

How are we? Are we good? If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them and turn to Nehemiah, chapter 13. We'll finish our study of the book of Nehemiah this weekend. We've taken eight themes found in the book and just tried to develop them over the last few months. The book ends in a peculiar way. What I mean by that is Nehemiah ends in a way that independent films end. It's kind of always disastrous. The mainline movies everybody loves have the happy endings. The ones that win the Academy Awards are the ones nobody actually saw because everybody died at the end and it was awful.

What happens in Nehemiah is very much that things don't end on a high note. They actually end on a low note. Lest you think, "Oh man, I'm not really in the mood for a low-note sermon," I'll have you know, really the low note we find in Nehemiah 13 should make us marvel at the love and grace of God toward his people. What we're going to do is kind of walk through Nehemiah 13. Here's what Nehemiah 13 is going to do. If you're a Christian in here, it's going to tell us the truth about us. If you're *not* a believer in here, it'll help you understand some of our inconsistencies.

What we've read and what we've learned in the book of Nehemiah to this point is that the world is broken. Nobody really wants to argue about that. Whether you're secular or religious, everybody can look out at the world and say, "Something has gone wrong." What you think that something is varies from tribe to tribe, but ultimately, everyone would agree the world is broken at some level and needs some repair.

What we've looked at from the book of Nehemiah is that we, as the people of God, as the Christian church, as the localized church here at The Village, are to be people of empathy and compassion. We enter into the sorrows of others. We enter into the loss of others. We care deeply about one another as believers in Christ, first and foremost, and then flowing out of the walls of the church onto the rest of the world. We are people whose lives are marked by compassion.

Then we're people who have a relationship with God. God is not just an idea to us. We have a relationship with God, and that relationship works itself out through the Word of God and prayer. Then we are people who act upon our prayers. We're not people who just pray and sit around and hope. We pray, and then we act upon the prayers we have prayed. We don't just pray God would encourage you; we encourage you. Then from there we looked at and learned there will be opposition toward us as the people of God.

Then from there we said there'll be a great need for grace and mercy inside the household of faith, because there are a lot of sinners in this room. A lot of sinners go to The Village Church. A lot of sinners are covenant members of The Village Church, which means we shouldn't be surprised when someone disappoints us, and we shouldn't be surprised we will have to extend grace, receive grace, and walk with one another in a way that marks us as Christians with patience toward one another. What that means is we're not people who are perfect by any means but *are* people who rest in the forgiveness of God and are pursuing perfection.

Then from there we looked at the fact that we are a people defined by and directed by the Word of God. We are very serious about the Scriptures. We don't pick and choose what we want from the Scriptures. If you want to immediately roll to Leviticus, there *are* answers to that. All right? We are people defined by and directed by the Word of God. We don't apologize for that. It says what it says. We are people of the Word, shaped by the Word, guided by the Word, directed by the Word of God. It is a divine Book. It is sacred literature for us.

Then we said last week as we live to rebuild what is broken in the world, bringing glory to God, we are fueled by and empowered by the faithfulness of God toward us, despite our circumstances. So that's what we've marveled at, and now, at this point in Nehemiah 13, what we're going to find out about us is what has always been true about us as the people of God is we're prone to do some of the same things over and over and over again.

There is in each of us, as believers, a type of drifting that can take place if we're not careful. So we're going to look at how we're prone to drift and *where* we're prone to drift, and then I want us to marvel at the grace of God toward us, despite the fact you can check in on God's people from Genesis to Revelation to today and we all still have the same tendencies as sinful and yet delivered men and women. So let's get to work here. Nehemiah 13. We'll pick it up in verse 4.

"Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king.

And after some time I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I

gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense."

What has occurred is Nehemiah sets these reforms. People are serious about God. They're following after God. They've lined themselves back up with obedience to God. He heads back to King Artaxerxes, 800 miles away, the king of Persia, heads back to his kingdom, and then he comes back to Jerusalem, and so many of the reforms he put into place have become brittle, if they haven't altogether begun to fall apart.

If you don't remember, or haven't done the study our groups are going through, Tobiah had actively worked against the reforms of Nehemiah since the beginning. In fact, in Nehemiah, chapter 6, Tobiah actually hired a false prophet to prophesy to Nehemiah that God had told him Nehemiah was going to be murdered and that he should leave. So Tobiah had very subversively been undermining the people of God and the seriousness about pursuit of God among God's people.

Nehemiah leaves, and then we have one of the caretakers of the house of God, the center at which God's people are encouraged, motivated, comforted, corrected, and sent out to live for God, making a house for Tobiah in the middle of the house of God, clearing out aspects of worship to God in order to make room for a man who subversively works against the things of God. That brings me to the first point, in which we are all prone to drift.

Check in on us at any point in history. Check in on us here today. We all have a tendency, over a period of time, to grow less and less serious about holiness. We tend to grow lax in our seriousness about holiness. We tend to allow things in our lives that shape us in a way that does not motivate us *toward* God but rather pulls us *away* from God. We have a tendency to allow a lot of things in our lives that are kind of morally neutral that do not have good effects on us in regard to our relationship with God and our desire to know him and follow him.

For the most part, what's going to get most of us isn't some overtly horrific thing. I think we'll have plenty of people at The Village Church who struggle with serious addictions to drugs and alcohol. In fact, one of the marks of this church is the way God has worked in that community and in the community of those who walk in same-sex attraction. God has really pulled them out and begun to really shape and mold and move in their hearts. It's a beautiful thing.

But most of us aren't struggling with heroin. That's not where most of us struggle. It'll be in that morally neutral area, that thing that isn't blatantly evil or wrong, but, for whatever reason, to give it room in our hearts distracts us and pulls us away from the things of God. There are morally neutral things in your life and my life that rob us of our affections for Jesus Christ. What happens over a period of time is we make

room for those things in our lives, rather than being serious about eradicating those things or holding those things in check so we don't drift away from holiness.

God has been very gracious in this drift. In fact, again, if you check in on us at any point in Christian history, you will find us to be people who are prone to drift away from holiness. So God gives us a couple of things to really help us. One is the Word of God. The reason you have that Scripture in your lap or on your device right now is, once again, that God might guide you. But that's not all he gives you. He also gives you the community of faith.

Let me be honest with you. I have blind spots. I'm not quite sure what they are, because they're blind spots. What God has given to me, because of those blind spots, is the Word of God that the Holy Spirit might open my eyes to them in study of the Word, and he has also given me good godly friends who know me, who I have invited in to read my mail, if you will.

I've come to the conclusion after 20 years of pastoral ministry that one of the most loving things a person will ever do is confront you in your sin. The reason I say it's the most loving thing is because 90 percent of the time it does not go well. A "Hey, I noticed this inconsistency; I noticed this drift in you," is almost always met with justification and then accusation. It's almost always met with, "Well let me explain why that has happened. You don't understand my life. You don't know me. And since we're on the subject of weaknesses, I just happen to have a list of yours."

When you confront someone about their sins, you're almost always risking the relationship itself. That requires a type of love that is not a weak type of love, but a love that's willing to risk for the good of the person. So God, knowing you and I are prone to drift, prone to wander... This isn't new. We've written songs about this. "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love." We sing that song. God has given us an anchor. God has given us a tether. God has given us ways to stay in safe water.

He has given us the Word of God, and he has given us each other, which is why I want to continually lay before you what Danny talked about in his testimony, and what we lay before you all the time. It's not good enough to just show up here on the weekend. You will not pull out of the community of faith what you should be pulling out of the community of faith if sermons and songs are all you're getting. We need one another, and we need one another honestly. Are you tracking with me?

We don't need pretty you. In fact, that's the last thing we need. The last thing we need is pretty you, the one who's all put together, has no struggles, wears a cape, never has any doubt, whose marriage is perfect and whose kids obey just with looks. The room got cleaned, right? We don't need *that*. We need honest

you. We need *you*. I'm telling you, one of the great paradoxes of the Christian faith is our weaknesses edify and encourage one another to greater holiness.

Isn't that strange, that strengths and perceived strengths and, in particular, projected strengths can actually at times hinder growth in the things of God, whereas honest weaknesses have a way of stirring us up to greater holiness, creating safe places for us to experience the grace of God? This is what God has given to you in our tendency to lack seriousness about holiness. Let's keep reading. This is verse 10:

"I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. So I confronted the officials and said, 'Why is the house of God forsaken?' And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses.

And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service."

This is going to sound self-serving, but I'll turn it at the end so it doesn't...maybe. It's one of those awkward things where I have to handle the text but it's going to be awkward. Let's see. The second way we are, as the people of God, historically prone to drift out of safe waters and into dangerous waters is, over a period of time, to drift from godly, biblical authority.

Let me say it this way. There are a couple of things at play here that are not conducive to spiritual health for you and me. One is a culture that places zero value on authority itself. In fact, any authority is kind of viewed with skepticism, as maybe tyrannical or dictatorial. It just feels unsafe. In fact, in my seventh-grade year, one of the most common phrases you would hear from a seventh-grader was, "You ain't my mama." In seventh grade, eighth grade, eighth grade for the second time, that was a refrain from the crew I ran with. "You ain't my mama." That was our way of saying, "You can't tell me what to do."

Here's the thing. It wasn't like I was listening to my mama. There were these kind of niche people who might or might not have had authority over you, but even that authority you resented, and that is predominate in our culture. There's very, very little respect for any type of actual authority. In fact, there's a questioning of whether there should be any authority over you whatsoever.

If you put that together with a complete biblical ignorance on what the church of Jesus Christ is, you have an avoidance of authority and a misunderstanding of what church is. Then that combines to put you and me and all of us in a great deal of peril. Let me read you a verse about church that will sound so countercultural and so strange to you it might kind of rub your heart in the wrong way. I want you to pay attention to how this verse sounds to you so you might see if some of this drift might be occurring even in you.

In Hebrews 13, verse 17, it says, "**Obey your leaders and submit to them...**" We're going to finish reading this verse, but I want to lay this before you. Nobody joins a church off of that verse these days. No one. People join churches like this: "Oh, I love the music, and that guy makes me laugh." The Bible just said when it comes to joining a church you are submitting to and agreeing to obey the elders of that church.

That word *obeys* sounds crazy, doesn't it? Nobody thinks that when they join a church. "I'm going to obey these men whom God has put over my care. When they weigh in on life and wisdom, I'm going to obey. I'm going to submit. When they preach and proclaim the Word of God, I'm going to obey. I'm going to submit." Nobody thinks that anymore. In fact, if they do something we don't like or try to weigh in wisdom on our lives, we'll just find a church that stays out of our business.

Do you see how that puts you in harm's way? What the Bible says about the people of God, particularly those of you who are Christians who have joined *this* church, is what you have to do is obey and submit. But listen. There's far more weight on the elders than there is on you. Watch this. "**Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.**"

Let me tell you one of my most frequent fantasies. When I lay in bed at night, just me and my thoughts, what I fantasize about is pastoring a house church: six dudes and their families, knowing where everyone is, how everybody is doing, directly connected. You know when somebody didn't show up. You know how somebody's marriage is, because even if he'll lie to you, she'll be telling the truth to my wife in the next room.

So then after you leave I'll say, "Hey, how are the boys doing?" "Well, I'll tell you what. Derrick certainly isn't loving his wife like Christ loved the church." Then I'll be able to call Derrick and go, "Derrick, what in the world, bro? I asked you how your marriage was. You told me it was great. Your wife was complaining about your selfishness in the next room." That's a fantasy of mine. I just dream like, "Oh gosh, that would be awesome." Instead, what the Lord has done is *this*: 12,000 people, 6,000-7,000 covenant members across four campuses.

Here's what the Word of God has said. You are to obey and submit if you're a covenant member, and we are, as the elders, held accountable for how we cared for you. That's terrifying. I have to stand in front of God with the elders of this church and give an account for how we shepherded you, how we cared for you, how we laid tracks for you, how we held you accountable, how we stirred up your affections for Christ, and whether or not we served you or leeches off of you.

Then the verse continues: "**Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.**" This is a great turn on words here. He's like, "It's no advantage to you if you beat your pastor down so badly he's like, 'Gosh, I hate this job, but let me be faithful to God.'" It's no advantage to you if your pastor has a long list of people he would like to see God take home. Faithful brothers and sisters... It's just time for them to go on home to glory. It's no advantage to you if you're on a death list in your pastor's office because you beat him down and nag him to death.

With all of that said, let me say this, specifically to our covenant members. Ten years in, it is a delight to be your pastor. Speaking for the staff and for the elders, you make it a joy to serve God by serving you. Are you giving yourselves applause right now? That's awkward. "We *are* awesome. You always say we're not awesome, and now you're saying we're awesome." Right? No. I'm saying thank you for the way you encourage the staff, you love the staff, you encourage me, you love me. We feel cared for and loved. You make it a delight to serve you, and don't ever applaud yourselves again. I will add a weekend message that's on total depravity if you ever do that again.

Now I want to just tease this out a bit more to you, enough that I would say this: it is God's will and his command that you find a church and join it. This "I love Jesus but not the church" nonsense needs to stop. It's a lie. Augustine says no man can have God as his Father who does not have the church as his mother. I'll tell you this. If you come and say, "Matt, you and I are cool, but I hate that 'skantchy' wife of yours," then you and I aren't cool, right?

If you're like, "Matt, I really love you, but man, I can't believe you married that idiot wife of yours," are you and I going to be buddies after that? I'll choke you out. You and I can't be friends if you're going to... Right? That's absurd. So for your own soul care, because you have a tendency to drift away, to think you're smarter than anybody else and not really know what your blind spots are, God has given you the bride.

I feel bold enough to say I believe if you are not a member of a local congregation, you are walking in disobedience. I'm not saying you're not a Christian, but I *am* saying you're in sin. We're not doing a membership drive here today. All right? I'm not going, "So membership class is in a few weeks; join." I'm saying find somewhere that's serious about the Word of God, that is serious about caring for your soul, a group of men and women who are willing to pour themselves out for your benefit, and join.

There are no perfect churches. If that's what you're holding out for, you'll be holding out forever. It is in most of us a rebellious spirit that would have us not joining anywhere, not belonging anywhere. See, the thing about attendance but not belonging is you can control it. That's why you like to do that. You like to control. Nobody is going to tell you about your business.

What good is the church if we have no right to get in your business and you have no right to be in ours? Do you see how you even short-circuit all God has done for you in calling you to be a part of his people? We've so individualized this thing that we've hurt ourselves. We're prone to kick against godly, biblical leadership. They hated the prophets. They hated Christ. They hated many of the New Testament leaders, and to this day, you have people who treat the church like an ecclesiological buffet. Let's keep going to the third place we have a tendency to drift.

"In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city?'"

Now here's what's important to know. I'm saying we've always had a tendency to do this. Do you hear what Nehemiah is doing? "Didn't our fathers do this? Didn't Solomon do this? Haven't we done this before? Haven't we already received what happens when you drift from God like this?" Here we are, looking at Nehemiah thousands of years later, and Nehemiah is pointing a thousand years before that and going, "Hey, haven't we played this game before?" Now let's keep reading there in verse 18:

"Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.' As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates, that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day. Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice."

Verse 21 is interesting. **"But I warned them and said to them, 'Why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you.'"** How great is that? I want to put that in our church covenant. "You do that again and I'll lay hands on you." It's biblical. **"From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the**

gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love."

So much of what the Sabbath is is lost on us in 2013, but here's where we're prone to drift. This is significant. We are prone to drift by doing rather than being. I'll try to explain that. The Sabbath was woven into the fabric of how God created the universe to be, because you and I, by our nature, are going to try to earn what can't be earned. There is something that happens in me when I complete tasks. When I can check something off, there's a euphoric kind of, "I just accomplished something spectacular" thing that occurs in my soul.

Lauren came home yesterday, and she said, "Oh, you made the bed." "Yes, I did. I also unloaded the dishwasher, and the kids have been fed, and their rooms are clean." Cape. This husband thing is a breeze. I'm dominating this husband/father thing right now. Then when I turn in a manuscript or finish a sermon or get some things done, I can feel this kind of "I can do this."

Here's what happens. It doesn't take too long for me to then, in turn, become enslaved to those things. Now I *have* to turn those things in, I *have* to get those things done, because my whole identity now is caught up in that. I have to preach a lights-out sermon every weekend, I have to be the best husband possible, and now I'm carrying all the weight of what is impossible, and I am crushed and owned by any and all failures.

What God says just to remind you because you're dumb is, "Once a week stop and just be. Your identity isn't in those things. Your identity is in me. Your identity isn't in what you can accomplish or what you can get done or how you can clean yourself up or whether or not you do this or whether or not you do that. Your identity is found in my adopting work in Jesus Christ."

We have a tendency to forget that. Almost all of us do. In fact, most of us have a default movement of trying to perpetually clean ourselves up so God might approve of us. The Sabbath is going to step right into that nonsense. God screams from the heavens, "Stop! Just stop!"

"Well let me clean up. This arm is still so dirty."

"Stop it!"

"But I'm trying to get better at this."

"Okay, just stop. Today just stop and rest in being mine. You're already mine." I've said this same thing to you for a decade: he doesn't love the future version of you. That's not who he's wild about. You 10 years from now is not who God loves and has rescued. *You* right now. That's what makes grace so amazing. For you to go, "Yeah, but I have to quit cussing"... Okay, I think you should grow in that. I think it's a good thing to grow in a way of expressing yourself that's not vulgar. That's growth, but that doesn't rescue you before God.

"I have a real problem with lust and pornography." Well I think it's a very good thing for you to pursue holiness in that matter and to be serious about the devastation that's going to reap in your heart and in your marriage and in future relationships if you're not careful, but you no longer viewing pornography doesn't save you. "Well I have a real drug and alcohol problem." Okay, I hear you. That's something we definitely want to see God work in, but you being clean in addiction does not have you accepted before God.

It is by his blood and righteousness alone that you're saved, and the Sabbath screams out, "Stop! Just be. Be my son. Be my daughter. I love you now." My experience has been, like a father and husband who neglects his family to buy them trinkets and toys, we will neglect our relationship with God in order to try to serve him and get things done for him.

That then takes all the delight out of ministry and makes it duty-bound and, really, when all is said and done, harms what makes our relationship with God flourish. So one of the things you and I have a tendency to do is drift toward doing rather than being. It's why we need to be continually reminded of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then one more drift here I want us to talk about, and then we'll conclude our time together.

"In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair."

Hello? Yes, please. I was reading that when I was getting prepared for Nehemiah, and I was like, "I'd like to do a whole sermon on just this verse, but I'm not quite sure what to do with it." Just in case any of you are overzealous, that should not be your life verse nor your philosophy of ministry. "Well they weren't being obedient, so I ripped out their hair and beat them." Let's keep going.

"And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, 'You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women?'" So here we go again. He's referring backwards. "Haven't we already done

this? Haven't we already made this mistake?" Yet here we are in today's day making the same mistakes again.

"Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?' And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite." You should remember him. He was also, with Tobiah, subversively against the reforms of God.

"Therefore I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good."

Do you see what I mean about this book ending so strangely? He literally shows up, beats half the nation, and then the book is over. Let me give you the fourth drift. The fourth drift that occurs to us historically and to this day is all of us have a tendency to get very nearsighted and lazy about the things of God. This text, historically speaking, was used to preach against interracial marriage. That was an ignorant, foolish hermeneutic. I don't quite know how they really milked that out of this passage, because it's absolutely not there.

This is about inviting into your life cultures that are adamantly opposed to the things of God. That's what's taking place here. It's not that a black man shouldn't marry a white woman, or a Hispanic man shouldn't marry a white woman, or a black woman shouldn't marry a white man. That's not what's happening in this text. He's saying, "You have invited cultures into the covenant community of faith that are adamantly opposed to the things of God." First and foremost, he's talking marriage here. Here's what I mean by nearsighted, although I believe marriage is just honestly the illustration of the point.

I'll say this. If you get offended, it's not my intent. I've seen this far more with young women than I have with young men. Young women in their one-bedroom apartments begin to see their girlfriends begin to get married, and they begin to feel lonely. So they find a guy. He's a good dude; he just doesn't really love Jesus much. He'll go to church, but he's kind of just going to church because it's missionary day, and she's bringing him to church. Then she ends up marrying this dude who's not serious about Jesus Christ.

Here's where it's nearsighted. What happens when now we have kids? What's the temperature in the family unit? What's the goal? What's the desire of the family? Is the desire that we would grow and challenge and shape and see our children become godly? Is it that we might raise children, that we might have a family unit that declares the glories of God to the world around us? What do we do with our money? Are we openhanded with our money, or are we just building bigger and bigger houses and getting nicer and nicer stuff? All of this is decided by the family unit.

Young single ladies, I have met so many women who are far more lonely and distraught today *because* of being married than I have ever met single women who are lonely and desperate who are *not* married. I would plead with you to hold out for a man of God. "Well they're hard to find." They *are* hard to find. Even our young men now... I'm not quite sure what they're doing. I don't know why they don't ask you out on dates. I don't know why they don't pursue you. They don't live their life that way. They're not sitting in the living room wishing a sandwich would just show up on the coffee table. They get up and make it.

So I don't know. I apologize for their laziness in regard to pursuing you, and in their lack of integrity in pursuing you, and how they flirt with you. You be a woman of God and call them on that nonsense, and we'll see how quickly it shuts down. If you have a dude flirting with you who hasn't declared his intentions, just call him out. Just go, "Hey, are you courting me here? Are you interested in me? Because that's inappropriate, your little joking texts to me all the time. Stop that nonsense unless you're serious."

If you'll approach this seriously, then I think you'll find yourself a serious man. If you're like, "I might run him away if I do that," it might be a dude who needs to be run away. "Oh, he's so cute." That cuteness wears off, yo. That cuteness wears off pretty quickly at the house. In the end, again, this is just a lack of seriousness about the things of God. When we date, when we approach marriage, our concern is what? It's godliness. It's temperature of the house. It's the rest of our lives. It's not momentary decisions.

I'll give you another illustration of this same kind of laziness and lackadaisical approach to the things of God. If you're in a place where God is moving in your heart and you're growing in your knowledge of the Word and you're finding your marriage and relationship with Jesus Christ flourishing, I think it would be foolish to take a job somewhere else for more money where you're not sure if you'd have those things. One is shortsighted; one is longsighted.

If you've found a place of care where you're growing, to leave that spiritual care and that spiritual vibrancy to make another 10 or 20 grand a year in order to get a little bit nicer of a car, a little bit bigger of a house, is shortsighted and foolish. Again, we don't have categories for that in our day and age. That's why the church is so weak. There's kind of a laziness that occurs over a period of time when it comes to the people

of God. They're not serious about the things of God, and they're lackadaisical in their approach to growing in godliness.

Now none of this should feel like a heavy weight, a heavy burden to you. It's actually God outing you. It should be a bit comfortable. "Oh good. He knows I'm lazy." Why I started this sermon saying this will cause us to marvel at God is because God has always known this about his people, and yet he's steadfast and longsuffering, and he hears their cries, and he delivers them from evil and rescues them from their sin, and despite the fact that all of us are repeatedly on this list over and over and over again, our God declares, "I know. I know, and I've made a path for you. I've granted forgiveness to you."

So you and I mature, we rebuild, we actively walk in the world, one day at a time. There are no steroid shots in regard to growing in godliness. It is a day-in, day-out living for God in full knowledge that God has given me all I need today to be obedient to what he has called me to today. I don't know how you work. If I begin to think about what I have to accomplish this month, I will begin to stress out and not sleep well.

If I think, "Okay, I have to turn *this* in at this time. I have to get *this* done by then. I have to have *this* meeting. I have to get *this* scheduled. We have to figure out when to have dinner with them. We have to figure out how to put this together," I will literally start freaking out. I'll have to start saying to myself, "I don't have to carry all this. I don't have to carry all this." I mean, I'll wig out. I'll get anxious and stressed. I'll start losing sleep.

But if I'm going, "I have to preach this morning, I have to catch a flight to Minneapolis, I have to speak tonight, I have to eat dinner with my wife and go to bed," then I'm great. It's just today, with the full confidence that God has given me all I need to be obedient to all he would have me do today. Just about bedtime I'll be running out of fuel, and when I wake up tomorrow morning there will be new mercy. It's a day at a time, and we keep getting up.

Okay, you're going to screw up. Right? Like today. I mean, how easy was that? "I'm going to preach, then I have to catch a plane." Somewhere in there, I'm going to absolutely be lazy about holiness. I'm going to lack seriousness about pursuing the things of God. I will kick against my authority. Some of this is going to happen today. What's God's response? "Yeah, I know. Get back up. Let's go. You still have mercy, and bedtime is a few hours away. Let's go." It's a day at a time. This is how we grow in godliness.

So really, my encouragement to you is... *What needs to be done today?* What steps of faith need to be taken today? I do not believe you can fix you, so if you're going, "I *am* kind of lazy when it comes to the things of God," what I'm saying is, "Take steps." Those steps don't fix you, but they put you in some positions to experience the mercy and grace of God.

If you're struggling with addiction, get into recovery. If you've been lazy and lackadaisical about membership, then sign up for the membership class. Join a group. Take steps. Those steps will not fix you. The only thing you're better at than jacking up your life is not fixing your life. You can't fix you, but you can take steps that will allow God to move powerfully in your life. What steps need to be taken?

Since God is clearly warning us, "My people have a tendency to do this," then we should take to heart these things and consider how we might position ourselves to experience the grace and mercy of God in a way that's life-giving and increases our vitality and energy in our faith, that we might be serious about the things of God, not lackadaisical, not that these things don't really matter, that you're the one person who's going to nail this without being obedient to the Scriptures. You're not that guy, because that guy doesn't exist. Let me pray for us.

Father, I thank you that you love us despite us. I thank you that in your knowledge that we have a tendency to get lazy about holiness... We become lax in our sexual ethics, we become lax in what we intake and think on, we become lax in how we handle relationships, we become lax in how serious we are about purity before you in all areas of our lives, and yet you love us and extend grace to us. God, we have a tendency to not want to sit under any authority. We have a tendency to not feel like we need to obey anyone but our own desires, and yet you love us.

Father, we have a tendency to just want to do rather than be, so I pray today you'd let us rest in simply being. God, we do have a lackadaisical approach by which we pursue you and growth in you. We have a tendency to be lazy about your things and the things you've commanded us to be about. So God, I thank you that even in this there's grace and mercy for us. We love you, and it's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

We very purposefully end our services the same way every weekend. Not to be rote or to be routine, we are trying to bring you back to a focal point of remembrance week in and week out. Every time we gather we want to end the same way. We want to rally around the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ. Therein is our anchor. Therein is that rope. Therein is the mercy of God over our stumbling and bumbling about. The reason God is able to be longsuffering and patient with us is that he has sent Christ to absorb our sins and grant us righteousness that was Jesus' righteousness, not our own. When we get together at the end of every service, we celebrate this as Christians.

Now let me coach you a bit on Communion. If you are a believer in Christ, if you are a member of another church, I want to welcome you. Hey, celebrate this with us, all right? We're family. Let's celebrate. I would encourage you to take a little piece of bread and take that juice and we'll partake here shortly. I do want to

also ask this. If you're not a believer in Jesus Christ right now, I would just ask you to abstain. I'm not trying to judge you or be harsh here. I want to just try to explain this.

For us, this has very significant meaning. We're celebrating the fact that redemption has been given to us. This doesn't forgive us. We *have* been forgiven, so we celebrate forgiveness in this. For you, the only thing that's going to happen if you eat that oyster cracker and that tiny cup of juice is whatever happens biologically when you eat an oyster cracker and drink grape juice. Your sins will not be forgiven. You will not be granted right standing before God. You will simply eat a small cracker and drink a little juice. So will you just abstain?

Now maybe over the last hour God has done a work in your heart. He has stirred something up in you. Maybe for the first time today you want to lay your "yes" down. The same grace that has been extended to us that we're celebrating in this Communion meal has been offered to you by God. In fact, you being here today is some objective evidence that God is pursuing your soul.

So maybe today for the first time you *do* take that piece of bread, you *do* take that cup, and you celebrate what Christ has done for you. You lay your "yes" down and say, "I'm going to be serious about the things of God moving forward. I'm going to submit my life to him." If that *is* you, we would love to hear that you have done that so we might help you grow in your relationship with God. Again, God has not created you to walk this journey on your own, isolated from the rest of the body, so it becomes important for us to know we have a newborn in our midst.

I'm going to pray for us, and then you'll be free to partake in Communion on your own, and then from there we're going to sing unto the Lord. I want to say this every week. We don't sing because God needs us to sing to him. Are you tracking with that? God doesn't have low self-esteem and what he really needs is for you to encourage him today. It has been a crazy week. Most of the world is in rebellion. He could really use someone singing good things about him. God hasn't given us song for him. He has given us song for us.

Singing has an incredible way of taking what's in your head and moving it down into your guts, moving it down into your heart, so you might feel it. I know it's awkward for some of us, but this is a discipline that must be exercised by the people of God for the good of the people of God. So I'm going to pray for us. Feel free to partake in Communion. Then we're going to sing unto the Lord, and I want to encourage you to stay and work on that. Practice that. Jay will do a great job of leading you in it. Work on engaging your heart and mind with the truths about God. Let me pray for us.

Father, thank you for these men and women. Thank you for the grace afforded to us in Jesus Christ. We love you, and it's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

God bless you. Love you guys.

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