

WHEN WE STOP SETTLEING FOR SECOND BEST

15 February 2026

SUMMARY:

This message challenges believers to examine whether they have drifted into settling for less than God's best for their lives. Using the story of the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda, the message explores how Jesus asks not about our past but about our willingness to change: "Do you want to be made well?" The message presents Lent as a sacred interruption - a 40-day period of sustained examination where we voluntarily remove distractions and comforts to confront what has quietly become our master. It is not about earning God's approval through suffering, but about creating space to honestly assess whether we are fully alive in Christ or merely existing. Bruce Downes emphasizes that wanting change and being willing to change are not the same thing, and that Lent provides the intentional framework needed to stop our drift toward settling and to realign our lives with God's purposes.

KEY POINTS

- Wanting more in life and actually changing direction are not the same thing; we can desire better while remaining unchanged
- Human beings naturally drift into settling for less without dramatic rebellion. We adapt slowly to busyness, distraction, and emotional distance
- Jesus' question "*Do you want to be made well?*" demands more than sympathy. It asks if we're ready to live differently
- The wilderness is not punishment but confrontation. It removes noise, distraction, and comfort so clarity can emerge
- Identity that has not been tested remains only theoretical; conviction untested by fragility remains fragile
- Lent is a sustained interruption long enough to truly confront ourselves, not just a momentary reflection
- We fast not because food is evil, but because appetite reveals dependence and what has become our master
- Settling happens quietly and stopping it must be intentional
- Lent returns annually not because we forget the calendar, but because we forget ourselves and what truly matters
- The goal is not to suffer to please God, but to become fully alive as He created us to be

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- John 5:2-9 (The healing at the Pool of Bethesda)
- Mark 1:9-15 (Jesus' baptism and temptation in the wilderness)

QUOTES

- Jesus is not looking to the past, but he is looking to the present and he is looking to the future. He is asking, do you want your life to be different?
- Are you tired of your situation and are you ready to live differently? These are not the same thing. Some people would stop and say, yeah, I don't like the way things are but I'm happy to keep living the way I am.
- Living is not the same thing as being alive. The question becomes is how do we interrupt our life? How do we catch ourselves in the middle of it?
- We live in a time when human beings, when we're left alone, we settle. Left uninterrupted, we adjust downward. Left without examination, we slowly build our lives around convenience rather than conviction.
- Lent is not about earning God's approval, it's about examining what has quietly become our Master.
- We do Lent every year, not because we forget the calendar, but because we forget ourselves. We forget what we want. We forget what matters. We forget that we were not created merely to cope, but we were created to be fully alive.
- Settling for who we are happens quietly. But Lent is about stopping and asking intentionally, is this what we want?
- If you want to be made well, are you willing to interrupt what has become familiar? That is what Lent is about.

WHEN YOU WANTED MORE BUT SETTLED FOR LESS

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer.

ICE BREAKER

Question: Share one area of your life where you have noticed yourself "drifting" or settling for less than what you truly want. What made you aware of this drift?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Question Jesus Asks - "Do you want to be made well?"

- Why is this such an uncomfortable question?
- What is the difference between being tired of your situation and being ready to live differently?
- Can you think of an area where you want change but haven't been willing to change direction?

2. The Drift

The message talked about how we "drift" into ways of thinking and feeling without dramatic rebellion.

- What are some ways you have noticed yourself drifting in your spiritual life?
- How does "living" differ from "being fully alive" in Christ?
- What subconscious habits or patterns have you developed that pull you away from who God calls you to be?

3. The Purpose of Lent

"Lent is not about earning God's approval; it's about examining what has quietly become our Master."

- How does this understanding of Lent differ from what you previously thought?
- What has "quietly become your Master?" What do you rely on for comfort, identity, or security besides God?
- Why do you think the Church asks us to do this examination every year?

4. Sustained Interruption

The message emphasized that Lent is a "sustained interruption" - 40 days long enough for surface enthusiasm to fade and deeper questions to surface.

- Why is sustained interruption necessary for real change?
- What makes short-term enthusiasm different from lasting transformation?
- How can we support each other through the entire 40 days?

5. Into the Wilderness

Mark 1:12 - "*The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.*"

- What does "wilderness" mean in practical terms for your life?
- How does removing comfort and distraction bring clarity?
- What are you afraid might surface if you truly enter into silence and stillness?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Individual Reflection

Take 5 minutes of silence for each person to consider:

- If Jesus asked you today, "*Do you want to be made well?*" what area of your life would immediately come to mind?
- What one thing could you remove or reduce during Lent that would create space for God to speak?

Group Sharing & Accountability

- Share (if comfortable) what you are sensing God is asking you to address this Lent
- What will you give up, not to suffer, but to create silence and space?
- How can this group support you through the 40 days?

Specific Action Steps

Choose at least one from each category:

Remove/Reduce (Create Wilderness):

- Social media usage
- Television/streaming services
- Comfort foods or drinks
- Busy-ness and over-scheduling
- Background noise (music, podcasts while commuting)

Add/Embrace (Enter Silence):

- Daily 15-minute silence/solitude
- Scripture meditation (not just reading)
- Honest journaling before God
- Walking in nature without devices
- Extended prayer time once weekly

Confront (Face What's Real):

- Schedule that difficult conversation you've been avoiding
- Examine your calendar. Does it reflect your stated priorities?
- Look at your bank statements. What do they reveal about your true values?
- Ask a trusted friend: "What do you see in my life that I might not see?"

Commitment and accountability

Write down your answers to these questions:

1. What specific thing will you give up/reduce during Lent?
2. What specific practice will you add to create space for God?
3. What one honest question will you sit with during this season?
4. Who in this group can check in with you weekly?

Exchange contact information with your accountability partner.

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving Father, we thank you that you don't ask us to live with disappointment. You are a God of healing and wholeness who invites us to be fully alive. As we enter this season of listening, help us to do so not out of condemnation but out of love, freedom, and wholeness. Meet us in the wilderness. Restore us. Heal us. Help us stop settling for second best when you offer us abundant life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LEADER NOTES:

- Create a safe, non-judgmental space for honest sharing
- Don't rush the silence/reflection times
- Be prepared to share your own struggles with drifting
- Emphasize that Lent is about freedom, not legalism
- Follow up with group members during the week
- Consider creating a group text thread for encouragement