



Theme: Becoming Better and Not Bitter
“Through Prayer and Worship”

Sermon by Jeff Huber, July 19-20, 2025, at Summit Church, Durango

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹ Come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. – Psalm 95:1

VIDEO Sermon Starter

SLIDE Through Prayer and Worship

Today we begin a new series of sermons on something that we say here often but deserves a bit more attention and really an entire series of sermons because it's such an important idea. If there's one thing I've learned in life, it's that we can't always control what happens to us, but we do have control over how we respond. One of the major themes of following Jesus is how do we become better in life and not bitter by what happens to us.

My mom and my aunt and my nephew are here this weekend and for a few days visiting us and so it got me thinking about family. One of the things I enjoy doing is playing golf. My mother and I still play together and two of my cousins, my aunts sons, will be here in August and we will play some golf together. All three of us played with their dad, my uncle Jim, and it was our grandfather who taught us all to play

even though he had a horrible golf swing and we picked up bad habits from him.

GRAPHIC Jeff with Grandpa 1966

GRAPHIC Jeff Andy and Jim Golf Photo

One of my most vivid memories is playing golf with grandpa and being very frustrated because I was not very good. I got really mad at one point and threw my golf club and it landed up in the tree. My grandfather looked at me and said something like, “Do you feel better? Because that's not going to help you get better at golf.” I remember one time he walked off the golf course because me and my cousin Andy we're throwing such a hissy fit over bad golf shots. He didn't say a word, he just walked to the clubhouse because that was one thing he could control and he wasn't going to spend the next few hours with a couple of petulant boys who expected to be better at golf even though we didn't play or practice very much.

What I've discovered about my own life and in most of our lives is that we often expect to get better even though we sometimes don't put in the effort. We live in a world where we expect to be able to watch a YouTube video and be better at something and life just doesn't work that way. If we want to be better at life or our job or marriages or friendships or relationships or faith, it takes practice. Over the next 5 weeks we are going to look at 5 practices that can help us become better and not bitter when it comes to many things in life, but particularly being people of faith and following Jesus.

As we begin this series, I want to remind you of the truth that once again we have talked about often here in this church. We often like to say the words that we heard as children that, “practice makes perfect.” This is a lie. Practice will never make perfect because we are not perfect human beings and we will always have imperfections. Practice can, however, help us become better and not be bitter because practice makes progress.

SLIDE

Practice makes progress.

If we follow Jesus, we can see this in his story. Jesus could have become bitter as he was betrayed by his friends and eventually went to a cross. He could have given up on the whole human experiment given how he was treated as the innocent man who is put to death.

While none of us are in danger of being put to death, we all have things happen to us that are challenging and sometimes can make us bitter. One of the people I think about when it comes to this idea of becoming better and not bitter is Viktor Frankl. Victor was a survivor of the Nazi Holocaust who eventually became a psychologist and wrote a groundbreaking book, "Man's Search for Meaning."

GRAPHIC Viktor Frankl Quote

"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves... Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way".

Frankl helps us understand that the key to becoming better and not bitter is to recognize that the only person we have any power to change in any relationship, or any circumstance, is ourselves. Jesus understood this truth because when he ran into people like the man in John 5 At the pool of Bethesda where people came to be healed, we hear these words.

BIBLE

⁵ One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"

What's so fascinating is what happens next which is what we often find when people approach Jesus and he asks them questions

they may not want to answer, or Jesus gives them advice they don't want to follow.

BIBLE

⁷ “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.”

It's easy to be bitter when we feel overwhelmed by our health challenges or in life in any way. We can find ourselves becoming so bitter that we can't even get up and walk. Jesus simply responds to this man by telling him to get up and take his mat and walk. He doesn't say any magic words. He simply reminds him that he doesn't need to be paralyzed by the world and the people around him who keep walking ahead of him.

I found myself thinking about this when I was listening to a podcast this week talking about the severe issues of mental health among people under 30. You can see by this graphic that those under 30 are twice as likely to struggle with anxiety and feeling overwhelmed by the world. The article I was reading also looked at some recent research that found mental health challenges are expanding exponentially for those who are younger because of artificial intelligence and how we are being fed more regularly anxiety inducing headlines and information. We spend so much time on our phones and it can be overwhelming.

It was especially telling that most of the experts in the field of psychology said that the issue was linked to not only cell phone use but the lack of being centered in some that came around you and give you anchor. Feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed can happen to any of us when we don't know what to hold on to and it feels like the ground is constantly shifting under our feet. As people of faith, we recognize that this issue goes to the very core of our being and to our identity. I think of Saint Augustine who put it this way, “You have made

us for Yourself, oh Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find our rest in thee.”

GRAPHIC St Augustine – You Have Made Us for Yourself Oh Lord

The most critical element and practice I believe which can help us become better and not bitter, not being overwhelmed by the world and everything it throws at us, is the idea of worship. Worship helps us understand that it's not about us but it's about God. Worship helps us see ourselves in the right perspective and helps us find an anchor that we can hold on to in the midst of the storms of life. Worship is meant to be a practice that helps us be better and more focused on others instead of ourselves and our own problems.

SLIDE Worship puts God first

What I've learned is that we all struggle with this idea because we hesitate to be honest about the fact that we all worship something. The very first story in our Bible that we talked about in the past sermon series, of Adam and Eve in the garden, is about two people want to be God and worship something they can control. This is not just their story but it's our story if we're honest.

GRAPHIC Jeff and Grandpa 1987

This is an issue for pastors as much as anyone else. It's time for a bit of confession now. I showed That picture of me and my grandpa when I was about four years old earlier period now I want to show you a picture of me shortly after graduation from college with my grandfather. It was a time in my life that I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I had part of my degree in engineering because my grandpa was an engineer but I worked in that area doing some internships and I didn't like it. I confessed to my grandfather that I thought I might want to be a pastor and he looked at me with love and concern and said, “That is a challenging profession because they don't get paid very much.” He knew I kind of liked getting paid well when I worked for Bank of America and Pacific gas and electric.

But I looked at him at that moment and instead of receiving his advice and being thoughtful I simply blurted out to, “Well I'm gonna be a good one.” The idea I had in my head was that if you were good at what you did then you will get paid well. I hate to tell you that we are human and all of us feel that at times, that our worth is wrapped up not just in what we do but how we get paid. I want to be clear that it's good to be excellent and it's OK to be paid well. Problems start to happen however when those become our driving force and we think we are defined by our profession or our accomplishments or how much we get paid. We begin to worship those things and they can mess with our hearts which are meant to be directed towards God, the one who made us to love us.

I was visiting with the church member recently who hadn't been able to be in worship for a while. They were sharing with me why they couldn't be in church, and I tried to encourage them and tell them it was OK, and I understood. They emphatically told me that it was not OK because not being in church meant they were working too much, or they were away with their family doing things and they just got out of control in their life by making the wrong thing the main thing. They told me very clearly that I shouldn't excuse them because it wasn't good for them or their family to not be in worship because they began to worship the wrong things. I then asked them if I could use that in worship this weekend and they said for sure because they needed to make a change because their family was getting bitter about life instead of getting better.

What I have learned is that it's easy for any of us to get off track and to begin worshiping the wrong things. One of the places we turn to be clear about the focus of worship is the psalms which was the worship book of the Hebrew people and the worship book of Jesus. We find these powerful words in Psalm 95.

BIBLE

- ¹ Come, let us sing to the Lord!
Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.**
- ² Let us come to him with thanksgiving.
Let us sing psalms of praise to him.**
- ³ For the Lord is a great God,
a great King above all gods.**
- ⁴ He holds in his hands the depths of the earth
and the mightiest mountains.**
- ⁵ The sea belongs to him, for he made it.
His hands formed the dry land, too.**

BIBLE

- ⁶ Come, let us worship and bow down.
Let us kneel before the Lord our maker,**
- ⁷ for he is our God.**

BIBLE

**We are the people he watches over,
the flock under his care.**

If only you would listen to his voice today!

What voices are we listening to today? What voices try to tell us they are God? There is a part of us that understands how this works because we go on vacations to places that display the beauty and the majesty of God. I see lots of people posting about great hikes and trips they are going on which are in the beauty of creation. There is a part of us that understands we need to get away from the distractions and the noise. We need something bigger than ourselves.

This last week I was in Grand Junction to do a wedding for a couple from our church that moved there recently. We had worked together doing the pre marriage preparation and they really wanted me

to do the wedding and it worked out where I could to do that and then pick up my mother and aunt at the train station in red junction and bring them home on Saturday. I had some free time on Friday morning and so I decided to play some golf since I was talking about that in my sermon this weekend. They typically keep score using an app On my watch which keeps track of my score and helps me to get better when I'm playing.

But I forgot my watch on this trip and I decided that I would just play and have fun and enjoy the beauty of the creation around me. I played at this beautiful course at the base of the Colorado National Monument and I was playing by myself so I didn't need to impress anyone. Instead, I prayed as I was playing about the beauty that was around me and decided that it was better not to try to impress God or anyone with my golf game. I snapped a few pictures and I thought you might enjoy seeing these beautiful place in which I got to play.

GRAPHIC Jeff at Tiara Rado

GRAPHIC Tiara Rado Golf Course

And do you know what happened? I played the best I have ever played, I think! Since I wasn't keeping score I'm not really sure but I had a great time and I came this close to getting a hole in one. Of course, there is no one to see me and I could have photoshopped this or just placed the ball on the ground right next to the cup, but I promise you that this is where the ball ended up on the best hole I played on that day.

GRAPHIC Jeff's Almost Hole in One

Here's what I know is true. When it comes time for me to be with God face to face, God will not be asking about my golf score or about any hole in one that was almost. God will not be asking about my best sermon or my best job or how great of a father or husband that I was. God will simply want to know one thing. Did God have my heart? Or did God almost have my heart? Worship is about giving God all of who we

are and realizing that even when we come up short like that golf ball, God grabs us and brings us into the hold if we are willing to let go and to give God all of who we are.

The challenge is that we often think that it is all about our human effort which gives us meaning and purpose. While we do need to do our part, we also need to let God do God's part and that is what worship is all about. Worship is about giving our heart to God. Even for me today, preaching this sermon, I sometimes get caught up in looking over my sermon notes just before the 5:30 service starts because I want things to be just perfect. I sometimes forget that one of the main places that I get to worship is when our team is singing at the beginning and there is liturgy happening and we are meant to be turning our hearts to God. Yes, I want to get the hole in one and I want everything to be perfect, but it's not up to me. It's up to God and I need to let go of my own human effort to give God my entire heart.

SLIDE Prayer is Personal Worship

It's important for us to gather together in worship and it's important to remember that prayer is a personal form of worship. Prayer is our way of putting God first and connecting with God on a personal level. It's also a way of becoming better and not bitter because, as CS Lewis put it, we don't pray to change God but we pray to change ourselves.

SLIDE “I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God, it changes me.” –C.S. Lewis

Prayer shifts how we understand ourselves and God and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We don't pray to change everything around us. We pray to change our hearts and to give us a new perspective. When I was doing youth ministry full time there was a pattern of prayer that we taught children which was called the five

finger prayer. There was one developed for students and adults and I always found it helpful and it's a way of coming to God in prayer that we can use several times a day. I find that if I do this pattern of prayer five times a day it changes me and it changes how I see the world. It helps me become better and not bitter by making this a daily practice.

SLIDE Five Finger Prayer

But they have given this to you on record this week that we have called the fivefold with the students I invited them to use their fingers.

SLIDE Praise and Adoration

The thumb was the first movement of prayer because it is an opposable digit which helps us hold on to God. The thumb is an amazing part of the human body. Without the thumb it would be difficult to hold on to anything. This is the first movement of prayer because praise and adoration are about putting God first and it sets the stage for every other prayer movement. It is simply an acknowledgement that God is God, and we are not.

BIBLE

¹ Come, let us sing to the Lord!

Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.

It is captured in the first verse of this Psalm that we read earlier which talks about coming to God and singing joyfully. It is about looking at the mountains all around us, like the Colorado National Monument while you're golfing, and just giving thanks for what we see all around us. We recognize that there is a rock on which we stand and which we can find our anchor and purpose and very being. We sing to the Lord because we were made by God to be loved by God and it changes us from being bitter and to being better.

SLIDE Thanksgiving and Gratitude (build on last one)

The second finger which is our pointer finger is meant to remind us to give thanks and have gratitude. We typically point at others

because we are judging them or blaming someone else, we're picking on them for some reason. There is an invitation in this part of the prayer to point at others and give thanks for them instead of judgement. This prayer reminds us not to see people as objects but as people, the way God sees them. Are we willing to give thanks and love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us as Jesus calls us to? Are we willing to have a bigger picture in mind when we look at others? Jesus invites us to love with our whole heart and not just part of it or the part that feels good. That's why the psalmist continues in Psalm 95 with these words.

BIBLE

² Let us come to him with thanksgiving.

Let us sing psalms of praise to him.

I remind you of something that many researchers have found which is that giving thanks changes us and helps us become better and not be bitter. People who keep a thanksgiving journal are 10 times more likely to be happy than those who never give thanks on a daily basis. Being thankful daily changes us and this is an important part of prayer. I'm reminded of the young woman I walked with through cancer treatments who seemed to always be joyful when I came to visit her. I asked her how it was she was able to do that with her difficult diagnosis and she said it was because every day she began by writing down 5 things for which she was thankful. Then she would write five more things down each evening before she went to bed, and sometimes it was just being able to take a breath or the smile of a nurse that day. Her thankfulness changed her making that part of our prayers can change us.

SLIDE Confession (Build on Last One)

Then there is the middle finger which is about confession and the reminder that each of us needs forgiveness. Sometimes we say things we wish we didn't say, or we do things we wish we hadn't done, like

give the middle finger to someone. I know that some of us think that the middle finger is the sign of international peace and goodwill, but for most people it means there are issues going on. I will never forget teaching my students this prayer and the next week one of them came back and said, "I had several people this week tell me they were in need of forgiveness!" They also admitted that some of it might have been their fault because of some things they had done which may have caused people to give them the signed confession.

There is a reason that Jesus included this idea of forgiveness in the prayer that he taught us when he said that we should to pray for our sins to be forgiven, just as those who have sinned against us. Jesus taught often about our own need for forgiveness because he knew that all of us would need the gift that he gives us from the cross. He looks at us with love and compassion does he know our human causes us to not only fall short but to do things that cause pain and hurt for others. Prayer is about being honest and bringing to God those things for which we need forgiveness that we can't fix and that no one can fix for us. This is the ultimate gift of getting better instead of being bitter by letting our unforgiveness put us in prison.

SLIDE Petition for Others (Build on Last One)

The fourth part of our prayer is our ring finger. I was reminded of this on Friday when I officiated at the wedding in Grand Junction. When each person places a ring on someone's finger during a wedding, it is a reminder that we are going to put someone else first. The ring is meant to be a reminder that we are willing to love someone else well and sacrificially. We petition for others by lifting them up in prayer and naming them before God. This once again takes us out of ourselves and puts us in the place of being willing to sacrifice, just like Jesus sacrificed for us. We talk about the church as the bride of Christ and the image is meant to be that Christ was willing to sacrifice for us and so we should be willing to sacrifice and pray for each other.

SLIDE **Promise of Offering (Build on Last One)**

Finally, there is a pinky promise that we make in this prayer. We promised to offer ourselves to God and to use our gifts for God's purposes and not just our own. In our time of worship together, we have a time of offering and remembering that we want to give ourselves to God because all that we have, our time, our talents, and our resources, belong to God. God gives them to us to steward and to take care of, but we are invited to return and give those to God.

I think of our students who are going on the middle school mission trip this week and the high school students that returned from their mission trip last week. Each one of them had to earn hundreds of dollars to go and serve others and I remember one of them saying to me how strange it was to make money so that they could go serve someone else, but how good it was for them to remember that none of it belonged to them. This time of offering in our prayer reminds us that everything belongs to God. We just get to use this time and these resources, but they belong to God. They belong to the God before we were born, and they will belong to God long after we are gone.

GRAPHIC **Five-Fold Prayer Card**

My hope is that this week you might use this Five-Fold prayer card as a practice that will help you become better and not bitter. Maybe you put this physically on your phone so that you see this prayer and you offer these prayers before you look at your phone each morning or before you go to bed each night. You might think about having this with you at each meal so that you do this five times a day. What I know is that we only become better and keep from becoming bitter when we are willing to practice and make some progress towards putting God first. I have found for myself that it takes intentional effort. It doesn't just happen because left to our own devices we get caught up in streaming our favorite show or doing our favorite hobby or whatever it

might be that distracts us and keeps us from remembering what it is that brings us peace.

I remind you again of our scripture memory verse for this week as well as the verse that follows it which speaks about the voice that changes everything for us if we are willing to listen. Would you say these words with me if you're willing?

BIBLE

⁶ Come, let us worship and bow down.

Let us kneel before the Lord our maker,

**⁷ for he is our God. We are the people he watches over,
the flock under his care. If only you would listen to his voice
today!**

I pray that we might listen to God's voice today as we worship and bow down and kneel before the one who created everything. He is our God, and he watches over us. God made us to love us and we are under his care if we will listen to his voice. What voice are you listening to today? Is it a voice that helps you get better or one that makes you bitter? I invite you to bring that to God in prayer.

SLIDE Prayer

Prayer and Adoration...

Thanksgiving and Gratitude...




Confession...

Petition for Others...

Promise of Offering...

In Your holy name... Amen.

July 19-20 Order

1. Jenny welcomes people.
2. Song – Raise a Hallelujah
3. Song – Graves Into Gardens
4. Jeff...
 -  Welcomes people...
 -  Mention the QR Code
 -  Greet People and invite to be seated.
5. Sermon Intro Video
6. Sermon
7. Offering Slide (Texas Floods)
8. Meditation Moments
9. Song – Revelation Song
10. Prayer and Lord's Prayer
11. Care Ministers (If any are present)
12. Connect with us (Stephen Ministers)
13. Middle School Mission Photo (Present at 9 AM Sunday)
14. Closing Prayer