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The church is not an institution for perfect people. It is a sanctuary for sinners saved by grace, a nursery for God's sweet children to be nurtured and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ's sheep, the home for Christ's family. The church is the dearest place on earth.

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If you have your Bibles, why don't you go ahead and grab them. That will be our text for our time together today. Matthew, chapter 28. If you have a background in church, you'll know that verse. That text is referred to as the Great Commission. Let me catch you up. I've been gone for the last couple of weeks. I've been in Africa working with Bob and Julie Mendonsa (Naomi's Village), and then the two churches we work with there (Rift Valley Fellowship and Geoffrey's church there in the slums of Kijabe).

I'm just always encouraged by your faithfulness. You bought Rift Valley Fellowship a five-acre plot of land to build their church on. Then the church in the slums that also is being used as a school during the week that houses about 148 children and gives them both breakfast and lunch was almost completely built by several of you who your Home Groups came together and raised like \$50,000 and built this beautiful building in the middle of a pretty awful slum where now these kids are being educated and a church is being held on the weekend.

Again, for your generosity to the nations, I'm always proud as your pastor to watch how you operate in a way that wasn't us organizing anything but rather you just being the hands and feet of Jesus. So I'm fresh back from that. I want us to dive right back into this series we've called *The Dearest Place on Earth*. We got that quote from Charles Spurgeon who called the church the dearest place on earth within the context of writing about the flaws of the church.

I always loved that. The dearest place on earth is an imperfect place, and that must be, because if it was a perfect place, it would not be dear to any of us, would it? If the church was nothing but perfect people, then who would feel welcome there? No one. The fact that the church is imperfect is actually a grace of God for imperfect people to come be a part of what he is doing.

If your expectation of your local church experience is you're going to find a perfect place... If you're a guest and you've stumbled in... Maybe this is your sixth church in 10 years. You're like, "Maybe this is it!" Let me help you. We're not. You are on a quest for the unicorn, brother. You will not find it. In fact, beyond that, you are looking for an Oompa-Loompa on an unicorn that also has wings. You will not find it. There are no perfect churches. If there happened to be one, would not your arrival jack that up? Would you not, showing up at Oompa-Loompa Pegasus Unicorn Land, actually destroy the perfection of that place? Yes.

So the church is an imperfect people. We've marveled through the four weeks before I headed to Africa at exactly what the church is. What we said was when all is said and done, the church is made up of a group of people who God has made a singular people. The reason we marvel at that is because we're made up from all different backgrounds, all different socioeconomic statuses, all different kinds of ethnicities. Even if you look around this room today, it's not to the place where I would like it to be, but listen.

If you look around here, I mean, some of us grew up in church. Some of us, man, just got saved a year or two ago. Some of us grew up in such a way that we never even really said a cuss words except ones we've invented. "Dingfod." Stuff like that, right? Then others of us, man, have lived hard. We have people who haven't been addicted to much, and we have people who have been addicted to *much*. We have people who have lived very hard. We have former addicts of drugs and alcohol and former addicts of Sunday school and Bible study.

God has redeemed, and he has rescued. We have poor, and we have rich. We have PhDs and GEDs, and those letterings are different, right? On and on and on I could go. What God has done is broken down, by the gospel, the walls of hostility. He has created a people. We're a mess. Even as we try to figure each other out, we have to stumble and bumble through that. Praise God the nature of our relationship is built and based upon God's relationship with his church.

What I mean by that is God's relationship with his church and, therefore, our relationship with one another in the local congregation is not contractual but it's covenantal. Do you remember that? If there is anything I could really burn into your mind and heart out of this series is that God's love toward us and our love toward one another is not *contractual*; it's *covenantal*. What I mean by that is we're not saying, "I'm in if you do this," but rather, "I'm going to do this so we all might be in."

Covenantal relationship is not built upon... This is the illustration I've used. Vows in a wedding ceremony are covenantal language. Vows don't go, "If you're rich and healthy, I'm in." That's contractual. "You make money. You stay healthy. I stay with you." That's contractual. Rather, wedding vows are what? They're covenantal. "For better or for worse." Right? Regardless. "Richer or poorer, sickness and in health, I give myself to you."

That's covenantal, and that's God's relationship with his church. "I give myself to you." Our response: "We give ourselves to you." Therefore, the nature and basis of our relationship with one another is not contractual ("You'd better do these things for me") but rather covenantal ("Let me become this for us"). So we walked through. There are 59 "one anothers" in the New Testament. Love one another (17 times). Greet one another. Consider one another better than yourselves. Outdo one another in honor. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Some of you single dudes, don't be trying to flex that one today, all right?

On and on I could go here, but there are 59 "one anothers." What covenantal relationship looks like means we don't show up and go, "Somebody had better greet me. I haven't been greeted. The Bible says greet one another. No one said *hi* to me. Hey, I don't feel like I'm being outdone in honor." We don't show up that way. We show up and go, "I need to greet someone. I need to encourage someone. How can I outdo with honor?"

See, we always giggle at this, but it's so American evangelicalism. "I don't really like it. The parking...I don't like it. There's no place to get a mocha here. Are you serious? Is this church? What kind of church is this that a brother can't get a mocha and a parking spot close?" That's not our posture. Our posture is, "I'll park way out there." Our posture is, "Let me find someone to greet. Let me find someone to encourage." We don't show up demanding. We show up *being* for the good of the whole. If we could actually operate that way, how beautiful would it be?

The dearest place on earth is an imperfect church made up of people from different backgrounds of all sorts who have been brought together by the blood of Jesus Christ. It's the thing we have in common. Right? It's the thing we have in common! What you and I share is that God saved wretches like us. Some of us, it was religious "wretchedry" (I don't even know if that's a word, but it is now). For others of us, it was worldly wretchedness. He saved wretches like us. I have a little jetlag apparently still.

In the end, that's what you and I have in common. Since I've been shown the patience of God by God and since I've been given the grace of God by God, it enables me to be patient and gracious with other people. Hear me. We're going to, at times, collide. Our different backgrounds and our different cultures and our different life experiences, if we're not careful, are going to make sparks fly unless we can lean hard into Jesus Christ and trust in his goodness and grace and then extend that to others.

Then we talked about how the church was ordered. I tried to show from Scripture that it is the biblical expectation for the believer in Christ to be committed to a local context. Not just *go* to a local church but *belong* to one. Then we started talking about how a local congregation is governed, namely via a body of elders, not some sort of weird Jedi counsel but rather a group of men who are willing to lay down their lives for the good of the people.

An elder of a local congregation is not a man who aspires to power and authority but rather a man who is willing to lay down his life for the good of the people. He must model that at home, or he is disqualified. If a man wants power, he is not fit to be an elder. The call to eldership is not, "Come and lead." It's, "Come and die." A man who wants power disqualifies himself. The proving ground is his home. A man who will not lay down his life for his wife and children most definitely will not lay down his life for a group of people he vaguely knows at the church.

An elder is a man who comes home exhausted and walks into the kitchen and says, "How can I help, Boo?" An elder is someone who goes, "I'm exhausted, but I'm going to get on the floor, and I'm going to tuck them in. I'm going to say their prayers. I'm going to kiss their head. Then I'm going to go sit down with Mama and see how the queen is doing. Then I'm going to go to bed happy and exhausted." There's your elder.

That leads us now to...*What is the purpose of the church?* Here you have this really eclectic group of people who is made up of all different kinds of backgrounds. There's ethnic diversity. There's socioeconomic diversity. There's educational diversity. On and on I could go here. Then in the middle of all of that, what we find is God has ordered it with elders and members. We're committed to one another. We're not pushing away from the table.

We're completely aware that we're going to offend each other at times. We're going to trip over each other at times. We're going to misunderstand one another at times, but we're not going to push away from the table quickly. We're going to grind it out. We're going to get in there. We're going to say, "Help me understand." We're going to listen more than we talk, but we're going to be ferociously committed to. In that, the church will, according to Ephesians 3:10, reveal the manifold wisdom of God to the world around us.

The wisdom of God will be seen in how we love one another, interact with one another. Then the other big piece of that is the church has been built out as a missionary organism. Are you tracking with me? I want you to see this here. This is the Great Commission. Again, I think many of you will know this. Some of you

won't. We're just going to read this and then talk. If you've been here, I just read a little bit and talk a little bit, read a little bit and talk a little bit. That's how we'll go.

Let's look at verse 18 of Matthew 28. "**And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'**" Now look right at me. It doesn't matter what he says next. It doesn't matter! "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**" So if the next line is, "So sprout wings and fly to the moon," then I'd just get yourself set. Wait for some wings to shoot out of your back, and get ready to check out the moon.

Because, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [Jesus].**" It doesn't matter what comes next. Whatever comes next, you can push all your chips in, because it's happening. Why? Because, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given...**" Doesn't Jesus operate this way if we follow his life? I mean, who else tells a guy who has been dead in the ground three days to stop it? "Lazarus, get up. Come out here."

I mean, what kind of authority is that? Do you know a brother who could do that? You don't? Jesus did it. He rebuked storms, and they obeyed. I mean, this is a man with ultimate authority, God in the flesh. Jesus says, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**" "Governmental authority?" "Yeah, that's mine. I'll use that." "What about the authority found in nature?" "Oh yeah, that's mine too. That obeys me also. All authority has been given to me."

Then watch what he does with this authority as he commands his people to go out. "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...**" Once again, I want to stop. This idea of going actually kind of can be broken down, "As you go." This isn't about you loading up your car and heading somewhere to make disciples, but rather as you go in your life, the purpose behind your life, what you've been created for, is actually to make disciples.

I want to talk about you for a second. I rarely ever want to talk about you outside of just laying before you that God says you're not as awesome as you think you are. I think some important things can be found if we watch how intricately God is involved in your life. I want to show you two things about you. Here's the first thing.

Psalm 139, verse 13 through 16, is a passage of Scripture that's been hijacked by women's ministries for years. I do believe it applies to women and has a special thing to say to women, but it's not just for women. To avoid any weird emails, ladies, this text does apply to you, but it doesn't belong *just* to you. Are we good? I'm not saying there's a part of it... "It's not for you, ladies. It's for the men." No, I'm saying it's not just for you. It's for all of us. Let's look at what he says.

**"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."**

This passage is spectacular. Here's what he just said. God knit you together in your mother's womb. He has two kind of pieces here on what exactly it was God did in there. One, God put together our physical form, how we're built. He did so in light of the days he had formed for us. I'll use myself here. I am a loud man. I have always been a loud man. This didn't happen to me post-Christ. I lack an "inside voice." I have what adults call "a voice that carries."

I have spent many a day in D Hall and a lot of discipline in my home way before the days of time out, you little, lucky punks. Go think about that. I wish we had that in my day. I would have loved to have gone and thought about something. That's not how it worked. In fact, anyone could whip you when I was a kid. Can I get a "glory" from someone else in here? I mean, just random strangers could see you acting up and could put a beating on you. Nobody is calling anybody!

In fact, they wouldn't even go, "How cruel is that adult!" They would say, "I wonder what that kid did." They might even get in line. I am loud and spent the bulk of my life getting in trouble for my loudness. According to this text, when God was knitting me together in Mom's womb, knowing the days he had for me, knowing what he was going to call me to do, knowing what he was going to call me to be, he began to weave into my throat *strength*, and here we are.

One of the great ironies is what I used to get in trouble for, I actually now get paid to do, which isn't completely accurate. It wasn't like when I was in seventh grade I was like, "Jesus loves you," and people were whipping me for that. That's not quite what was happening there, but according to this text, God did this. God knit you together according to the days he would have for you. I think the more spectacular piece in this is he mentions this unformed substance here.

Here's what I think is going on in this text. I think this is talking about your aptitudes and how you've been designed and how you're wired. You know, that kind of "fight and flight" idea of how you respond to stimuli. Are you a fighter? Are you a flighter? I'm in the middle. I'm a "slap-and-run" guy. I'm not easily categorized. I don't want to full-on fight you, but I will a little bit. I'm not going to run until I've actually inflicted some wound on you.

In the middle of this, here's what I know to be true in this room. You're drawn to things, and you don't know why. You're good at things, and you don't know why. Some people are really drawn to athletics. They love them. From the time they're little children, they... Some of you have a little boy. They just want the ball. "Give me the ball. Where's the ball?" They just want to play every sport they possibly can.

Then some kids don't want that at all. They want to color. They want to paint. They want to sing. They want to learn the piano. I don't know. Maybe *no* kid ever wanted to learn the piano, but in the end, they're drawn more toward the arts. Some of you are really good at business. You have this intrinsic, high entrepreneurial, "I'm going to overcome. I'm going to get it done." You're driven. You're linear.

You're Type A. I can really mess with your head by showing up at your house and just moving something a little bit, and you'll feel it. "Somebody moved that coaster." You'll go move it back. You're wired that way. You don't even know why, but you're wired that way. We're drawn in certain directions and aren't quite sure why. We love certain things and aren't quite sure why. Some of you are great with numbers, and some of you couldn't pass second grade math. It's not for lack of effort. It's literally you have been wired a specific way, according to this verse, according to the days the Lord formed for you.

That means you have been uniquely wired by God. That's awesome. Not only have you been uniquely wired by God, but the Bible also says you've been uniquely placed by God. This is Acts 17:24-26. Here's what it says. **"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."**

Listen to this. **"And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth..."** This is huge. **"...having determined..."** God having determined. **"...allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place..."** So you might have surprised Mom and Dad, but you didn't surprise the Lord. God has uniquely wired you and uniquely placed you. If we went on to read in Acts 17, here's what you would read: "That men might seek him and find him, though he is not far from any of us."

This placed within the context of the command of God to make disciples of all nations should eradicate boredom from the Christian mind and heart. I'll paint you a picture of how this actually works so disciples are found and made and drawn into the kingdom of God. For no reason whatsoever, I was drawn toward athletics. I mean, I don't have the body for it. I don't really have the temperament for it. I don't have the coordination for it. I would have probably done great at writing poetry or painting something, but my heart was I wanted to play ball.

I joined a football team when we moved from California to this place. I ended up lockering next to a guy who also loved football named Jeff Fairclaw. He actually starred on the team and went on to play college ball. I got to just *be* on the team and run scout stuff. "This is what the other team is going to do. Chandler, stand there." Right? That was kind of my world. We were the dummies the starters practiced on. Hey, safe place for me to be uncoordinated and lanky, all right? Don't judge.

In the end there, here you have Jeff lockering next to Matt. Both love athletics, but Jeff saw past football into the kingdom of God, and playing ball for him wasn't an end of itself. He understood it to be the avenue by which he could share the gospel with others. Sure enough, he turned to me not long after two-a-days started and said, "I need to tell you about Jesus. When do you want to do that?" Aptitude and allotted periods and boundaries collided, and God got his hooks in me.

I'm standing here today, and I'm opening up the Word of God, and I'm proclaiming to you, if anything good has happened in your heart in this place, it's because a 17-year-old kid saw past high school football and into eternity. He treated his football period and practice as a mission field for the gospel of Jesus Christ. See, it brought a meaning to ball that transcended ball. If this is true, that means the meaning of you living in your neighborhood goes well beyond you simply living in that neighborhood.

Who is in the office next to you, is in the cubicle next to you, whoever you share a workstation with, that goes monumentally beyond just work. See, I think one of the horrible things about our culture is it's trying to get you to find your purpose in work. I'm hoping you can see through the lie. You know they're not naming the building after you when you retire, right? You know that. Say, "I know that." I know it! All right, so you're going to retire. They're going to replace you. Maybe they'll give you a watch or something. I don't know, but they're going to replace you.

Three or four years later, no one is going, "Oh, man. Remember when so-and-so worked here?" They're just grinding it out, grinding out their 40 years or however long it takes to fill that 401(k). Then you're going to die, be painted up like a clown, and put in a box. Is that too much? When I'm jet-lagged, I don't have the filter I normally have. This is your end. On that day, the board of the directors is not going to gather around and mourn. The company is not going to fall apart. So your purpose isn't in your work.

Are you working hard? You'd better be working hard. You're a child of God. You reflect well what a born-again man or woman does, which is work hard for the Lord. You work as you work unto the Lord. This is not, "Be lazy because it doesn't matter." It's, "Work hard because it doesn't matter." What brings purpose to the workplace is our understanding that we've been uniquely wired and uniquely placed because men will seek him and find him because he is not far from any of us.

He met me in a football locker room. That's what he meant when he said he is not far from any of us. Your neighbor. God is not far from them because you're next door. Your coworker. God is not far from them because you're next door. Those other adults you sit with when your kids are playing soccer or flag football, God is near them because you're sitting in the bleachers. See, we should never be bored. There's an eternal significance to every aspect of our lives.

I want to see the world through these lenses. I work out not because I have any hope at ever being swole. I go and work out because it enables me to encourage other believers. It helps me build relationships with people who don't know Jesus. Would I like my power clean numbers to come up? Sure, but that's not what's motivating me to get up and go. What's motivating me to get up and go is I work with a bunch of Christians. You actually have to be a believer in Christ to be a pastor here. It's actually in the rules. "Are you a Christian?" "No." "Well, I'm afraid you can't be a Groups guy." Right?

I need to embrace in this community God's call on my life to herald the good news of the gospel. God has placed me in all these scenarios. My daughter loves to ride horses, so she goes out and rides horses. God has put me in that arena now with her. Not a literal arena but in that arena to kind of be and meet people I probably would have never met. I don't know. Horses wig me out. They're big and scary. I'm not getting on one. I get to be with my daughter.

My son is playing flag football. God bless him. He has too much of his daddy. He doesn't have a bright future in athletics, but right now he loves the boys playing. I get to meet all these parents. My youngest daughter is in gymnastics. We're suburban. You have to put your kid in stuff, or you're an awful parent. Now I'm at these little gymnastics meets. I'm meeting people I wouldn't meet otherwise. In all of this, I want to see through these lenses. God is near to them because he has put me there.

Then I'm not like, "This is so dumb. Why am I here?" Then all of a sudden it doesn't have to be about whether or not Reid is going to be All-World. Then I don't look like a buffoon out there other than a buffoon for Christ. God has uniquely designed you and uniquely wired you and uniquely placed you so men would seek him and find him, because he is not far from any of us because he put you there. That's awesome.

How does the church bring glory to God? By making disciples through us individually living this out and corporately inviting them into our family, inviting them into the outworking of the 59 "one anothers" in this place. He doesn't just stop there on this, "As you go, make disciples of all nations." He keeps going here. **"...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."**

Again, I love this text because here's what happens. As you herald the gospel to people... You must herald it. No one is ever going to look at your life and go, "Do you know what? They're just such an upstanding citizen, I think I'll trust their God." You do know that's not going to happen, right? The way you live your life might be attractive to them, but no one is going to spontaneously become a Christian because of that. You will have to open your mouth.

That was Paul's point in Romans 10:14-15 when he said, "**How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written...**" Listen to this. "**How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!**"

You're going to have to eventually open your mouth and say it. Lifestyle evangelism only works if you actually get to evangelism. If you think you're going to be some place, and they're going to say, "You want a beer?" "No, I don't want one." "Please tell me about your God." If you think that's actually going to happen, then you're a sad kind of naïve. You're eventually going to have to open up your mouth and share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ with people.

That's the best news in the world. There's no sin with more power than the cross of Jesus Christ. That's our message. There's no sin with more power than the cross of Jesus Christ. There's home for you right in this. The call of Jesus: "**Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**" Is this not what we proclaim? There's rest for you. There's home for you. There's healing for you found in this place. We're heralds of the good news.

That's why he moves on and says, "**...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**" because as we proclaim...look at me...some are going to believe. Not all but some. Some are going to believe. I always want to just cling to that because I've walked with people long enough to know I will lose heart at times and think, "This brother is never going to come to know Christ..." I will, in essence, become more reformed than the Bible.

I want to cling to Isaiah 59:1: "**Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save...**" I want to believe that in my heralding, God is going to save. I know he is not going to save everyone, but he is going to save some. Those who he does save we baptize. I want to talk to you about baptism just for a quick second. My feel is that in the South, baptism is kind of a ritualistic, kind of traditional idea. A couple of things. It is a ritual in some sense, and it is tradition in some sense. But what we're doing in baptism is celebrating the salvific work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Baptism is us publically saying, "I have died with Christ, and I have been raised with Christ to walk in the newness of life." One of the great celebrations of those who come to know Jesus Christ is that we...as we were and even, in some sense, as we are...have died as far as God is concerned. When I think back on the sins of my life and on my current struggles and on the sins I have in my future, here's my rest.

That Matt Chandler is dead. The one who partied like he did back in the day? I don't need to worry about that guy. He is dead. The one who struggled the way he struggled? I don't have to worry about paying for that. That cat is gone, dead. The one even now who is fighting for *this* and fighting for *that* and trying to cling quickly to *that*? He is dead. He is dead! Baptism. When we dip you under water, we are showing out our union with Christ.

I died with Christ. When Christ died on the cross, he took all my sin. All the wickedness of Matt Chandler, all the unrighteousness of Matt Chandler, all the wandering of Matt Chandler, the doubts of Matt Chandler, the fears...they went into the ground with Christ. When he was resurrected... Thank God we get to the resurrection. That would be a long time to be holding you under the water, right?

When we get to that resurrection, I get to now celebrate that he has given me new life. He has filled me with the Holy Spirit's power. He has enabled and emboldened obedience to the things of God. Where I couldn't even fathom obedience before, he has granted to me the grace of obedience. Baptism is a public showing out of our union with Christ. It's not to be taken lightly. It's not some small thing. It's a huge thing.

If you're one of our brothers and sisters who just continually push that further down the timeline, I'm telling you baptism is an extremely important expression of what Christ has done for us where we publically say, "This is my confession. I have died, and I have been raised in Christ," where we celebrate our union. I want to encourage you to quit pushing that down the timeline and be serious about being obedient to what God has commanded you to do, which is to be baptized upon belief.

All right. Now he doesn't just stop there. There's this last component here. Really, there are two more components. This last one I think kind of stings a little bit, so let's do it. I'm willing to do it because I love you. Let's go. Verse 20 says, "**...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**" This becomes interesting if you start to think about it because Jesus is telling the disciples to go make disciples, but *these* disciples have to teach *these* disciples to observe all that he commanded *these* disciples.

Therefore, the expectation is the disciples who are making disciples are also observing all he commanded. Now I'm going to ask a question. I'd like some feedback. Will you ever get to the point that you're observing all he commanded? Are you ever going to have a 100 percent day? Okay, now. You just said that,

so let me lean in on it. That is huge for you to get. Nothing is more crushing to Christian maturation than the idea that you're going to arrive or that you *have* arrived.

You begin to think that way, you'll put a crushing weight on you, or you'll walk in a type of self-righteousness that's disgusting before the Lord. We don't ever arrive until glory. Until then, our lives are marked by a perpetual and near-constant ethic of confession, repentance, and reconciliation. The life of a believer is marked by those three things. It is the biblical expectation on the people of God that we are an ever-maturing people.

Here's what I know. If you and I could sit down right now and have a chat, I think you'd probably be able to say, "Here are some things I feel like I'm doing really well at right now in regard to my relationship with the Lord. Here's where I'm pursuing him." Then there will also be these areas of your life where you're like, "You know, I need to get stronger at this. I know God loves me. I'm not trying to be legalistic about this, but this is an area of my life where I've become convicted, that I want to grow in."

Here's what I would tell you. Ten years from now, more than likely you will have gotten better at *this*, you will have found that you have drifted in some of *this*, and God will have revealed there are whole new areas of your life that you haven't surrendered to him. Then repeat the next decade. Then repeat the next decade. Then repeat the next decade until God brings you home. Then in that moment, there will no longer be any need to confess, repent, or be reconciled because all things will be made new. Until that day, brother, sister, our lives as Christians are marked by confession, repentance, and reconciliation.

In fact, the Bible pretty clearly lays out a strong expectation that you and I would be maturing and warnings to be careful about not maturing. Let me give you just one of those. I have a bunch here, but I need to be mindful. Luke 8:14 says this. This is the parable of the sowers. Jesus says the kingdom of God is like a man who sowed seeds he threw. Some seeds fell on the sidewalk. Some fell on the shallow rocky soil. Some fell among the thorns and thistles. Some fell on good ground. Then he ends the parable, and his disciples pull him aside and are like, "We have no idea what you're talking about."

Jesus goes, "Okay, let me explain it to you." That in and of itself is helpful for me. For the disciples to go, "Yeah. Yeah, I don't get it, Jesus." I'm like, "Okay. All right. These are my people. All right. I can do this." Now look at Jesus' explanation, particularly of the seed that fell among the thorns. **"And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way..."** We could take that language and put it right into the Great Commission. "As you go, make disciples." **"...as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature."**

I mean, there are probably a dozen texts I could take here on this idea of maturation, that God's hope for you and what Christ paid for you on the cross is an ongoing maturation where you begin to trust the Lord more and more and more, where confession, repentance, and reconciliation become a rhythm in your life, an ongoing ethic in your life. Because here's the picture Jesus just painted in Luke 8. We hear the Word, receive the Word, and as we begin to go, we begin to notice things.

Okay, so we begin to notice the pleasures of this life. We begin to notice the cares of this world. We begin to notice riches. All of a sudden, there's a great deal of concern about how we're perceived and how we're looked upon, and what we have, and what we don't have. The Bible says that chokes out any chance at maturity. It chokes it out. James would say it this way: **"...be doers of the word, and not hearers only..."** We could get into the book of Hebrews where the writer of Hebrews said, "By now you ought to be mature, but you're not. By now, you should be off of milk, and you should be eating meat, but you're not."

You have this rhythm in the Scriptures that God's expectation is that you and I are maturing. We don't arrive, and that gives grace for where we find ourselves today. God's expectation is not, in this moment, that you have arrived, that you're nailing it, that you have it all put together. That's not the expectation of God. The expectation of God is that we're moving that way. Are you tracking with me? We're moving that way.

See, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ means to be a follower of. Unfortunately, in our day and age, we have to tease that out a little bit because what the Bible is talking about is not *converts* but *disciples*. See, what we have in our day is the ability to make a convert. Somebody goes, "Yeah, I'll give my life to Christ." We'll put you down, and say, "Oh, we had a convert." The goal of Christianity isn't converts; it's disciples.

For someone to say, "I'm going to give my life to Jesus," but then not to give their life to Jesus and follow Jesus is no good for that person or for the glory and name of God. God is building his church via disciples. People have a growing seriousness about following the Lord that makes itself known in every area of our lives from the lenses by which we see the world to how we spend our money, to how we treat other people, to how we spend our time, to how we work at work. On and on and on I could go.

Then I love this last promise. **"...I am with you always, to the end of the age."** At every point of this, I'll find my flesh flare up. As you go make disciples (and that involves proclamation)... Man, I'm trying to share the gospel with anybody I can share the gospel with. I've never gotten over that initial, "Ugh. I'd rather be cool," which is comical as a 39-year-old man. Right? That rubs on me. So what ends up happening is I get to enter into this ethic of confession, repentance, and reconciliation every time this rubs against my heart, because Jesus is with me.

So a perfect example. I was flying back from Orlando Thursday afternoon. I love plane rides because the people can't go anywhere. I sat down in my seat, and the guy next to the window... I'm on the aisle, row 20, on the Super 80, always. I need that exit row. I'm sitting next to him. He has the "don't-bother-me" vibe. You know, didn't even acknowledge you sat down. You sat down, and he didn't even look up to say anything.

I know my theology is saying this is providential. "God has put you in this seat and put him in this seat." I know that. Then in me I'm like, "Oh, he is not interested. He doesn't really want to hear. He hasn't even looked up to say anything to me. This dude doesn't want to talk. I mean, I can just feel he doesn't want to talk." I'm wrestling with the Lord, like, "I know!" I'm wrestling.

In that moment, I have the sweet, "I'm here. I haven't abandoned you to do this. I'm not asking you to save this man, Matt. You can't save him. Are you kidding me? You're ridiculous. I can save him. I can save him, and I happen to be here." So I did what always works for me. I don't know that you can use it, but I just go, "Hey, are you on your way home, or are you on your way to work?"

"I'm on my home."

"Oh, what do you for work?"

"I'm in IT. What do you do?"

Then I win. As soon as you ask me what I do, I've won. "I'm a pastor. So what kind of pastor would I be if I don't ask you where you land on these things?" What happened on that plane ride, just to kind of lay out before you this ethic, is I started... Finally when I realized what I was doing... That's half the battle right there where I'm having this argument with my mind and with the Holy Spirit about whether or not I should engage this man with the gospel when I do believe God has orchestrated that little seating area there.

What's happening in my heart is I'm going, "Oh my gosh. I'm embarrassed. I'm embarrassed! I don't want this man to think I'm an idiot. This man who I don't know, who I more than likely will never see again, who... What? Could spread the Word in the community I live in that I love Jesus, as if that's not as public as it possibly can be? I mean, what am I afraid of in this moment?" I went, "Oh my gosh. I'm ashamed. How could I be ashamed of you, Lord?"

Then I got to just very quickly go, "Please forgive me, Lord. Please forgive me. I don't want to be ashamed of you. I want to join Paul in Romans 1:16 where he says, **"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation..."** I want to believe. Then I want to walk in that. I don't want to be two-

faced. I want to encourage the people you've asked me to live to boldly live like this when I'm living like a coward."

What I got in this moment is Jesus going, "I'm here." Then when it comes to teaching disciples to observe, that's a dangerous sport. Do you know how easily Christians are offended by calling them to be obedient to the Bible? See, Bible Belt Christianity is really, really goofy. It's okay to like Jesus as long as you just don't do it too much. I mean, like Jesus, but just don't be a freak about it. Like Jesus. Just don't take it too far. So to call people to full-on following Jesus Christ, that's nerve-wracking. Jesus goes, "Just tell them I'm here."

In your neighborhood concerning your neighbors, Jesus is there. In your workplace, Jesus is there. He has not abandoned us to do this on our own. How pathetic will we be at it if we had to save? We don't. He does. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. So as we go, let's herald the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's see who he'll draw to himself. Let's baptize. Then let's walk in the ongoing ethic of confession, repentance, and reconciliation. May it mark our community of faith as we marvel all the more at the grace of God. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women. I pray you would give us lenses by which we could see our neighborhood and work and our hobbies. I thank you for the aptitudes you've given us and the passions you've given us and how you've drawn us to certain things, God, where you've placed us and how you've placed us. I thank you for the neighborhoods represented here, the office complexes represented here, the workplaces represented here, all of which, God, you can rightly and biblically say you are not far from anyone because you have put us there as heralds of your goodness and grace.

I pray we would embrace that. Father, where we have walked in immaturity, where we have not been serious about growing, where we cannot remember the last time we've confessed and repented and been reconciled, either to others or to the path of obedience, God, I pray you would do that work among us today. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.