

Reference Point

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 April 2017

Preacher: Roger Cryan

[0:00] I presented you with some of what it looks like to travel down Addiction's Road. I presented some information trying to help us understand what it looks like at the beginning of this journey.

! Kind of what it looks like along the way, and then the last three lessons taking a look at some of the consequences. And we've played for you some testimonies of people who have been on Addiction's Road and how they described both their start on the journey, some of the middle road, and some of the consequences that they were struggling with at the end, and how it changed so drastically from the beginning to the end, and how eventually they found themselves enslaved to their idol, their substance, or their activity.

And so we can all identify with that, even as believers. We understand that even though we have new lives in Christ, we're not completely free from the presence of sin both outside of us and inside of us.

We still recognize that there are those desires within us that seek other things to replace God with other things. And we, at times, live with the consequences of that if we don't turn away from that God substitute to worshipping God himself.

And it is a sad reality. We're seeing that at times in our lives, certainly, but in the lives of other people, too. You probably could identify people that you know that are having this struggle.

[1:50] Scott Lading sent me an article from the newspaper after last Sunday's class that identified two young men, South Bend area, who had started on this journey and came to a sad end with both of them losing their lives.

So we know people that are on that journey who are struggling. And as I said earlier, we may be somewhere on that journey as well, not really taking advantage of the resources that we have in Jesus Christ to stop going down that road and actually going down the road that is glorifying to God and good for us.

But we're going to have opportunities to minister to people who are caught in this bondage and in slavery. And we need to consider, well, where do we start? How do we help?

And that's what the rest of our lessons are going to be about. As Jesus Christ moved in our direction to deliver us from our bondage, now we are his ambassadors in the world today.

And we have that privilege of representing him and clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and moving in the direction of other people as well to help them as someone came alongside and helped us.

[3:16] So we want to take a look at some of those steps that we can take to really be effective ambassadors for Jesus Christ, representing him in the world in which we live today.

So where do we begin? There's so many different areas to deal with, as we showed, I showed you in the last three weeks, as we took a look at how every aspect of a person's life is affected by this addiction that they're enslaved to.

So where do we begin? And as I thought about this, I kept going back to the importance of a point of reference. A point of reference being an indicator that orients us generally to whatever else is out there.

It equips us to know how we respond to the circumstances that are out there or the different ideas that are out there that come our way every day.

That point of reference is so important because it sets us on firm footing and gives us something by which we can evaluate the things that we see that are out there, things that we're coming in contact with, again, whether they be circumstances or ideas.

[4:35] So we need a point of reference that will keep us rightly oriented as we help others and move into the various areas of their lives that need transformation or redemption.

So what's the point of reference that will keep us on track as we reach out to help others? What's the most important thing that this person needs that will direct the rest of what needs to happen or change or be transformed?

What is it that will help the rest of what needs to be transformed?

That's the fixed point that we'll operate from as we begin dealing with these issues of life. It's the reference point that I think will really give us the direction we need to answer that question.

What needs to happen next? What does the person need to see or hear that will help them be transformed in this area of their life?

[6:06] So that's the reference point we're going to work from. A quote from Tim Lane, and we couldn't remember where this quote came from. I still can't remember.

But from Tim Lane, biblical author and counselor, he said, You don't behave your way into sin. You worship your way into sin.

You don't behave your way out of sin. You worship your way out of sin. We're not looking for, in this case, the topic he was dealing with was anger, sinful anger.

We're not looking for anger management. We're looking for worship realignment. So that's the reference point that he was operating from.

And so we're not looking for just better ways or methods to handle anger, better ways of communicating. I mean, these are all things that might need to be taught.

[7:03] But what is the reference point from which all these things flow out of that will give a firm foundation for why a person should build their life on this truth, this principle?

And so that's what we want to take a look at today, this reference point. Why is it that this should be our reference point in what we're going to do in helping other people?

And so I've just came up with a number of different reasons that I think will help us stay on track. Number one being God is worthy of worship. In Revelation 5, 11 and 12, the writer says, Then I looked and I heard the voice of many angels numbering thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand.

They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.

And so here we have this innumerable number of angelic beings before the throne of Jesus Christ. John seeing them and hearing them ascribe praise and glory and honor to the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

[8:27] So here are persons, the angels, in their pure form doing what Christ is worthy of, ascribing to him praise, honor, and glory, worshiping him.

So if the angels in their pure form are doing this, which we would have to say is the right thing to do, it would be an example for us to follow.

The only thing that hinders us from doing that is that I've been affected by sin. And in my condition, I have this tendency to look for substitutes to ascribe glory and honor and praise and worship to.

And so I can learn from this example of the angels in what they're doing, ascribing glory and worship to God, because God is worthy of that worship.

Psalm 29, 1 and 2, Ascribe to the Lord, almighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. I mean, that is due him for, again, who he is.

[9:41] Ascribe to him. In all that we do, whether it's in our words, we're looking for, well, what does that look like? Ascribing to the Lord the glory due his name.

Well, it's going to involve everything I do with my whole life. The things that I say, the way that I speak, the things that I do every day with the various members of my body.

In all those things, I'm ascribing to God the glory that's due his name, because he has made me who I am as a creature, a human being. And so I'm going to use everything that I have to ascribe to him the glory and worship that is due him for what he has done.

Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. And then Psalm 96. I never remember the speaker's name who was here a couple weeks ago that was going to, I can't even remember that.

Yeah, Barbados. Thank you. But he spoke from this passage. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of nations. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

[10:47] Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. Tremble before him all the earth.

So these calls to worship God are sent out to all people, unbeliever and believer alike. At the bottom line for every human being, what he needs to be doing, and what needs to be moving him through life as a human being, is this bottom line of worship for God.

And so the writer here in Psalm, and God himself through the Psalmist, is calling to the people to what they were made to do as human beings.

But because of sin, we have the tendency to turn away from. And so he's actually calling the people, certainly back to something that God is worthy of, but something that they were designed to do as human beings.

So he's calling them back to their true humanity, really, which is where they will find their richest and greatest fulfillment, and that is in worshiping God.

[11:57] Before any benefit that comes to us as individuals that might motivate us to worship God, is the reality that he is God and worthy of worship.

So even if there was no benefit to us in worshiping God, we should still worship God, because he is worthy of worship.

So that's the bottom line that drives us. Because again, there will be times in my life that I won't feel like worshiping God. Like, I won't feel like there's real benefit in worshiping God.

Well, that can't be my bottom line for worshiping God. My bottom line has to be, he's God, and he's worthy of worship.

And so that's what will help drive me during those times and move me to worship him when I'm tempted to substitute him with something else, or again, when I'm just not there in my feelings.

[13:01] So the first reason why this is our reference point is that God's worthy of worship. The second one, it was the focus of Jesus' ministry to a woman entangled in sin, in John 4, the woman at the well, who was at that point in her life where she was a disaster, life broken apart, and an outcast in her community and culture, and at the bottom of the barrel, really.

And Jesus came to her and ministered to her and brought to her a message that she needed to hear. And at the end of that passage in there, when they're talking about worship, a topic that she brought up, he said, yet a time is coming and has now come, and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they're the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. So there he was to deliver a woman out of her bondage, in this case in sin and idolatry, which led her down this path of real destruction, conducting relationships with men in a sinful way, and her focus, as Jesus is emphasizing here, was wrong worship.

Now, did she need to learn something about how to conduct relationships with men? Well, yes, she did. But before that, what needed to happen in her life was that she needed to come in a relationship with God and worship him.

And it's from that right relationship and understanding that she would learn and be motivated to conduct relationships with human beings in a way that would be honoring to God.

[14:56] And so Jesus is getting her on track, but at point of reference is helping her understand what true worship is. And so we need to not lose sight of that reference point when we're seeking to minister to people caught in addiction.

Number three, we're commanded by Jesus to make disciples who will be committed to obey him. Why this needs to be our reference point. This is what we're commissioned to do in Matthew 28, 19, and 20, where we're told to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

So it's out of this relationship as a disciple now that this person learns how to obey everything that God has commanded, Christ has commanded, for the rest of their life, the whole of their life, but it's all founded upon this initial relationship that they have with Jesus Christ.

And so that's what we're seeking to do as we move in the direction of people. We're not giving them something less of what they need by introducing them to Jesus Christ in all this.

We're giving them essentially what they desperately need in order to have the rest of their lives be brought into conformity to what the man, as a true human being, is to be living in the world today and back then.

[16:27] So another reason why this is our reference point, number four, it's what focuses on the real cause of the person's enslavement and addiction.

When we look at Romans 1, 18 through 32, and we can't read all of the verses here, but Paul says, after he's describing the way people suppress the truth of God in their lives, suppress meaning, they push it back, and as a result, their lives take on all of these behaviors that are really destructive that are not glorifying to God.

And this is what he says, what happened. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the creator. So the core problem that produced the behavior that's listed in that chapter, in chapter one, was a worship problem.

They exchanged worship of God, the glory of God, for something which he created, which was never meant to be that which would take the place of God.

And so Paul is helping these believers who are struggling with some of these issues, helping them understand and bringing them back to the point of reference.

[17:51] Listen, you need to remember what was going on in life here. And then later on in the book, he takes them down this path of, again, understanding what has happened, but he begins by helping them understand what's at the core of all of this destructive behavior that's going on in your lives is, again, that exchange that has taken place.

And, of course, later on, he tells them how they were rescued from that to something new, which we'll take a look at a little later on. A quote from Tim Lane, again, in a paper that he wrote titled Godly Addiction, The Church Can Minister to Addicts.

He has this quote, We don't behave ourselves into sin. We worship ourselves into sin. If I'm angry, then I've already been worshiping something that is not God for many moments, minutes, hours, days, and weeks.

Perhaps I've been worshiping my comfort, my right to feel good, and when you get in the way of my comfort, you're not witnessing an impulsive response of anger.

It's like, all of a sudden, it's there. It appeared out of nowhere. No, it's been there. Instead, you are impeding a heart that has, over time, given itself over to something other than God.

[19:21] God. So it's been there for a long period of time, and it's been cultivated by the individual, by us, whatever. It just took those certain set of circumstances for it to be revealed.

When someone was impeding what I was really thinking I had to have in order to be happy, and I struck out at them, in this case, but in sinful anger, then what was in my heart, what I was really worshipping, found its avenue of expression because of what was out there.

So, that's what we're looking at. When we're looking, having this as our point of reference, we're dealing with that which really gets to the issue of the heart that has to be dealt with in the person's life in order for them to be out here and enjoying, again, what God has for them to enjoy in this life.

Another quote from Tim Lane, we worship our way into sin and we must worship our way out of sin. So, our understanding of what brought on the conditions or the enslavement is what should be the focus of our help.

Again, I'm wanting to say again that we're not giving somebody something less when we're bringing Jesus Christ to them and the gospel and God's counsel.

[20:50] If we lose sight of the true cause, then we'll turn to resources that are insufficient to deal with and overcome the true cause of the enslavement.

We don't want to miss that. If we don't deal with the true cause, then the individual will be left with something far less than what can only be found in worship of God.

The individual will just be exchanging one idol for another. So, we can't be satisfied with the individual or ourselves becoming an idol worshiper of something that's socially or culturally acceptable.

Okay, so the individual is no longer an addict or whatever it is, but now he's a person who worships possessions and is a workaholic and so, but that would be certainly more acceptable than being a drug addict or an alcoholic, et cetera, et cetera.

Well, what have we accomplished? We're not about giving people socially or culturally acceptable idols to worship. We're wanting people to come into relationship with God and offer up unto him the worship that in glory that is due his name and that is good for them.

[22:12] So, we need to be careful that we're not settling for, again, these, what might be culturally or socially acceptable. We tend to think that the real bad sinners need Christ more than the self-righteous sinners and think, well, that person's really, an okay person, he's a nice guy, et cetera.

Well, yeah, he is a nice guy, maybe easier to be around, but still, he's an individual in total rebellion against God and in dire need of right relationship with God and in danger of being lost for all eternity and having to pay the wages of its own sin.

So, we've got to be sure we're not losing sight of each person's true condition apart from God and the exchanges they make for God, whether it's drugs or alcohol, material possessions, relationships.

We're seeing the various symptoms, what's going on in a person's life, the behavior that's coming from a heart condition, a worship condition that needs to change, and we don't want to miss that.

I mean, we would be very upset with a doctor. I would have been years ago if he knew I had cancer and was treating me for the flu and thinking, well, this is going to be a lot easier for him to hear than me telling him that he's got a tumor in his kidney.

[23:47] and he would not be doing me any favors, really, by doing that. And so we are going to recognize the true core problem that people are dealing with and move in their direction with that as our point of reference, and that's going to guide us in how we reach out to the person, how we speak to the person.

And all this is not meaning we're going to be harsh with a person and say, you're going to hell if you don't repent today, and if you repent today, you'll be all better. You know, there's, Proverbs lets us and helps us understand how we speak to people and how we provide answers in due time.

And Jesus himself gives us the example of how we approach different people in different times. But the reference point doesn't change. The reference point is there to guide us in how we approach people.

Number five, it provides us with the, well, provides the individual with the essential personal and powerful connection with God that he or she desperately needs in dealing with this addiction, whatever it is.

The individual isn't left with choosing a higher power to his liking that can't address issues of the heart that really affect his present and his eternal state.

[25:21] There's a lot at stake here in the person's life. The repentant individual enters into a personal relationship with a powerful, living God.

Romans 8, 15, Paul says to these believers, again, helping them understand that they don't have to be what they were in the past. He says, you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you receive the spirit of sonship, and by him we cry, Abba, Father.

So it's brought them into not an impersonal relationship with something that they have deemed for the time as the power that they're going to seek to call upon for help, but the living God who is all-powerful and one yet is transcendent but also close so that they can call that one father in that kind of personal relationship.

Luke 15, 11 through 32, just a portion of the passage there about the prodigal son and the son returning back to his father while he was still a long way off.

His father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son through his arms around him and kissed him. So while the son's sin was great and he reiterated himself how undeserving he was and how great his sin was, no matter how great that was, the love that the father had for him was extravagant.

[27:00] It was beyond anything. that the son had done. And so that's what we're looking at here. That personal relationship where the sin was not so great that couldn't be covered by the love of the father toward that individual.

So why start any other place? Why not start, as that is our reference point, with a personal, loving God who is wanting the welfare and the flourishing of that individual that's coming back to him.

So it's in the relationship with God that the individual receives this right to be called son in this personal relationship, but not just that, the necessary power to live a new life.

Ephesians 3 says, For this reason I kneel before the father, I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being.

So again, that's what we've been talking about is where the problem originates is where God goes to work on the problem. And he provides the resource, in this case, of this Holy Spirit to dwell within the person that will strengthen them with the power that God has through that indwelling spirit that they need in their inner being that would affect who they are outwardly.

[28:36] And so Paul is helping these people understand really the core problem that you are dealing with and that you still struggle with at times even as a believer. The resource that you need is what God has provided in his Holy Spirit.

And he is the one who will strengthen you in your inner being. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

So in those times when we think, it's just no use, there's no help, I can't, you know, I've struggled with this for so long, what's the reason? I may as well just go ahead and keep on going.

Well, no, then again, we've lost, we've moved from the point of reference and who God is in Jesus Christ and his spirit and have put the point of reference and our strength and our own ability to accomplish this transformation in our lives.

And so the Apostle Paul is helping these believers understand and refocus here, go back to the point of reference from which you, from and out of that person in this case, that they are connected and united to, this is how you live.

[29:56] This is where your resources, your strength comes from and he is the one who is able to do immeasurably more than what even you think you want to try and accomplish in your transformation.

Number six, it gives the individual a new identity and standing with God. We took a look at this last week and you shared with me as a class some different ways, phrases and words that God uses in his word to help us understand who we really are as one who is in Christ Jesus.

So just briefly again this morning, Romans 6, 11 through 12, the Apostle Paul, again, going to these believers before he moves on to those chapters where he's talking to them about what they need to be doing practically in living out this new relationship that they have.

He's solidifying, bringing them back to the point of reference that gives them that reassurance and understanding that they are able to live new lives.

And he says, in the same way, count yourselves dead, or the word can be translated consider to, well, that, consider, consider or reckon yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

[31:24] That's their new standing with God. They are alive to God, and their position is that they are in Christ Jesus. And on the basis of that, that being the reference point, he says, therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

So this gives them that understanding, that foundation that they need to build on for what they do and how they respond to the things that are out there that are calling them to yield themselves to whatever it is out there, and trying to convince them that they can't say no.

God is Paul, God through Paul, is helping them understand no, you can through God and this union that you have with Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 1 through 3, Paul does the same thing with the believers there in those first three chapters, emphasizing to them, again, their unity that they have in Jesus Christ.

Over and over again, he uses those two words, in Christ, in Christ. So out of this union, in Christ, is the position that they have as believers, and it's out of this union with Christ, the individual can be, what it says in Ephesians 5, 1, therefore be imitators of God.

[32 : 51] So he's giving them the firm foundation, again, the reference point that they can go back to, so that they can understand why and how they can actually now be an imitator of Jesus Christ, even in the midst of the great struggles that they were having to face as believers at that time.

It's all made possible because of the union that they have with Jesus Christ. And we should be saying glory to that. That is a wonderful thing and something we probably need to start our day with every day in drawing ourselves back.

I am in union with Jesus Christ, therefore I have what I need to live for his glory today in whatever I'm facing.

And then plead, God help me to do that and live out who I am in Jesus Christ. So when you're meeting with a group of others who are also learning to live new lives in Christ, i.e.

the church body, when we come together we don't introduce ourselves as well I'm an alcoholic or I'm a drug addict, I'm a workaholic, I'm a shopaholic, I'm a foodaholic, whateveraholic that you're wrestling with and struggling with, we don't introduce ourselves as this is who I am, this is who I am and this is what I'll always be.

[34 : 21] No, we introduce ourselves as I'm a child of the living God who is fighting against the temptation of whatever it is. This is my reference point, I'm dealing with the reality that I'm still one who is wrestling but I'm not concluding that that's who I always will be.

I'm a new creature in Christ, I'm wrestling with the enemies that I have to live that out in the resources and with the resources that God has given me.

That's how we all are as we're here. We look pretty nice sitting there and look like we have it all together, all of us, but we all know we don't have it all together.

We know that even as we leave here and go home, and even today, there will be issues that we're wrestling with, that we've wrestled with a long time, and that we need this reference point to go back to and quite possibly need the reminder and to go back to it so that we are facing these issues with a different mindset, and again, a different point of reference that will give us a different perspective of how we're facing these issues that we've been wrestling with for a long time.

And we have that in our new identity in standing with God. who we are has a direct bearing on how we face temptation and the very real transformational living that we can experience.

[36 : 02] Number seven, this point of reference provides the whole counsel the individual needs for restructuring all areas of life. From God comes loving, wise counsel for what the true image of God in man looks like.

It's seen in the person of Jesus Christ and God's word. The person's whole life, our whole lives, need transformation. And God provides all that we need for total transformation in every area of our lives.

And Psalm 19, 711, gives us that reassurance in identifying for us the character of God's word, love of the Lord, the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul, and in keeping them there is great reward.

So as we move in the direction of people with the resource of God's word, we're not coming with an ineffective tool or implement to use to bring to them and offer them help.

It is that which will revive their soul. love of the Lord. And as they learn that and begin living that for God's glory as a true worship of God, they will begin learning that in keeping them there is great reward, reward that is far greater than a substitute idol will ever be able to bring in this life and certainly in the life to come.

[37 : 36] Well, I have to keep going here. I won't finish what's rest is there. number eight. This reference point connects the individual to loving, caring, encouraging, empathizing group of fellow travelers who are also being transformed into true worshipers of God.

And again, that's this body of Christ. In that article I was reading by Tim Lane about how the church can be helped addicts and he was saying in the article for too long the church has kind of removed itself from those who are struggling.

In reality, we're all strugglers and those outside have been uncomfortable in coming because many times they come in the sense that these people have it all together.

There's no way they understand what I'm dealing with or struggling with where in reality we do. But we have to just start thinking a little bit more of how do we move in the direction of one another and others so that they understand that we're coming as fellow travelers who have learned and who've come into right relationship with God and have the counsel that they need for life now that we want to give to them as well.

Romans 12, 5, So in Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others. And then in Ephesians 4 talking about the body of Christ and how we're joined together and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

[39 : 16] So what I do in your life will have a real bearing on how you are successfully dealing with the issues of life that you're dealing with.

And so we have to again think about well how do I come together with others in the body so that we are really serving and ministering to each other on that level.

That's what we need to consider. Oh let's see. And then the Hebrews 3, 12 through 14 passages that says see to it brothers that none of you has a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God but encourage one another daily.

So again we're looking for what is the truth that I can bring into the life of this person that they need to hear at this point that fits this point of reference here that they need to hear that will really help them.

And I'm not just trying to help this person feel good about themselves. I'm really trying to help this person understand what they desperately need and pray that God would move them in that direction of accepting it.

[40 : 33] I came across something that was a little troubling as I read it. I'm not one to go on Facebook but a close friend a relative of mine had posted something on her site and even used the terminology you know I feel addicted so that caught my attention and so I started looking at the different things that people were posting back to her and some of the posts were and I expect because my niece is a Christian young lady and I expect most of these were coming from her Christian friends just be happy the way you are you're beautiful the way you are don't worry about it be content the way you are love who you are success is confidence and health and self love how could I not say something when I'm hearing this so my first post ever

I went back and Carol said well do you want to do it privately I said no put it out there and the other people are putting their comments out and I have to listen to theirs so they can listen to mine and so I shared some of the things that I have been teaching of course we're going to be going back to visit so I have a connection that we can make again to elaborate a little bit more so I couldn't get a 45 minute lesson on the topic but I was disturbed by the things that Christians were bringing to her that didn't fit and go back to the point of reference and that was really giving her the help that she was crying out for that would really help her so the importance of point of reference and then lastly this point of reference it's what brings real persevering hope in this life and for eternal life and I've got some other scripture passages there and comments but our time is up but I hope just through some of these points that we're really encouraged that that we have a resource a point of reference that is sufficient from to work from as we minister to each other and other people and that is in the person of

Jesus Christ in the gospel that we can bring to other people well let's close in prayer father you've done a tremendous work in the hearts of many people and we're still need of that work that you can do in us but we thank you for what you've begun and what you continue to do help us to be faithful ambassadors as we work with others and move in the direction of helping others who are still at where we were at some time in our lives and help us with that same love and compassion of Christ to move in their direction and share with them what their heart desperately needs and we pray that you would be the one to draw them to Jesus Christ to know life and what true life is as a human being here and throughout all eternity we thank you for this in Jesus name amen