



the fruitful been life

WEEK 3

nathan kingsbury
brian bradford
joshua wright

Day 15

Extreme Development

There is a lot of talk these days about everything being “extreme.” There is Extreme Makeover, Extreme Days, and even extremes that I have never heard about or seen. A simple search on the web for the word “extreme” produces hundreds of results. After hitting “enter” on my laptop, I found extreme programming, extreme networks, extreme sports, and even my personal favorite, extreme ironing. The word “extreme” seems to be a buzzword these days. Well, one subject that I did not find in my quick web search was extreme development.

Extreme development is, by my definition, where one life is extremely influenced by another’s life for purposes of becoming more like Jesus Christ. Essentially, I am talking about what many would call discipleship, mentoring, etc. The ultimate of this in your life has to be, at least initially, with the development of you as a human by God Himself. Psalm 139:13-14 says, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” God was busy developing you physically before you even knew you existed. Extreme development is not only physical, but also spiritual.

Paul Cole was his name, and even though I had known him only for a short time, I knew I wanted to be around this guy. He was funny, outgoing, and best of all, in love with Christ.

It was my sophomore year in college, and I had found a mentor...or better yet, a mentor had found me. Paul saw something in me that I did not see in myself, thus he asked me to meet with him and four other sophomore guys once a week for mentoring. It was during this time in my life that I grew more than I ever had before regarding my spiritual development. From the official times of meeting to the informal late night talks about girls, God, and games played, Paul showed me what it was like to be a college student who was sold out for God. Even though I did not realize it at the time, I was experiencing “extreme development.”

This was first modeled for us through and by Christ. He chose 12 guys to follow him around for three years, listening to him teach and watching every move he made. This was the model for extreme development. Out of this experience came a movement called Christianity! -B.B.

What about you? How have you been developed? How are you being developed? Have you ever been extremely developed? Below, take some time to write out how you have been developed in your life, either by coaches, mentors, teachers, parents, etc.

How were you developed in your childhood? What/Who developed you?

What about now? Is there anyone developing you in your teen years? If so, how is that happening?

If you have never experienced the fruit in your life of having a spiritual mentor, seek one out today! Do not wait even until tomorrow. Send an email today to your youth pastor, small group leader, etc. asking them to take you through “extreme development.”

Day 16

Choosing Wisely in Crisis

Jeremy was a junior in high school when crisis hit. The call came one day that his father had been killed in an off-shore helicopter crash in the Gulf of Mexico. Jeremy was devastated, as his only father had just been yanked prematurely from his life. This was an experience that not only Jeremy will never forget, but that I will never forget. You see, I was a junior as well and played on the football team with Jeremy. We were good friends, and a tragedy like this only brings you closer together as friends. However, I was not the only one who grew closer to Jeremy during this time. He also grew closer to God, as he had only become a Christian a short time before this incident.

Moments of crisis in our lives are opportune times for us to grow closer to God. In fact, it often seems like God is most real to us during the valleys of our lives. Sadly enough it often takes a crisis in our lives to wake us up to how much we need God. And in my observation as a youth pastor so far, it seems like teens will go in one of two directions during a catastrophe in their lives. They will either draw closer to God, or shove further away from Him.

The question is not “if,” but “when.” When will you experience a crisis in your life? Now I am not talking about your boyfriend breaking up with you after you thought you would be married. Besides, you could not have known that anyway since you only dated one week, and eighth grade doesn’t count! However, I am talking about you losing a loved one or finding out your parents are getting a divorce. How will you respond?

Christ modeled for us how to respond to a crisis. I don't know about you, but I would be freaking out if I were about to be crucified (especially after watching the Passion of the Christ movie). I would want to avoid this type of crisis at all costs, but not Christ. He took on this pain and agony and defeated Satan, sin, and death so that we could have life. He responded positively, and produced amazing fruit as a result of it.

Another model for us regarding crisis is found in the Old Testament. Job was a man who experienced it all. He lost his house, his animals, and even his family. On top of that, his friends left him, and he contracted huge physical problems (i.e. painful sores). So what happened? Well, everyone else wanted him to "curse God and die." But Job said no! He turned the opposite direction and cried out to God, and God blessed Job for doing that. Job chose wisely. He chose God.

Take out a piece of paper and write at the top, "Choosing Wisely in Crisis: My Crisis Commitment to God." Write a few sentences stating how you will commit to turning to God in times of crisis. You will be like Job and not his friends. You will even commit to helping others do the same. Sign it and date it. Although this is just a simple piece of paper with your signature on it, it can be a valuable tool in helping you choose wisely in times of crisis. -B.B.

Day 17

A "Reality Experience"

The simple Christian Life:

Man – I had it good growing up. I had good Christian parents who loved God and me very much. I was involved in church and even helped run our youth ministry in high school. I went on a few local mission trips and loved ministering to people on the streets. I attended a Christian college and loved every minute of that experience. God always provided everything financially and I felt for the most part I was a great Christian. I felt a call to the ministry and felt ready to minister and reach out to unbelievers.

The real life:

My eyes were opened to the real world when I went on my first overseas mission trip to Uganda, Africa. I couldn't believe how they lived. No running water, big families in small clay houses, dirt floors, and only one pair of clothes. I was also amazed at how young the people were and wondered where all the elderly were? I asked that question and one of the missionaries told me that because of AIDS, most people don't live past age 30.

I found it quite funny that many of the Ugandan children had never seen a white person before. They kept running up to us and touching our skin. Sadly, Christianity had very little influence in Uganda. I realized that the church we worked with there was one of the only representatives of Christ in the entire city. My heart felt burdened for these students who were about to die. I wondered how many would hear about the message of Jesus before their lives ended. Only five missionaries cared for them at that time, only five to try to reach the many African people who needed Jesus.

I thought of this scripture in Matthew 9:35-38 that says, "He felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, 'The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields.'" -N.K.

Questions:

1. How are we reaching out in our own community?
2. Are you praying that God will reach your community and beyond?
3. How are you working and reaching out to friends, relatives, and people that you come into contact with?
4. What will you do to start making a difference for the kingdom?

Day 18

Developing Brokenness

I think everyone faces brokenness at some point in his or her life. Maybe it's a teacher not believing in you, a parent making you feel like you're not good enough, another student making you feel you're not cool enough or someone saying you are not pretty or handsome enough. It's being cut from the basketball team or being last to be chosen for a pick-up game. The list of examples goes on and on.

Other times it's even more serious. It's failing a class, the death of a friend or loved one, or a broken relationship. Life is challenging and there are times when we hit rock bottom and have nowhere to go. Usually in these times we feel like no one cares.

A scripture that always gives me comfort is Psalm 32:18, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted...And saves those who are crushed in spirit."

A Story of Brokenness:

In my later years of college I experienced major brokenness. I lost one of my closest friends named Heather. Heather died in a car accident. She was speeding down the highway while drinking, lost control of her car and hit a telephone pole. Heather's death rocked my faith. Around that same time a girlfriend and I broke up, plus a church I respected hurt me badly. Depression hit and life in general seemed like too much for me to bear. I started questioning my call in ministry and whether I wanted to remain a Christian. I felt alone, broken, empty, and confused.

God Filled My Brokenness:

God helped me pull myself together. I realized that only Christ could fill the emptiness. I soon let myself open up about the hurts in my life and asked for prayer. I also realized later on that God used Heather's death for his glory. Many people accepted Christ at her funeral, and God worked in that community in huge ways. I can honestly say now that I am glad for the broken period in my life. I learned so much. I learned that I personally couldn't live without Jesus. You can run away from God or you can run toward him. No matter which way you go – He's waiting! -N.K.

Questions:

1. When did you experience brokenness in your life?
2. Who was there for you during that time?
3. How were you able to get through this brokenness?
4. What did you learn from this time of brokenness?

Day 19

Developing Character

“Bear with one another,
and forgive one another;
if anyone has a complaint against another;
even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”

Colossians 3:13

There is nothing more important to chat about than character. Character is something that I think about daily. I hope to invest many good character qualities in my son Micah. Accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior is a huge step in understanding character, but this alone does not heal all of one's character flaws. Jesus changes the heart, but it takes time to develop Godly characteristics. I've been a Christian for a long time and am a youth pastor, but in the past three years I've found some character flaws in my own life.

A tough crack on my character

Each year we're evaluated at work on our job performance. We sit with our supervisor and he gives us a job performance score. There are three different forms in this evaluation process. One is a spiritual development evaluation (Cross Training) part where we're evaluated on our spiritual lives. The second evaluation, personal development, judges our developing leadership skills. The last evaluation is on the success of our ministry and how we are accomplishing our goals. This process has been awesome for my development and it keeps me accountable and on track with my goals.

One of my lowest scores on my evaluation one year was on my character. Most of my scores were high except for this one area. When I asked about this, I was told that I couldn't hold a confidence. There were a few times that year when I opened my big mouth and talked about things that I shouldn't have. I was not trusted by some of my supervisors. This was a huge issue for them. I remember arguing with them and then finally realizing the truth. I had hurt some of my team. Another small area I lacked in was functioning as a team player by helping other ministries besides the student ministries. These lessons were hard to hear, but they were true, and needed improvement. -N.K.

Looking back

I'm glad my supervisors addressed these issues with me. Although that evaluation was difficult for me, it was also needed for my leadership development. I believe character and integrity are the most important things for me to develop as a pastor and as a team player.

Questions:

1. How is your character? Can you be trusted? Are you playing team ball?
2. Ask a few of your closest friends how you are doing in the area of character development?
3. Application: Do a word study on Character. Interview a few people you respect and ask them, "What does having character mean to you?"

Day 20

Developing Authenticity

Matthew 23:28 “You try to look like upright people outwardly, but inside your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

In today’s world we very seldom see people who are authentic or real. It’s hard for people to talk about their struggles or failures. But when they’re transparent and open, God does amazing things. I believe there are four types of masks that people wear to hide who they really are.

The Clown Mask

Many times I see students wearing a clown mask by hiding their pain with laughter and jokes. They are the life of the party and everything seems okay. Deep down though, they are hurting and they are covering up their pain with this mask.

Illustration: Chris Farley was on Saturday Night Live and in movies like: “Black Sheep” and “Tommy Boy.” Everyone who looked at Chris on the outside saw a funny dude who enjoys life, but on the inside he was hurting. He filled his emptiness with drugs and eventually died from it. Be real about your pain and take off the Clown Mask.

The Cool Mask

A popular athlete in the high school I attended walked up to me one day and asked me to pray for a family request. I couldn’t believe he had asked for prayer. For a split second I saw his Cool Mask drop off. I saw a person hurting and concerned about his family. Sometimes we wear a Cool Mask, acting like everything is cool when really our lives are difficult and we don’t know what to do. We act like everything’s fine when, in reality, everything is far from fine. Take off the Cool Mask and let God heal your pain.

The Silent Mask

I often come across quiet and seemingly lonely students. I try hard to invest in them to get them to open up. These students wear a Silent Mask and choose to close themselves off, hiding the pain inside them. It's okay to be quiet, but when you hide, acting like things are okay when they are not – you are wearing this mask. Be open and transparent and take the Silent Mask off.

The Super Christian Mask

Being involved in church my whole life I've worn this mask too often. I acted holy when I wasn't truly living a Christ-like life. I acted one way at school and like a different person at home. Many Christians play church, but are not sold out totally to Christ. Take off the Super Christian Mask and be genuine. -N.K.

Questions:

1. What masks are you wearing?
2. What mask holds you back from being real?
3. Who is one person you can be real with and talk about your struggles?

Day 21

Investing

Not Just For Old Guys

When I was fourteen, I developed a huge desire to be a guitar player. It was right after I went to the Freak Show, a concert whose headliner was D.C. Talk, and who had Audio Adrenaline as the opener. I was hooked. All I wanted to do was rock. I had this old guitar my Grandma had given me, but it was so bad that the strings would make my fingers bleed if I played it for any good period of time. Finally after bugging my parents to the point of insanity, they broke down and bought me a new electric guitar. I played it day and night. Sometimes I would even wake up and still have it on. I wanted to be good; I didn't care if my fingers hurt I, wanted to make that thing sing.

All through high school each night I put hours into playing my guitar. I started some bands with my friends and played through high school and college. In college I was in a band called Rain On the Land. It was a great experience, and I got to travel all over the place and open for bands, like Pillar, the Elms, Radial Angel, and Switchfoot. None of that would have happened if I had not invested a lot of time in practicing that guitar.

There are so many things we can invest our lives in. We can put our investments in sports and try to be great athletes. Or we can invest our time in the pursuit of a good time, always trying a new video game, or going to that party or this party. You can invest financially and try to become rich. You can invest into pretty much anything you like, but is there any investment that you have that's eternal?

Money does not transfer into the afterlife, and I'm pretty sure you can't take your skateboard or your Xbox with you. In all reality there are only three investments that are eternal;

People

The word of God

God-every member of the trinity

God made every human being with a soul, so thus they are eternal, and after death they will either go to live with God forever, or they will be separated from Him forever. This means that every human being has great value. God loves every single one of us, and He wants us all to know Him for eternity. But some people either reject Him or have never had a chance to meet Him. When we invest in people we develop relationships with them to let them know that God truly loves them. This can only happen when we have already been invested in, and then when we choose to invest in other people. This is so important because we know that God has invested in us, so much so that we was willing to pay for the consequence of our disobedience and clear us of all debt. Every person you meet is worth so much to God, so they should be treated with worth.

Second, God has made His word eternal. This means when you are reading the Bible you are getting to look through a window into eternity. Whatever you learn from the Bible, will go with you into eternity. So investing in the Bible is a good idea. It is one thing that you can take with you into eternity.

Third, God is eternal. God is the creator of all time and space. He was not created but was always there. He is the reason for life, and not only life on earth, but also eternal life. He created you to know Him, and to have a relationship with Him, now and forever. He loves you more than you can feel, and

He wants to spend eternity with you, but the great thing is He wants to have a relationship with you now. Even though you have sinned, even though you are not perfect, God wants to have a relationship with you. He has invested everything in you, giving His only son so that you don't have to be separated from Him anymore. All He wants is for you to invest your life into Him so your rewards will be in Heaven and you may enjoy them for eternity.

To have a truly fruitful life don't invest in the stuff of this world that will be junk someday, but invest into eternity. -J.W.