

Man, I love this place. I'm not kidding. Every time we do this, I just have hard time hanging in there. I wear two rings on my left hand, and it's not a fashion statement. My wife still dresses me to be honest. She lays stuff out on the bed and tells me that's what I'm wearing, because if she didn't, I'd be wearing a blue t-shirt right now. And I know some of you find my dress right now unacceptable, but it would be worse if it were not for my wife. I wear two rings on my left hand, both were gifts from my wife. The first one she gave me on my wedding day, and it's both silver and gold, because my wife wanted me to be able to wear either a silver watch or a gold watch. The second one was given to me by my wife after the birth of my son, and inscribed on the inside of it is Psalm 145, "One Generation shall commend your works to another." And I come from about 100 years of dysfunction. My great-great-great grandfather was hung for robbing trains. And that was one of the high points in our history. I remember being 12 years old the first time I thought, "No, not going to be the way I do my house." And so, these two rings...I don't like jewelry, I don't like that they clink all the time. They always clink together, and they clink against my coffee cup. And I have this nervous habit of tinkling my fingers now and making music with them. Like, there's nothing magical about these rings, nothing. I don't go invisible when I put one on, I don't rule the universe with them, they're just rings. Honestly, I don't even know that they're very expensive rings. I mean, I know we got this one at James Avery for like \$20. They're not expensive rings. And honestly, if you found them outside in the parking lot, if they fell off my hand and you found them in the parking lot, maybe you don't even pick them up. I mean, maybe you're just like, "Oh, somebody dropped a ring," and you get in your car. There's just nothing spectacular about them. They're just rings. That's all they are. But to me, they're more than just rings. To me, they're a constant reminder of Christ's command on my life to love my wife like Jesus loved the church. And I need a reminder because that's not easy. All the single people are confused; all the married couples are with me. This one, it's there to remind me that I am to impart the greatness of God to my children, which is very different than telling my children what God likes and doesn't like. It's very different. God's not the cosmic police of the universe, He is the creator of all things good. So, my job isn't, "Hey, don't do that. God doesn't like that." Right now, my job with a three and a half year old and a one year old is "God created the color pink and He's the one that came up with candy." And that's my job right now, to impart the greatness of Christ to my children. And so, every time these clink on a glass, every time they annoy my hand, every time, for whatever reason, I'm awkwardly carrying something and I have to shake some man's hand who wants to show me how much of a man he is in that handshake, every time that happens, I'm reminded. Like, just a little bit ago, we sang "Come Thou Fount," and in that, it says "Here I raise my Ebenezer," and for our generation, for most generations in here, that's kind of a lost concept on us. But Ebenezer was a stone that they placed in the Old Testament that would be a reminder of what God had done. And so, these two rings for me, they're more than silver and gold, they're more than jewelry to me. To me, they're reminders of all Christ has done and all that He has gifted me with in my family and in my responsibility to lead them and love them as Christ commands. And so to me, they're rings, but they're much more than rings.

So tonight in about five minutes, there are going to be these men and women, and they're going to grab this basket of bread and they're going to pass it around. And here's the deal. There's nothing magical about the bread. We bought it at Kroger. It's where we got it. There's nothing magical about it. It's just bread. And then after that, we're going to pass by with these tiny little cups of juice. It's not wine.

I've been pushing for wine, but we're Baptists, which means we only drink in private. So, it's juice. Eventually, we'll turn that over, but right now it's just juice. And there's nothing magical about that juice. We bought it at Kroger. It comes in

these little plastic things, and it's just juice. There's nothing magical about it. If you drink it, it doesn't mean that you're not going to get sick. It's just bread and it's just juice. That's all it is. But to those of us who, by faith, have been saved by grace, not of ourselves but because of Him so that no one would boast. To us, this is much more than bread. To us, this is much more than juice. So for those outside of this, tonight it's bread and it's juice, for even those who are religious. I wanted you to catch this theme tonight. I wanted you to catch this theme that in the end, Jesus is not interested in building a religion. That's not what He's doing. You can go to church your whole life. Can you not ascribe to every truth of Christian doctrine, but then say, "It's not for me," and be lost? Absolutely. Can you not be perfect in morality and still be lost? Christ doesn't come to build moral people, He's come to save them and change their souls. The other part is just a thing that occurs because of the first. So for us, this is much more than bread. It's much more than juice.

Jesus, He took the bread on that night, it must have been so confusing, and He broke it and said, "This is My body." And then He took the cup and said, "This is My blood." And then on top of that, He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." He says, "Listen, you're going to want to remember this moment," because the next day, the most paradoxical moment in the history of the universe would occur. 100% complete love was going to collide with complete wrath in the cross of Jesus Christ. Now, I know we live in 2006 and for some reason, it's popular opinion that God is not angry with sin anymore, even if there was such a thing. If you've ever wondered about God's feeling towards sin, you need to look no further than the cross of Jesus Christ and the slaughtered body of His Son. Because in the torturous death of Jesus Christ, you find all the wrath of God towards mankind and their sin and the love of God despite their sin. It's a paradoxical moment. It's hard to get the head around. All His wrath, all His love, one moment. And Jesus goes, "Remember. I want you to remember. Don't forget how much I hate sin. Don't forget how much I love you despite sin. Don't forget those two things." So, we're going to do some of that tonight. We're going to do some remembering tonight.

But there's this other piece that I want us to talk about tonight. There's this other piece that I want us to see tonight. And I'm going to do it really, really quickly. So if you have your Bibles, go to 2 Corinthians 1. Starting in verse 20, "For all the promises of God..." I'll stop there. All of them, every one of the promises of God, every promise that God has made, if God made a promise, it's included in this text. If you can think of a promise that God made, it's now in this text. Let's keep going, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him." All the promises of God, every promise that God has made finds its "yes" in the cross of Jesus Christ, every one of them. Every promise He has made finds its "yes" in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So that by partaking in that death tonight and partaking in a little piece of bread and a little glass of juice, we, by faith, partake in the death of all the promises. And so tonight, it's more than just bread. Tonight, it's than just. Tonight for those who have been saved, for those who are being saved, it's the yes-es of God.

And so, what does that mean? Okay, we'll run through just a couple of big ones for time's sake. Like, He is sufficient. God has said Jesus would be sufficient, He would be all that we needed, and if we had Him, nothing else would matter. Like health. It wouldn't matter if we lived to be 103 or we died 30. He was enough. If we reached into our pocket to find our keys and pulled out 4 \$100 bills, we are still looking for our keys. It wouldn't matter. He's enough. If everything went well or everything went wrong, He is enough. If we lived a life of ease or a life of suffering, He is enough. This is the promise of God that finds its fulfillment in the cross of Christ, and by faith tonight, we partake. You are enough. The Scriptures say that He's going to forgive all my sins, justify me and let me stand perfect before Him. 13 years in, I still can't get my head around that. Because I know the definition of perfection, and I am acquainted with me. So tonight, I'm going to put stale bread and bad grape juice in my mouth and I will hope by faith that justifying, propitiating act of Christ on the cross.

Or how about this one, and the church always needs to be reminded of this one. When He takes the cup, He says, "This is the blood of the new covenant." He says that the old way of being is gone. What was the old way of being? The old way of being was a rigid law system that made you with discipline, white knuckle morality. Jesus goes, "No, in the new way, I'm going to change your heart." Did you hear that tonight? "So, I grew up in church, I knew right and wrong, I walked out

in the parking lot with this girl, she put her hand on me and started prayed with me, I started blubbering like a baby." That is what we're talking about here. It's not a rigid set of rules that must be followed; it's the Holy Spirit awakening the soul. Jesus says, "I'm going to change your heart. I'm going to changer your heart so you'll love what pleases Me and you'll hate what I hate." And listen, you know why I need to think on that tonight when we do communion? Because in some ways, that's so true, and in some ways, I'm so far off from that. Anybody with me? Anybody who's not is a liar.

Or how about this one. One day, Jesus is going to turn to His right and say, "Today?" And God the Father is going to say, "Yeah, today." And He's going to crack open the sky and come back and get us. And maybe right now, you're in that place in life where that does very little for you, you're just like, "Oh, that'll be cool." Maybe you're in that place yet where you're just going, "Yeah, I'd like that, but I'd really like that promotion." The Lord will kill that soon enough. Well, not soon enough, but eventually. He will kill that in you. So maybe tonight, that's the "Yes" I need to focus on. And listen, these are just some. These aren't all. These are just some of the biggies. He's also promised that those who would train up a a child in a way that they would go, even in the end, they won't depart from it. And so, it's one of those promises. And so, I see Dustin baptizing his little girl, knowing I have one and I'm looking forward to that day, hoping, hoping, "Save. Save." It's by faith tonight. I hope in the yes- es of God in the flesh who shed His blood to pay the price for the reckless foolishness of men.

Okay, so here's what we're going to do here tonight. I'm done. I'm just going to pray for us, and here's what's going to happen. As I pray, I'm going to say, "Amen." And the moment I say "Amen," there are going to be men and women all over the place. They're going to get up and they're going to head to the back and they're going to get these baskets of bread and these things of juice and they're going to start passing them around. And while they do that, we're going to sing two songs. One is called "Tasting Forgiveness." It's a phenomenal song about communion, "Maybe this time the bread and the wine will be more than food on my lips." And then, we're going to go into a song about the blood. And here's what I want you to do. As they sing those two songs and as they pass out the elements, I want you in two places. I want us to remember, and Bleecker's going to lead us in some of that. When he gets to the blood, I want you to on the cross, but here's what I want you to do first. I want you to find a promise. I want you to find a promise you need right now. I mean, have you been there, where you just need that promise, you need to chew on it, you need to think on it, you need to dwell on it. I want you to find that promise for you tonight. And I don't know what it is. Maybe it's one that I mentioned, maybe it's not one that I mentioned but one that you know. And while they pass out the elements and while we sing these songs, I want you dwelling on that. It's what men, not too long ago, called "meditation." Think on the promises, think on the purchase of those things. By faith, let's think on those things that, when we're partaking in communion, it's not bread, it's not wine, it's all the promises of God finding their "yes" in Him. Don't do the elements once you've got your bread and your wine. Just hold them. We're going to take them together as a family.

Two more clarifying statements: If you're here tonight and you're a believer in Christ and you attend another church, we're glad that you're here. We know we're a mess, we know that we're loud, we know all that stuff. We're glad that you're here tonight. Please do communion with us. Please celebrate with us tonight, because the same Jesus that saved you has saved these young men and women. Celebrate with us tonight. Please do communion with us. The second thing: If you're not a believer here tonight and you're here because somebody you knew was getting baptized or a friend just invited you out to dinner and brought you here and you walked in and they gave you a hot pocket and just suckered you in here tonight, let me try to explain. We love that you're here. I'm not ever going be disrespectful to you or your life or what you're doing. I'm going to present the gospel and let Jesus take care of the rest. I'm going to talk to you about the rhythms of the universe, how things are at the deepest level of the universe and I'm going to talk to you about what the Scriptures say. But here's the thing about communion. Communion is a very deeply sacred deal for those of us who know Christ. I tried to explain why. So listen, I'm glad that you're here. You're invited into this place as deep as you want to go. Please come to a home group, please come to a small group, please come to Celebrate Recovery, please come

to nights of worship that we do, please come to the service projects that we do. If you want to go to China, we run there several times a year. If you want to go to Liberia, we'll run there. If you want to go to Guatemala, we'll run there. Come play, come join. Bleecker will buy you dinner anytime you want dinner. Come and hang out. You are welcome to be a part of this place, but here's the thing. Communion is very serious for us. So here's what I'm going to ask. I'm not trying to judge you, I'm just trying to explain to you what this is. When that plate comes by you, when that basket comes by you, you need to just keep passing it by. Because this is bread and it's wine, but to us, it's much more than that. And more than you know, I pray that there would be a day where you take a piece of bread out of that basket. But if tonight you're not a believer, then you need to pass it. Okay?

I love you. I swear I love you. I'm glad that you're here. I don't ever want to make you feel like you're not a part, because I want you to see the kingdom of God through the church. I want you to do that, but tonight's a family deal. So, I'm going to pray and they'll start playing some music behind me even as I pray. And when I say "Amen," immediately, there are going to be men and women handing out bread and glasses of juice. And I want you concentrating on this first song, just on the promises of God that find their "yes" in Him. I want you to claim them, I want you to trust Him for it, I want you to ask for help in trusting Him for it. And then Bleecker will lead us in some reflection on the cross. And then from there, I'm going to come back up and we'll do communion together.

I love you. Let's pray, "Father, I thank You so much for these men and women, and I thank You for just a chance to come in and celebrate You and the goodness of You and the thought of You and what You do. And I thank You that You've transcended age and generation and money and status. You've transcended all of that. You've done it all. We had athletes and artists. We had a sixty-two year old, we had a forty year old and a slew of twenty year olds. I thank You that You have not abandoned this post-modern generation, but You're moving and saving and well, You're just doing what You've always done. I thank You that You are not only ancient but You are today, that You're the Alpha and the Omega and every letter in between. I just thank You for Your goodness and grace and find myself overwhelmed by them. I pray that, for my brothers and sisters in here, this would be more than just bread and more than just juice, but the reminder of Your wrath towards sin and Your love towards us and all the promises and all the universe being made right and finding their "yes" in the cross, would be dwelt upon deeply and we might leave this place having experienced You. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

The Scriptures tell us that on the night that Jesus was arrested, He took bread and He blessed it. And He broke it and said, "This is My body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way, He took the cup and He blessed and He said, "This is My blood, the blood of the new covenant," and He gave it to them to drink. The funny thing about the cup that night is it got all the way back around to the circle and got back in Jesus' hand and He said something I, to this day, find thrilling. He got the cup back and it was a lot better than our little ghetto plastic ones here and He got it back in His hands and He said, "Hey, this is the last time I'm going to drink with you until..." He said, "Listen, we're drinking together tonight, I've established this new covenant and I'm not going to drink with you again until..." And He put forth this time in the future when we would drink together again. He put out there, this time in the future where we would sit down and there wouldn't be ghetto plastic cups but that we would sit face to face with the king of the universe and we would drink with Him again. And we wouldn't know in part, but we would know in whole that on that night, at that table, there will be no more tears, no more fear, no more working out of salvation, no more sorrow, no more tiredness, it would all be gone, and that the kingdom would be fulfilled and we'd be back in Genesis 1 and 2. And we would drink again. We would drink the wine of the new vine that night with Him, heaven and Earth restored, new heaven, new Earth, gone are tears, gone is sorrow, gone is fear, gone home, done, fulfilled. It seems like Jesus was anxious about it, wanted it to get there, "We're going to drink together again." And then you've got this really interesting conversation about what was to come. He says, about the day He's returning, that He doesn't know the time, only the Father does. And so, for 2000 years, does Jesus keep looking over to the Father saying, "Today?...Today? No? Okay...Today? No? Okay...Today?"

Eventually, there's going to be this day, maybe today. There's a couple of hours left. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe the day after that. Maybe the day after that. Maybe I don't get to see it. Maybe I just get to die, which is fine with me. Maybe my son gets to see it. Maybe his son gets to see it. Maybe his son's son gets to see it, but there's this day coming where Jesus looks to the Father and says, "Today?" and the Father says, "Yes, today!" And at that, the universe is ripped open, the Son returns, new heaven, new Earth and all is fulfilled. And we drink once again, with no tears, no sorrow, no fear, new heaven, new Earth, Genesis 1 and 2 restored. Therein lies our hope. That's our hope, not that all would work in this life but that all will in the next.

So, I thought we'd end that way tonight. I thought we'd get in tonight, celebrating on the way out that there is this day coming where the trumpet's going to sound and the glory of God will be seen in the heavens. It's going to be an amazing day. You guys are a bunch of obsessive/compulsive plastic cup breakers. Here, I'll join you. Let's just get it out of the way. Break them. As in all things, let this be symbolic of one day, the plastic cup going to the wayside and being replaced by the goblet of life in Jesus. I love you. I love the king. Stand with me. Let's celebrate Him.

**Dustin:** "This is my daughter Macy. My name is Dustin. And you know as a parent, there's many things you want for your child. And as a believer...you know, the one thing that you want that you can't give of yourself is eternal salvation and that relationship with Christ. And so, we pray and we hope and we ask our heavenly Father to do for our children what He's done for us. And so, it's my privilege to share with you that He has done just that. So Macy, why are we here tonight?"

**Macy:** "It's because me and momma and Miss Anne were talking how Jesus died on the cross, and I just wanted to pray to Jesus and ask Him to live in my heart."

**Dustin:** "Macy, because you've asked Jesus to live in your heart, and you believe in Him as your personal Lord and Savior, it's my honor to baptize you not as my daughter but as my sister in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Jacob:** "Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jacob Vanhorn. I am the college and singles pastor here at the Village Church. And I would love to introduce you to Kyle Murphy, my brother in Christ who will be baptized this evening. And Kyle would like to share a few things with you about what Christ has done in his life."

**Kyle:** "I came to a decision at a young age, only later to find out that it wasn't really a decision to follow Christ but a decision to, more or less, impress my peers. At the age of 15, God really got a hold of my life, and it's been a gradual process ever since. After I got out of a bad relationship last summer, God had brought me to the Dallas area and brought me to this church and has, slowly but surely, been showing me the love and grace that He is really about."

**Jacob:** "Kyle, what is your profession of faith?"

**Kyle:** "I believe in my Lord, Jesus Christ."

**Jacob:** "And it's my honor to baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Paul:** "This is Dawn and her husband, Justin here to support her tonight. And she'd also like to share her testimony of God's saving grace."

**Dawn:** "I grew up going to church, but I always thought that God wanted me to do the right things. And then if I did that, He would love me, because everything in my life was based on my accomplishments and the things I did for other people. And everything changed this summer after my senior year of high school, when I visited my Aunt Vicky and

Uncle Darrell here in Texas. And I just felt the love and acceptance of God just right where I was in my life. And ever since then, God has walked with me in my life, and I have walked with Him. And He continually shows me just the depth of my sin but also the greatness of His grace that covers everything. And so, this is the symbol of God's redemption in my life."

**Paul:** "Dawn, have you come to believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior?" Dawn: "Yes."

**Paul:** "Then it is my privilege, my sister, to baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Man:** "...It's my privilege to be here to baptize her and also to be able to share with you a little bit of her story. As this is just an emotional time for her and for all of us as we have this great opportunity to proclaim the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus. Diane came to faith several years ago and was actually baptized several years ago. But it was through this process of sanctification, of her walking with Jesus, some of which came through illness and a lot of struggle. But she came through the membership class and realized that she's never been baptized by immersion that is the example in the New Testament. So, she felt that to walk in obedience with Christ was to follow Him in His example of baptism. And so, she's here and she said, 'I just don't want them to think that I've got this all figured out and that this is just a struggle. And I'll probably struggle 'til the end.' And I can just say amen to that. But our hope is not for today; our hope is for tomorrow. And we are here to proclaim that our hope is in the death and resurrection of our Lord. So, Diane have you trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?"

**Diane:** "Yes."

**Man:** "Then based upon that public profession of faith, in obedience to Christ's command, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Mary Beth:** "Good morning. My name is Mary Beth and I'm a student at Furman University. And this is Sarah, my sister in Christ. And we have become just the closest of friends through a lot of heartache and pain, and the Lord has been so faithful in His love for us. Sarah was raised and was baptized as an infant, and today, she has come saying, 'I want to make a public profession of my faith for the Lord and His love for me.' And so, it is my privilege to baptize Sarah. Sarah, do you believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ as your Savior?"

**Sarah:** "Yes."

**Mary Beth:** "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Don:** "Good morning, my name is Don Warren, and this is my wife, Amy. And she's here this morning and has asked me to baptize her. And this is the first time I've ever done something like this, so I'm going to mess up. In any event, she's going to tell you a little bit about her story and how she's come to her decision to want to be baptized."

**Amy:** "After many years of living what I consider to be a good life, God, in His great mercy, allowed me to see my sin. And over the last couple of years, I've come to know what grace means. And it's become real to me, and I'm so glad He extends the free gift of salvation to anybody who will accept it. And I'm here to take that act of obedience now and be baptized."

**Don:** "Amy, do you believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior?"

**Amy:** "I do."

**Don:** "Upon your confession. The one thing Paul said was don't bang their head on the mic. Amy, upon your confession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Don's Father:** "Since he didn't get it right the first time, I'm going to give him another shot."

**Don:** "This is my father. He knows I'll mess it up again. As I mentioned, this is my father, and he wanted me to give his testimony today. So, I'm going to do the best I can to paraphrase what you wrote. The first thing I want to preface it with is that we sometimes ask ourselves 'Why is there so much pain in the world?' And I've really come to understand that it's because the Lord uses pain. And if we didn't have that pain, a lot of times, we'd never turn to Him. And that's the story of my father. He grew up in a broken up home, and he went through a devastating divorce. And years after that, he found another lady and got remarried. And in the midst of that, he had a heart attack and then she had terminal cancer. So in the midst of all that, the Lord used that pain and brought me home one night. And in the kitchen, the Lord touched his heart and he got on his knees at the age of 63 and made a decision that he couldn't live life on his own, that he needed the Lord's help. And with that, the Lord came into his heart and took him as he rode the highest part of the mountain. And after that, his wife died, and he went to the depths. But Jesus has always been there. And that's what he's here for. And he said that at the end of his little speech, praise His name, He's always there. Do you believe in the Lord, Jesus as your Savior?"

**Don's Father:** "Yes."

**Don:** "Then I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen"

**Woman:** "...and today it's my honor and privilege to be here to baptize Jordan Smith. Jordan has known the Lord since she was a small child. She was baptized as a small child and followed Christ as a small child. And as she's grown older, she's realized that she didn't give herself completely to the Lord. And so about a year ago, she decided that she had to let go of life the way she was living it and totally surrender herself to Christ. And so today, as an outward expression of her faith and this decision that she's made, Jordan has decided that she wants to be baptized. So Jordan, do you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?"

**Jordan:** "Yes."

**Woman:** "Okay Jordan, it's my privilege and honor to baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Mary Catherine:** "My name's Mary Catherine Dunn, and this is my dear, Christie Bernstein. About two years ago, while Christie and I were in college, we were on a trip together with school and the Lord just laid this conversation in our laps and we began talking about what the Lord had done in my life. Christie didn't grow up in church, and we had become friends in college and had some really good conversations. But on this particular trip, the Lord just started calling Christie to Himself. So through the next couple of months, Christie began coming to church and really seeking after the Lord and came to a faith in Him. Then over the last few years, Christie and I have been able to learn and grow together in Christ. And so, it is my honor to be up here with her tonight. So Christie, have you come to a place where you trust Christ as your Lord and Savior?"

**Christie:** "Yes."

**Mary Catherine:** "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Paul:** "This is my brother in Christ, Stephen Walsh, and he would share his testimony of God's saving grace in his life."

**Stephen:** "I grew up in church, and I just always thought I was a Christian. I never really questioned my salvation. Last summer, I was eating lunch with a friend, and we met two or three times a year just to talk about God. She would talk, I would listen. It just went right over my head. Last summer, we were eating lunch and just something about our conversation was different. We went out into the parking lot, and she asked me if she could pray for me. And she put her hand on my shoulder and I just broke down in tears. I couldn't explain what had happened to me, but I knew that Christ changed my life that moment. I don't remember the drive home. I don't remember getting out of my bed and reading the Bible that afternoon. But I knew I was different and that it was my calling to follow Jesus the rest of my life."

**Paul:** "Stephen, have you come to believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior?" Stephen: "Yes."

**Paul:** "Then it is my joy, my brother, to baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Randi:** "Hi, my name is Randi Gross-Moon, and I'm a member here at the Village Church. And this is Martha Bennett. And Martha came to Christ when she was 17 years old, and she has been following Christ since then. She was baptized as a baby, and because she wants to continue to follow the Lord, follow in His footsteps, she has made the decision to be baptized tonight before everybody there. Martha, have you accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior?"

**Martha:** "Yes."

**Randi:** "Okay. Actually, let me read the Bible verse that she chose for this baptism. 'Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.' (Romans 6:4) Martha, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Paul:** "Good evening, my name is Paul Matthies, and I serve as the membership pastor here at the Village Church. And tonight, we get the joy of celebrating lives changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ through the ordinance of baptism. And this is my brother in Christ, Brandon Bond. And Brandon was not raised actively going to church, though he said he had a mental understanding of Christ. And that never made him question his salvation until about 3 years ago, he was invited to go to the Village while at a party. And he came, and through the preaching of the Word here and through the sermons that he heard, he began questioning and seeking and searching. And about 3 years ago, during a movie that he was watching at home, a certain scene gripped him. And it was during that scene that he began weeping and got on his knees and encountered Christ in a saving way and surrendered his heart to Him. And so, he is here to publicly profess his desire to follow Christ and be a part of the body of Christ here at the Village. So Brandon, have you come to believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior?" Brandon: "Yes."

**Paul:** "Then it is my privilege, my brother, to baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Carl:** "I'm Carl Haveret, and this is my very special, special friend and our sister in Christ, Robin Bundy. Robin came to know the Lord at a young age and was a regular church attender through most of her particularly teenage years. And through the trials and tribulations of events through the past three or four years, she's allowed her relationship with Christ to wane and get to a place where it shouldn't have been. Well, the good news is she's back on the team. Through the power of a couple of very special relationships, the power of prayer, God's grace and also the power of, frankly, this

incredible church where we are tonight, she's back to reaffirm her faith in Jesus, her savior. Robin, do you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior with all your heart?"

**Robin:** "Yes, I do."

**Carl:** "It's just an honor and a privilege to baptize you tonight in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Lauren:** "Hi, I'm Lauren Borgeson, and I'm their home group leader."

**Jenna:** "Hi, I'm Jenna Jager, and we are baptizing Jessica"

**Lauren:** "Jessica was baptized when she was a baby, and she was brought up in a strong Catholic home. But it wasn't until about a year ago until she began to walk in an intimate relationship with Jesus. And it was about around that same time when she came to my home group, and I was just able to watch God do a big work in her heart. And when people ask me about my home group, I normally tell them about Jessica and just the powerful conversion story and being able to walk along side her and watch the Lord totally change her heart and change her desires to His desires and to just watch her fall more in love with the Lord. So, it's our honor to baptize her tonight." Jenna: "Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?"

**Jessica:** "I have."

**Jenna:** "Then I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Paul:** "This is my sister in Christ, Jessica Brazil, and she'd also like to share her testimony tonight." Jessica: "I was raised in the church, I accepted Christ in my heart as my Savior, surrendered my life to him when I was 11. But it wasn't until I was 18, when I was in college, that I really began to realize that I had not been living my life, although I surrendered it, I hadn't been living it for the Lord, I had been living it for myself. And so, over the next 3 or 4 years, God really did a whole lot in changing me and helped me to realize that His path for my life was to go into Christian counseling and to serve His people and serve Him for the rest of my life by helping them with the struggles that they have in their lives."

**Paul:** "Jessica, have you come to believe and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" Jessica: "Yes."

**Paul:** "Then it is my joy, my sister, to baptize you in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

**Brett:** "My name is Brett Wiseman. This is my brother, Scott Wiseman. Scott and I were both baptized in the Episcopal Church as babies. And though that baptism to us is very significant and important, Scott has decided, like I did, to be baptized by immersion after he's accepted Christ. Scott accepted Christ in high school, and since then, especially this last year and a half, it's been awesome to see how God has grown him and changed him, and we're excited about that. Scott has really grown into a man that I respect and that I desire to be like and admire. Scott, have you accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior of your life?"

**Scott:** "Yes, I have."

**Brett:** "Then I baptize you now as my brother in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

**Courtney:** "Howdy. I'm Courtney Treadaway, and I lead a small group in the North Dallas area. But more importantly tonight, I am the brother in Christ of this individual here, Chris Earnst. And he'd like to share a few words with you."

**Chris:** "I was blessed to be raised by two godly parents who found the value of sharing Christ with me at a young age and having me get involved with my church. In fourth grade, I had the opportunity to go to church camp out in West Texas, and there I heard about a relationship with Christ. And it was there that I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior. In the time since then, through high school and college, through trials and tribulations, I've definitely grown and been broken down and rebuilt by Christ. And I'm excited to become a part of this church and do life together with the people here at the Village."

**Courtney:** "Chris, have you come to trust Christ as your Lord and Savior?"

**Chris:** "Yes."

**Courtney:** "It's my privilege to baptize you, my brother, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

One of the most beautiful parts of what we're celebrating here tonight is, first and foremost, the transforming power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit through the cross of Christ and His grace. That's primary, that's ultimate. But there are these other things too that we celebrate tonight. And one of them is that, in the cross of Christ and in the saving act of Jesus, He also creates family. Like, He creates relationships, deep, eternal relationships. And so, the men and women that are standing up behind me, they are men and women who have been in the water just like you have been in the water. And they are men and women who have stories similar to yours or very different than yours, but the one thing we have in common is that where we were, Jesus found us. Some of us grew up in Christian homes, some of us didn't. Some of us came to know Christ late, some of us got baptized as children. But He just showed up and saved us. And so tonight, I want to welcome you home. I want to welcome you home, and, on behalf of the staff and on behalf of the covenant members who are behind me, we are in a covenant with you to love you, to walk with you, to help you discover the gifts that Christ has imparted to you. I want to invite you to change us. And I know historically, churches haven't welcomed that, but come and change us. Come. I believe that God's given you a vision and a way of seeing and a way of being that we need here, which is why Jesus brought you here. So, come and change us. You know, you've been prayed for long before you got here. Years before today, years before me, this place was praying that Jesus would save young men and save young women and save men and save women and call unto Himself, a group of men and women who would serve Him in the kingdom faithfully. And so, although we did not pray for you by name, we have been praying for you for quite some time. So, welcome home.

Will you pray with me? "Father, I thank You so much for these men and women, and I thank You for how You brought them here, through families, through friends, through fathers, through college roommates. Thank You. I pray that we, as staff here, would be faithful to help these be connected to the body and not just attenders here but connected to Your body and grow in a relationship with you. I pray, Father, that we would be faithful to help them discover their gifts and plug in. Father, I thank You that standing up here is a new way of doing life, for the younger ones, a new way of being married, a new way of raising children. There's new life, new ways, as You say, all things new. We love You. I thank You for these men and women. Amen."