



CENTERED: A PLAN

A REPEATING PATTERN AROUND A CENTER

Order flows through our universe in repeating patterns around a center. Think about it: from the spiraling arms of a galaxy to the orbiting planets of a solar system; from the branches of a tree, to the petals of a flower; from the strands of DNA to the nucleus of an atom; the pattern is everywhere. Even the basic shapes we use to build and organize our world are repeating patterns around a center: squares, triangles, rectangles and circles.

What is true in creation is also true in our own lives. We live by repeating patterns around a center. Ongoing behaviors like breathing and eating sustain our bodies. Just as important are the centers we choose. People become great musicians, fishermen, accountants and golfers by a repeating pattern of practice around the center of their interest. On the dark side of this truth, addictions can become a center that drains our life away in a whirlpool of repeating destructive behaviors.

Since this is the pattern we see all around us in creation and our own lives, it is not surprising to discover that the Creator is shown in scripture to be a centered relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From this Center of love, goodness and creative power all reality flows—from the throne room of heaven to the living room of your home.

But the connection between God and where we live is not always clear—for a very important reason. People can choose their center. It's a simple choice: between making The Center—the Creator—our center, or Something Else. The Something Else can take many forms: a career, a family, an addiction, a religion, a house. It turns out that expressions of Something Else are mainly just cleverly disguised reasons for my real center to be . . . Me.

A person doesn't have to live very long to find out that Me-centered living is widespread in our world. Scripture says it is universal—that everyone at some point chooses a different center than the love, goodness and creative power that is God. The result is the mess we are in. For anyone paying attention to our world, the situation looks bleak . . . except for some amazing news.

THE NEWS

In the middle of the mess, it is good to pause and consider these basic facts:

In the beginning was . . . delight

In the end will be . . . deeper delight

In between is the amazing story where you and I now live.

All creation, all of history is about God's desire to share his delight, to include us in his deeper delight. In Scripture the story begins and ends with delight.

Since God treasures us in this way, he isn't prepared to leave us hopelessly messed up—if we want a way out. Despite our choice to look for love, goodness and delight Somewhere Else, God came, as a human, to let us know he still wants us. We have been given a new chance to center our lives in the living Center. Here is what he said:

“I have come that you might have life in abundance . . .”

“This is life: that they know the Living God . . .”

“Come to me, all who are weary, and I will give you rest. Accept my guidance, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble.”

“This is the work of God: to trust the One he sent.”

“My sheep know my voice, and follow . . .”

“Come, follow me.”

Now, you've likely heard of Jesus. But even if you've been a regular church-goer, it's not a sure thing that you've really *heard* what Jesus is inviting you to do. It's very simple:

“Follow Me.”

Let's be clear what Jesus is *not* saying here:

“Admit I existed”

“Agree with my teachings”

“Live a moral life”

“Go to church”

“Do good things for God”

All these are fine . . . they just miss the point. What Jesus has done is invite you to a relationship where he is the Center of your life—and you're not. Where he is Lord. He's invited you to follow him into the Center.

So a vital question would be, “Is your relationship with Jesus the Center of your life?” To put it another way, “Do the repeating patterns of your life center around receiving and acting on what Jesus is saying to you?”

If not, then your life is off Center—as you've probably noticed. But if you really wanted that to change, what could you do? Here's a plan.

A PLAN TO BE CENTERED

A change of centers begins with a change of heart. You decide you want God to be Center of your life, and that you are done with trying to run your world. This may seem risky, but think about it—who is better qualified to run your world? Trusting it to God turns out to be an amazing relief!

At this point a conversation with God is good. You might want to start with an apology. After all, you have been disrespecting the Creator of the universe, going your own way. It's important for the relationship with God to say—and really mean—you're sorry, and that you are ready to let Jesus lead your life. You can be sure God will gladly take you up on your heartfelt offer to follow Jesus.

Now about getting centered. From here your next move depends on where you have come from. If this is your first time to really entrust your life to Jesus, he has given us a simple way to say with our whole selves—heart, mind and body—that we are ready to join him. It's a bath—a plunge in water that says I'm leaving the old Me behind, and accepting the new Life with Jesus as Center. It's called baptism, and if you're ready for it, the person who gave you this can show you how simple it is.

Whether the water of your baptism is still drying or is now a distant memory, by trusting Jesus you've gained a powerful ally to help you to be centered—his own Holy Spirit. With his Spirit present to lead us, the key challenge for those who follow Jesus is simply *staying* centered. Here is where paying attention to our repeating patterns is crucial.

If the repeating patterns of our lives—the rhythms and habits of our days, weeks and months—do not move off their old centers, then it will soon be clear that our true center has not really moved much either.

On the other hand, when Jesus is our *Lord*, listening to him leads us into deepening experiences of the love, goodness and creative power that is in the Center of Life. The big question is, how do we keep listening to him central?

Jesus shows us how—with some very practical repeating patterns.

THREE REPEATING PATTERNS

Relationships grow stronger through focused attention. Jesus made time alone with God a *habit*—a repeating pattern around the Center of his life. If we are to be his followers, we will do the same.

How do you spend time with someone you can't see? How can we hear a voice that makes no sound? If we aren't used to thinking about what exists beyond the reach of our senses, this can seem puzzling. But the same capacity that enables us to desire and choose a relationship with God in the first place also enables us to communicate spiritually.

Here lies the key to meaningful time with God—that we come *desiring* to be with him, to receive what he gives us, and to do what he says. As a rule, God doesn't reveal much to people who make a habit of ignoring what he says. On the other hand, God is actively looking for people who *want* to meet with him.

This capacity to want God, to desire fellowship with him is where our ability to hear him rests. If we receive and do what he says, even in the smallest ways, our capacity to hear and receive God's life grows. Our trust in God rises, which is the core quality that God's friends share.

How does this work in practice? There is no formula, just as there is no formula for falling in love with someone. The key is to feed your desire. When there is desire, we find a way to be together. Cultivating time alone with God for you on a particular day may involve reading, music, journaling, dance. Whatever way you do it, your purpose will be to interact with God, bringing your true self, and receiving what God brings you.

Jesus made it a habit to slip away from the crowds and the pressing demands of life to spend time alone with God. When we are following him, we will do the same.

Despite our best intentions, though, we can lose our focus on the Center. Here is where another pattern in Jesus' life brings great help. Jesus found three friends who could share his love for the Father, and the best and worst of life with him: Peter, James and John. At the high and low points of his life, they watched him, learned to trust him, and so became powerful examples of the Life centered in Jesus.

Jesus still brings together bands of 2 or 3 brothers or sisters who will make him the center of their lives. What holds them together is their common commitment to follow Jesus. At a practical level they steadily ask one another these centering questions:

- What is the Lord saying to you?
- How are you responding?
- How can we help you with this?

Over time, this repeating pattern of helping each other attend to what Jesus is revealing has the life-transforming effect of centering our lives in God. Stunningly simple. Stunningly powerful.

A third pattern of Jesus' life emerges when our desire for him leads us to habitually seek him, along with a few companions. We find ourselves being drawn into an extended family that usually includes people very different than ourselves in gender, age, ability and interest.

Sometimes the diversity in this community is so great that it would fly apart, except for our common commitment to follow Jesus and to help each other do the same. This shouldn't surprise us much, since it was just such a company that Jesus traveled with during his life on earth.

The diversity of the group, as we learn to value and affirm the gifts each one brings, is core to our living the vibrant life centered in God, both as individuals and as a community. As each person does what the Lord has shown them to do, vibrant families of Jesus are formed. The quality of love and life in these communities is such that other people looking for Life want *in*—because there they see Jesus—with skin on.

What does it look like when they come together? As you might guess, there is no formula—just as there is no formula for any healthy family gathering. What usually happens is they share a meal celebrating Jesus. Each person has been listening to the Lord, thinking carefully about what the Lord would want them to pass along to encourage the others. It might be a song, a reading, a picture, a present. It may be a burning question. As each one shares, the community grows strong.

The kind of centering questions the family shares around are familiar:

- What has the Lord been showing you that will help us?
- As we are listening to each other, what is the Lord saying to us as a family?
- What will we do about this—and how will we help each other?

The repeating pattern of gathering in this way wonderfully reinforces our commitment as individuals and community to stay centered in Jesus. Valuable as it is though, the gathering has little meaning apart from the ongoing life shared with the Lord and each other outside the gathering. Family—not event—is the core reality.

As these healthy families of Jesus form, grow, and reproduce an amazing thing happens. The reign of Jesus grows in your city, your country and ultimately across the earth. This can happen through one centered life. And that life can be yours.

CENTERED: NEXT STEPS

How to get started? Follow Jesus. Find regular time to spend with him, sharing where you are, listening to what he says. Do what he says, however small it may seem. And find a friend or two who want centered lives. Get together and begin. When there are more than three of you, start another band of brothers or sisters. (You don't have to leave the first one.) As more and more of you follow Jesus, be alert to welcome the larger family he is bringing together.

The truth is, centering our lives in God is not easy. Expect serious opposition from many directions. It will be an ongoing adventure and a lifelong process. But by following Jesus in the repeating patterns of his life, it can be stunningly simple. It is stunningly powerful. And it is Life—now and forever!



Notice: *Centered* assumes you have received this copy from a follower of Jesus who is available for more conversation with you about the centered life. Such friends are free to copy and share *Centered* for this purpose. All other copying or distribution of *Centered* in any form is prohibited without the written permission of the publisher.