

Good morning, Catalyst! If we haven't met, my name is Sue Sweeney. I attend Catalyst here with my husband, Jeff and his family. We all started coming here about 7 years ago. Jeff and I have two daughters, Stella, who is 4 years old and Clara, who is 20 months.

[1 **Jimmy Eat World**] The song the band sang at the beginning of the service this morning, "The Middle" is by one of my favorite bands, Jimmy Eat World. When Jim Adkins, the lead singer of Jimmy Eat World, was asked what this song, "The Middle," was about, he said it was inspired by an e-mail he received from a fan; a teenaged girl who needed advice about fitting in at school. She wanted to hang out with the "Punk Rock" kids, but they told her she wasn't "Punk Rock" enough for them. Which, is kind of against everything Punk Rock is supposed to be about. It's supposed to be something anyone who is on the outside can feel like they are on the inside of. And apparently, that wasn't the case. That's why Jimmy Eat World wrote this song. It's a message to lonely, angsty teenagers everywhere, "You're in middle of the ride. Everything will be alright"...someday. [i]

But, I ask you guys this morning, "will it be alright?" Did that turn out to be true for that lonely high school girl who wasn't punk rock enough for the punk rock kids?

We say to young people now, "it gets better." But, does it eventually get better for all of us?

"Will it get better?" I bet a lot of us asked that in high school. I bet a lot of us are STILL asking that.

[2 **Fitting In**] As soon as you're done worrying about trying to fit in at school, you're trying all over again to fit in at work and with new groups of people. The goal is to get in good with the "right people" and to be "in" with the movers and shakers at the top who can make things happen for you. You're here (*gesture low*) and you want to get to here (*gesture up*).

It sounds like a lot of us, who are WAY past high school, are STILL trying to fit in. No wonder they say high school never ends.

But, what if it could be **different**? What if we could escape all the anxiety we feel when it comes to knowing where we fit. What if we COULD fit in, not matter what?

The **GOOD NEWS** is "fitting in" isn't about GETTING somewhere else or BEING something else.

It's about learning to be content where we are. It's about knowing that we are EXACTLY where we are supposed to be.

[3 **Normal Amy**] Do you guys know Amy Poehler? She was on Saturday Night Live and the TV show, Parks & Recreation. She's a really funny writer, actress, and comedian. [4 **Silly Amy**] Earlier this year, I read her autobiography, Yes Please.

In her book, she tell a story about a guy she dated who was a **male model** and for her, it was a pretty big ego boost that such a good-looking guy would be into her. One day, she was hanging out at his place and kind of snooping through his stuff when she found a diary he was writing in. She flipped through it and found where he basically wrote that she was "funny, but not that pretty."

Amy's first thought was, "I know that already, dummy... I win because I tricked you with my personality! I don't even like you!"

And then she writes that she "went home and cried and took way too long to break up with him."

She continues, "I had already made a decision early on that I would be a plain girl with tons of personality, and accepting it made everything a lot easier. [5 Quote] If you are lucky, there is a moment in your life when you have some say as to what your currency is going to be...Decide what your currency is early. Let go of what you will never have." [ii]

That's an interesting perspective. Have you ever thought about what your currency is? She is not talking about actual money here. She's talking about how we use what we have to get what we want.

The humiliation Amy Poehler must have felt after reading that bit about herself in her boyfriend's diary and her idea of deciding what her currency was stayed with me for a long time.

A few months later, I traveled out of town for work to something where I would be meeting a lot of people for the first time and I remember pretty vividly standing in the hotel lobby, thinking about whether or not I was going to be able to make any new friends that week and Amy Poehler's quote popped up in my head again, "Decide what your currency is."

I thought, "What is my currency? What do I offer people and whatever I have, will it be enough to get noticed?"

Then, I had a sort of epiphany. You only need currency if you're trying to buy something...

(pause) [6 Quote] You only need currency if you're trying to buy something...

...and what was I trying to buy? Was it the opportunity to fit-in with the right people? I wanted, so badly, to be valued and accepted by people I would probably never even see again. Why was it so important to me that I have their approval?

I work so hard at fitting in and I feel like it's never enough. I feel like I'M never enough.

Do you ever feel that way? I think I know why that is.

[7 Measuring Cup] How about a visual? Let's look at this measuring cup. Let's imagine that a full cup means I'm a fancy pants. People want to LOOK like me and they want to BE me. Right now this cup is empty. I'm going to fill it up with water. This water represents what our culture says is important. It's currency I want to earn. So here we go...

(Begin pouring water into the measuring cup)

Here I am being smarter and more popular

Here is that BIG promotion at work I've been hoping for.

Here's some for being younger, thinner, and prettier

A nicer car, a better home, all the clothes the magazines tell me to buy.

Here are my perfectly-raised children. They're better than yours. Oh! This one went to Harvard!

And here's 500 likes on Facebook and 300 reTweets #winning!

(Hold up the measuring cup) This should be enough

But, the truth is (as much as we hate to admit it) it is never enough because there will ALWAYS be someone who is smarter, *(Begin to pour the water out of the measuring cup, back into the pitcher, a little at a time)* cooler, better-looking, and wealthier, than you. There will ALWAYS be someone who is more talented and a way better parent than you will ever be. You will never measure up. You will just end up feeling empty.

BUT, that is **GOOD NEWS!** This business about filling ourselves up with enough currency so we can fit in, only to find that we're actually empty doesn't even matter because God is turning everything upside down.

(Place measuring cup upside down)

God is telling us that we can stop playing this measuring game. We can stop defining ourselves by the standards of our culture. We can learn to stop measuring things altogether. But we tend to forget that and so did the early church in the Bible.

If you have your Bible with you today, look for **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**. If you picked up one of the Bibles on your way in, it's on page ###. If you don't have a Bible, you're welcome to take that one home with you today. It's free.

[8 Greece] Let's go back about 1900 years to Greece in the 1st century. Paul the Apostle is writing a letter to the church in Corinth. What you need to know about these people in Corinth was that they were not part of the upper class nobility or the wealthy elite. Most of them were regular people who want what many of us want today- to just have a little more status and admiration. They wanted to fit in.

The most important value in Greek culture during that time was wisdom. It was their currency. If these regular people in the church in Corinth could prove to everyone that they did somehow measure up in wisdom, despite their modest position, then they could have some clout and influence among the most important people in their society.

So, they decided they did have a kind of special wisdom that their fellow Greek neighbors did not. I suppose this made them feel a little bit better. They claimed that since they had the fortune of knowing about the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, it served as a special kind of wisdom in it's own right. In this passage in 1 Corinthians, we see that Paul is chastising them for this because they're mixing up what society wants with what God wants and doing that will lead them down the wrong path. Paul writes,

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God. God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin. Therefore, as the Scriptures say, "If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord."

[9 Wisdom = Foolishness?] Let's get something out of the way really quickly: Paul is suggesting that wisdom is foolish, so what does that mean? Does that mean we can check our brains at the door when we walk into church and not ask questions? Does that mean we don't need education? That's not what it means. Paul is flipping the values of the Corinthians upside down. He's calling into question the standards they are measuring by. He is challenging their desire for more currency.

The problem was, they began to talk about themselves as being *spiritually rich and powerful and nobly born in Christ* and really just as good (maybe even a little bit better) than everyone else who couldn't claim to have that particular bit of wisdom. They talked themselves into thinking God was providing them an infinite amount of currency.

And you see how this gets [Paul really upset](#). He basically says, "Ok, I see what you did there. You're trying to be fancy. You're trying to measure your worth by the standards of your culture and worst of all, you've mixed your faith up with what your culture values and tried to make a combo of the two. You think wisdom is important because that's what your culture tells you is important and now you're telling everyone God is helping you with that. God doesn't care about what the people in your culture value."

[10 [Measuring Cup](#)] Paul takes the opportunity to remind the church in Corinth how the Bible continually speaks of God. God doesn't play by the rules of our culture. He didn't then and He isn't now. God has something else in mind. He is overturning the established order. The kingdom of God is in direct opposition to what society thinks is important and valuable.[iii] Just like the measuring cup, the kingdom of God is upside down too.

In our [culture today](#), we may not value wisdom in the same way the Greeks did, but we certainly have things that we hold in the same regard. You and I find ourselves, if we're honest, wanting to be powerful, famous and wealthy just like the Corinthians wanted to be wise, noble, and rich. We want to be winners.

But sometimes, we feel like [losers](#).

And I'm standing up here telling you that whatever society considers a loser, is actually a winner to God!

And, I know what you're thinking. Sue, that actually sounds kind of [terrible](#). I don't want to be a loser.

So, let me clarify what I mean. You're only a loser to those who are still trying to win at the game. They're still playing this game of earning more currency to buy more of what our culture values. It's a rat race.

And to make it worse, we fool ourselves into thinking, because maybe it makes us feel better, that God somehow [sanctions](#) this, that He shares the same values our culture does, that He will actually help us earn the currency we need so we can be better than everyone else.

[11 [God Values ---- Culture Values](#)] But, the Kingdom of God and the life He calls us to is a whole completely different thing. It's not part of the game. What God says is important is here (*gesture right*) and what our culture says is important is over there (*gesture left*) and we need to stop trying to mix the two together.

Deciding to quit the game is threatening to people because most everyone is still playing it. They want desperately to fit in and to measure up, but it will never be enough.

So, you DON'T have to play by their rules. No more striving. No more measuring. No more trying to fit in. No more Rat Race.

So, why do we keep trying to play the game?

If you already feel [embraced](#) by God, then ask yourself, "what am I still striving for?" because you are already exactly where you need to be.

If you're just now sensing that God is calling you, you don't have to strive anymore. You are already exactly where you need to be.

You already have all the currency you need to fit in. To God, in this moment, because you are His creation, you have already [proven to be enough](#)...more than enough...exactly the way you are.

All you have to do is accept it. And that seems to be the [hardest part](#).

[12 Spiritual Practices] But here's something you can do right away to help you learn to stop measuring yourself by the wrong standard. Out here, we have our "Spiritual Practices Guide." [Fasting](#) teaches us that we are not in control of our lives, that everything we have is a gift from God. We have no currency that we can claim to have earned on our own. We have nothing we can boast about. Fasting reminds us to be generous with what God has blessed us with.

The first thing is [choosing something](#) to fast. Traditionally, Christians have mostly chosen to fast from meals, but you can choose to fast from anything that seems to control you.

If you find yourself [concerned](#) with having enough of a certain kind of currency, you may want to consider fasting this. If you feel like you need to dress nice to feel accepted, you might consider taking a break from buying new clothes.

The next thing is to decide [how long](#) the fast will last and while you're fasting, you may decide you have a little extra time. Use it as extra time to connect with God.

Lastly, if you fast correctly, it will be challenging. [Having a friend](#) to help and encourage you goes a long way in helping you to be successful.

[It's a really hard thing to do](#), to stop playing the game- to stop trying to determine your currency, to stop measuring yourself by the wrong standards, to stop trying to fit in.

It's something that is very difficult for me to do, but it starts by trading the familiar for the unknown – it starts by taking a risk with the spiritual practice of Fasting- to give up the comfortable for the slightly uncomfortable [and trust that you will come out the other side](#) with a better sense of what your worth really is. You will know what it means to be exactly where you need to be. You will know that you are already enough.

There is a glaring difference between what our culture is telling us and what God is promising us. I want to show you a video of some moms and their kids because it is a good example of how easy it is measure ourselves by the wrong standard.

[VIDEO - New Perspective \(3:19\)](#)

Our culture tells us there is this [gap](#) between who we are and what we think we are supposed to be and just like those moms in the video, we are, all of us, so painfully aware of all the ways in which we fall short. We can count all the ways in which we are somehow not enough.

The moms in the video were measuring themselves [against other moms](#) instead of by the boundless, unconditional love of their children and I think God is looking at you the same way these children are looking at their moms. If these kids love their mommas so much, how much more does God love each of us?

[To all of us who are in the middle](#) of the ride- the ride that is actually a rat race- are you going to keep trying to play the game you can never win, or are you ready to stop?

God already decided what you have is more than enough. You are worthy right now. You are already accepted. You already fit in.

[It's time for you](#) to accept this upside down idea of how things are really supposed to work.

It's time for you to stop measuring yourself and others by what our culture thinks is important.

It's time for you, and me, to fast the things that get us caught up in the game, in the rat race.

"God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin."

Imagine if Catalyst was a people who decided to stop trying to fit-in with our culture so we can measure up? What if we stopped the rat race? What if we accepted the place where we are- right here and right now - and allowed God, through the Holy Spirit, to begin the work of aligning our hearts with God's heart, in order to restore us...ALL of us...to God's perfect creation.

This morning we will share in Communion. We take Communion to remember what God has promised us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is calling us on a journey that begins by dying to our desire to earn currency and ends with finding a life in the kingdom of God that is entering into the here and now, a place where the outsiders are all insiders.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to participate in Communion. If you're willing to step out of the rat race, to trust that God has called you exactly where you are, if you want to be part of this upside-down kingdom, then you're welcome to come to the Table this morning.

Let's pray.

God, we confess our desire to fit in and the anxiety we feel about how hard we have to try. Please make the bread and juice into spiritual food that gives us the courage to stop the rat race and receive God's grace and love. Amen.

Catalyst, I hope this is good news that wherever you are, that you're exactly where you need to be. You are accepted. You are enough. Go in His grace and in His peace.

NOTES

[i] Phillip Obenschain, Backtracking: The Story Behind "The Middle" with Jimmy Eat World, Alternative Press, August 26, 2013,

http://www.altpress.com/features/entry/backtracking_the_story_behind_the_middle_with_jimmy_eat_world

[ii] Amy Poehler, *Yes Please* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 19-21.

[iii] Pheme Perkins, "1 Corinthians," *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, (Oxford University Press, 2001), 269-270.