

How are we? It's going to be like that, huh? All right. Hey, I want to start us off a little bit differently today, so we're going to do a survey, and here's what I ask of you. I ask for honesty and participation, and if at any point I feel like you're not being honest or you're not participating, I'll engage you at that level. What I'm giving you an opportunity to do here is decide which way this goes. You can go happy, or you can go not happy, depending on your honesty and participation. I'm going to ask a series of questions and ask you to trust me knowing some of you don't know me, and I haven't earned that trust with some of you, but for a lot of you I have earned that trust.

Let me ask questions, and we'll just see where the Lord takes us. I want to make a point. How many of you did *not* grow up in Christian homes? You didn't grow up in Christian homes. Moms and dads weren't talking to you about Jesus. Look around. These are the people who did not grow up in Christian homes. All right. Go ahead and put your hands down. How many of you grew up in Christian homes, but hit this season where it was Mama and Daddy's faith and it wasn't your faith, so you set out to kind of discover your own way and played a little bit and partied a little bit and then came back around? How many of you would say that's your story? Okay. A lot of us there. Everybody keep your hand up. Look around.

I know some of you are like, *Man, I have my kids with me, bro*. All right. It's okay. Go ahead and put your hands down. How many of you came to know Jesus Christ, became a believer, after your twentieth birthday? After your thirtieth birthday? After your fortieth? Fiftieth? We'll just stop there for everybody's sake. There were several of you. Awesome. Let me ask a couple more. We'll move out of the range of spirituality and just into some other things. How many of you, your parents are still happily married? How many of you are from homes where your parents were divorced either early on or at some point since you left the house? How many of you, your parents are married, but not necessarily happily? Again, some of you are like, *I'm here with my parents, bro*.

Okay. Let's do a couple more. How many of you have a master's level education or above? Okay. So we're a very degreed crowd. I didn't say smart; I just said degreed. Now this is one of those things where I'm going to ask you to trust me and let you know this is a safe room. How many of you did not graduate high school but have a GED or some sort of equivalent? Okay. Get that hand up, man. God's grace upon me. Okay. Let's do this. Again, I want you to trust me here. A safe room. Any Democrats? Come on. You can get that hand up. Don't look around the room. Just look right at me. Don't look anywhere else, just right at me. Okay. We have some Democrats. Put your hands down.

How many of you have a past that has drugs and alcohol in it? Okay. A lot of us. How many of us would say we have some form of abuse in our background? Yeah. Okay. Why don't you put your hands down? Here's the lie I want to point out. One of the great myths about our faith is that there is a type of person who becomes a Christian. How many of you were not born in the South? Look at this. According to the bumper sticker, you got here as quick as you could, right, but you weren't born in the South? Anybody born in a different country? Man, look at this! I mean, that's a higher percentage than you would think.

Now the myth is there's a type of person who becomes a Christian, and even in our sample size, you can see that's ridiculous. I mean, we're all over the map in just this room, and I can't even see what just happened in Denton and Dallas. We are all over the map. Some of us grew up in homes where Mama and Daddy talked to us about Jesus, drug us to church, told us how good he was, extended to us mercy and grace, loved us, and communicated to us the glory of the gospel, and we became saved and believed in Christ at a young age, and have not gone too crazy wayward. Sure, we had that day we got really angry and said, "Dingfod," or something like that, but ultimately, man, we've been pretty straight-laced and in the church and have done pretty well.

Then there are others of us who come in here today being clean and sober for maybe a week or so. There are those of us who were abused growing up, or those who were loved well growing up, and there are those who have a skeptical nature by birth. There are some kids who just come out of the womb going, *I don't know about that*. Then there are other people who come out of the womb going, *Whatever you say is true*. Those are kind of your edges. Most of us are in the middle there, but you have both of those types of people.

What we're seeing in here are people who didn't graduate from high school to people who have a master's or above, people who come from money and people who come from poverty, people who have partied and people who have not partied, and on and on and on we go. God saves, and that truth, that singular truth continues to blow my mind to this day because of how he goes about doing it. God is not in need of a particular set of circumstances in order to save. He doesn't need you to grow up in Ned Flanders' house to save you, and he doesn't need you to be strung out on coke for a decade to save you, either.

God simply saves. The prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 59:1 just said it this way (I've always loved this verse):

**"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear."**

Translation: God doesn't have T-rex arms, all right? He's not right here saying, "Oh, I really wish I could help you, but you're really a mess. If my arms were a little bit longer, I could grab you." That's not what's happening. God saves. God rescues, so you could invert this text and say, "God's arms are long enough to save, and his ears will hear those who cry out to him."

What I want to do today starting out on this series is marvel a bit at *how* God saves and *where* he works that salvation and then tell you kind of what he does with those people he saves. Turn in your Bible to Luke, chapter 7, and we're going to talk about where God saves from.

1. *God saves the wayward and the uninterested.* Let's look at Luke 7. We're going to pick it up in verse 36. This is, for me, one of the most gut-wrenching, beautiful stories in the Gospels. **"One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner..."** Let's stop. A woman of the city who is a sinner is not talking about where she lives. Are you tracking with me?

**"A woman of the city..."** When this phrase is mentioned in the Gospels, it's not that she has a flat downtown. It's not that she is an urban dweller. A woman of the city who is a sinner is a prostitute. Let's get that on the table. We have a prostitute who has heard that Jesus is reclining at the table of a Pharisee's house and look what happens.

**"And behold, a woman of the city who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said..."** To who? Who did he say this to? Do you have your Bibles? Who does he say this to? Himself. He's not talking to anyone else in the room. He's thinking to himself what we're about to read.

**"Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.'"** Now let's stop, and then we'll get into some of the scary stuff about Jesus. Really, in this story the picture that's being painted... I don't know how you read the Bible, but I want to just put myself here. I want to be sitting in this room watching Jesus recline at the table, seeing the door open (*Who is this?*), seeing her lip quiver as she spots Jesus.

Then she walks around and can no longer contain herself, throws herself on the floor, is sobbing in her shame and her guilt and the disgust she has in herself and is seeking forgiveness and validation. The Pharisees delighted in her shame, because if she's dirty, they're clean. They loved that she felt that. They loved her shame. They fed off of her shame, because if she's dirty, they're clean, right? It's a telltale sign of self-righteousness. No desire to see people stuck pulled out of being stuck. Simply, actually a small, probably unvoiced delight that they are stuck, because I'm not. That's exactly what just happened in this.

She's sobbing snot tears, hair down, cleaning his feet, and he says to himself, *This man can't be a prophet. If he knew who this was or what sort of woman (that makes me angry) this is, then he wouldn't let her touch his feet because she's a sinner.* Now here's where Jesus is scary, verse 40. **"And Jesus, answering..."** Right? Nobody has said anything. Nobody asked a question, but Jesus answered him.

I mean, this is why if I'm around Jesus, I'm just going to try to pick a psalm and just roll it through my head. The whole time he's there, *I delight in your law. I delight in your law. I delight in your law. I delight...* "Well, what are you saying?" *I delight in your law.* This is (just to get past the humor in it) your reality right now. I mean, he knows what you're thinking, the motives of your heart, right now better than even you do. Some of you, he's answering you today. That's why you're here. Watch what happens here, all right.

**"And Jesus answering said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he answered, 'Say it, Teacher.'" Don't get confused here. This is not Simon Peter. This is Simon, the Pharisee. He is answering the one who thought, *If he knew what kind of woman this was, he wouldn't let...* Simon is not Simon Peter; it's Simon, the Pharisee. That's who we're eating with today, and he begins to answer Simon like this in verse 41. **"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could [both] not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?' And Simon answered, 'The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.'** And he said to him, **'You have judged rightly.'**"**

Now watch Jesus' body language. He turns to the woman, but says to Simon, so now he's facing this woman. This woman was behind him washing his feet. I don't know how he was reclining, but she's behind him, not in front of him. He's talking to Simon. Now he stops, and he's turned, and he's faced this woman in her tears, in her shame, but is continuing to talk to Simon, and look at what he says.

**"Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.'** Then he said to her, **'Your sins are forgiven.'** Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, **'Who is this, who even forgives sins?'"**

He doesn't even acknowledge that. Look at what happens in verse 50. **"And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'" We have a woman who enters this scene, completely devastated, broken, coming out of prostitution, walking in a great deal of shame, so much shame that the very sight of Jesus turns her into a blubbering, snot-flowing, face-drenched brokenness, and yet the gospel is so**

profoundly powerful that he tells her, "Your sins are forgiven." **"Go in peace."** Not "Go in regret," not "Go wishing you had a different life." No. **"Go in peace."**

The power of the forgiveness of God, the delight of God via Jesus Christ, takes what is shameful and removes it and replaces it with the delight of God. God saves among the wayward, but he also saves among the uninterested. Probably the best example we have of someone who is uninterested in becoming a believer in Jesus Christ would be Saul on the road to Damascus who is going to end up being Paul and writing about 70 percent of the New Testament via the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If there was ever a brother who was not interested in becoming a Christian, it was Saul.

Saul had made it his mission in life to crush this new sect of Judaism, to crush what he believed was a wayward cult out of the true religion of the world, and he set out steadfastly to destroy it. We have biblical and historic record of him imprisoning, beating, and killing men, women, and children who belonged to the Way, or what we call Christianity. On the road to Damascus, armed with papers to continue this oppression of this group of men and women, Jesus knocks him off his horse. He literally knocks him off his horse. He falls to the ground, and Jesus asks the question, **"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"**

Saul is persecuting the church. Isn't it interesting that Jesus doesn't separate those out? He doesn't say, "Why are you persecuting my people?" He says, **"...why are you persecuting me?"** "Who are you?" **"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."** From that day forward, Saul becomes Paul and faithfully serves God Almighty until the day God calls him home. Now in that moment, God is not forcing Saul/Paul to love him. He's simply revealing himself, and upon God revealing himself to our souls, we won't say no to that. When you see clearly what your soul was designed for, you don't say, "No, thank you. I kind of get that, but I like this. How about this? Can I have this?"

If you see what you were created to participate in, you join in what you were created to participate in. You don't say no to that for something else. This is a brother who was completely uninterested, didn't have anybody break up the fallow ground. It wasn't like somebody had been sitting down with him talking about the four spiritual laws and trying to help him understand why he was wrong. The Lord just showed up in his disinterest and blew this fool up. Now let me tell you why this is such good news for me and for you.

I have been a believer in Christ for 20 years. I've been following him faithfully for 20 years, some days better than others. Just love and grace, but for 20 years now I've steadfastly tried to follow the Lord, and in that 20 years I have had friends and family members who I love deeply not want anything to do with Jesus Christ. They have not wanted anything to do... They have even at times forbade me from bringing it up. "Matt, I'm going to talk to you about things that are going on in my world. I want to get advice, but you better stay away from that Jesus stuff. I don't want to hear that from you." I've run into those walls. I've had

to be subversive about it. They're not going to let me do it like normal humans would where you just have a conversation, so I'm subversive.

I just pretend like I'm talking to somebody on the phone. "Yeah, Jesus loves you. I'm so sorry. One second... Well, here's the deal, bro. In your marriage you have to love her like Christ loved the church. It's so crazy. It's just like you. It's crazy. Just give me one more second. If you would love her like Christ loved the church and you initiate and you would serve and you would encourage, then, man, I think she has a better shot at being obedient and to do biblically what she's supposed to do, but you have to do what you're supposed to do. Then we'll see what she has to do, but you need to quit worrying about what she's supposed to be doing when you're supposed to be doing what you're supposed to be doing. Almost done."

I mean, you have to do it like that because they're not going to... And, man, maybe you'll think I'm an idiot for this, but I believe the Bible, which means I believe hell is real and eternity is long, so that's gut-wrenching to me. It's gut-wrenching to me, so what happens (and again we're different people) is I'll lose heart after so many conversations, after so many invitations, after so many deflections or walls or believing it fell on deaf ears. I'll feel like, *Gosh! They're just so hard. It's just so hard. It's just not going to happen.*

I'll lose heart. Then I'll find myself not pleading with the Lord, not looking for opportunity, not praying and fasting and really pleading with the Lord to save them. I'll default into maybe certain theological ideas or terms and try to find peace there instead of doing the thing our Father has asked me to do. Our heavenly Father is the only father, ever, who says, "Pester me. Bother me. Keep asking me. Don't quit asking." Earthly fathers, have any of you ever told your kids that? "You know what? You've asked me 72 times and I keep saying no. What I would like is for you to just not... I want you to wear me down. Destroy my will until I say yes or snap and hurt someone. Keep bothering me."

Our heavenly Father does just that. "Pester me on this. Test me on this. Approach the throne of grace with confidence." He even uses illustrations: the persistent widow. "I'm not an evil judge; I'm a good judge. Don't let off of this." I find that often I put the burden of salvation on myself. *If I was just smart enough or if I just had a better argument or if I just kind of understood their argument or if I could just get 10 minutes with them over a cup of coffee or a glass of something else, maybe I could help them understand or see.* I'll put the burden of salvation on me. How dumb am I? I can't save anybody. The world has a Savior; it's not me.

We'll do something a little bit differently today but I think, necessary. If you're in here and you would say, *Man, there are people who I love deeply who are not interested in Jesus Christ at all. They have no desire to know, love, and experience the grace I have experienced, and I'm heartbroken over them, and I would love for them to come to know love and serve Jesus Christ.* Maybe it's a wayward son or daughter. Maybe it's a

brother or sister. Maybe it's a Mom or a Dad, but you have someone in your life who you love deeply who is not interested in Jesus Christ at all, not interested in the things of God at all. I mean, they're just a wall.

If that's you, would you just raise your hand? Let's do this. It's going to be a little bit more charismatic than Baptist, but it will be okay. We're "Bapti-costal." You better get used to it. Here's what I want you to do. If you just raised your hand, I want you to stand with me. I'm standing up, too. Go ahead and stand with me. There will be enough of us standing that you'll be all right. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to ask, and we're going to ask believing. We're going to ask, believing his arm is not too short to save.

We're going to believe, however hardened your daddy is, however wayward your son or daughter is, however complacent your sister and brother are, however angry your best friend is, that our God's arm is not too short to save and that his ear is not deaf to our cries. I'm going to ask him to save what we cannot save, and we're going to believe he can. We're going to believe he's able. We're going to believe he's willing. *Well, what if he's not willing?* Well, that's none of your business. We ask. We bother. We beseech. We believe, and in the end, the rest is in God's hands.

What I want for you is for you to not lose heart, but to continue to believe that he's able. I mean, didn't he save you? Did you see how many of you raised your hand? There are several of you who got saved post-50, post-60, a couple of you. I mean, you *can* teach old dogs new tricks. The Holy Spirit can; you can't. I want us to pray. I want you to pray with me, and we're just going to pray. Everybody standing is representing one, two, three, maybe a whole family of people, but God works in mighty ways, and I want us to believe him for it. I'm going to pray for us, and then we're going to begin to expect and believe that he's going to save our friends and family members. Let's pray.

Father, at different times and in different ways you've rescued us. You saved us via a new neighbor or a new co-worker or a friend or a situation or a scenario that you called us to yourself, and you redeemed us by your grace. We ask that in your saving power, you might save the men and women we're standing for today, that you might rescue and call them unto yourself, that they might see your glory and beauty, the glory and beauty of your forgiveness and mercy, the fullness of life you offer as something attractive so you might break who needs to be broken and you might heal who needs to be healed and you might restore what needs to be restored, that we might see people we love deeply come to know and love and worship you.

Not for a scalp on our wall, but because you're good and gracious and you save. We believe that as we stand today as evidences of that grace. There are those standing even now who were indifferent, who wanted no part of this, when you showed up via a son or a daughter or a brother or a sister or some other

means in which you began to communicate to us that you love us and we can be forgiven. We trust you, Jesus. We're hopeful that you will be mighty to save, and it's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Thanks, guys. Have a seat. He saves among the wayward and the uninterested, but again, that's not the only place he saves. Not all of us were wayward and uninterested, or the type of waywardness we were in was not a licentious waywardness. What I mean by that is we were not in rebellion with drugs and alcohol and partying and promiscuity. That is not where we were rescued from. God saves not only among the wayward and uninterested, but he saves among the religious and morally upright.

2. *God saves the religious and morally upright.* Let's go to Luke 15. (That will be just a couple of pages to your right.) In Luke 15, we're going to read 1 through 3. I'll put a heavy emphasis on 3, and I'll test the education component we talked about earlier. **"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him."** That's our uninterested and our wayward, right? Tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to hear Jesus Christ, but look who else is there. Verse 2: **"And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"**

But verse 3 is huge. **"So he told them this..."** What? **"...parable."** Now this is not a trick question. Is that singular or plural? Singular. Yes. **"...he told them *this* parable."** It's not that he told them these parables; it's that he told them *this* parable. Now we need to do some work here, and I'll tell you why. Because he rips off three stories. He gives the story of the lost sheep, the story of the lost coin, and the story of the prodigal son. That's not *a* parable. That's parables, except Jesus says, "No, no, no. All three of them have the same point. They all three have the same point."

The best way to try to explain this to you, if you're familiar with movies, is that Luke 15 looks a bit like a Quentin Tarantino movie. Do you understand what that means? If you don't, it's okay. It's a bunch of stories all telling the same story. You're just trying to (in the middle of it) figure it out. All of these three stories have a singular point, and here's what I'm going to contend: the singular point is *not* that there is grace, mercy, and forgiveness for the tax collector and sinners, although I believe that's completely true. I believe it's an invitation to the Pharisees and scribes to get over themselves and become part of the kingdom of God. Let me show you why I believe that.

In the back part of this text, let's look at verse 25. The younger son takes his money (his inheritance) from the father, and he goes and blows it. I mean, prostitutes and bars... I mean, he hits the scene until he comes to the end of himself. He's totally enslaved to his addictions and in a pigsty (literally in a pigsty). The whole world has fallen apart. He's gotten to the end of himself and has decided, *Even my father's servants live better than this. I'll go home, and I can't be a son anymore. I've sinned too greatly, but maybe*

*he'll just let me be one of his servants.* He comes home after this really nasty background. He comes home, and he has this speech rehearsed.

*I'm going to tell my father, I'm not worthy to be your son. I've sinned against you. I've sinned against God. If you'll just let me be your servant...* But the father, in the story, doesn't listen to that nonsense at all; he immediately hugs him, kisses him, welcomes him home, puts the robe on him, puts a ring on his finger, and then kills the fatted calf. That means, "We're having steak for dinner. We're going to celebrate tonight. Kill the fatted calf."

Now the older brother, he did not leave. He's our rule-follower. He's our firstborn. He's the one who came out of the womb saying, *Yes, sir! Yes, ma'am! Give me the rules. I will find my worth in my ability to obey the rules.* Huh, firstborns? *Just give me the rules. I'll be better at the rules than the middle kid. I can tell you that! Give me my rules and I'll follow them.* The older brother nails the rules, and he's going to tell us about it. It's another firstborn attribute. Let's look at this.

**"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in."** Now the next sentence we're about to read literally took me to my knees in tears about six years ago, and I'll tell you why.

I have a real soft spot in my heart (probably because of my own background) for the younger brother, for the one who went out and just made a train wreck of it all and pushed the boundaries as far as he could and ended up realizing he was bankrupt, not knowing what to do, and came home. I have a soft spot for that, and you know what I tend to be hypercritical of? Religious people. Religious people get on my nerves with their little trite sayings and their judgmental self-righteousness.

*Like, I didn't want to plant a church in Dallas. Are you serious? Get me out of here! Let me go someplace harder. Let me go someplace where it's a bit more hostile and you don't have to worry about the cultural nature of this beast where we're naturally inclined to conservatism, so we go to church because it's good for business, and we're good people. We don't really love the Lord. We don't really have a relationship with him. It's just a thing you check off your list culturally.* I didn't want any part of that. I judged that, and in so doing, actually became the older brother. Isn't that ironic? Look at this next line, because when the Spirit caused it to jump off the page, I just wept.

Verse 28: **"But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and..."** What? **"...entreated him."** He pled with him. "Don't do this. Get in here." See, the fundamental posture of my heart toward

religious, self-righteous people was, *Fine. Stay outside and pout. We're eating some filet in here. We have the good wine. Daddy didn't roll out the boxed wine. We have good wine. We have a band. Dad threw some hard cash at a band. You can hear the dancing. I mean, this thing is epic in the other room. You want to sit out and celebrate the fact that you've never smoked a cigarette? You want to sit outside and celebrate that crap? Then go out and celebrate it. We're going to be in here.*

That was the fundamental posture of my heart, but that's not the fundamental posture of the father. He came outside and was like, "Get in here. Come here." Watch how the older brother responds to the father's entreating. **"But he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'"**

You see, "Here's how good I am; here's how bad he is. Do you see why you shouldn't be doing this? I've obeyed the rules better than he has. Why would you celebrate a rule-breaker when I've been the rule-follower? I did all that you commanded. I never left you. I've done all that you've asked me to do, and you're celebrating him?" The father comes out and entreats, "Get in here. Come into this party." What's his response? "No, I want a young goat with my friends. Let me huddle up with people who think like me, act like me, walk like me, celebrate what I celebrate, and get frustrated at what I get frustrated about. Give us a little goat to eat!"

At that point, again, my heart is, *Fine! Take your goat and go do what you do with a goat. We're having filet and wine. Enjoy the goat with your buddies. We'll continue to do work...* But look at the father. He just does not have this position toward the older brother, toward the religious and self-righteous. **"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"** God's heart toward the self-righteous is, "No, no, no. This is your party, too, bro. That's your fattened calf, too. That's your wine, too. This band is playing for you. Get in here! Get in here!"

Here's what I think happens to self-righteous, religious people. Your dad and my dad did the best they could with where they are, but almost all men carry a little bit of a "daddy wounds," no matter how spectacular our daddy was. In fact, one of the things I pray over my son out loud all the time is that God would protect him from my shortcomings and failures and that God would send other men into his life who reflect better the things I reflect poorly.

One of the ways I began to operate with my own father, and I don't believe it was anything he did. I just think it was the sinfulness of my own heart, but what I picked up on early was if I would just do what Dad

said and kind of leave him alone, I thought we would be cool. *Let me just do what I'm told and leave Pops alone*, because here are men...

This is an overgeneralization. It's not going to be all of you, but it will be most of you. *Give us a task list and we'll dominate, but don't ask us how we feel. We don't know! Quit asking! We're frustrated.* That's the emotion we're feeling. Most of us don't know, so our default is task. Give me something to do. We run with our heads in our hands and our hearts way back there. We just don't know, so I, being male and not understanding the world and not understanding the gospel or God's love for me, began to just go do what my dad wanted me to do and try not to bother him because I didn't want to bother him.

I didn't know how he felt about me; I wasn't sure how I felt about him, so just let me do what he wants me to do. *Let me mow the lawn. Let me try to clean my room.* (My dad will watch this and be like, "Man, you didn't mow that lawn. You didn't clean any room.") If I could just do the task and stay out of his way, I thought we'd be cool. My fear for so many of us is that we have brought that type of mentality into our relationship with God. *Let me do what he wants me to do, and I won't bother him.* In that fundamental attitude, you have taken from yourself the joy of the relationship that will fuel your obedience.

That only leaves you fear and willpower in which to walk in obedience, and those are horrible fuels that don't get you all the way home. Joy gets you all the way home. To know you're delighted in, to know you're loved, to know you're forgiven, to know you're accepted, to know you're wanted, that's the fuel of obedience...*that's the fuel of obedience.*

The invitation to the older brother is, "Get in here. Why would you just want to go hang out with your friends and a goat when you have me and your brother and the fattened calf and the wine and the band? Get in here. Can you hear that? You can hear them dancing! I don't even know what kind of dance that is, but you can hear it. Are you sure you want a goat with your buddies? Get in here!" The invitation is, **"Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest."** "Get in here. Come on."

He saves among the uninterested and the wayward, but he also saves among the religious and the self-righteous, the morally upright. Another perfect picture of this in the book of Acts is the conversion of Lydia in Philippi. Lydia is a fashionista, just a straight-up fashionista, a dealer in purple cloth. She has a house in Thyatira and a house in Philippi. That's Paris and New York. The woman is living large. A religious woman. In fact, on the Sabbath, she is with the other Jewish women with the Torah on her lap when Paul shows up and begins to explain to her more fully what she is reading in the Torah, and she's converted.

Think about this. Someone just got saved at church. Someone was at Bible study and got saved. Lydia (fashionista with houses in global cities) becomes a convert and believes in Jesus Christ as her Lord and

Savior. He saves among the self-righteous and among the religious, and after all these years, I don't know which I marvel at more. They're both spectacular! He saves from one other spot, and some of these overlap, but flip over in your Bible to Acts 17, and then I'll get out of my intro. (I'm kidding. Relax, if you're a guest.) He saves among the religious and the self-righteous. He saves among the wayward and the indifferent. Now look at this. We'll pick it up in verse 24.

**"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, [and perhaps] feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us."**

Not only does God save from among the wayward and indifferent or uninterested and not only does he save from among the self-righteous and the religious, but God also saves among every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth.

3. *God saves from among every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth.* The God of the Bible is the God of the universe, and he has those among every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth who will worship him and love him. In fact, the picture of all things being made new is a picture of all cultures coming and laying down their cultural treasures as offering to the Culture-maker. Right now, all over the world in this 24-hour window, men and women are going to gather, and they're going to worship Jesus Christ just like we are.

They're going to open up the Word of God, and they're going to proclaim it. They're going to do it in large group settings. They're going to do it in houses. They're going to do it in hiding. They're going to do it out in the open. I know we work very closely with the EPC in Yei, Sudan. In Yei, Sudan, they have gathered under a thatch roof with no walls, and they're going to get after the Lord for about three hours. They're going to dance, and they're going to shout and sing. They're going to preach the gospel. They're going to partake in Communion. They're going to get after the Lord.

We've also been into Asia. We've done it in a house, a bit nervous about getting the door kicked in and being on the news, those of us who were on the team. They wouldn't be on the news. That's just another day in their lives, but for those of us who were there training and teaching, we would have probably made the news. It's happening in Iran, and it's happening in Iraq, and it's all over Africa, and it's all over Asia, and it's all over South America. In fact, the power of global Christianity has very quickly shifted away from the Western world and is now in Latin America, in Africa, and in Asia, and it is exploding.

That will be hard for some of us, because for some of us, we thought America was it. Patriot, military brat, "God shed his grace on thee..." I love the United States of America, but God has raised up empires for his purposes and then disposed as he has pleased for millennia, and we are not the apex of his plan. That might offend some of you, but it doesn't make it any less true. Right now we can watch as God spreads his glorious gospel all over the globe, and we can participate in whatever level God calls us into, but God is saving from among every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth those who will love, exalt, and worship him for eternity.

Now what I just laid out for you is a recipe for disaster. If God saved you out of waywardness and disinterest, and God saved you out of self-righteousness and religion, and God saved you out of a different culture, and then you throw those three people in a room (let's just call it a home-group), that's a recipe for disaster! If you have a young woman who just got saved out of prostitution, just got saved out of the strip club, reeks of smoke and is sitting next to a woman in home-group who has never smoked a cigarette or maybe smoked one a couple of weeks ago and feels so guilty she doesn't know if she can go on, and she's trying to confess this in a home-group while the former stripper is smoking in the home-group hearing this woman talk about how guilt-laden she is for this behavior, and she's like, *Are you kidding me? Shut up!*

Then you have a guy from a different culture who finds *all* of that offensive. I mean, how in the world is this going to work? Well, the beauty of the gospel is he takes the disinterested and the wayward and the self-righteous and the religious and all the tribes and cultures and he puts them in a mixer. Then he pours out a new people. He pours out a completely new people, and that means we are no longer defined by the things we raised our hands on earlier. I don't know if you saw what I did, but what we just tried to do was get a quick snapshot, a quick profile, of who we are.

We are predominantly upper-middle class. We're predominantly Anglo. We are highly educated. We are... On and on I could go. For the most part, this is who we are, and those things in our society define us and put us in niches of culture, and the gospel goes, "No, no, no. I made my own people. It's not upper-middle. It's not poverty or wealthy. I made my own people. It's not Anglo or African-America or Hispanic. No, no, no. I make my own people. I put you in a mixer, and I make my own people." In fact, let me read 1 Peter 2. I'm just going to read verse 10 for time's sake, but if you have your Bibles, go over to 1 Corinthians, chapter 12.

Here is verse 10 of 1 Peter, chapter 2. "**Once you were not a people, but now you are** [God's people]..." You have to hear this. Once, you and I were not a people. Do you know who my people were? My people were Jan and Steve. Those are my parents. Linda and Johnny, those are my in-laws. Lauren, that's my wife. Audrey, Reid, and Norah. That's my people. You're not my people. I'm not laying down my life for you; I'm

laying down my life for them. I'm not finding ways to serve you; I'm finding ways to serve them, because these are my people. Blood is thicker than water, correct? Yeah. Yeah.

But God says, "No, no, no, no, no. Once you were not a people, but now I have made you my people," which means, as hard as this is for some of us, that you and I are as family as me and that group I just mentioned because we are bound together by blood, and it is a blood far thicker and more powerful than the genetic code of my own line. It is the blood of Jesus that makes us family. You and I were made a people. Once we were not a people, but now we have been made a people. Let's look at how this people interacts. First Corinthians, chapter 12. I'm going to pick it up in verse 14.

**"For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."**

Now as a pastor and as one of the elders of this church, this is the kind of text that drives the force of what we work on during the week. What this just said is, for us to be all that God would have us to be at The Village Church, you need me, I need you, and we need each other. We have been uniquely designed and uniquely wired, all of us, with certain gifts, abilities, and backgrounds, so that in the pouring out of the those things, we might grow up into the fullness of all God would have for us. God has uniquely...look right at me...made you to be you. There are those in this room...

In fact, let's just do it. How many of you would say you're kind of a shy person and the thought of ever being in front of people is mortifying to you? So there are a lot of you in here who are like, *Oh, please don't do anything else with this hand being raised right now. Just move on to your next question, please.* Then the other extreme is how many of you are just like, *Hey, if we're not having fun, I'll solve that? What do you need me to do? You need me to jump off something? You need me to catch something on fire? Let's do this! Put me in front of whoever you want.* All right. That's some of us there, too. Those are extremes. Most of us are in the middle somewhere, but those are kind of your two bookends.

God wired us this way. He gifted us this way. I think one of the most paralyzing things you can do to yourself is look at other people and think you're supposed to look like that and you're supposed to do that. Where it is appropriate to look at other people is when you're looking at their zeal and pursuit of the Lord, but the outworking of their gifts should not be gazed at, as that's what you're supposed to be. That's his

point. "Hey, man, if everybody is trying to be the eye, how are we walking anywhere?" It's important for you to know there are no small parts in the body.

Now physically, you know this. Does anybody get cricks in their necks? Anybody? This is interactive. Okay. We get cricks. Now tell me that doesn't change everything. How tiny is that? You're not even sure where it is. *I think it's somewhere right in there.* You can just give a general region. Somewhere in there, but doesn't it affect everything? Like when you drive, you just have to trust the sovereignty of God because you can't check that blind spot. You just have to kind of slowly make your way over with the blinker and listen for a honk. Have you ever broken a toe or rolled your ankle? What happens if you break a toe and you have to kind of limp on it? You're making your body work in ways that aren't ideal, so other parts of the body start firing up and acting up.

There are no small parts, but when all parts are functioning as they were designed to function, you get something spectacular. Oh, that you might understand and realize you are to play your part well. You are to be you. You are not the future version of anyone. You're not the next anyone. You're you, and listen. I think God's pretty pleased at what he did. I mean, God is looking at you with regrets. "Who did that? Look how meek they are! Geez! How am I supposed to get anything done? I need a lion, and you gave me a lamb." This is Psalm 139. "[You are] **fearfully and wonderfully made...**"

God delights in how he wired you, and now, according to this, where he placed you. You just have to grow comfortable in serving the Lord and serving his bride, the church, in how he designed you to do it. You might need to *grow* in your gifting, but you don't need to steal someone else's. Are you tracking? I want us to look at one more text, and I'll close us out. Romans 12, 9 through 13, we'll see the gospel break down walls of hostility in a pretty profound way. Romans 12. We'll pick it up in verse 9.

**"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."** Seek hospitality. Let me explain hospitality. Hospitality is simply us saying, "You matter. You matter to me." Hospitality is not the gift of decorating well in the house. Hospitality is not having people over and having it candlelit with accents and putting leaves on the table in the fall. That's nice; it's not hospitality. Hospitality is, "You matter to me."

By the way, that's one of those moments where I realized I've been married, because I didn't know *accent* when I got married. I knew I had a Jordan poster and a couch. That's what I came in with. I learned accenting and... We don't have time.

In the middle of all of this, we are to *seek* to show hospitality. That means our relationships with one another are, "I care about your marriage. I care about your kids. I care about the state of your heart. I care about how you're doing. Come to my house. Let's go grab something to drink. Let me hear how your heart is doing. Let me hear where you're frustrated. Let me hear where you're hung up. Let me hear where things aren't going well. Let me rejoice with you when things are going well." We are to seek this out. We're not to be passive; we're to be active in showing hospitality. The people around us matter.

I love this: **"Outdo one another in showing honor."** We should just make a sport out of that for the next eight weeks while we're in this series. We would have our head on a swivel, and the game is, "I'll bless you more than you can bless me." Why not? We'll do a little fantasy draft if that sucks you in. We'll get a way to track it on our app. Let's just try to say for the next eight weeks during this series to breathe it into our life and culture we're going to outdo one another in honor. We're going to seek to serve one another, be patient with one another. This is in the context of Christian community, and the command is, "Be patient with one another. Hold up well under tribulation."

We have growing to do, and this is what God does in the gospel. He breaks down the walls of hostility. If we can be honest, and maybe we can't be honest, secularism has failed us in this regard. It has not brought about greater tolerance; it has actually created more intolerance. Are we all unified in the political arena right now, or is it more polarized than ever? Yeah. More polarized. I try to stay out of the culture wars. I find myself served better just by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and letting things land, but Dan Cathy of Chick-fil-A was asked a question. He didn't picket. He didn't walk around with a sign.

He was asked a direct question, a question he answered honestly, and they tried to burn his business to the ground. I don't even know who "they" are, but you saw a culture turn aggressively on what? A man who was asked a question and answered a question about what he does with his own personal resources. That's not tolerance; that's intolerance. *Well, what he stands for is intolerance.* No, no, no. Here's our Christian position. Our Christian position is that we love and serve the world even if we disagree with them.

So if I live next door to someone who lives a way of life I believe is unbiblical, their testimony about me would be, *He disagrees with me, but, man, that dude loves me. He's always inviting me over to the house. He knows what I like. He gives us gifts. He engages us. He respects us. He loves us. He doesn't agree with us, but man, that dude loves us! One night I looked out, and he was just freakin' mowing my lawn. I was like, "What are you doing?" "I'm mowing your lawn!"* That's how we live. We are the church, this new people, the church. The bride of Christ is the manifold wisdom of God becoming visible to the world around us.

For the next eight weeks, we're going to look at this idea of being a city on a hill and look at what it means to be God's people, set up for the world to behold the glory of God. We're going to talk about marriage.

We're going to talk about divorce. We're going to talk about sex. We're going to talk about lust. We're going to talk about all these things and the Christian view of those things *and* how far we fall short of those things and marvel at the grace of God as we seek to see him do work in our lives to bring about greater obedience in those areas. Let's pray.

Some of you have come in here today and you're wayward and disinterested, and I don't think it's any accident at all that you're here. I think an objective evidence of God's delight and love for you is that you are here, that you've come on a day when we would be discussing God's deep love and pursuit of the wayward and the uninterested. You've come in here, and you don't think this is for you, and you don't think God can save you, and you think you've gone too far. God brought you here on a day where someone who has sinned in far greater categories than you was forgiven by God Almighty.

Others of you, you've come in, and God bless you, you're really good at church and really bad at Jesus. We're going to move into a time now where we simply respond to the reality that God has offered forgiveness to those who would accept it. If you would say in this place that your testimony is you've come in here today and you've been a bit wayward and you've been a bit indifferent and you've been a bit disinterested and that you feel in your heart and your mind maybe God stirring some things and leading you in some things that historically you've shied away from.

If that's you, and you say, *I've come in here today and been a bit wayward and disinterested*, would you just lift your hand? You don't have to be ashamed. All of us have been in that spot where we can lift our hands and go, *Listen. I've been disinterested. I've been wayward. This has not been where I've made my home. I have not put down roots in the gospel.* Okay. Praise God. Why don't you put your hands down? If you say, *Man, I think I'm religious. I think I'm good at church and bad at Jesus, and I want to rest in his delight in me. I just want to kind of raise my hand in showing I'm tired and weary of religion, and I want Jesus.*

If that's you, would you just lift your hands? Oh, praise God. Okay. I'm going to pray for us, and then we're going to move into a time of worshipping the Lord via song. We'll do Communion in Denton and Dallas, and then there will be men and women who you can pray with if you raised your hand and said, *This is who I am.* You'll have the opportunity just to be prayed over and prayed with and an opportunity to talk with someone.

Jesus, I thank you for your mercy and grace. Father, I thank you that you save from among the wayward and the disinterested, that you save from among the religious and the self-righteous, and I praise you that your arms are not too short. For the men and women we stood for, we ask that you would do a powerful work, and in our own lives, we ask that you would do a powerful work. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen. I love you guys.

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