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Title: Quitting Quitting

Scripture: John 21

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Welcome. We made it to the end of 2023. My name is Bryce Vaught. It's so good to be with you. Not sure what you all had to go through to make it to this point of the year. But it's great to end the year just gathering together. So, let's pray before we begin. Father, we are grateful. We just come to this moment, and we confess God that we need you. As we begin to enter a new year, a new season of life, I pray that your spirit would speak to us this morning, that we would have ears to hear, and that we would continue to grow and flourish in your grace and your kindness as we seek you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, in the summer of 2022, in July, a young 20 something year old engineer went viral after posting a TikTok video. And it wasn't because he did something crazy or dramatic or outlandish, it was because what he said resonated with a multitude of people. There was just a video he recorded of himself waiting for some public transportation, and in the video, he said the following quote. He said, "I recently learned of this term called quiet quitting, where you're not outright quitting your job, but you're quitting the idea of going above and beyond where you're still performing your duties but no longer subscribing to the hustle culture mentality that work has to be your life."

Again, that video went viral to where countless people started posting their own videos on TikTok, describing their journey of quiet quitting in the workplace. Within a couple of weeks, a couple of national media outlets, at least two, started reporting on this trend in our culture with different opposing takes on people's views and understanding of this. One guy, Kevin O'Leary for CNBC, just went really extreme and said, if you're a quiet quitter, you're a loser. And then someone else, another national prominent leader, had a bit more of a tame response, but he was opposed to this idea of quiet quitting. And he just said, look, there are many companies whose job descriptions aren't adequately described, and these companies rely on employees who are willing to go above and beyond their job description to make work happen. And he said for people quiet quitting, I wish people would just quit. But instead, to quietly quit, you end up burdening those around you.

Now, my purpose this morning isn't to preach against or bash quiet quitting in the workplace. I really understand that there are times and seasons where maybe people are at a company that is demanding an unfair amount of labor. It's also easy to see that many of us can make our jobs and careers an idol and maybe it's wise that you pull back and focus on what you're responsible for and that you take care of yourself.

But as I began to understand, just think about this definition of quiet quitting referenced by this young individual, I began to understand that quiet quitting isn't necessarily just a workplace issue. It can be a life issue. That we're all prone to lose heart. We're all prone to get to this place where we don't outright quit, but we stop going above and beyond what we need to do. We do this in our society. We see issues and things that we want to fight for, against injustice, and we want to meet the needs of our community. I don't know about you, but it's easy to be overwhelmed with the needs of our world today to where it's easy just to do the bare minimum.

It happens in marriages. At times, all of us in a marriage will unconsciously pull back because of fatigue or just frustration. But then there are many who make a conscious decision that says you know what, I'm not doing this anymore. Divorce isn't an option. I don't want to get that complicated or go through all that trouble. But I'm done. We can even do this in our faith. I can't tell you how many times since being in ministry that I've met someone who after hearing that I'm in ministry, their response is, well, you know, I grew up in church, but, you know, I still believe in God. I'm just not involved anymore.

It's interesting when you read through the New Testament that there are certainly some strong warnings to believers about abandoning faith. But more than that, there are more warnings to followers of Christ to not lose heart. I think the real struggle for many professing Christians is not whether you're going to quit the faith, but maybe you quietly quit. You're still following. You're still there. But you're not going to go above and beyond.

The question is, if that season is a common struggle for all of us, how do we move past that? What are some of the essential elements for renewing our devotion and our enthusiasm for following Christ? It's that issue that I want us to address as we come to John chapter 21. And for the sake of time, instead of reading through the whole chapter, I just want to set the scene for you really quickly.

John 21 is the last chapter of the Gospel of John. By this point, we've seen and then followed the life of Jesus through his death and crucifixion. And recently he has appeared and is resurrected from the dead. And he appeared to his disciples. And he's begun to teach them, and he's not yet ascended to the father. He's still present with them, meeting with them, and teaching them.

But the disciples are kind of in this in-between season as they prepare for Jesus's ultimate departure from them. And when you come to John chapter 21, we see that Peter speaks to the rest of the disciples and says I'm going fishing. To which a few of the other disciples respond you know what, we're going to go with you.

Peter has had a bit of a rough patch in recent days. So, they go fishing. And the text in John 21 just simply says they went into the boat. Not a random boat. They're not renting a boat for a day. This isn't a joyride. This isn't a hobby. This is Peter's boat. The boat that Peter used to make a living before he left everything to follow Jesus.

Certainly, some debate among scholars as they consider what's taking place here. Some will read this passage and conclude that Peter is quitting. He's quitting completely. He's going back to what he did before he started following Jesus. And others will say well, he's not totally quitting. It's just this weird in-between time where he's waiting to get instructions on what to do next. He's got to make a living so he's going back to try to earn some money.

Either way, you kind of have to read into the text to decide what's happening, but maybe we can use our definition of quiet quitting to describe what Peter's doing here. I don't think he's quit outright. When Jesus does appear in just a moment, he confronts him and Peter responds Lord, I love you. You know that I love you. But maybe he's out of place because of recent days where he's afraid, unable to give above and beyond. So, they fish all night and catch nothing. The next morning, Jesus appears on the shore there about 100 yards offshore.

They don't recognize that it's Jesus. He just calls out to them, children, do you have any fish? No. Why don't you try casting your net on the other side of the boat? I can see Thomas at that moment just being like I doubt that's going to work. But they do it.

At that moment, the Bible says that the net becomes so full of fish that they're unable to even pull it into the boat. Recognizing what's taking place, the disciple, the Apostle John, turns to Peter and he says it's the Lord. Peter then puts on his clothes as he is stripped for work, and he jumps out of the boat to swim back to shore to see Jesus leaving the rest of the disciples to pull in the fish themselves and follow Him into shore in the boat.

When Peter and the disciples make it to shore, they find Jesus with the fire, inviting them to have breakfast. They caught 153 fish. They begin to cook the fish and share a meal. Jesus, after they finish eating, confronts Peter, asking him the questions that we just heard read. Peter, do you love me? Three times. If so, feed my sheep. What kind of lessons can we learn from this interaction in Peter's life? Maybe it can help us not lose heart as we journey in faith.

How can we come out of this season of quiet quitting? The first, I believe, is that we need to relearn humility. You may read through this passage and say well, look, I don't necessarily see this passage reference pride as an issue. And you may not see it in this passage, but if you do a character study over the life of Peter, you begin to see that this might be an issue for Peter.

Peter's journey of faith is really interesting. If you go back to the very first interaction that Jesus had with Peter, it's eerily similar to the interaction we read of in John 21. You go back to the first time that Jesus is interacting with Peter and Jesus is publicly teaching from the shore and the crowd is pressing back on him. And so, he steps into this boat to project his voice. And it's Peter's boat.

After Jesus finishes teaching, he turns to Peter and says, hey, let's go fishing. To which Peter's response is look, we've been fishing all night. We haven't caught anything, but we'll go. They go out and as they're fishing, they haul in this large quantity of fish. Peter's initial response at the catch, as he begins to fall on his knees, says depart from me for I'm a sinner. He recognizes Jesus's worth and his need for Jesus.

If you begin to follow Peter's life throughout the mission of Jesus, Peter grows. He listens to Jesus. He learns from Jesus. He followed follows Jesus's example. He becomes the first disciple to confess to Jesus as the Christ. He is one of the three who's taken up on the mountain of Transfiguration. He's penned as a leader for the disciples in Jesus' absence.

You come to the night before Jesus' crucifixion. Peter starts to really struggle when Jesus begins to wash the feet of the apostles of the disciples. Peter's response is hey, you're not washing my feet. Don't even think about it. To which Jesus says look, if I don't wash your feet, Peter, you have no part of me. At that moment, you can tell that Peter's struggling with spiritually understanding what's taking place there that night.

Later on, Jesus warns the disciples, saying look, I'm going to be betrayed. You guys are going to flee to which Peter speaks up and says I'm not going to betray you. Everyone else may fall away but Jesus, I've reached the point I'm not going to fail. Jesus says look, you're going to deny me three times. Peter doubles down and says even if I have to die, I will not

deny you. Then when Jesus is arrested, we see that Peter's been asleep in the garden. He can't stay awake for an hour. Soldiers show up. Peter tries to fight this band of soldiers, and even when he's apparently trying to do something right, he's wrong. He follows Jesus from a distance and denies Jesus three times. Luke tells us that the third time Peter denies Him, he turns, and sees Jesus looking at him, to which he runs away and weeps bitterly.

Proverbs 16 tells us that pride goes before a fall and it goes before destruction. I think we have this misconception of maturity where oftentimes we equate maturity with independence, that we feel compelled to show that we've arrived, that we can't depend on anyone else.

Certainly, we can see how that takes place in our Christian life. We want to so badly arrive at a place where we don't need to depend on anyone else. And yet it's in this moment that Jesus takes Peter back to their first interactions. As if to say, Peter, you had it right to begin with. That recognition and confession that you need me, is still true today, that apart from me, you can do nothing but say I believe. This moment was a turning point for Peter.

When you come to Peter's letter in First Peter chapter five, he encourages his audience, his church. He says, "In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

And if we're going to not lose heart in our Christian walk and our journey of faith, we have to relearn humility. A dependence upon the Lord and a dependence upon one another. As it is important to constantly relearn humility, we also must remain in community. If you go back to John 21, Peter's response is, look, I'm going fishing. I don't know about the rest of you, but this is what I'm doing. You go back to the trend of quiet quitting. One of the people who opposed the idea had this response, when you quiet quit, it's not just that you're quitting on a company, but you're quitting on other people, people who depend on you. And yet, the other disciples, upon hearing Peter announce that he's going fishing, they're like, we're not going to leave you by yourself. We're going with you. And the reality is we were created to exist in community. If we're going to flourish in our life, in our faith, we need one another.

Science even proves this. I was reading one study in the American Psychology Report that said a review of 38 studies found that adult friendships, especially high-quality ones that provide social support and companionship, significantly predict well-being and can protect against mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. It says they're also less likely to die from causes, including heart problems and other chronic diseases. People with no friends or poor-quality friends are twice as likely to die prematurely. A risk factor, get this, even greater than the effects of smoking 20 cigarettes per day. It's astonishing. And it just goes to show you can't argue against the science that scientifically it's healthier to eat Twinkies with friends than to eat broccoli alone. Do with that what you will.

But the reality is, when we get up and consistently encourage you to be a part of a group or to serve in community, it's not just to increase the numbers of those who are involved. It's

we're convinced that your life in reality depends on it. We need one another. No one has it all together all the time.

I love how in the story of John 21, as they're hauling in this big catch, this should have been enough to register in Peter's mind what's going on. He's been here before. He's seen this play out before. Peter should have been the one to register that this is the Lord. But it wasn't. Peter goes to show that many times in our life when we struggle and are going through difficult circumstances, that sometimes our spiritual perception is a bit off. We can begin to second-guess ourselves. We can begin to hesitate on what we normally would know. But because Peter is with his people, John speaks into his life and says look, Peter, this is the Lord.

We encourage you to be involved in a study group. We've got some that are yearlong, some that are two years long, some that meet open-ended, that they are meeting continuously, that to be in relationship with people who know your life, people who don't just know your life but also know the Lord. Because there will come a day when you are struggling to perceive what God is doing and you need to have someone in your life who can point out Jesus to you and remind you of the truth of God's Word.

Upon hearing this, Peter jumps in, swims back to shore, and we're told that He finds Jesus on the shore. And the ESV says that he's sitting there with a charcoal fire. Interesting little note and it may not seem like a big deal, but a charcoal fire is only mentioned two times in the New Testament, in John 21 and then three chapters earlier in John chapter 18. It's there where we see that Jesus has been arrested, and He's on his way to be put on trial and the disciples flee. They run for their lives.

But John and Peter are following Jesus from a distance, wanting to see how this plays out, and what's going to happen to their beloved teacher when they arrive at Jesus's trial. John has a bit of a connection, so he's able to get in a little bit closer. Peter's left outside. We see in that moment he's standing with a Roman soldier and a slave girl. And John 18 says he's standing around a charcoal fire. And it's in that location, in that moment that he denies Jesus three times. It's not a coincidence. The author is using that word to connect those two events. More than that, Jesus is using this moment, this object, to connect these two moments for Peter.

Sense of smell is a powerful memory trigger. In fact, your smell is directly connected to the memory center of your brain. I'm sure you've had the experience of smelling a particular smell, and it can immediately take you back to a previous moment in your life where you've experienced that smell before. Imagine when Peter gets to the shore and gets just a whiff of that charcoal fire. He's immediately taken back just to a few days earlier, to the moment that he most regrets in his life. And Jesus is sitting there, not to condemn him, not to show him, look, I saw what you did. He invites Peter to eat. He wants Peter to remember who he is and what he's done on his behalf. If we're going to not lose heart, if we want to get out of our season of quiet quitting we need to remember Jesus.

His whole point is Peter, look, I know that this is your darkest moment, the moment that you can't move past, the moment that you feel like will haunt you forever. And I want you to know I saw it. And even there, I love you. Because Peter, you didn't just fail me at that moment. I

succeeded on your behalf, where you failed, where you denied me. I continued. I bore your sin. That moment on the cross, I received the punishment for your sin. And I didn't just die. I'm resurrected. I'm here before you Peter, to invite you back to know that you have been chosen. You are loved, and you are welcomed permanently.

There are many here today that need to know that the moment you most regret, that hides in the dark place of your heart, Jesus was there. And even there, He loves you. You need to remember that Jesus is for us and what He's done for us.

And lastly, we need to reset our purpose. Peter was called to a high calling as a disciple, and then he was eventually tagged as someone who would be at the forefront of the launch of the church. And so, at this moment, Jesus confronts Peter and says look Peter, do you love me? And if you love me, feed my sheep. Do you love me more than these? Do you love me more than your former life? Then get back to what's most important to what I have called you to.

Like Peter, we also have been called to a high calling as people of faith, people who are created to exist as the Church of Jesus Christ, a light in a dark world. There's an old saying that says you can't see the forest for the trees. And really what that means is that we oftentimes miss the big, beautiful picture because we're focused on the details in front of us.

My wife and I like to go to national parks. And a few years ago, we went to the Smoky Mountains, and there are a few driving tours that you can take where they have a pull-off to the side of the road, you can get out of your vehicle, and you can just look at the vast landscape, the beauty of the park. I mean, miles and miles of trees and geography and living creatures that just make this landscape beautiful. Imagine being lost in the midst of the forest. Trees that were beautiful from afar are no longer beautiful. Instead, it's frightening if you don't know where you are, or what direction to go in. You might feel this pressure to survive. And there are a lot of things you could do and a lot of things you maybe shouldn't be doing.

Sometimes the Christian life is kind of like that. That in the moment, we just feel lost, stuck in this really terrifying landscape, forgetting that one day we'll be on the overlook, and we'll see how God has brought it all together to create this beautiful picture of redemption. But when you're lost, you can get overwhelmed with all the things you should be doing. Important things. And yet, we can forget the highest purpose we're called to. And we're called to know and love God with all our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our strength. We are called to love our neighbor as ourselves, to make disciples, and to help others find and follow Jesus. And that's my prayer for us today, is that as we close out 2023, and move into 2024, we will just take a moment and remember the high purpose that we're called to.

And if you're here and you're overwhelmed with all the things you should be doing and wish to be doing, take some time to reflect and ask God to give you clarity for the days ahead here. In just a moment, we're going to close. Russ is going to come and lead us to a time of communion. This would be a perfect opportunity to ask God to reveal some areas in your own heart and life where maybe you've quietly disengaged, maybe in your journey of faith, you've just lost heart. Ask God to renew your devotion, renew your enthusiasm as I am, for the days ahead, that we will move forward with a devotion that's unmatched by Him.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I thank you for the life and example of Peter. Thank you, Jesus, that you see us even in our darkest moments, and that you invite us to yourself. Lord, I pray that today you would call us just to see you, that you would speak into our life, that we would relearn humility in some areas, that we would maybe reengage with the community that's meant to give us life and hope, and that we are a part of that. Father, I pray that today each of us would take some time and have a moment that we'd remember what you've accomplished on our behalf through Christ, and that we'd reset our purpose today to follow you and help others to know and love you as well. In Jesus' name. Amen.