

Hey 7:15! How are you guys doing? That's great. I only got one "Woo" at the 5:00, so that's pretty good. That's awesome. My name is Adam. I work with the middle school and high school students here in the NextGen department. I'm very excited to be with you guys tonight. I do want to speak real quickly. My wife and I are some of the only people who bring a child to this service. She is the one holding up that lime green baby back there who apparently glows. I just want to thank you guys and encourage you.

We've always obviously loved The Village, but coming in here at the 7:15... It's basically like taking a Walkman to a Mac store if you bring a baby into the 7:15. A lot of times our baby is loud or obnoxious, and you guys have always been great. No one has turned their head and made us feel stupid for having a baby in here. We've kicked a lot of seats on our way in and out of rows and no one has ever turned around and given us a dirty look, so I just want to encourage you guys with that. Thank you so much. Thank God there are kids in here. I would hate to be in a church where we make somebody feel bad for having a kid in here.

I love this church and I love that about us. For all of you kids out there, I feel some of your pain, too. I grew up going to church with my family and I was a terrible kid. I was a delinquent in the church pew. I couldn't sit still. I couldn't keep my hands to myself. I couldn't share. There was even a season in my life (my mom doesn't remember this, but I remember it plainly) that I had to sit in the pew in front of my mom, away from my brothers and sisters, so I was like on isolation, so she could observe me during the service because I just couldn't handle it for that long. I just couldn't be quiet for that long.

In fact, I was talking to my mom recently about this, and she said, "Adam, there were some days where I would come home from church and think, *I am never going back to that church again.*" My dad was the pastor, which makes it... I'm being honest. That's what she said. I was like, *Man, I must have been terrible.* All that to say, if there is noise in here tonight, even if it's from a non-baby, if you guys are making noise tonight, no judgment from up here. I probably deserve it, so bring it on. I don't care. I love it.

With that being said, we're going to be in Ephesians, chapter 4. If you have a Bible near you and you want to grab that. Ephesians 4, verse 32. It's the last verse of Ephesians, chapter 4. While you turn there, I want to reiterate what Steve said. Hey, we're all family in here. This is family. This is not Mom's Sunday, and if you're not a mom it doesn't apply to you. This is not Dad's Sunday, and if you're not a dad it doesn't apply to you. First of all, most of us in this room had human parents, so most of us came from a family, so I'm guessing something we say tonight will apply to you.

This is not an exclusive Sunday. This is inclusive. We're all family in here. This is our family. If you didn't have a family before you walked in here tonight, welcome. We'll eat later. Ephesians 4:32 is going to say this: **"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."** Then chapter 5, verses 1 and 2 say, **"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."**

I absolutely love these three verses. To me they are some of my favorite verses in Scripture. One of the reasons I love them so much is because I love discipleship. I love mentoring. I love Christ as my leader, and if you read these verses, three times in three verses Paul said something about, "Do this just like Christ did." "Imitate God." "Follow after him just like Christ did." He said it three times in as many verses. He just says it over and over again. "Hey, this is the way it is set up." In fact, he says, just like **"dearly loved children."**

In other words, this is the way a family works. The same way the family of God works. There is someone set up to imitate and then dearly loved children follow that. They imitate that, so what I want to talk about tonight is discipleship. I strongly believe every one of you in this room should be discipled. There should be somebody who is more mature than you speaking into your life, and there should be someone who is less mature than you that you are speaking into their life.

That is the way God has designed it in the Scripture, and that is why he says family is the primary place for that to take place, because the best discipleship is inter-generational. That you would be with somebody from another generation either pouring into them or being poured into. That's the way Christ set it up, so let me pray for us, and we'll walk through these verses.

God, I pray in your mercy tonight you are very clear and obvious with us about what you would have us walk out of here with, a clear understanding of your gospel and a clear trajectory toward discipleship. God, I pray in your mercy you would remove from me any flawed words I might share tonight. That we would walk out of here not remembering some quip or phrase but Scripture and your Word and your intentions. We pray these things in your Son Jesus Christ's name and for his sake, amen.

Verse 32 starts like this: It says, **"Be kind..."** Every time I read that verse I fly right past that. **"Be kind to one another."** Yeah, of course. Of course the Bible says be kind, so for a couple of reasons I don't listen, because when I hear, **"Be kind..."** in the Bible I don't usually think of that as God saying, "Be kind." When I hear, **"Be kind..."** I think of my first grade teacher saying, "Adam, it's not okay to punch people when they cut in front of you in line. Be kind." I hear my mom saying, "Stop pulling your sister's hair. Be kind."

It's much harder for me to hear that, stop there, and say, *God says be kind. This is wisdom from the Lord to be kind.* I've talked to people throughout this day after this sermon, and these are the two words that have really stuck with people. I want to encourage you this morning to hear these words from Scripture and hear God saying it. **"Be kind..."** I'll tell you why.

Because those of you in here who are husbands, do you ever struggle with being kind to your wife? I know I do. Wives, do you ever struggle with being kind to your husbands? What about roommates? Roommates, do you ever struggle with being kind to each other? I see nudges and looks through the room. Do you ever struggle with being kind? Is that a struggle of ours? Absolutely. How about this? A lot of you guys in here are grown sons and daughters. Do you have a long record historically of being kind to your parents, or have we struggled with that?

The Bible would say very plainly, **"Be kind to one another."** God says this. Maybe we should take a second and listen to this. I'm so glad God says this, because left to my own devices, if I had no fear of man or what people thought of me, if I had no fear of God, I would not be kind. Kind does not come naturally to me. Naturally, I'm a very unkind man, although I love the appearance of kindness. I would like people to think I'm kind.

A couple of weeks ago even, I was sitting right back there in the left side of the church with my wife and the sun (just like it was a little bit ago) was shining through those windows. My wife was sitting there with our newborn son, and I remember having to sit forward in the chair and very awkwardly using my giant noggin to shade my wife and son from the sunlight. I remember thinking, *I bet if someone is looking at me right now, they probably think this is kind,* but in my head I was coming up with all sorts of evil.

I was giving God advice on how bright the sun should be. God, really? This is ridiculous! I'm trying to pay attention in church. My retinas are burning out. I can't see anything. I'm telling God where he should be putting clouds. Just one. One big cloud. I'm looking at the guy next to me who is huge going, *Come on, buddy! Lean forward. Eat some of this up. I have to do this whole thing by myself?* Literally, this is how sick my brain is. For a second, I thought, *I wonder what people would think if I took my newborn son and held him up Simba-style towards the sun. If I held him up and pretended I was playing with him, but really give myself a reprieve from the sunlight.*

I am not by nature kind. I need God to say, **"Be kind..."** When I think about kindness, I often think about (in fact, I've had a lot of conversations about this today) how well disciplined I am and particularly how disciplined my tongue is. How disciplined is it, the things that come out of my mouth? The insults that come out of my mouth? The unkind things that come out of my mouth? So many times when I was growing up, my mom would ask me a very loving question and my response would be awful.

I can remember times my mom would say something like, "How was school today?" I would say, "Don't worry about it." Yeah, I was a bad son. I was terrible. I'd say, "Don't worry about it" for everything. "Adam, how are you today?" "Don't worry about it." Because I am not by nature kind. I have a lot of repenting to do. I'm not up here saying I'm perfect. I am the total opposite. I am not kind. That is why I am so glad God says, "Here is some wisdom." **"Be kind to one another."**

I need to hear God saying that to me. Don't hear my voice saying it. Hear Scripture. **"Be kind to one another."** The next thing it says in the verse is, **"Be tenderhearted."** When I hear *tenderhearted*, I instantly recoil. I take a step back and I think, *I do not like that being in the Scripture*, because to me tenderhearted in our culture means to be weak or to be hypersensitive. Like, *Don't joke around with Adam. He's tenderhearted. It's like, Bless his heart.*

I am! I don't like it because I know I'm hypersensitive about things. I know I am! I know the first time somebody pointed out that my... Well, the first time it was funny, but the fiftieth time somebody pointed out my newborn son and I are both bald, it's not funny anymore. Seriously, I know it's the first time for you, but for me, I hear it every day. I can get really hypersensitive. I know nobody walks up to a baby and points out other flaws, but male pattern baldness they feel like they're okay.

Like, no one walks up and goes, "Hey, that's a cute baby. His eyes are really close together. I guess he takes after Dad." Nobody says that. Nobody walks up to a baby and says, "Oh, I see she got Grandma's cankles." It just wouldn't happen, but because he's bald, you feel like you can make fun of us. Listen, I know I'm bald. If I could grow hair, I would grow hair. I'm hypersensitive. But that's not what the Bible means when it says *tenderhearted*. That's what I take. It doesn't mean weakness.

The Bible doesn't call us to weakness. In fact, quite the opposite. In fact, the words we use around here are to shepherd our family, and shepherding is in no way weak. In John, chapter 10 when Jesus says, **"I am the Good Shepherd,"** he doesn't say, "I am the Good Shepherd because I give really good hugs." He doesn't say, "I am the Good Shepherd because my sheep eat greener grass," although his provision and his affection are awesome. He says, **"I am the Good Shepherd,"** because when a wolf comes, I don't run away.

In 1 Samuel 17, when Saul asks David, "Why should I let you go and fight the giant?" David says, "I'll tell you why. Because I'm a shepherd," and almost word for word (this is my favorite Scripture) David says, "I'm a shepherd. It works like this. When a lion or a bear comes and takes one of my sheep, I chase him down. I rescue that sheep, and then when that lion or that bear turns on me, I grab him by the beard and I strike

him until he is dead. I am a good shepherd." The Scripture is great. Saul goes, "Do you want my armor? Go ahead. You have it."

To be a shepherd of your family is not to sit back. It's not just to give good hugs. It's not just to provide. It's to fight, and not fight *with* your family. Fight *for* your family. I know none of us in this room have a problem fighting *with* our family. We've grown up. We're experts at fighting *with* our family, but I see so few of us fighting *for* our family. Whether you're the son, the daughter, the mother, the father, or the grandson, are you fighting for your family? There are absolutely influences in this world that would wish to negatively impact your family. Are you fighting them?

I'll tell you, if you're not, if you're sitting out the battle, if you're sitting on the sidelines. Let's say it like this. If you were in a real battle and you decided, *You know what? I'm just going to sit down*, and your enemy finds you, will your enemy just give you mercy because you're taking a time out? No. Listen to this. The Devil, the Enemy, Satan, he is not a pacifist. He will not withhold attacks on you because you have refused to fight. The influences are there. The battles are there. We need to fight for our families. That is what we are called to.

Tenderheartedness is not weakness. When the Bible says you need to be tenderhearted, what it is saying is you need to be sympathetic and compassionate, not weak and hypersensitive. No. Compassionate and sympathetic. In other words, you need to hear what other people say and you need to care. That is sympathy. That is tenderhearted. That you care about problems that don't belong to you. They belong to somebody else. Let me ask you, do we ever struggle with that as a family?

Does your mom ever try to relate something to you and you blow up because you don't understand where she's coming from? Or your siblings or your dad or your son or your daughter? Do we ever have trouble with sympathy? Wives and husbands, do we ever have trouble with sympathy, not understanding where the other person is coming from? When I think about this and I think about the discipline here, I think how disciplined are my ears to hear where somebody else is coming from and to care about it?

That is the sympathy I've been called to, but I'm terrible at it, so I'm so glad the Scripture says for me to be kind and for me to be tenderhearted, sympathetic. One of the things I deal with all the time in student ministries... I have a lot of students who come in who think their mom is their enemy, who think, *She took this away. She won't let me do that. She is my worst enemy. She is against me.* I have students who as their teacher come to me and they think I'm their enemy. *You assigned me this. You won't let me turn this in late*, and they think you are my enemy.

I meet men and women who think God is their enemy. He tells me I can't do this and I can't do this, but I desperately want to, so he must be my enemy. Let me tell you, people, the Scripture says over and over again, God is for you. He disciplines those he loves. Your parents, for the most part, they're for you. Just because they don't let you do things you want to do does not mean they are against you. The Bible says they are for you. For some reason we get this in our head that all authority is adversarial. *If somebody tells me what to do they must be my enemy.*

Well, let me tell you discipleship means you humbly submit to somebody else's authority, and that's the way it should be because they know better than you do. When they disagree with you... My wife and I heard this phrase a while ago: Where godly men disagree, you should tread lightly. I think that's very true and speaks well of discipleship. If you find yourself with wiser people and they disagree with you, you should tread lightly. That leads really well into the next part of the verse.

It says, **"...forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."** This is the cornerstone to all of this, to all this discipleship, to everything is forgiveness. If conformity to Christ is being like Christ... If being like God (imitating him) is our goal, then repentance will never be more than a step away. I mean, how long will it be if I'm pursuing Christ before I realize, *Man, I'm sorry, son? I messed up right here. Daddy should have done this and he did this.* Before, with my roommates I realized, *Do you know what? I messed up. I should have done this and I did this.*

Or with my friends or with my home group... Repentance is the cornerstone of all of this because conformity to Christ is our goal. Now some of us in this room have a lot of repenting to do. I've only spoken for a couple of minutes about my issues. I have a ton of them. I need to repent of a lot of things in my past. I mean, if I were to list all the ways I mistreated my parents (even just in high school) who I've probably sinned against more than anybody else in my life, it would take me weeks to go through the list of things I need to repent of with my family. Some of us need to start with repenting. Say, "I'm sorry. This is where I'm flawed."

Some of us in this room have been withholding forgiveness, because somebody sinned against us. You're sitting here going, *But my dad said this. My mom said this. They did this to me. My friend did this,* and you've withheld that forgiveness because, like a grudge you just can't let go of, you don't think they deserve it. The problem is the Scripture. The problem is the verse. What does the verse say? How do we forgive? We forgive one another as God in Christ forgave us, and trust me, there is nothing you have done to deserve or earn God's forgiveness.

He offers it freely to you, so why would we make our parents live to a standard Christ doesn't hold us to, or our families live to that standard, or our friends live to that standard? We withhold forgiveness until they've

earned it, until they want it back from us. No, that's not the gospel. I'm not making this stuff up. This is the Scripture, that Christ forgave us this way and so, likewise, we should be forgiving. Now do not pervert this and turn it into,

*So, we should have no consequences,* because I absolutely believe in discipline. I absolutely believe in consequences, and in student ministry I see kids all the time who say, "Mom, you can't hold that against me. You have to forgive me like God forgave me." Your parents are absolutely allowed to discipline you. Let me say it like this: Grace is great and sin is serious. We don't let people continue in sin just because grace is so great. That's right out of Scripture. That's Romans 6. Grace is great and sin is serious, so let's spend some tonight maybe thinking about who we need to forgive, who we need to repent to. Absolutely all of us need to repent to God in this room.

Then we continue in the verse. Verse 1 of chapter 5 says, "**Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.**" I love this. First of all, imitating God. What it is saying is these attributes we just covered are attributes of God. God is kind; he extends us grace. God is tenderhearted; he is compassionate and sympathetic. God forgives us. Those are three beautiful attributes of God, and not only are they great attributes of God, but he's called us to imitate them.

In this verse, "**Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children,**" what it establishes is what kids do. A kid who is loved will imitate. What will they imitate? They'll imitate you. They'll imitate all of you. I work in student ministry not because we love gathering students together, but because we love gathering them with another generation of people. Some of you guys in here volunteer in kids' ministry, Little Village. Some of you guys volunteer with the students, and we love putting you with the students.

That is the point: To put you with the kids because inter-generationally that is going to benefit them. Hear me, and this is truer the younger you are, but the last thing most of us need is more time with people our own age. It's the last thing most of you need, and it's absolutely true for the kids we work with. They need people who are older and wiser. Proverbs 13:20 says, "A wise man has wise companions, and the companion of fools are fools." You need wise people in your life if you want to be wiser.

You, if you hang out with nothing but fools, guess what? You will be a fool. That's why we're all called to this discipleship thing. This is a process we are all in. In verse 1, it talks about, "**...as dearly loved children.**" When they have done research with people who become Christians very young and have continued into Christian maturity through high school, after college they found those people who continued on that train and did well had two things in common. It wasn't church participation. It wasn't church attendance.

It was...*Did their parents model what it was like to follow Christ or did they have a significant relationship with another adult who modeled for them what it was like to follow Christ?* That's what it was. If we want our church to raise up in spiritual maturity, that means you find someone who is less mature than you and you pour into them, and you find someone who is more mature than you and you have them pour into you.

I hope that is happening in your family, and if it's not, let me tell you our NextGen staff... When Cassie and Caroline (who are awesome by the way) and I sat down and talked about what our hopes are for the church for discipleship and we talked about what it looks like inside the family, we came up with three really simple things. I'll list them and then I want to go through them.

First, that there would be a *family discipleship time*, an intentional time where the family sits down together and says this is our time to be with the Lord, to read Scripture, to ask each other questions. Secondly, that there would be *family discipleship moments* where we're looking constantly and continually to speak God into one another's lives and to look through current events with a gospel lens. That our schedule is a gospel-centered schedule. Thirdly, that there would be *family discipleship milestones*. That we as families and as a church are celebrating milestones together.

1. *Discipleship times*. Now with discipleship times (finding an intentional time) what we're talking about there is that you dads who are in charge of your families, or whether you're with roommates or whatever or your home group, you are taking a time out of the week and saying this time is set aside so we can dig into the Word together and we can ask each other deep questions. It can look different for different people. For me, before I was married, my roommates and I picked Thursday nights at 9 o'clock. This is when we're doing it.

Now as a married man, my wife and I pick Sunday nights. We're going to go out to dinner together. Oscar doesn't talk much since he's still zero years old, but we ask him good questions. We've had very good talks with him that he will be held accountable for even though he won't remember them. We have very good talks there. I meet with two guys who mentor me once a month at a very secret location, and they ask me good questions. Asking good questions is one of the keys to this whole thing. Investigating and investing are the same thing. If you want to invest in someone, you investigate. You get to know their life. You ask them good questions.

Some people have give me pushback on this and said, "Adam, I don't want to designate a time because I feel that is just too stringent. I want discipleship to happen more organically." I understand what they're saying, but here is the problem: People so easily use that as an excuse to do nothing. *Just let it happen*. Let me tell you that organic... If you buy an apple at the store and it is certified organic, that doesn't mean

they found them in the woods. That doesn't mean somebody ate a core, threw it into the woods, an apple tree grew, and they collected them after they fell off the tree organically.

No, they cultivated it. They grew it. They planned it. They considered it. It was intentional. It was calculated, and then they sold them to a store that sold it to you. That is organic. It's incredibly planned from beginning to end, and that is the way discipleship should be as well for your family. You are saying, "This is the time we're doing it. This is what it's going to look like. This is how we're going to invest." It's incredibly intentional.

2. *Discipleship moments.* There are discipleship moments where we say any time of the day. Sure, discipleship moments may happen more nomadic. They might just be moving around. You might be anywhere when these things happen. They might be more sporadic. It might happen at different times every time, but it happens with no less intentionality. You are intentionally looking for opportunities to speak the gospel into the lives of the people around you.

That is a discipleship moment that you take advantage of every opportunity, whether it is something you saw on TV, something you see out in public, something you experienced together. You take that moment and talk about, "Isn't God beautiful in that he did this?" Or, "That is an evil influence. We need to fight against that." That is a discipleship moment.

3. *Discipleship milestones.* That we as a church celebrate things together, achievements together, reaching certain ages together, like we celebrate baptisms together. We celebrate milestones. I'll tell you why I love this one. So many of us, when I look around the room, are enduring discipleship or enduring our duties, but we are not enjoying pursuing Christ. When the Bible speaks about pursuing Christ, it is absolutely in the context of our enjoyment.

Enjoy in the Lord. Not entertainment, but enjoyment. We are engaged with God. It is never about enduring this duty. It's about having joy in the Lord in this, and that is what our discipline is for. God is for us in that. The last part of that verse says, "**And walk in love, as Christ loved us...**" Christ doesn't nag us into sanctification. He doesn't pick at us until we get it. He loves us into sanctification. He loves us into a version of us that is more like him.

We're not trying to become better versions of ourselves. We're trying to become versions of Christ. We imitate Christ. It's not a self-improvement seminar when you read the Scriptures. It is a Christ-centered, beautiful Scripture. Now I know some of you guys will look at this and you'll say, *I've never been disciplined. My family didn't disciple me. I have nobody to pour into my life. I can't do it.* Do you know what that is?

That's a problem. It's a problem you weren't disciplined, but it's not an excuse. We're trying to break a cycle of generations not being disciplined.

We're not trying to perpetuate anything, so if you haven't been disciplined, yeah, that is a problem, but it's not an excuse. You come and see one of us on the NextGen staff. You come and see a pastor and say, "What does that look like for my family if I'm going to lead my wife or my girlfriend or if I'm going to lead our roommates in some kind of discipleship? What would that look like?" You get equipped to do that. Some of you guys will say, *I feel unprepared*. I'm going to tell you, you absolutely should.

You are under-qualified. Three times in three verses it says, "Be like Christ." "Imitate God." "Be like Christ." If our goal is conformity to Christ, then you are unqualified, but that is not an excuse. That's just a lofty, tall order to be more like Christ, and that is why the cornerstone of this whole thing is repentance. How long, if my goal is pursuit of Christ, will it take me before I recognize my own flaws? That's why this thing has to be covered with, *I should have done it like this. This is where I messed up. This is where my thoughts went. This is where my heart went. This is what came out of my undisciplined mouth*, and repentance has to be the cornerstone of discipleship.

Right now I'm going to pray for us, and then I'm going to lead us into Communion, but I would pray, guys, that you would... It's very easy to find reasons why not to be discipling, why not to be disciplined. It's going to take work and it takes fighting for, especially in your family. I'd pray tonight maybe you would consider areas in your life where you need to repent and areas in your life where you need to offer forgiveness. Let's pray through these attributes of Christ right now together.

God, we thank you and we praise you that you are kind, that you have extended us grace. God, we thank you that you are tenderhearted, that you have shown us sympathy and compassion. God, we thank you that you are forgiving, God, not because we have earned anything, but rather because of who you are in your kindness and in your compassion. God, I pray you have mercy on us tonight as we would even attempt to step into your presence, pray to you, and see your face as we worship you. God, we pray these things in your name and we pray your will be done for your sake and for your glory, amen.