

Baseline Week – LENT: Episode 2

Today is Wednesday, February 24th. My name is Kyle Hahn. You're listening to Baseline Weekly.

Today we're going to take a couple of minutes to reflect on the cleansing power of Jesus. But first I want to tell you about a particularly perplexing scenario in my email inbox. One of my favorite pastimes is decluttering my email inbox. Every couple of weeks or so, I go through my apple mail and unsubscribe from all sorts of junk mail. Do you ever do this? I don't know who is selling my email but I get all kinds of junk. Lower rates from Geico, \$1 off my next uber eats order, 10% off my next CVS purchase over \$50. I get excited and then I realize I never spend \$50 at CVS. That's beside the point. Most of the time I scroll down to the bottom of the email and click the nearly illegible "unsubscribe" button. It takes me to another page and I select "I wish to no longer receive any of these emails." Confirm. Boom. Done. On to the next email. You know this drill.

Most of the time this works. But there is this one email that has been haunting me for over a year now. It's a promotional email from Walgreens. I cannot tell you how many times I have tried to unsubscribe from this particular email. I click the link and then it takes me to a page that says "no email associated with this account." Zero options. I get frustrated and then just delete the email. A temporary fix. A week goes by and then I see Walgreens pop up again. The cycle repeats. (Seriously, if anyone has any ideas for how to permanently unsubscribe from Walgreens emails, let me know. Send me an email, but put IMPORTANT in all caps in the subject.)

This silly cycle that I so often find myself stuck in reminded me of our battle with sin. I don't know if you've thought about this lately, so I'll just remind you that we are in a spiritual battle. There are so many passages that describe how sin has infected our world and our hearts. It is something that we literally wage war against on a daily basis. If you need a refresher of that, Romans chapters 6-8 is a good place to start.

The reason I bring up my junk mail debacle is because no matter how hard I try, the junk just keeps showing up in my mailbox. It doesn't matter how many times I try to unsubscribe; it keeps coming back.

The same is true for our hearts. We can try to manage our sin and clean ourselves up on our own, but it just doesn't work. Sometimes we can clean up our outsides and present a put-together image, but on our own, we simply cannot cleanse ourselves. It's only the tender love of Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that can truly cleanse our hearts.

You might know at a cognitive level that Jesus wants to cleanse you of your sin. You might know that repentance really is worth it. You might even know a verse like 1 John 1:9 that says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* But we still resist it. I know I do.

I think a lot of the time it has to do with pride. I don't like being wrong. I convince myself that I'm better than I really am. I think I can clean myself up on my own. I feel like I need to get to a better spot in order to meet with Jesus. I get stuck in a performative mindset with God. Or I just ignore my sin entirely. I start scrolling on my phone or move on to the next task and distract myself into oblivion.

In this season of lent, we are invited to declutter our hearts. It's like clearing out the junk in our email inbox and unsubscribing from the things that are not bringing us life. When we clear out the junk we make room for new growth.

You might be thinking, ok ok, this sounds good but what does this actually look like practically? Well, I think the important word for us is inventory. Just like my email inbox, we take stock of our inner life and note the things that need to be there and the things that are junk. Taking an inventory of our inner life helps us lean into the things that draw us toward Jesus and allows us to rid ourselves of the things that draw us away from Jesus. Without taking an inventory, it's very hard to ever make it to confession and repentance.

In just a moment, we'll practice this together. But before we do, hear these words from Psalm 51.

*1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.*

With those words on our minds, I want to take the next few minutes to practice this together. I'm going to lead us through a simple exercise drawn from Ignatian spirituality. We're going to make two lists. So pull out a journal and a pen or open the notes app on your phone. The first thing I'd invite you to consider is this:

- (1) What brings you life? This might be a relationship, a conversation you had recently, a hobby, a specific spiritual discipline, a song, a memory...try to be specific as possible. Write down whatever comes to mind.
- The second question is this: (2) What takes life from you? This might be a recurring sin, an unhealthy habit or attitude, a conflict with another person, a fear, really, anything that drains you. Again, be specific as possible. Write down whatever comes to mind.

Whatever has surfaced, offer it to God in prayer. It might be something to celebrate or something to confess. Either way, the point of this exercise is to move us to action. So take the next step.

I'd like to close with a prayer from Henri Nouwen. *"O Lord Jesus Christ, I pray that this Lenten period may make me more aware of your forgiving presence in my life and less concerned about performing well in the eyes of my world. Let me recognize you in the depth of my heart where you dwell and heal me. Let me experience you in that center of my being from which you want to teach and guide me. Let me know you as my loving brother who holds nothing--not even my worst sins--against me, but who wants to touch me in a gentle embrace. Take away the many fears, suspicions, and doubts by which I prevent You from being my Lord, and give me the courage and freedom to appear naked and vulnerable in the light of your presence, confident in your unfathomable mercy. I know how great my resistance is, how quickly I choose the darkness instead of the light. But I also know that you keep calling me into the light, where I can see not only my sins but your gracious face as well. Be with me every hour of my days. Praise and glory to you, now and forever. AMEN."*

(This prayer was taken from *Show Me The Way* by Henri Nouwen)