

January 25, 2026

Ezra 3 Sermon Slides

Slide 1

Our heart's desires are shaped and molded by the habit-forming practices in which we participate daily and weekly. ...these habitual practices are "liturgies."...the word "liturgies" does not mean just the elements of a formal order of worship, but the practices we engage in daily. (*These liturgies*) shows how these habits express core spiritual priorities and allegiances..."liturgies" grab our imagination and direct our actions without us realizing it. Liturgies—whether 'sacred' or 'secular'—shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world. In short, liturgies make us certain kinds of people and what defines us is what we love. What do you love? that is the life-defining question. "Practice Makes Perfect?" –Mike Emler (JBC 27:1 (2013))

Slide 2

"thin" practices or mundane (e.g., brushing our teeth). They are not pursued for their own sake and they are not the sorts of things that give identity or shape our fundamental desires. Other habits are "thick" or full of meaning. These practices play a significant role in shaping our identity. They form us into certain kinds of people and can be positive or negative. Examples of thick practices with positive value include going to Sunday worship, engaging in daily prayer, and meeting regularly for Bible study and fellowship. Examples of thick practices with negative impact include habitually viewing pornography, commuting two hours a day while listening to inflammatory talk radio, or perhaps even plunking down in front of the TV every evening. No doubt these practices signal the kind of people we are, but they also shape who we are becoming.

Slides 3 & 4

All habits and practices are ultimately trying to make us into a certain kind of person. So one of the most important questions we need to ask is: Just what kind of person is this habit or practice trying to produce, and to what end is such a practice aimed?

It forces us to reckon with how our practices "preach" to our hearts, as well as proclaim what our hearts love. Do we realize how our habits influence our fundamental desires? Do we understand how practice shapes what we ultimately love? For example, if I habitually work late and miss family dinner, I am schooling my desires in a particular direction. Desire for accomplishment, vocational competency, money, and acclaim from others is stoked, while desire for godly shepherding of my family wanes.

Slowly the foundation for my identity shifts. It's not usually a deliberate process. I don't wake up one morning and decide to ignore my family. It happens by degrees, through repeated practices that weaken love for God and family. And then one day, if I'm honest, I realize my desire for God's priorities has grown cold. "Practice Makes Perfect?" –Mike Emler (JBC 27:1 (2013))