lesser level of our personal love for Him?* Sadly, some choose to structure their lives limiting God and they teach others to do so too!

But God gives every believer the capacity to fully lead a Spirit-led life—we can be others-centric like Jesus, move from the unseen world of our hearts to a corresponding "action" of *doing God's will!* And just what is God's will in the New Covenant? Well, it's clear what Jesus commanded His followers to do: His Great Commission, to "go forth and make disciples" in every nation...including ours!

But how about us...are we limiting God...limiting His commandments to us...limiting His promises for us? *Instead, God's best is clear: we can be others-centric—amazingly, gloriously settling for Christ!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. From the episode: “Let’s be frank: when it comes to making everyday decisions, we are tempted in our weakness, even if short-term—like impatience, fear, unbelief, ambition...you name it. The fact is, when embracing these kinds of weaknesses, many *don’t settle for Christ*...instead, they veer off and actually limit God to *their* desires...to *their* shallow experiences...to *their* feeble beliefs...to *their* low expectations. It’s in this way that even serious Christians settle for less.” Discuss.
2. Upon reflection, have you had Christian pastors, teachers, or disciplers who have led you on a path of often, even structurally, limiting God—that being done by the dissemination and influence of their own doctrines...their own experiences...their own weaknesses...? Discuss.
3. How can a serious believer arrive at quite consistently “settling for Christ?” How are you doing at settling for Christ? Discuss.