

**[Grizzly Man Pic]** Have you heard of a guy named Timothy Treadwell? He's also referred to as the "Grizzly Man." He started a foundation called "Grizzly People" to help raise awareness about the treatment of bears in North America. He would go out to where bears were, Katmai National Park and Reserve in Alaska, and he would approach the bears, and sometimes even touch the bears. He filmed and documented his interactions with the bears. You can tell as you're watching him, that he felt the bears trusted him and wouldn't harm him.

Against all laws and repeated warnings by park officials, Treadwell would camp in the park, near the bears. They warned him over and over again, bears are wild animals, they are not pets. But Treadwell wouldn't listen to them. They didn't understand. He's the grizzly man, and the bears won't hurt him. In 2005, they released a documentary chronicling 5 years of his exploits and finishing with his death in 2003. He was camping in Katmai National Park with his girlfriend, and he was bit by a poisonous spider, and they didn't have time to get him to the hospital. NO! I wish that had been how he died. That's not how it ended. How did it end? He was killed by a bear. Obviously right!

If it hadn't been a bear then maybe we would be able to say, maybe he knew something we didn't, maybe he had connected with these bears. But no, it's exactly how we thought. You sleep with bears, you're gonna die.

For some reason, Treadwell couldn't see that living with the bears was a terrible idea. Friends, family, the park officials, even the US government told him this is a bad idea. There's one moment where he even yells at the government and says, "How dare they tell me I can't stay here and protect these bears." How dare they? really? They are worried about your life and your well being here man! There's only one way this ends. but he didn't listen.

It seems pretty obvious to us right? Sleeping with bears bad. But I wonder, are we any different from Treadwell? are there things in our lives that are going to kill us, that we are oblivious to?

**[no smoking sign]** For a long time, smoking was harped on by the church as a sin issue. But now, the church doesn't really talk about it anymore, but the culture does. All the gruesome new anti smoking ads are showing you the cost of smoking. And

yet we still won't you to stop. Not for our health nor the health of those around us. But an addiction is hard to break. So hard in fact, most people just remain in their addiction, they continue to sleep with the bear, even though they know all the facts.

[busy, money sign, food, beer, angry boss, religious person] Maybe your bears aren't a substance addiction. But maybe your bear is busy-ness of our schedule, or over spending, over-eating, or over drinking. Abuse of power, pursuit of the top, no matter the cost. For some, it may even be the way we practice our faith as self-abusive, self-shaming, trying to earn God's love, type of religion. We are involved in something that isn't great, but we've convinced ourselves it's not that bad. That it won't have the toxic effects it's had on someone else.

You may think that's not a good list. Those aren't really causing harm. If they are a crime, they are victimless crimes. But this is why we need someone to point these things out to us. It's hard for us to see the bears in our own lives. We think we're fine. We think they respect us and won't harm us, but really, they're just waiting for us to fall asleep.

In the Church, we have a term for these types of things, the things that grab a hold of us and destroy our lives. It's called SIN. And one of the most enticing parts about staying in it is that it is comfortable. It's what we've known. This is the way it's always been, or it's what's expected of me, or even worse, it's too hard to change. It feels fine, it feels right, why is it so bad? Sin convinces us we've tamed the bears. That though they might kill others, they won't kill us.

But this is why leaving, what we call "repenting", is so necessary.

[Desert] We are in the season of Lent, a season of self-denial and self-reflection. The 40 days of Lent represent the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert before he began his ministry. So, as a symbol of joining Jesus in the desert, many of us have chosen to give up something in our lives to remind us that we don't get life from this thing because, as Jesus said, we don't live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. We also have been taking a hard look at ourselves.

Attempting to see over and over where we place our strength and value. Is it in God, or is there something else that we are clinging to? So we are asked to repent of that, and return to God.

I believe we want to repent, we want to find true life, that's why we're here. But I also believe many of us give up on finding that life because it's too hard, and we settle for what we've got. But I would propose today that it requires a journey through the desert, that will feel like dying, in order for us to find new life.

[scripture slide] Turn in your bibles, or in your bible app, to **Numbers 21:4-9**. If you grabbed one of the free bibles in the back its on **pg 107** and if you don't have a bible, you can keep that one. It's our gift to you.

While you're turning there, I want to share a little about where we're at the story. God's people, the Israelites, were slaves in [Pyramid] Egypt. It's safe to say that they lived in a perpetual death. It was a non-existence. God heard their cries for help and he rescued them, using a man named Moses. He brought them out of death and made a covenant with them, a marriage ceremony, which we talked about last week. Now from there, God led to the edge the land promised to their ancestors, the edge of life. But they were too scared to go in. They weren't ready for life! They had been dead so long that they couldn't believe life was possible. So God spent the next 40 years teaching them how to live. The problem with that is that it meant wandering around in the desert for that time.

God kept telling them that all they needed was Him, but they kept arguing and grumbling and complaining to Moses. This is one of those stories. Now as I'm reading this, pay close attention to where they LOOK when things get hard.

4 They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; 5 they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

6 Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

8 The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." 9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a

pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

[Pyramid] So where's the first place they look when things get tough? Egypt. "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt?" Ummmm. You were slaves in Egypt, and now you're free? But i don't like this food. But you were slaves and now you're free. yeah yeah but... Listen, obviously, living in the desert is not the most ideal situation. But God didn't want them to wander around in the desert either, he wanted them to move forward into the promised land, but they weren't ready to trust him. So here they are, in the desert, and God is proving himself over and over again that he can be trusted. But when it gets tough, what do they do? They always look to Egypt.

Now, this whole snake business is obviously really weird, but God's antidote is even weirder? Make an IMAGE of a snake and look it. Now hold up. Last week, didn't we hear pretty clearly that we aren't supposed to make images? Right? It's number 2 of the big 10, the second vow of the wedding ceremony, and here it seems God is asking them to break that vow, that commandment.

But there's something else going on here. the word used here is key... "8 The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live."

"Look at it." Not worship it. "Look at it." The ancient Hebrew language had words that meant 'revere/worship/bow down' just like we do in English, so if God had wanted them to worship the snake, he could have told them to. But he doesn't He just wants them to look at it. He says... "Look at it." God is not calling them worship the snake and be healed, he's calling them to look at it and be healed.

Why a snake? In the ancient world, snakes were a symbol of wisdom. Snakes were the embodiment of good advice for places like Egypt and Babylon. What is Egypt known for? [Indiana Jones pic] just ask Indy, "snakes...why'd it have to be snakes." So when the people ask for Egypt what does God give them? Egypt. And what happens? They start dying. Now, this is not God's punishment on them for making a wrong choice, this is God giving them what they want. God is in a very tangible way showing them that if you get what you want it leads to death. Which *of course* it does

- the wisdom of Egypt enslaved them in the first place. Of course the wisdom of Egypt is death. Pretty foolish, actually.

It's also made of bronze [bronze] Anyone wanna guess what this era of history, between 3000-1200 BC, was called? The Bronze age. Nice. So, Moses is using every bit of technological advancement that was at his disposal to make this snake.

[snake + bronze = ???] This snake on a stick, that to us holds little value, would've been for them the pinnacle of all wisdom, and all technology known at the time. Look at it and be healed. Why? Because they asked for Egypt. They asked to return to what they knew. Here's a picture of the best that Egypt has to offer, the very height of human progress, LOOK AT IT! This is it. See where this gets you? Death. Now that you see where looking back gets you, maybe you will be ready to turn your backs on Egypt once and for all. Maybe then you can choose life. Wake up, open your eyes and choose life.

[Grizzly Man Pic] That's easier said than done of course. Just ask the Grizzly Man, right? He was told over and over that if he continues to sleep with the bears he's going to die. But he wouldn't change. Anyone who's tried to change how they live can tell you, it's so easy slip back into those old habits. We've tried to go on diets, give up smoking, get out of an abusive relationship, get out of debt, and at some point, the journey toward freedom was so difficult, that we just reverted back to the old habits, again and again. It doesn't matter if it's the first time, fifth time, or the fiftieth time. When things get hard, we look BACK to Egypt/death/bears rather than look FORWARD to Promised Land/life.

What do we do if we are sleeping with bears? We're not in Egypt, but we're still seeking the snakes of human wisdom and progress. Can we be rescued from that? Can we find a serpent raised up to rescue us?

Yes, we can. Turn over to **John 3**. again if you grabbed a bible from the back is **page 741**. This follows immediately on the Temple cleansing we saw last week. One of the Jewish leaders has come to Jesus to inquire about his mission, basically asking Jesus, "What are you up to?" In response, Jesus cites that story of Moses and the snake.

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. John 3:14-21

[Snake - Jesus - Cross] Jesus finishes his conversation with Nicodemus by pointing back to the snake, and at the same time pointing forward to the cross, the fulfillment of the new covenant. Why? What’s going on in Christ’s death that in any way relates to the snake in the desert? That’s a great question, I’m glad you asked.

The snake in the desert was God revealing to the people as clearly as possible, this is what you’re asking for, and this is what it gets you. God gave them what they wanted, and they were dying because of it. So God peels back fabric of the so and reveals to them the smallness of their endeavor. And once they see where that pursuit leads, they are healed.

In the same way, the things that we pursue that are counter to God’s way only lead to death. By doing so, we are sleeping with bears, thinking that they respect us and won’t harm us. But in the cross God is revealing us to us the result of our choices... death.

But it gets even better.

The death that is at the end of our choices has now been fulfilled in Jesus. God dies in our place to show us the end result of the path we’re on, but also to invite us into a new path, new life, freedom. But he’s not hiding anything. Leaving death still *feels* like dying. It takes a while to learn a new way to live. It took the Israelites 40 years in the desert to shake off the chains of slavery, but the end result was freedom.

That still doesn't sound very fun does it? I need that new life now. I'm struggling in this old life, these bears are gnawing at me as we speak. I know. And in the past, the church has been guilty of over-promising and under-delivering when it comes to the speed at which this freedom becomes natural. "Just come down to the altar and pray this prayer and all your problems will go away." I think we all know it's not that easy.

Leaving death feels like dying. Period. You're putting to death an old way of thinking, believing and living. And that hurts. It takes times to learn this new way. But it's worth it. Because living the old way was always leading to death. Even if it felt natural and comfortable, you were sleeping with bears. Eventually, they will get hungry. But in Jesus, death has died, and after some time in this new land, you'll begin to find your way. And you're not alone in this process. We are here. And even better, the good news of this new way of life is that God is with us. And he is all we need.

John finishes out this section and discusses the ramifications of God sending his son into the world. He talks about believing and condemnation, light and dark, life and death. For us this morning, it could be re-written in this way.

*God so loved the world that he took the consequence of our choices on himself, so that if we would choose Him, we would have life. He did not do this to shame us or because he wants to show us how evil we are, but so that we could be rescued from the grasp of the bears we have been sleeping with. If we choose to sleep with bears, we're gonna get eaten. Life has come, but we have loved the bears more than our own life. For many of us, the struggle of leaving what we've known is too much to handle, and we'd rather just stay where we're comfortable, then to go through the pain of losing the familiar. But if we will go through the pain of leaving the bears behind, we will find true life on the other side.*

**[Grizzly Man Pic]** The documentarian said that Treadwell found peace with the bears because it was too difficult for him to live in the world of humans and real relationships. He had been hurt and rejected so much that to live in the world of humans was too painful. He had fabricated this world in his head where nature was

good and peaceful and it was the humans that brought destruction and violence. It was too hard for him to go back to the humans and the journey through the desert was too much for him. And so he stayed where it was comfortable, he stayed where he felt was his place, and he died because of it.

There are many of us in this room that are sleeping with bears. We have things in our life that are bringing death and we are too busy or too familiar to see it. We need God to reveal what these things are. We need it to be on display for us so that we can LOOK AT IT and be healed. Our choices have gotten us here, but God has taken the consequence upon himself so that we can have LIFE.

Leaving death feels like dying. But it's the only way to find life! Leave the bears, choose to live.

**[Communion Slides]** Communion Set-up and EXAMINE ::

Today, that leaving begins with a death. Specifically, Jesus' death, embodied in this communion ritual.... On the night Jesus was betrayed he had one final meal with his closest friends. He took a piece of bread and, after giving thanks for it, he broke it saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat, all of you. Do this in remembrance of me." For us, this bread represents the areas in our life where we continue to seek death, we continue to sleep with bears.

Likewise, after they had finished eating, he took a cup of wine and said, "This is my blood of the New Covenant, the new promise, that is poured out for the sins of the world. Take and drink, all of you, do this in remembrance of me." For us, this juice represents that the promise between God and us has been secured. That when we continued to choose death, God died in our place, so that we can now have new life.

you don't have to be a member of Catalyst to take communion. This is Jesus' table, and it is open for anyone who desires to leave the bears, leave the things that bring death, and embrace the life that comes through Him.

But before we approach the table, I want to lead us through a prayer of examine. This is practice that we do fairly often at our gatherings because it helps us process what God is speaking to us through the scriptures in tangible ways. So you can read



along, or you can close your eyes, whatever you want to do. There's four questions, I'll give some time after each question for you to reflect.<sup>3</sup>

1. What are the "bears" in my life?
2. Where in the last week have I been satisfied with death?
3. What would it take for me to leave these "bears" behind?
4. Where in the next week can I begin to leave the "bears" behind?