

gods that Fail (and the only God who satisfies)
Part #3 – “LIBERATION FROM THE IDOL OF COMFORT”

John 4:1-38

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on March 19, 2017 by Pastor Steven Edelman

Will you help? Will anyone help? Those words summarize a tragedy that happened when no one was willing to give up their comfort and safety to help in a time of urgency. In New York city, a number of news sources reported the story of a man who had been out in his car, looking for a victim, when he came across a 28-year-old woman driving home from work in New York City. The New Yorker says, “he followed her. She parked at the train station, adjacent to her apartment. The man parked, too, and attacked her with a hunting knife. Multiple people witnessed the assault but didn’t do much of anything. In the moment of urgency, no one called the police. No one physically helped the woman. Someone yelled “stop!” The attacker fled. The woman, wounded but not fatally, staggered to the back of her apartment building and went inside a vestibule. The attacker returned, found her, and attacked again, stabbing her and assaulting her sexually. He fled again before she died.... For more than half an hour multiple, law-abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks in Kew Gardens. . . . Again, no one telephoned the police during the assault; one witness called after the woman was dead....” The original report said that multiple people “came to their windows at 3:00 AM in response to her screams of terror—and remained at their windows in fascination for the 30 minutes it took her assailant to complete his grisly deed, during which time he returned for three separate attacks.... The key line in this story came from one of the witnesses (none of whom were named), who said, **“I didn’t want to get involved.**

The one indisputable villain in this case, other than attacker, was Joseph Fink, who worked in the apartment building across the street from where Genovese lived. He saw the first attack, did nothing, and, after the attacker fled,

took a nap in the basement, rather than going outside to help the woman.¹ He did nothing and took a comfortable nap! **Are we not like Joseph Fink when we idolize comfort?** We often choose ease over doing the right thing. We all have people in our life who God has placed right in front of that need to be rescued by the gospel. But we don't want to be inconvenienced and often prioritize comfort over doing something about it.

A social psychologist calls this the “bystander effect” which is where everyone “diffuses responsibility” rather than acting in a time of urgency. At times, I see this lack of response in my own Christian life.

Comfort confuses the Christian. Comfort immobilizes the Christian. The idol of comfort keeps us from not only putting God first, but also answering the call of Jesus. Will anyone help?

We are in the middle of a series titled “gods that fail” and today we will be looking at finding “liberation from the idol of comfort.” As we have been talking over the past number of weeks, an idol is anything in our life that is elevated above God. Therefore, you can turn even good things into idols. You can turn a *good* thing like family, success, acceptance, money, your plans, etc. into a *god* thing—into something that has a dominant position in your heart and life. Something that you believe is essential to your happiness and meaning. When you place good things over God it becomes an idol or sin.

Tim Keller says, “An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought.”

So once again, let's identify the idol, resist the idol, and defeat the idol.

The idol of comfort is active in your heart when you place fleshly desires above God. Personal comfort can come in many different forms

¹ Nicholas Lemann, “A Call for Help,” *The New Yorker*, March 10, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/03/10/a-call-for-help>.

including: Food. Sleep. Sexual gratification. Relaxation. Beauty. Preferences. Security. Each of these are legitimate desires, placed in the human by God, and have a physiological effect on the human body.

Let me show you how Jesus avoids comfort to help others and then how we embrace comforts which immobilize our Christian walk. The first thing we want to look at is...

1. To live like Jesus, we need to identify our idol of comfort.

We can identify our comfort idol in how we seek an elevated quality of life.

a) We seek comfort in pursuing an elevated quality of life.

We are going to see that Jesus' life was anything but comfortable and stress-free. Having a good quality of life is not necessarily wrong. However, as we are going to see in the life of Jesus the pursuit of comfortable Christianity is not Christianity at all. In John chapter 4 we read that He was on mission for the sake of spreading the gospel. He lived out this urgency to bring the gospel to those who needed it. We see various examples in the life of Jesus that contrasts the idol of comfort in John chapter 4. What is the motive of Jesus?

In John 4:1-2 we see that:

- Jesus is working hard with His disciples and the number of people they are baptizing increases.
- He calls a select number to full-time ministry.
- Jesus doesn't stay in the middle of His success... He goes North to continue the mission. He is multiplying ministry!

In John 4:5-6 it says, "So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, **wearied** as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour."

- Notice that He is weary (uncomfortable) because He was working hard for the sake of the gospel.
- The Greek work for weary means "**to be tired from doing good things.**"

- The “good things” and decisions that Jesus makes are focused on rescuing lost people with the gospel, not advancing His quality of life. He doesn’t fight for His rights or freedoms to have what he wants, for a nice hotel, a hot meal, but He sacrifices personal comforts to advance the gospel. But attends to his basic needs and waits for a drink.

How does our Western life contrast with the life of Jesus? Are we weary from being on mission? We have one of highest quality of lives in the history of the Western world! The very nature of being raised in our Western culture teaches us to consume. Every commercial is trying to sell you something that you don’t need. With every image, emotion, song and catchphrase marketers are trying to get in your head to sell you the next thing. Who’s slogans are these? Just Do It! Nike. "Melts in Your Mouth, Not in Your Hands" M&M "There are some things money can't buy. For everything else, there's MasterCard." Then you get the bill and realize that you have been duped.

We can pinpoint our idol by revealing the reason we do something. We like our stuff and our comfort. Do we not? **The lie that captures our heart is, if we advance our quality of life we will be happy and have meaning.** I see this playing out in my life in so many ways. For fun, I have jumped on the realtor website to look at houses and I find my heart being captured by beautiful houses that I can’t afford. I caught myself imagining what my life could be like in that perfect house, in that perfect location. The idol of comfort shows up in how you entertain yourself! In how you prioritize your time and resources! Our capitalistic society gives us freedoms and the ability to have a lot of comfortable extras that go well beyond our basic needs. **At some point, we need ask the question – How much is enough?**

Let me illustrate it this way. What would you do if you won the lotto 649 for 10 million dollars? Where does your heart go? I know there are many things that

I can imagine buying that I believe would make me happy. There are numerous things that I would want to do that would bring me temporary pleasure. Comfort can so easily become an idol.

What are you working hard for? What comforts or securities dominate your thinking? When these comforts drive our life, we become slaves to the comforts of life and spectators of the gospel.

Brian Dodd says, “You can be a great person with a stable job, family, and social life. You can pay your taxes, help your aging parents, and recycle, while simultaneously being profoundly enslaved by the idol of comfort—an idol that makes peace and predictability its highest priority. I learned that one of my idols was the god of comfort. Comfort lets you slack off when you want, tune out when you think you deserve it, and be selfish even when you know you are called to give. When you worship comfort, you don't have to give until it hurts, you don't have to love unconditionally and you can do whatever you feel like with what you believe is YOUR time.”

Comfort is a clever little idol because in the moment it doesn't demand much from you. However, worshiping comfort is very costly and the idol will disappoint. You will become discontent and unfulfilled with all your comfortable stuff that demands your attention. You become a slave to managing and maintaining a high quality of life with temporary satisfaction, which consumes and haults spiritual growth. As you can see, that's why comfort is an appealing and yet very unsatisfactory god. Can you identify the idol?

We also see the idol of comfort thrive in our lives when we seek privacy over the gospel.

b) We seek comfort in our privacy.

We can identify comfort as an idol when we choose personal privacy over Jesus.

In John 4, notice that Jesus creates an uncomfortable situation by getting personal for the sake of the gospel. He invades the privacy of the woman's life by making a very personal statement that eposes her sin in a very clever way.

In verse 16, *Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."*
17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."

When she tried to avoid the issue of a husband (4:17), Jesus responds with a personal fact, you have had five husbands and the man you are with is not your husband. Awkward! Jesus then helps her. He offers her something that will her change her life.

We can identify the idol of comfort in our heart when we value our privacy over Jesus. Many of us can keep people at a distance because it's just easier. Our comfortable privacy idol can keep us from sharing our faith with others. It will keep us from the important conversations that will lead people to Jesus. It will keep us from growing in our faith.

For this very reason, many guys are too proud to go marriage counselling when they need it. For this reason, we won't talk to a friend about the sin we are struggling with. We value the comfort of privacy over exposing private issues that keep us from close relationship with Jesus. For this reason, you won't talk to your neighbor, coworker, or family member about Jesus. Privacy keeps us from helping others who need Jesus. We don't want to feel uncomfortable.

The excuse that we keep everything private, "I can't trust anyone." It's my personal business! It's uncomfortable! I don't want to be exposed. I agree that you can't trust everyone and we overuse the excuse for the sake of comfort. The idol of comfort keeps sin private and active. Comfort idolatry deceives us. The comfort idol yearns for privacy, makes no demands, and will only do for others if

it brings stability or relieves stress. It is selfishly introspective, constantly non-committal, and abhors anything impinging upon personal freedom. The more resources we have, the less time we have for relationships.

The comfort idol pushes away authentic relationships leaving you with distant and stagnant faith.

As we have seen, we need to see that the idol of comfort is active in our heart when we seek a high quality of life and privacy above Jesus. Secondly, to live like Jesus, we need to resist our idol of comfort.

2. To live like Jesus, we need to resist our idol of comfort.

Jesus resists his desire for comfort on multiple levels in this passage.

a) Jesus ignores comfortable social boundaries.

In verse 6 Jesus is waiting at the well for a drink and is approached by a woman. TO understand what is going on we need to pay attention to verse 7. In verse 7 it says “A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” The background of the story reveals how socially awkward this was for Jesus. This was awkward because it was a woman who was a Samaritan. A woman of despicable race and religion by the Jews. She was also sleeping around and had a questionable reputation.

Jesus finds himself in a socially uncomfortable situation.

What do we do when someone makes us feel uncomfortable? Avoid! You know, the person who talks too much, has questionable fashion, the awkward cat lady or family that has “hello kitty all over everything.” You may avoid someone who has a lower social or economic status.

We see Jesus engaging social discomfort in their culture because:

I. She was a woman

- Jesus is male, single, religious, and Jewish, which clearly defined social boundaries that ought to keep him from speaking with a woman in such a private setting.

- It was considered socially unacceptable.
- In this world men rarely speak to women in public, even if they are married to them. Single men *never* speak to or touch women at any time.

II. **She was a Samaritan**

- She is a woman bearing the history, language, religion, and attitudes of people on the far margin of Judaism.
- The Samaritans had a bitter history with the Jews and didn't trade with each other.
- They were an isolated group.

III. **She had a questionable reputation.**

- Historically, water-drawing took place either in the early morning or at dusk in order to avoid the Mediterranean heat.
- While mid-afternoon work like this was not unknown, the scene reminds us of this woman's social isolation.
- **She draws water when other women are absent.**
- We learn the reason for her isolation (4:18).
- She has destroyed her reputation and broken the morals of her community. The fact that Jesus has a conversation all the more remarkable.

Look at the disciples response in verse 27. *“Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?”*

Notice that Jesus overcomes the social stigma to reach her. He crosses many boundaries, both social and cultural comforts, to help the woman in need. Jesus is thinking on another level. On a kingdom, missional level. His message was for everyone, the sinner of every culture, age, gender and social class. **What happened?**

Look at verse 28, *“So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 29 “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” 30 They went out of the town and were coming to him.”*

Are there people in your life you are not comfortable approaching with the gospel? Why not approach them? We all know deep down we are afraid of what others think and say about us. We don't want to be uncomfortable and awkward! Jesus embraces the awkward so that her life can be changed! Jesus overcomes social discomforts.

b) Jesus refuses physical comfort over mission.

Look with me at verse 31 to 34. *31 Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” 32 But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” 33 So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” 34 Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”*

Notice that Jesus overcomes physical comfort by denying food when he must have been hungry. Scriptures tells us that Jesus became tired and thirsty like in the temptation stories. But as in the temptation stories (cf. Matt 4:3–4; Luke 4:3–4), we, like the disciples in this present story, must learn from Jesus not to allow fleshly desires and its needs to dominate our concerns (cf. John 4:31–38).

I would have said, “Jesus just eat the sandwich or whatever it was!”

I am challenged by His response - because he purposely goes without. Why does He do this? He creates intentional fleshly unbalance where he could have given balance. Food is fuel, and to deprive the body of food leads to serious consequences. But it is much more than fuel, because when we eat our body releases chemicals into our bloodstream that cause a sensation of comfort. Sleep is necessary, and if you don't sleep, you will suffer negative health consequences. Jesus purposely denies physical comfort to focus on what is most important.

Our Western tendency is to consume, complain, and sleep. Then repeat. Consume, complain, and sleep. Repeat. We are a culture that is driven by what makes us feel good. We are constantly being tempted by something that will gratify our flesh or give our body relief in the moment. Jesus overcomes His fleshly comfort by not letting his flesh dictate His decisions. Because he recognizes the problematic outcome when living for comfort.

Paul Trip writes,

- “Comfort, you look beautiful to me right now, but when did you ever leave your place of prominence and glory to humble yourself for me?”
- Comfort, when did you ever enter my world to suffer on my behalf?
- Comfort, when did you ever shed your blood so that I could be cleansed from sin?
- Comfort, when were you ever raised from the dead on my behalf? When did you ever promise to give me new life and power?
- Comfort, when did you ever promise to send the Holy Spirit to fill me with true comfort that would help me to please God, even when my earthly comfort was threatened?
- Comfort, when did you ever promise to intercede for me to my Father in heaven, so that I could be strong in trial?
- Comfort, when did you ever promise to come again and redeem me from the things that capture me and make me their slave?”

Comfort, when not resisted will lead to lukewarm Christianity.

As we have seen, to live like Jesus, we need to resist the idol of comfort. Lastly, to live like Jesus, we need to defeat our idol of comfort.

3. To live like Jesus, we need to defeat our idol of comfort.

The remedy for defeating the idol of comfort is offered to the woman at the well. John 4:14 says, “**but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will**

never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The living water leads us to eternal life. **When you let Jesus the living water change your heart you start to live for Jesus and not yourself.**

We try to fit Jesus into our idolatry rather than dealing with our heart.

Justin Buzzard says, “I’m convinced that the reason there is so much shallow Christianity in our culture is because many people never replace their idolatry in their lives with Jesus, but instead simply bring in Jesus as an “add on” to their life, keeping their idolatry firmly in the center.”

Jesus shows us how we can defeat the idol of comfort through the power of the gospel. When we recognize that comfort takes primacy in our heart we need to speak the gospel to ourselves. When we really believe the gospel it brings us to the realization that comfort won’t rescue us or others. It brings us to a place that we want to purposely give up comforts to make disciples.

a) The cost of discipleship.

In verse 34 “Jesus said to them, **“My food is to do the will of him** who sent me and to accomplish his work.

Jesus shares with the disciples some costs and rewards of his mission.

- He talks about its essential character (34) as an act of obedience, the doing and completing of all the Father had called him to do.
- He speaks of the consuming satisfaction of his mission (34).
- The service of the kingdom is like a food which sustains and fulfills.

The big question: What is the will of God?

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, The will of God is your sanctification - to no longer be slaves to the comforts of sin. God’s will for your life simply is for you to become more like Jesus! To acknowledge Him that is in control and he want you to give up comfort to team with Him.

Jesus did not die so that you could have a comfortable life! He died so that we could be changed by the power of the gospel and accomplish His work through Him. When we are changed by Jesus we have a responsibility to help bring the gospel to others.

Matthew 16:24–26 says, Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

What are we giving up for Jesus? For discipleship? Time? Resources?

Bill Muehlenberg says, “Comfortable Christianity is really a contradiction in terms. There is nothing comfortable about carrying your cross, denying yourself, crucifying the flesh, and running against the ways of the world. The truth of the gospel is always uncomfortable. The sooner we learn that lesson, the better.”

How do you know if you are a disciple? How do you know if you are parent? To develop spiritually you move from dead... to infant... to child... to teen... to parent. To be a parent you need to be bringing up a child. Raising kids is a demanding task. **Discipleship is anything but comfortable. We can defeat the idol of comfort by giving up comforts for discipleship. By dying to self!**

We can also defeat the idol of comfort by responding to the urgency of the gospel.

b) The urgency of the gospel.

Jesus gives us a physical example of urgency; there is a limited amount of time between planting and harvesting. In the spiritual realm, Jesus is at work in the hearts of men and there are people who urgently need and want the gospel.

It's our job to sow and reap the gospel, so that the "crop" of believers is now being gathered into God's kingdom.

Look with me at verse 35 - Jesus says, "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest." Disciples open your eyes and see the harvest!

What is Jesus saying to us right now? God is at work right here in Victoria and there is a window in which we are called to reach others with the gospel. Look and see! However, you may not see it because you are too comfortable. Do you recognize who God has put in your life that urgently need the gospel? Give up your comfort and help them. God has acted primarily through people in the world, he is not a building.

Story – My renter died a couple months ago and I missed the window.

Gospel urgency means that we need to lay down our idol of comfort.

The Bible talks about the need for rest and rejuvenation – there's no question about that. God doesn't want us to be workaholics. I agree with that. However, I know I can use that as an excuse. I can justify my complacency or laziness as a desire for godly rest. **The idol of comfort is really good at deceiving me.** And somehow I can convince myself that I'm obeying God when I'm really serving the idol of my own comfort and pleasure. Does your usage of your time reflect a false idol of comfort? What about your resources? Or do you struggle to work out obedience in your life.

Brian Dodd gives us ten signs that our Christianity is too comfortable:

1. You are not attending church with a **high level of expectancy.**
2. You no longer seem to be concerned about **the spiritual condition of neighbors, family members, or your co-workers.**

3. You haven't had a **spiritual conversation** with a non-Christian in a long time.
4. **The Bible** seems like a history book. It's lifeless to you.
5. **Your happiness on a Sunday morning is more important** than what it takes to reach the unchurched. As long as you get your parking spot, your seat, and hear the music you like, everything's fine.
6. **The plight of the poor** doesn't concern you.
7. **Pictures of overseas suffering** do not move you to action.
8. You do not give your financial resources **sacrificially**.
9. **Your prayers** don't seem to be making past the ceiling.
10. It doesn't even dawn on you that **God could do something incredibly radical** in your life at any moment today. It's not even on your radar.

Many items on Dodd's list describe me at times. It captures a comfortable Western mindset that we can all so easily drift into. The "comfort idol" falls into the acceptable sin list because it's so prevalent and yet, a very effective tactic by the enemy that eliminates mission and gospel living. Here's what you need to know about your idol: That idol that you love, it doesn't love you back. False gods don't love you. Idols don't keep their promises. Anything you worship and build your life on other than God will suck the life out of you and destroy you.

Comfort confuses the Christian. Comfort immobilizes the Christian. Will anyone help? The idol of comfort keeps us from putting Jesus first and living out the will of God.

A relationship with Jesus starts when you identify and turn from your idols. Jesus was constantly identifying and challenging people's idols, calling them to turn from their false objects of worship to satisfaction in Him.

If God is speaking to you this morning, to move out of your comfort and complacency, I invite you to stand and pray a prayer as a response. Let Jesus help you defeat the idol of comfort by changing your heart which starts with repentance!

Prayer: I repent of my idolatry. God, I am sorry that I have chosen the comforts of life - over a life of obedience. I repent from loving and longing after lesser gods. Change my heart with the gospel so I can be more like Jesus. Show me the people in my life who need the gospel. Help me to take up my cross and be the disciple that you have called me to be! In Jesus name.

C.S. Lewis says, "If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end; if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin, and in the end, despair."