

Vision 2022

Following Jesus Together with Grit

01/02/21

Introduction

Happy one-year Citizens Church!! Tim. Pastor. **Pray. Today is a day worth celebrating.**

One-Year Birthday. We made it a year! But I want to make something clear → If you've ever been to a one-year-old's birthday party before, you know that that party is much less about celebrating the kid, and much more about celebrating the parents. **Look at what you guys have done! You made it a year!**

So it's great to celebrate our church's one-year birthday today - and acknowledge the collective sacrifices so many have made over the past year, but make no mistake we're ultimately not celebrating Citizens - **we're celebrating our Heavenly Father and what He has done this year, amen?** We're saying - Look at what God has done over the past year. Look at His faithfulness. Look at His kindness to us as a church.

And there is much to celebrate that God has done in 2021:

- We've seen 4 people get in the pool and be **baptized** professing that they have new life in Christ.
- We've seen **Community Groups** multiplied into various parts of our city - University City area, Matthews, Elizabeth and others.
- We've served foster families, people who are in recovery, elementary school kids and their families through our various **Serve CLT partnerships.**
- We've seen new **marriages**, new **babies**, new **friendships.**
- We've seen **healing** - physical, spiritual, emotional.
- We've seen people **confess** and **repent** of certain sins for the first time and begin to experience redemption and freedom in Christ.

**God has been so kind to us!

Why This Vision - Where We Are

But I believe we're just getting started. I'm praying and believing that God has so much more for our church in the years to come. So grab a Bible, head to **Galatians 6.**

What I want to do tonight is cast some vision for our church for 2022.

I want to share a burden that the Lord's been pressing on me over the past few months. And I want to share with you a phrase that is going to give shape to really our whole aim and vision for where we're going over the next year.

But before I give you the vision, let me tell you why I feel like the Lord is leading us into this.

1/2 Marathon. If you've ever run a race of any considerable length - half marathon, marathon, even like a 10k - probably the biggest piece of advice you get from experienced runners before your first time is to be careful not to start too fast and burn yourself out. Because what happens is you get to the starting line and you've trained and trained and you're there and there's energy and excitement and your adrenaline is going and the starting gun goes off and you fly out of the gate way faster than your intended pace and then what happens is by mile 3 you're burned out and done.

I don't know if you know this, but in the church planting world we're considered a fast start. People keep showing up, getting saved, getting baptized. We've got a lot going on fairly quickly. Despite my best efforts to screw it up, God's still been faithful and exceedingly generous to us in year 1.

But I've never been concerned about year one. I'm concerned about year 10. And year 15. And year 20.

Celebrating one year is cool. Really cool. But from the start - I mean like written down in the first vision booklets we had 2+ years ago - the vision of Citizens was to **be a church for the long haul**. We're in this, not for a year, but for many years.

The problem is that working against us is that fact that we live in a culture (both inside the church and outside the church) that is obsessed with novelty and ease.

We love novelty. We're obsessed with what is new. We want new - new city, new job, new house, new friends, new experiences. New is exciting. New is fun.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Screwtape Letters* says that we as humans have an aversion to what he calls "the horror of the Same Old Thing." We always want something new.

But perpetual novelty is a danger to spiritual maturity and a robust church family. Because the call of Jesus is often to more of the same. To steadiness and faithfulness in the things of old - Bible, prayer, community, gathered worship.

And there is a difference between **starting power** and **staying power**.

We need a vision to keep going when this gets boring and repetitive.

We don't just love novelty, we also love ease. We fight to avoid anything hard or difficult. There is an overwhelming emphasis that the goal of our lives is to be as peaceful, worry-free, anxiety-free, trouble-free as possible. That if it's hard to a certain extent that's ok, but the majority of our life is to be built around the maximization of comfort, control, power, and ease.

And that makes us flaky people.

- This job is tough so I'm switching.
- This marriage is hard so I'm bailing.
- These kids are disobedient and annoying, so I'm checking out.
- This friendship is costly, so I'm making unbiblical boundaries.

True for all of life, including our walk with Jesus.

We need a vision to keep going when this gets difficult and costly.

Galatians 6:1-10 - Walkthrough

And right into the midst of that temptation and pull towards novelty and ease comes **Galatians 6** and this phrase for our church.

Here's what I want to do. Let's walk through this passage together and then once I set up the framework for what Paul's talking about we'll talk about the vision for 2022. But I want to show it to you from the Bible first. Sounds good?

This is coming right of the heels of Galatians 5 - the fruit of the spirit - what we spent 10 weeks covering this past fall. We have these two operating systems within us - the flesh and the spirit - one that wants to choose God, go after God, follow God (The Spirit), and this other very real part of us that wants to live in rebellion to and independent from God's rule and reign (the Flesh).

And Paul just finished chapter 5 with this powerful command that really is a summation of what the Christian life is about - "Walk by the Spirit." Keep in step day to day with God.

Then Galatians 6:

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

When Paul says here - someone who is *caught in a transgression* - He doesn't mean like "gotcha" caught. He means someone who is stuck, someone who is under the control of, or overtaken by a particular sin. Someone who just can't seem to get any freedom.

And he says "you who are spiritual" - meaning the other folks around them who are currently walking with the Spirit - should restore him - meaning help him out, help him get unstuck. The original translation means something like "reset". It's what doctors do when a bone is broken. They reset it and get it back to working order.

And that's the command here - If someone is living in sin, running around caught in a struggle with sin - other believers are to come around them and help reset them into life with God with a spirit of gentleness. Meekness. Quiet strength.

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

But you need to know, when you step in to do this, you're going to be tempted to go right along with them. So you need to *keep a close watch on yourself*.

2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Given the context of verse 1, when Paul says bear one another's burdens, he certainly means spiritual burdens - being caught in sin, struggling in our faith.

But in just a minute he'll also address financial burdens - tangible ways of caring for each other. So it seems to be Paul has in mind both spiritual burdens **and** physical/tangible burdens as well.

And when you step in and bear one another's burdens, you fulfill the law of Christ. When we step in and care for one another, help each other fight sin, we are fulfilling what Jesus says are the two greatest commandments. Love God + Love one another.

3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each will have to bear his own load.

Now, Paul makes a distinction. He says in verse 2 - carry each other's *burdens*, and in verse 5 - each will have to bear his own *load*.

There is a difference between a *burden* and a *load*. Paul uses two different Greek words with two different meanings. His word for burden in v 2 (*baros*) means "excess burdens", more than you should be able to handle. His word for "load" in v 5 (*phortion*) means cargo. What you can manage and carry.

A load is a heavy backpack full of responsibility that is heavy, but given by God and manageable. A burden is an overwhelmingly crushing weight on your back. We carry our loads, we share each other's burdens.

6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Paul doesn't mince words here → He says you will not make a mockery of God. You cannot make God into a fool. You will reap what you sow. In other words - **you get out what you put in.** If you sow something, that's what you're going to reap. If you plant pumpkin seeds, you're not getting apple trees.

That's true in all of life:

- You put in junk food, like I did way too much of over Christmas, you get out bad health.
- You put in laziness at work, you get passed over for promotions.
- Flipside, you put in work on your friendships, you get robust, healthy relationships with others.

True in all of life, including our discipleship to Jesus.

- You sow deep Biblical community, Bible reading, prayer, you reap maturity, spiritual health.
- You sow jealousy, selfishness, apathy, you reap a frail, shaky faith and relationship to Jesus.

God's not mocked - The person you are in 20 years is the person you are becoming today. You get out what you put in. You reap what you sow.

9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

It's going to get hard. We're going to need each other in this. Do not give up on yourself, and do not give up on others.

Vision 2022 - FJTwG

That's Galatians 6:1-10. Let me apply it into our vision for the year. Here's our focus, our pastoral emphasis for 2022:

Following Jesus Together with Grit.

That's what we're going for in 2022.

- Following Jesus - take ownership over your discipleship to Christ.
- Together - take ownership over someone else's discipleship to Christ.
- With Grit - continuing to do so even when it gets hard, mundane, difficult...w/ perseverance.

For the rest of our time together let's talk about each one from Galatians 6, we'll take them in order.

1. Following Jesus

Follow Jesus. This year as a church, we're going to continue putting a big emphasis on following Jesus. On our discipleship to Him. What do I mean by that? Look at Galatians 6:5, -8.

Galatians 6:5, 7-8

5 For each will have to bear his own load.

7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

You have to bear your own load. You have to take responsibility for your walk with Christ. You are the one who sows, so own what you sow.

Are you going to sow to the spirit or sow to the flesh? What's the trajectory of your life going to be about this year?

Following Jesus means you own your discipleship to Jesus and your following after Him. What do I mean by discipleship to Jesus? We've talked about this alot.

The call from Christ throughout the gospels was to **follow Him**:

- **Matthew 16:24** - "Take up your cross and follow me"

- **John 10:27** - "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."

This means Christianity is not simply a set of rules you obey or a set of beliefs you affirm so you go to heaven when you die. Being a Christian is not simply affirming some propositional statements.

Being a Christian means following after Jesus. Being His disciple.

Come do what the first century Jewish disciples used to do when they followed their rabbis. Build your life around these three practices we've tried to continually lay before you for what it means to be a disciple or apprentice to Jesus:

1) Be with Jesus - build out space in our lives for all of the practices that help us abide, dwell in, live in the presence of God. Practices like - Bible reading, prayer, sabbath, fasting, feasting, silence and solitude.

2) Become like Jesus - As we are more and more *with Jesus*, the aim is that we would more and more *become like Jesus*. What is Jesus like? Galatians 5. Fruit of the Spirit. He perfectly embodies - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

3) Do what Jesus Did - as we are with Jesus and transformed more and more to become like Him, we are then moved to do what He did. To join Christ in the work He is doing in the world to redeem people and creation back to Himself. We imitate His ministry on the earth, living out the heart of God and the way of His Kingdom by taking care of the sick, making disciples, living in community, being generous, and practicing hospitality.

This is the path of discipleship to Jesus. The question is, will you walk it?

Will you decide today, priority #1 for 2022 in my life is not to sleep 7 hours each night and get better at golf (two of my goals - not bad goals), priority #1 is to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did.

Priority #1 is to follow Christ.

That is what our world needs. That is what our church needs. The best thing you can bring to our church in 2022 is not your talents, not your serving hours, not your financial giving - it's your discipleship to Jesus. You being with Christ, allowing Him to transform you, and following in His path. Sowing to the Spirit.

But no one can do this for you. You have to carry your own load. You have to decide - alright, by the power of God's Spirit, I'm going to sow to the Spirit. I'm going to build my life around Jesus. I'm going to own my faith such that in 20 years I'm more in love with and look more like Christ than I do now.

Philosopher and Theologian Dallas Willard put it perfectly when he said, **"The greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as 'Christians' will become disciples – students, apprentices, practitioners – of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence."**

Will you own your discipleship to Jesus this year?

GOSPEL

Here's the good news → All of the Christian life, from beginning to end, is not one of initiation, but response. God has been and is working. God makes the first move towards us, and we respond by His grace and power to His initiating love.

- So when I say - "Be with Jesus" - we know in showing up to commune with God that He is already there. That He is the one who first stepped towards us. That we love (1 John 4) because He first loved us and saved us and redeemed us.
- When I say - "Become like Jesus" - we know that this process of sanctification is a work of God and man. That God promises (Phil 1:6) to finish the work of making us like Christ that He began.
- When I say - "Do what Jesus did" - we know that it is Jesus who builds His Church. It is God who advances His Kingdom. We just join the work God is doing in the world.

All of discipleship is grace. God is working. He's moving. He's more committed to my discipleship than I am. He's more committed to me following Jesus than I am. So I learn to respond by His power, to His power. By His love, to His love.

We follow Jesus, a kind, gracious, welcoming, calling, inviting, initiating Savior.

Following Jesus.

2. Together

Second, we're going to Follow Jesus **Together**.

Galatians 6:1-2

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

We need each other in this. This is not a lone-wolf project.

I want you to notice the assumption of Paul in Galatians 6:2 when he calls all of us to bear one another's burdens - physical burdens, spiritual burdens - all of it.

What's underneath that statement is the truth - **we all have burdens**. There's a mutuality to it. He doesn't say draw a line and go - this half of the church is the bearers, this half is the burden. Not at all. All of us at times will have burdens we need others to help us carry, and all of us at times will need to step up and be the ones who carry burdens for others. Including me. Including your CG leader. Including you.

We're in this together. I need you, and you need me. And it's, to be honest, a sign of Spirit-led maturity, to be able to live into both. To borrow the language of Biblical Counselor Ed Welch - **Christian maturity means we learn to be needy and needed.**

And depending on who you are, you're going to struggle with one side of this community equation.

For some of us, following Jesus together means we need to learn to be needed.

We don't know how to carry, only how to be carried.

- We show up to Community Group ready to be taken care of. I'm here to get what I need. This group time is about me. So we don't go to Community Group when we don't feel like it or when it's not convenient because well it's for me anyways so if it's not what I need today, then why go? Or we have to be the one to go first or early in Engage the Heart so we can share our burdens and then check out when everyone else shares because that's the leader's job and I'm just here to be fed/helped.
- Or what about gatherings - How was church on Sunday? It was fine. Didn't like the music. Sermon wasn't really for me. We only know how to be needy.

- Take this outside of “church things” too. We are frustrated that folks don’t reach out to us enough, aren’t there for us enough. Conversations about friendship always revolve around what you need and are or are not getting.

And the call of Christian maturity is to go - ok sometimes Christ calls me to be the one who is spiritual stepping in and bearing the burden of those who are struggling - spiritually, financially, emotionally, mentally - whatever the case may be. ***I have to learn this year to be needed.***

For others of us, following Jesus together means we need to learn to be needy.

We have believed the lie that maturity means we’ve got it all put together. So we show up to group only ready to give, give, give, give. Or our friendships are predominantly, if not solely ones where we are the givers, the ones who pour out.

And on the surface it looks admirable. “That person is such a giver. So caring. So helpful.” But more often than not, at least speaking from personal experience from my own life, it’s either a defense mechanism against vulnerability or unchecked pride that makes us think that someone else’s health is completely dependent on us - us being present, saying the right things at the right times, holding them together - rather than dependent on Christ.

And the call of Christian maturity is to go - ok sometimes Christ calls me to be the one getting carried. A step forward in faith and following Jesus might mean for me to allow others to carry some of my heaven burdens that I’m trying to handle on my own.

Christian maturity is learning to be needy and needed.

14 Peaks. Lindsay and I love to watch mountain climbing documentaries. She likes the nature aspect. I don’t know why I like to watch them. Not a big nature guy, terrible fear of heights. It’s strange. But a few weeks ago we watched one called *14 Peaks*. It’s about a Nepali mountaineer named Nimsdai Purja. And it’s all about his mission to summit all 14 of the world’s 8,000-meter (which is about 5 miles high) peaks in the span of 7 months. Think Mountain Everest and 13 others just like it in 7 months. Before him the fastest guy to do it took 7 years.

But what I noticed as we were watching, was not only the incredible bravery and abilities of Nimsdai, he’s pretty insane, but also how reliant he was on the team around him. You don’t climb those mountains alone. Every climb he made he had a team of 5 or more helping him every step of the way.

And I love how honest the documentary was because sometimes Nimsdai is the hero and sometimes he’s the one being rescued. There’s this point on these mountains, once you reach around 8,000 meters, known to climbers as “the death zone”. It’s a space where you’re so high up that the pressure of oxygen is insufficient to sustain human life for an extended time span. I think it’s like after 3 hours in this zone you start hallucinating. So a lot of climbers carry oxygen tanks with them to help them breathe semi-normally while they’re at that elevation.

And there are two distinct moments in the documentary where the climbing group has trouble in the death zone. One of these times, Nimsdai is the hero. He has to step in at the last minute, he actually offers someone his oxygen who has run out, risk his own life to save one of his teammates. But then on the very next climb, Nimsdai runs out of oxygen. And instead of being the one saving, he’s actually getting saved.

And it just hit me watching this film, that the only way that Nimsdai is able to accomplish his goal is by both helping and being helped by others. Being needed and needy.

What a beautiful picture of how the Christian life is supposed to work.

Following Jesus together means we own our own spiritual health. We own our own discipleship to Jesus - I’m going to revolve my life around Him, follow Him, apprentice to Him.

But it also means I'm going to own the spiritual health of the person next to me, or across from me. The person in my group. The new person, the person who's been here 6 months, a year, 2 years. I'm going to take responsibility for my discipleship to Jesus and there's. Which means my aim for this year is that on December 31st, 2022, I'll look more like Jesus, but so will they.

GOSPEL

After all, isn't being needy and needed at the heart of the gospel? The gospel says we're desperately needy. That's the good news of Jesus. He comes to us in our neediness. In our brokenness. In our frustration. In our sin. Jesus entered our neediness to bear the burden of our sin on the cross and rescue us from satan, sin and death.

And then we're invited as we receive the goodness of Christ for our neediness to then go be needed by others, **1 John 4:11 - 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.** The gospel invites us to be needy, desperately unable to save ourselves, and then to be needed as we point others to the one true Savior.

3. With Grit

Let's talk about the last two words. **Following Jesus Together with Grit.**

9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Stepping into this call of Christ - following Jesus together is going to take some grit.

Like can we just be honest for a second? Life is hard. Some days I want to turn my phone off, go play golf, then spend the rest of the afternoon watching TV and eating pizza. Let's just be honest about how it is.

What do I mean by grit? Angela Duckworth, a PhD and psychologist who has devoted her life to the study and application of grit, defines grit as the **passion and perseverance for long-term goals.**

She writes:

"Grit is about having what some researchers call an 'ultimate concern'—a goal you care about so much that it organizes and gives meaning to almost everything you do. And grit is holding steadfast to that goal. Even when you fall down. Even when you screw up. Even when progress toward that goal is halting or slow."

The word the Bible would use for it is the word **steadfastness**. Having the perseverance and endurance to run the race of the Christian life all the way to the end. To finish well. To not give up when it gets hard, mundane, boring, difficult, tedious. To not throw in the towel on yourself or someone else when it seems meaningless or hopeless. To play the long game.

Grit means I don't grow weary in doing the good of following Jesus together.

- Grit means getting up in the morning and getting those 15 minutes with God even when I would rather sleep, because a lot of the time I would rather sleep.
- Grit means making that phone call to check in on a CG member even when I would rather watch TV, because a lot of the time I would rather watch TV.
- Grit means having the discipline conversation about obedience and grace and Jesus with my kid for the 10th time in 2 hours when I would rather just yell and be done.
- Grit means going to spend time with my non-Christian coworker even when it's easier to go hang out with the same people for the 4th time this week.

I'm not giving up. I'm not throwing in the towel. I'm not resigning myself to my immediate desires. I'm not letting myself be driven by what I want immediately right then in the moment just because it feels good or is easy or is the path of least resistance.

Toddlers. Because going after our whims and emotions is what toddlers do. That's not maturity, it's immaturity. Toddlers are driven by whims and emotions. I know this because I have one and I've watched her closely over the past 2 years. Harper doesn't stop to consider the big picture. She just wants what her heart wants regardless of the outcomes it will lead to. I want that cookie. I want to put my finger in this electrical socket. Another marker of my kid is how quickly she gets angry when it's not perfect. I'm trying to put this little piece in a puzzle and it doesn't go in right away so now I'm angry. No sticking power. She's driven by whatever her emotions and heart tell her. Follow your heart is not maturity, it's immaturity.

Sometimes, myself included, I'm preaching to me here just as much as I am to you → Sometimes, we can act like spiritual toddlers. We are driven by our whims and emotions. So if it's hard I'm out. I just want whatever is right in front of me, whatever my feelings and emotions and immediate desires say is best, that's what I'm going for.

Having grit means self-denial in view of the long game.

- Having grit means worshiping when we don't want to.
- Reading our Bible when it's unfulfilling.
- Living in community when it's painful.

That's the stuff of not growing weary in doing good.

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*,

"We live in what one writer has called the 'age of sensation.' We think that if we don't feel something there can be no authenticity in doing it. But the wisdom of God says something different: that we can act ourselves into a new way of feeling much quicker than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting....There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness."

Grit means saying no the immediate, felt want or desire - sleep, apathy, lust, selfishness - and saying yes to God and others.

Grit for Tim. Let me go first in this → I need Jesus, alright. There's one specific way this looks for me this year. One way in particular I feel convicted heading into this year.

It is hard for me to open up....I've shared about this before, I'm just naturally a pretty closed off person. I got into ministry to be needed, not needy. The Lord is pressing on me. And so one of the ways the Lord is pushing me to be gritty this year is by resisting the urge to hide and to actually share when appropriate, what I'm going through and struggling with.

So the other day I'm at breakfast with two close friends, members here, safe people for me. And I can feel the Lord pushing on me to share something I'm struggling with and it's actually like a battle in my soul. Like, I can feel the fight - don't share, share, don't share, share. To actually open up in that moment, and in the 100 other moments like that I'll have this year, it's going to take grit.

GOSPEL

And what good news we have in the gospel, that Jesus did not give up when it got hard. That he didn't throw in the towel when suffering came, when pain came, when it got difficult. That he didn't pause His ministry surrounded by a great crowd of people shouting "hosanna in the highest!" but he saw it all the way through - to

when a week later, surrounded by that same crowd, he's being mocked, beaten, verbally abused, persecuted, and killed out of deep love for us.

The love of Christ that goes to the cross. that dies, is buried, and rises again is a gritty love. Christ loves us till the end. He never threw or throws in the towel. He sees it through. He fulfills His promises.

And it is Christ that brings our souls rest and renewal in Him. Rig doesn't just mean find your teeth and figure it out - it's a reminder that the same power that raised Christ from the dead (Rom 8:11) now lives in you. Christ revives our soul (as we sang about earlier tonight and Psalm 23 promises us). He gives us the renewal and strength we need to continue to press on. To say no to ourselves and yes to God.

Following Jesus together with grit.

This Must Be Stronger Than That

Everything in you and around you is going to tell you a vision for your life where you follow Jesus arm in arm with other people for the long haul isn't worth it.

- **Instead of following Jesus** - the world, your flesh, and the devil are going to tell you to follow your heart. Follow your desires. Be your own king, your own master and ruler and captain. Don't revolve your life around Christ, revolve it around yourself.
- **Instead of taking care of others** - spiritually and physically - the world, your flesh, and the devil are going to tell you to look out for number 1. Your needs first. Your wants first. Take care of yourself. Put on your own oxygen mask, and if you've got stuff left over you can be generous, that's the American way.
- **Instead of having grit in the Christian life** - the world, your flesh, and the devil are going to tell you that the highest priority in life should be your ease and happiness. Why follow Jesus if it gets hard? Why follow JEsus if at times it makes you do things you don't want to do, or not you're not able to do things you want to do? Why follow Jesus if it makes your life worse?

Let me close by telling you a story about a pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer grew up in the early 1900s in Germany, and after becoming a Christian in his early teens, devoted his life to the study and preaching of God's Word. In the 1930s, the Reich and the Nazi movement was starting to infiltrate the church. Their goal was not just political rule, but an all-encompassing rule of the German people, which included their hearts and minds and religion.

In response to the Reich takeover of the German churches, confessing Christians left their pulpits and established their own secret seminary, known as **Finklewald**, led by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer established a robust vision of common life together for the students at the seminary. Morning and Evening worship, theological study, communal times of relaxation and prayer. Their theological training was designed to encompass their whole lives, not just their academic studies.

In fact, the pattern Bonhoeffer established at Finklewald was so all-encompassing that friends began to get worried. Was this too much? Would it lead to student burnout? Was this amount of formation truly needed?

One of Bonhoeffer's friends, **Wilhelm Nisel**, came to visit to address some of these concerns with him. While he was there, Bonhoeffer took Nisel to the top of a nearby hill, where if you looked to your left you could see the one-building seminary, and if you looked to the right you could see a German airbase, where soldiers were being trained to fight for the Nazi party.

And Bonhoeffer said to Nisel - "These soldiers are being trained for a kingdom of hardness and cruelty. They are being shaped. What we do here, must be stronger than that."

This must be stronger than that.

To have any lasting value in the world today, your spiritual formation must be stronger than all of the formation you're threatened with every single day. This robust version of discipleship → That we would follow Jesus together with grit, must be stronger than the discipleship of the world. This community of saints, God's people - following Jesus arm in arm, sowing to the Spirit, living lives aimed towards godliness together must be stronger than all of the shaping and pulls of the world around us.

This must be stronger than that. So we follow Jesus together with grit.

Communion. Pray.