



# New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

## GOODBYE, SNORKEL

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I'm so glad we're having a family service this morning! I always like it when nobody gets up to leave as soon as I come up to talk. So thanks for staying, kids.

How is school going so far? Did you like your first week? It's hard to believe that summer is already over, but you can tell, because the days are getting shorter. We put our pool away for the year, and maybe that's what got my mind thinking about snorkels. Addison got a new snorkel and goggles this summer and he used it a lot in that pool.

Have you ever worn a snorkel before? Who can tell me what you use it for? Of course! It lets you breathe while you see things under water. Has anybody here ever gone snorkeling in the ocean?

Snorkels are great, but they do have one problem. Does anybody know what it is? You can't go in very deep water with a snorkel, can you? You might be able to hold your breath and go underwater for a little while, but the snorkel only works if you're up near the surface.

What if I want to explore the bottom of the ocean? Can I use a snorkel for that? What do I need? If I'm really serious about it, I need to learn how to SCUBA dive, don't I? That gives me air I can take with me to the bottom in tanks so I can breathe underwater. If I learn how to do that, I can see so much more than I can from just being up snorkeling around. Think of how awesome it would be to get right up close to those fish, or a big coral reef or maybe to find some sunken treasure! The view would be so much clearer than from way up at the top with my snorkel and goggles.

So what does that have to do with church? I got to thinking that as a Christian, a lot of the time, I can be content to just be a snorkeler. We can all stay pretty shallow. What I believe about God might not sink very deep into my life. I go to church a few times a month, maybe say my bedtime prayers if I remember. And that might be enough to let me see a few cool things about God.

But there's so much more to see and discover. Don't you want to be a SCUBA diver for Jesus? Wouldn't it be great to take being a Christian to a deeper level, to understand God more and have it change your life? That's what we're going to be looking at over the next few weeks.

This topic has been on my mind ever since the beginning of the year and I've been looking forward to talking more about it. Because I believe that it's important for all of us to be able to get beyond snorkeling as Christians, to really dive in. This morning we'll talk more about what that means, and then we'll spend the next five Sundays exploring some ways to help us get there.

Because sometimes it's hard to know what you're supposed to do, even if you want to. Maybe we've made a decision to believe in Jesus for ourselves. Maybe we've made a few life changes. Then what? What comes next?

I've never gone SCUBA diving. But if I decided to try it, I don't think I could just do it on my own very well. I could use some instruction. It's the same way with diving deeper as a Christian. It helps to have some instruction and some concrete next steps to take.

So we'll be looking at specific habits (or "disciplines" as they're sometimes called) we can adopt that have been known throughout history as effective tools for becoming deep sea divers for Jesus. There's nothing magic about them – they're just practical steps that Christians discovered long before us.

Because as long as there have been Christians, Christians have wanted to get closer to Jesus. Paul sure did. Listen to what he wrote:

### **Philippians 3:8-14**

*...I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ -- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Paul was committed. He wanted his whole life to be about Jesus, and these verses help us understand what that's all about.

I've been in church since I was little, so all my life I have heard preachers talk about how important it is to grow in your faith and become spiritually mature, which is what diving deeper is all about. But what does that really mean? We can't really get to someplace if we don't know where that place is. When we talk about going from snorkeling to SCUBA diving in our faith, what are we saying?

That's an important question, because there is a lot of wrong thinking out there about what it means to be a mature Christian.

As we talk about it here, I'm operating on three assumptions that I hope you'll remember and quote to yourself all through this series. First,

**Maturity is meant for me.**

I once remember hearing a pastor preach about Suzanna Wesley. Suzanna was the mother of John and Charles Wesley, who became famous Christian leaders in the 1800s. But she had seventeen other children too. She was held up as this model of the ideal Christian woman. Supposedly, she spent an hour a day in prayer, and she spent an hour each week with each of her 19 children, giving them spiritual guidance.

I listen to stories like that and I go, "That woman was insane. If that's what it looks like to be a mature Christian, I'll never get there. And I'm not sure I would want to." We sometimes view maturity as being some secret level of Christianity for really holy people who aren't like us. It makes us nervous because we don't want to be seen as "too religious", so we back off and don't pursue what could help us grow. We leave it to the fanatics who are a lot more serious about what they believe than we are.

But real maturity is different. Maturity is a natural state for us all to reach. Think about a baby. If a baby didn't grow into an adult, we would think there was something wrong, wouldn't we? It's part of the natural process. You don't have to force it to happen – it is what we were designed to do.

The same thing is true spiritually. All Christians are intended to mature. Remember what Paul said in what we just read?

*I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

God's purpose and plan for us is that we would all grow in our faith, that we would all move from the shallow waters to the deep blue sea. It's not something that's just for a few – it's meant for me.

Secondly,

**Maturity is inside – not outside.**

This is a picture of my kindergarten glass. Can you pick me out in it? In kindergarten I got a new pair of shoes, and I was convinced they made me run faster. I would race around the playground with Kevin Whyte, thinking I was pretty cool. I was unstoppable. I was giddy with power in those sneakers. As I got a little older, I of course learned that there was nothing special about the shoes. I was just naturally the fastest kid in the world.

We sometimes see becoming a mature Christian as getting the right shoes – that it is like something we put on. If we could just take one more class – then we’ll have grown enough. If we just read that one more book, we’ll know enough.

But maturity isn’t about wrapping ourselves in the right information. If we think about a baby again, what does maturity mean? I remember staring at my kids when they were brand new babies, trying to see in their faces what they would look like when they got older. Now that they’re bigger, I can see how those little bundled up people grew into themselves. They’ve had the DNA from the beginning, and it’s just a matter of unfolding into who they are.

Christian maturity is about becoming what our spiritual DNA already has inside us. Paul used a word for mature that’s translated “perfect”. What it really means is “complete.” I find that idea much more inspiring than applying some layer of information to my brain. What God wants is for us to become who he created us to be and who he called us to be in Christ. That’s maturity.

This sermon series will have very practical applications of things to do that can help us in our growth as Christians. But it’s important to make the distinction that these outer activities in and of themselves are not maturity. Doing all the right things won’t matter at all if we’re not changing and growing inside.

A final assumption to remember as we get started is this:

**Maturity doesn’t earn me points with God.**

God already loves me as much as possible. He will not love me more because I’m trying to grow. He won’t love me less when I fail. This is not an extra credit assignment that will make me his favorite.

Secretly, we’d like to think that was true. We do something good that we’re really proud of, and we say to ourselves, “God’s going to be happy with me now.”

Look again at what Paul said:

*that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ -- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

This is not about our own righteousness – our own way of making things right between us and God. Paul says it is Jesus who took care of that and we put our faith in that being enough for God.

We know that when we first become a Christian, Jesus takes care of the sin problem. But then as we go along and start to grow, we start to think we take the responsibility back on our own shoulders. We think that Jesus got the ball rolling and we push it the rest of the

way to heaven. I listened to a friend teaching a Sunday School class one time who said he liked to think of becoming righteous as a partnership between us and Jesus. I've got news for you friends: It's not a partnership. It's all Jesus.

I will say it a million times: God sees us through Christ, and he is completely pleased with what Jesus did on the cross. It was more than enough for our entire lives. We lean on him, we throw ourselves on him and he carries us all the way. We don't earn God's approval on our own, no matter how mature we may become.

So if that's not the goal, if we can't score points with God for growing up, what is our goal? Why do we want to be mature?

For Paul, it all boiled down to five words: I want to know Christ. That was his motivation – to become more and more familiar with who Jesus is.

They used to have a game show on TV called "The Newlywed Game". The adults here today probably remember it. Couples would come on the show, and they would ask the husband or wife questions about their spouse to see if they could predict how the other person would answer. They would ask things like, "What's your husband's favorite breakfast cereal?" or "If your wife could travel anywhere, where would it be?" Sometimes their answers would be way off. You could quickly tell who knew each other well and who didn't.

Knowing somebody well means knowing how they think, what they like, what makes them tick and what they would do in a given situation. The same is true with knowing Jesus. The better we understand him and the closer our relationship to him, the more we will know how to act as his representatives in the world, because there won't be a question in our minds about what his response would be.

Knowing Jesus well also means having a friendship with him. It means having a close and personal level of communication with him. What a fantastic thought – that you and I can actually have not just a faith in Christ, but a personal relationship with him. We don't just believe in what he did on the cross as fact – we enter into a one-on-one knowledge of him personally. And just like any relationship, that knowledge can grow, which means the friendship can deepen.

I find that the most compelling reason to want to dive deeper into my faith – to have close communication with the Lord of the universe. The fact that we're even invited to do that is mind-boggling.

Knowing Jesus is the goal. It's the sunken treasure we're wanting to dive down and get closer to. And Paul gives us three initial insights here that we can expect as we get ready to explore the deep. First,

### **Knowing Jesus involves loss.**

That's a shocking statement, isn't it? But look again at Paul's words:

*...I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.*

For Paul, that loss meant all the previous hard work he had built his life on. He found out that none of it mattered in making him right with God. When he encountered Christ, he was forced to choose which he would go with.

It's not easy to walk away from something that has been really important in your life. But that's what's involved with being a Christian. Following Jesus means saying goodbye to other things.

Sometimes it means saying goodbye to friendships. In the summer after my freshman year of high school, I took driver's ed. There was this girl in the class who had a bit of a crush on me. Now believe it or not, there were not a lot of ladies who were taking much notice of me in 1982. So I was pretty flattered that somebody was actually flirting with me and trying to get my attention.

We got to know each other better, and I thought she was pretty cute, but there was a problem. I knew she wasn't a Christian. We had different values. Our lives weren't really going in the same direction. And I knew that a relationship with her couldn't go anywhere good for me. At the same time, I really liked being liked, so the thought of shutting her down was really difficult. But in my heart I knew what I had to do, so I told her why I couldn't ask her out. It didn't go real well and I felt pretty crummy about it for a while, but I knew without a doubt it was the right thing.

That was a tiny form of loss, but it represents the kinds of decisions we have to make all the time. Are there people in your life who are making it difficult for you to follow Jesus? Are there friends who aren't interested in knowing Jesus who pull you in the wrong direction? What are you going to do about it? Are there things that you spend time doing that make it difficult for you to follow Christ? What are you going to do about it? Whatever in your life gets in the way of knowing Jesus better is what you'll have to risk losing.

In the words of Stephen Sondheim, we choose things and then we lose things. To truly choose Jesus means accepting loss in some areas. And the loss is real. We will feel it and it will hurt. The good news is that Paul says knowing Jesus is so awesome that we will find the sacrifice worth it. Our whole perspective on the loss will change, and pretty soon what was so important to us won't matter as much. But we have to have the courage to let go of it in the first place. We can only know how we'll cope on the other side of having said goodbye – not before.

The second thing Paul points out is that if we're serious about this,

**Knowing Jesus requires focus.**

Let's take another look at Paul's words:

*...I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize...*

Twice Paul uses the phrase “I press on.” It’s an interesting choice of words. Because he used the same word just a few verses earlier in a totally different context.

Do you remember what Paul was like before he was a Christian? He was a mean one. He was like a bulldog going after Christians and taking them to jail. He just wouldn’t quit. He thought he was doing a favor for God, and he went after it with his whole heart. Guess what? The word he used for chasing down Christians was that same word for pressing on.

Have you ever on TV where they talk about the police being in “hot pursuit” of a criminal? That means they are running after them as hard as they can to catch them before they get away.

So the same intensity determination Paul showed in chasing Christians he now says he is applying toward knowing Jesus. He is pouring all his energy and passion and determination into this effort, throwing himself into the pursuit. He wasn’t going to give up easily.

He then talks about straining toward what is ahead to win the prize. Have you ever watched runners leaning forward, trying to cross the finish line first? The Christian life isn’t a competition, but Paul says it deserves that kind of effort and discipline.

In other words, although maturity is something we’re all capable of, it isn’t something we can take for granted. And it doesn’t come easily. It takes concentrated work. I’ve known people who were Christians for years and years who didn’t really grow at all over that time. They never invested themselves in it the way you would if you were going to run a race. Here’s what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

### **1 Corinthians 9:24-27**

*You've all been to the stadium and seen the athletes race. Everyone runs; one wins. Run to win. All good athletes train hard. They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally.*

*I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself.*

Wayne Cordeiro is a pastor in Hawaii. When he was in high school, he wanted to learn to play the guitar. But he wasn’t really working at it – he just liked the idea of it. So he would teach himself about a chord a week, but he really wasn’t improving.

There was a band at school that was playing for a dance, and their guitar player had to drop out, so they asked Wayne if he wanted to play. It was his lifelong dream to play in a band. All of a sudden, he was motivated. He would practice with the band 3 times a week and go over the songs every day until he had them memorized. In the space of just a few months, he became a very good guitar player. The difference was being focused. We can know Jesus better. But it will take a focused pursuit. We've got to lean forward into that finish line. Knowing Jesus does not happen on accident.

It's easy to get distracted or discouraged. A bad church experience can make us want to sit out the race. A busy life can weigh us down. Other interests can become detours that lead us off track. Paul says we have to push through all that and press on toward the goal.

A final point that Paul makes is this:

**Knowing Jesus takes a lifetime.**

Look with me one last time at Paul's words:

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.*

Here's Paul – the most influential Christian ever. He's written books of the Bible for crying out loud. But he says twice in these verses, "I'm not there yet."

If Paul hadn't already arrived, I can't expect to reach maturity myself anytime soon. That means adopting a learning attitude for the long haul.

There was a philosopher named Diogenes who lived about 400 years before Jesus. He had worked hard his whole life, and when he was an old man, somebody said to him, "Diogenes, you're getting up there. Give yourself a break. At your age, you deserve a rest from all your hard work." Diogenes replied, "If I've been a running a race this long, why would I slow down? I should run harder since I'm near the finish line."

I hope I can have that attitude as I grow older. I want to keep learning, to have a curiosity about Jesus until I die. Because without that curiosity, we stop growing. If we think we know everything we can, we won't be teachable anymore. Which is too bad, because there's always more to learn about Jesus.

Have you ever played a video game where you finished it because you got to the highest level you could go and there was nothing more to learn at it? Christianity isn't like that. Knowing Jesus isn't something that we can ever finish. There is always more to him.

We've been listening to the Chronicles of Narnia on CD as a family, and we're on the story of Prince Caspian. In that book, Lucy, the little girl who first discovered the magical country of Narnia in the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, gets back into Narnia a year later with her sister and brothers. And there's a scene where she meets Aslan again, the great lion who is the king of Narnia.

The great beast rolled over on his side so that Lucy fell, half sitting and half lying between his front paws. He bent forward and just touched her nose with his tongue. His warm breath came all round her. She gazed up into the large wise face.

"Welcome, child," he said.

"Aslan," said Lucy, "you're bigger."

"That is because you are older, little one," answered he.

"Not because you are?"

"I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

That's the good news of this entire message. The more we devote ourselves to knowing Jesus, the bigger we will find him. We won't ever run out of things to learn about him. And the more we know, the more we'll love him and want to get to know him even more.

That's our goal for the next few weeks – to give ourselves the equipment to dive deeper. For today, I leave you with these two questions:

1. Do I want to be a diver? Where am I at with my faith? Am I happy splashing around in the shallow water or am I ready discover the deeper things of God? If I'm going to mature as a Christian, I need to decide.
2. What have I got to lose? There's any number of things that could stand between you and knowing Jesus better, and if you're honest with yourself, you probably already know what they are. Are you willing to cut your losses and say? Forget it – no more snorkeling. I want to grow in my faith. Knowing Jesus means counting our losses.

The reward far outweighs the loss. Are we ready to say with Paul, "I want to know Christ?" Let's go for a dive!