

In the summer of 2000, Lauren and I were flying to Denver. We had been married for about a year. I was working at a church about 60% of my time, and the other 40% I was traveling and teaching at universities or conferences or something like that. We were flying up to Denver, I was going to do about a week and a half of teaching there. We were waiting in the airport because our flight had been delayed. If you fly the airline that I fly, it's just a general rule that it's going to go bad and there are going to be times you have to serve the drinks and even occasionally fly the plane. So we were sitting there and we're watching this three year old play with his cars. And he's just ramming his cars together, that's what he's doing. Boys don't need to be taught that, it's just intrinsic. So we're just watching this kid. He was so cute. We started talking about, "When do we want to start having a family? Are we going to wait three years? How's this going to work?" We were kind of having that conversation when an announcement came over the loudspeaker that didn't affect us, but it did affect this boy's mother. And so she (there's no husband there) says to the boy, "Hey, pick up your cars. We need to go." And he just stopped, left the cars right there, went over to his mom and grabbed the side of her face. We were like, "Oh, this kid is awesome. He's just going to kiss his mom on the face and go get his cars." And instead he just goes, "NOOOO!!!" And he grabs his cars and continues to ram them together again. And I got worried because Lauren was wearing a white shirt and I didn't want to get blood all over that shirt. And so I was like, "Move, baby. And don't look." Because we are agreed with what's about to happen but don't want to have to testify against this woman if it goes to court.

"So let's look away so all we have to say when we're interviewed is, 'We just heard a commotion behind us.'" But for whatever reason, and I'm not judging this woman, I don't know her circumstance, she did nothing. She just bargained. "If you pick up your cars, I'll do this..." And he's just not playing that game. "Whatever, woman." He's just playing with his cars. And I remember we were like, "Okay, we can wait a little bit on the kids. Three years sounds good." That's one end of the spectrum, to just do nothing.

On the other end of the spectrum, I worked at a church called Beltway Park Baptist Church. It was a legitimate Baptist church, which means you had a Wednesday night meal that wasn't really a meal, it was always like tater tot surprise. It was always something very ghetto. I'm sharing an office with a guy named Jeremy who was a worship pastor. And it was time for tater tot surprise and we were about 30 minutes late because we were walking down this hallway and we see a woman who was very key at this church dragging her son. He is not happy about having to leave. So he's screaming and yelling and she's dragging and dragging and dragging. And for whatever reason, he finally just rips his arm out and kicks her. So she put her hand on the side of his head and shoved him to the ground. And then she looked around, saw us and she starts running right at us. It was really weird. I was kind of panicky. I was like, "Come on, woman. We can go." Now I'm not a shirt tucked in guy, but Jeremy was. He had his shirt tucked in, and she takes his belt off him. And in what is probably in the top 10 most awkward moments I've ever been actually physically part of, she goes back over there and just starts beating that kid right there in the hallway. And the only thing that was going through my head the whole time was, "That's old school! That's old school, baby! Yes!" Because at this time I had grown a little bit bitter. You had this kind of new wave, "Nanny 911" thing happening where kids just got to go sit and think about what they had done. Because in my day, everyone beat the trash out of you. And not only that, but if you got beat somewhere else, the likelihood of you getting beat when you got home for the same offense tripled. And so we had gone from getting multiple beatings from a single offense to getting no beating no matter what the offense was. And I had grown bitter about this. And so I was celebrating this nine year old getting tore up in the hallway. I was just like, "Yes! If you're tired, I'll take a turn." It just all

came out on this kid. So you've got this end of the spectrum. To be honest, I don't know that I agree with either end of the spectrum. My wife and I have a real strict, "There's going to be respect in our house," but we also have a real strict "My wife doesn't take another man's belt off" rule also. And so we're kind of in that range in there. It was actually part of our vows.

And here's the thing about children. There are parts of being childlike that are very beautiful. I'll give you a philosophy of parenting that we operate by. I'm not telling you how to do yours, I'm telling you how we do ours. I don't lie to my kids, not even around holidays. Are you tracking with me? I just don't lie to them. And here's why. They think everything I say is true, and I don't want to do anything that gets them guessing on whether what I say is true or false, whether it's pretend or not. So we're just honest. And I can't tell you how often I have to go, "Ah, I'm not going to answer that. Why not? Because I'm the daddy. I don't have to answer stuff I don't want to answer." So we don't lie to them. And here's the redeemable qualities in our children and really in all children. There's a sense of wonder there, a sense of awe there and joy is really easy to create in their lives. Like we have a lot of fun in our house. Here's things that we do often. When there's no full moon, we get out the flashlights and head outside at about 8:30 at night when it's really, really dark and look for bugs and frogs. And I'm not a bug/frog guy, but hey love it. And then there are times where I let them get all in their pajamas and we say our prayers and we finish reading our books, and I go back downstairs, wait just a minute, I go back upstairs and go, "Do you want a donut?" To which the answer is always "yes." My son actually just screams, "Donut run!" when you say that now. And so in their pajamas, we will go to the Super Wal-Mart, to the Dunkin' Donuts, and we will sit there and eat donuts. So we believe in having fun. We believe in laughing a lot. We believe in all those things. And I pray to the Nth degree that my kids and I are always friends, but I am their father first. And if you mistake that and you're friends first, you'll not do the job. Here's why. There's redeemable qualities, childlike things that even Jesus says He values in us, but childish things have to be disciplined out, don't they? Like my two year old, Reid, is just learning that the universe isn't about him. That's about the time they learn that. I mean, you can kind of point them that way earlier than that, but it starts really sinking in at two. It's why they call them the terrible two's, because there's a rebellion against, "What do you mean I'm not the center of the universe?" And Reid every now and then, not often, still throws a fit. He doesn't get what he wants, so he'll plop himself on the floor or whatever. He's a thrower, so he'll throw something. That's what he does. And when that happens, Lauren and I are quick to grab his face and say, "No sir" or to swat his bottom or to pull the reins on whatever we're doing. "Inside. We're not playing outside anymore today." And then sometimes, if it's a heinous offense, he gets the trifecta, he gets the "No sir," a swat and "Inside!" He gets all three of them. And I'll tell you why. Because for a two year old to pitch a little bit of a fit is normative, but if he's still doing that at ten, if he's still doing that at nineteen, if he's still doing that at twenty-six, if he's still doing that at thirty-eight, if he's still doing that at fifty-two, then that's childish and sad. And the duty falls on me and his mother to remove from him what is childish and to encourage what is childlike. Are you tracking with me? So in everything we're trying to do, we want to encourage and help foster and help blossom childlike faith. It's why we don't lie, it's why we have a lot of fun, it's why we enjoy treats and things like that, it's why we have deep conversations. Because I like and it's my job to preserve awe and joy and worship in the deepest parts of my daughter and son. It's what God has commanded me to do, while at the same time disciplining childish behavior. So, you never get disciplined in the Chandler household for being childlike. You will get disciplined for being childish. I'm just talking about the kids, it doesn't work that way with Lauren.

Now in the New Testament, Jesus is going to, over and over and over again, encourage childlike living. He's going to point to children who come to Him and say, "Unless you come to Me like these..." There's this one great scene in the gospels where the kids are trying to get to Jesus and the disciples are like, "Oh, He doesn't have time for children." Jesus is like, "Hey, what are you guys doing? Let them come to Me. Let the little children come to Me." And that's when He starts teaching that there's something very beautiful about being childlike, there's something very pure about being childlike. And then over and over again, He's going to rebuke people who are childish. And so with that as our framework, let's get into this text. Luke 7, starting in verse 31, "To what then shall I compare the people of this

generation, and what are they like?" He's speaking to an extremely religious crowd but not necessarily a spiritual crowd. What I mean is these people thought they were God's people simply because they were born. It would be like us going, "Of course I'm a Christian. I'm an American." Or, "I've been in church all my life. Of course, my parent's were Christians, so I'm a Christian." It's that kind of religiosity. There's nothing really in the heart of it, there's nothing in the soul of it. It's just kind of a mental, "because of my parents, I am...because of my lineage, I am...because of my heritage, I am." It's kind of built out like that. So He goes, "What should I compare these people to?" And then in verse 32 He goes, "They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another..." So it's about to go very good and encouraging because He likes childlike faith, or it's going to be a rebuke because He does not like childishness. Let's go, "They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.'" Alright, it just went bad. That's not encouragement. Here's what He's saying. If you've ever played a game with a 2-3 year old, the rules don't matter, their rules matter. Like when my daughter first started picking up Hide 'N' Go Seek, she would tell you where to hide. If you tried to explain to her that that's not how the game works, she doesn't care. She'll tell you where to hide and count, and she's coming right where she told you to hide. If you're not there, she's going to go watch "Dora the Explorer." You're left in the closet for like an hour going, "Is this that good of a spot?" That is an immature, childish view of games. So what He's saying here is, "You're like spoiled, rotten children who, instead of wanting to play the way it's supposed to be played, invent your own rules and expect everyone else to follow." It just went bad. It is never a compliment for a grown man to say to another grown man, "You're like a three year old." That's never a compliment. It's a sign of disrespect for a man to say to another man, "You're like a four year old." That's not a win. So that's what Jesus just did. Jesus said, "What should I compare this generation to? I'll tell you what you're like. Four year olds, that's what you're like."

And then He's going to expand on it. Look at verse 33. "For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'" A good way to look at John the Baptist for those of you who know literature. Think a redeemed, Holy Spirit filled Walt Whitman. He kind of lives in the woods, he's a bit of a hermit. He comes out, yells at everybody and goes back into the woods. He is a deep thinker. He thinks about life, thinks about things at the deepest level, talks about how they are at the deepest level of the universe. This is who John the Baptist is. And his message over and over and over again was "repent." So he would come out, he would pray and spend time with the Lord. He ate no bread, he drank no wine. He ate whatever God would provide. So he would eat locusts, honey and he would drink water. Besides that, he would eat nothing else, just what God provided. He wouldn't wear cloth or cotton, he wore animal skins as his garb. He lived completely off of what God provided for him through nature. That's how he lived. And he would come out to the river Jordan and preach and teach a message of repentance. Which means he would say, "You've got sin in your life that needs to be dealt with." Produce fruit in keeping with repentance was his message. And here's what made him so dangerous. He wouldn't attack just external sin, but he would attack the heart of sin that leads to external sin. So he would go, "Okay, everybody know that adultery is sinful. Let's talk about lust...Everybody know that murder is a sin. Let's talk about envy...Everyone knows drunkenness is a sin. Let's talk about jealousy." So he's just going, "You have sin in your life you need to repent. You have sin in your life you need to repent." He was just bold and unafraid, and that the Pharisees did was say, "Who is this guy to tell us we're sinners?" So they've got to discredit him, discredit his message. And so they went, "The guy's got a demon. He's wearing animal skins and eating locusts and honey. He eats no bread and drinks no wine. Something's wrong with him. He's got a demon." And then Jesus reveals the other side of it, He reveals their hypocrisy. Look at verse 34. "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" So here's that He's saying. "John comes neither eating nor drinking and saying you had better repent, you had better repent, and you're saying, 'Who are you to tell me I have sin?' And I come eating and drinking and forgiving people, and you're saying, 'Ah, he's just like them. This message is wrong too.' So if you come eating or drinking, you're wrong. Or if you come not eating or drinking, you're wrong." Is this making sense now, if you roll it back up to the, "You're like children who want to play by your rules."

Let's unpack this and pull it into where we are. In five and a half years of pastoral ministry and fifteen years of preaching and teaching, I've noticed that most religious people tend to err on one side or the other. They err in license, which is, "I can do whatever I want. Don't you tell me I've got sin in my life. Don't you tell me how to live my life. I live like God loves me. I live how I want to live. God's okay with me as I am..." And they err in license. "I'll do whatever I want, and anyone who engages me over that is wrong." That one way. The other err is legalism. They go, "This is what it looks like, and here's the checklist." And they play off each other all the time. If a person who lives in license, they do whatever they want, don't you dare tell them that an area of their life is unbiblical, sinful, wrong or unwise, if you dare engage them on that, they'll go, "Ah, a legalist! You're a legalist. That's what you are." And anyone who doesn't obey this certain person's list of right behaviors and wrong behaviors, regardless if they're in the Scriptures or not, they go, "License! You live a life of license. You're not even saved." They play off of each other all the time. Almost everybody tends to lean, they tend to walk in error in one way or another, license or legalism. And here's the funny thing about license, and this is a very popular one today. The thing about license is if anyone engages them over their lives, they view it as hatred and legalism and a lack of grace, when it's usually not hatred or a lack of grace or legalism at all, but love. My five year old knows not to go into the street. If a ball rolls through the ditch and into the street and into our neighbor's yard across the street, she will go right up to the grass and then she'll look around for some help. She doesn't even look for cars and then go yet. She'll just wait for one of us or come in and with a concerned look upon her face go, "The ball!" And we'll go get the ball. She is afraid of the street, and that's a good thing. The two year old, he doesn't quite get it yet. So if the ball rolls out into the street, he goes after it. I mean, he's not looking. He doesn't quite grasp that there's a few teenage boys in our neighborhood who fly through our street going 45mph. And it would just take the right combination of timing for him to be killed. He doesn't see all that, he's two. Do you know what he sees? The ball, unaware of the cars, unaware of the dangers of the street. Not let me ask you a question. Am I a legalist, do I lack grace, am I unloving that I'm willing to grab him and tell him that he's in a lot of danger and not to do that? Is that unloving? Is it uncaring? Is it wicked for me to go, "I see something that for some reason right now you can't see or comprehend, and so you're going to have to trust me on this. You're going to have to hear me on this. This could end horribly bad for you?" That's not a lack of grace. That's not a lack of love. For me, it's the highest level of love, for you to love someone so much that you would engage them knowing that they might not listen and you might damage the relationship but if it works well, they might live. That's the thing that happens to people who walk in license. They just can't see the danger in what they're doing. Or they think they're going to be the one person that snakes their way though how God wired the universe to happen, which is narcissism. You just think you're God. You're not. And this is license. This is what happens.

Now, I didn't grow up with license. License is what happened to me later. Legalism, that's a fun one. I grew up with this one. I'll give you some examples of what I mean. The first time I went to a youth program at a church, it was a thing on Wednesday night called J.A.M (Jesus And Me). I continue to say you've got to be a Calvinist. How does anybody get saved in the 80's if it weren't for the sovereignty of God saving souls. And I came in to JAM and they showed a video called "Hell's Bells." And the premise of the video was that if you listen to secular music, specifically Journey, then you were going to get into amphetamines and maybe murder someone. I just remember watching it going, "Steve Perry? Seriously? Journey is going to make me do meth?" I mean, at least pick a different band. I played a lot of sports and nobody before our games on Friday night is rocking out to "Oh Sherry" trying to get intense and up for the game. At least pick a band that's singing about hate or something. Journey? "Send Her My Love?" And even the message in and of itself is flawed, because there's no such thing as Christian music and secular music. There is music that mentions Jesus and there's music that doesn't. But defining music like that is flawed. Music doesn't have a soul. And if those breakdowns are true, someone please help me with the fact that the majority of Christian music these days mentions nothing about Jesus, but instead it could be about Jesus, it could be about a boy. It could be about Jesus, it might just be about love. And then what do I do with the "Braveheart" soundtrack? If I listen to that, am I doing to do meth? The other big one was rated-R movies. There are types of movies that Christians see and there are types of movies they don't see. This is why I loved when "The Passion of the Christ" came out. Because Evangelicals have been beating the drum

of rated-R movies for decades. And then there's this horrifically graphic film about Jesus and all of a sudden it's, "Buy the tickets. Go see it." You had this really weird thing happening where it's, "Well, this one is okay." And then there's the one I jab at when I'm here all the time, because I heard it so much when I was a kid. Apparently, if I have a beer with my dinner everyone in the restaurant is going to see me have that beer and go, "I knew it! There is no God!" and then their going to go get smashed. So God forbid I have a glass of wine, which the Bible even says is a beautiful gift from the Lord, everybody in that building is just going to be like, "He doesn't love God." And then they're going to use me having a glass of wine to drink nine bottles and end up in the back of an El Camino with a new tattoo. Am I lying or is that not what we were taught? So here's the list. Look at the list. You cannot listen to secular music, whatever that is; you cannot go see rated-R movies; you cannot have a drink of beer or a drink of wine. And this is the list. And so legalists develop a list of behaviors that most of the time are not biblical, and then they demand that everyone else obey their list. That's legalism. And I have never met a legalist who really has a relationship with God or Jesus at all; they simply are made much of by their list and by telling everyone else that they should obey their list. They have objective evidences to say, "I'm better than them." That's legalism. It's exhausting.

And Jesus just said here, "Some of you, you're childish. You're going, 'I can do whatever I want, and nobody can engage me or say anything about my life'" Which isn't true. And it isn't safe, because at one time or another, all of us are going to walk in our blind spots. And then you've got the other group over here going, "Everybody's going to do it like me. They're going to go where I go. The areas I'm weak, they have to be weak in and strong in the areas that I'm strong in." This is what it looks like. And He goes, "That's childish too. You're saying, 'This is how you play.' And neither one of you have tapped into how things are and how I designed things to be." That's Jesus' accusation. Now look at what He says here. "Yet wisdom is justified by all her children." He's saying watch the man who lives in license. Like if we here at the Village see someone who just lives in license, we know that if they don't repent of it, they'll eventually just disappear. It is a fact that if we see someone walking in license, it's just a matter of time. It's just a matter of time before they consider their faith and go, "Oh, I don't know that I believed that to begin with." And the legalist gets drier and drier and meaner and meaner and meaner until he's using the Bible and theology and God to beat people up all the time. Jesus says, "Wisdom, true wisdom, the one who understands that their sins are serious offenses before God confesses those sins, doesn't sit in those sins and grows into the fullness of life and enjoys all the beauties of this life deeply. Wisdom will be seen in her children."

So I'm wondering where you are this morning. It's a funny thing to constantly be burdened for people you don't know. Because here's what I know. I know there's a lot of people here walking in license, and I know there's a lot of people waking in legalism. In fact, the reason we have so many people walking in license in the Bible Belt is because they grew up under legalism and said, "If this is it, forget it." And then they bail. Then they start hearing the gospel again and go, "Maybe there was something more to that." I mean, we're flooded with 25-35 year olds who grew up in church until they were 16 and then hadn't touched one for a decade. Why? Because they sat under the weight of legalism and said, "If this is Christianity, I want nothing to do with it." And now they're hearing, "Oh, maybe that wasn't Christianity." So the truth is most of those are living in license now, because they point back to legalism and go, "That's not it." And they're right. That's not it. It's just as retarded as what they're doing. It's retarded, childish, immature. That's what I'm talking about. That's the definition of retarded. You are supposed to continue to grow. You're on a trajectory to health and joy and you hit a ceiling and you stop, because you're over in license pointing to legalism going, "I'm not going to get there." And the legalists are looking over at the license people going, "I can't go that far." And Jesus is saying, "Oh no no no. Repent of your sins. Be proactive in knowing what's dark in your heart and laying it before Me, and then enjoy life fully." And when you do that, that's a beautiful reflection of how good and merciful and beautiful Jesus is. If you err on either side, things get goofy, they get retarded, they get childish.

Let's pray. "Jesus, thank You for our time together. I pray just for these next few minutes as these men and women head out and do the things they need to do today that You would just richly help them to be aware of Your presence. I pray for my brothers and sisters who tend to walk in license, who just do whatever they want and no one can engage them. I just pray for Your mercy on them this morning, that they might sit here a bit, that they might repent of those things, that they might come up and grab a pastor's hand and say, "Just pray for me. I'm struggling here." For those who walk in legalism, God, it's such a dry, horrible way to die slowly. I thank You that it is for life that You have come into the fold, as You said. So help us, Jesus. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name that we pray these things, sung these things, did these things today. Amen."

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