

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. Ephesians 2 will be where we will camp out for our entire time together. I might read a couple of other texts, but we'll pretty much just be anchored in this one. We are in week eight of our *Recovering Redemption* series, so I thought it would be a good time to kind of drop a stake in the ground, remember a couple of things, before we move forward.

Next week and the week after that, we're really going to begin to talk about relationships and what it's like to walk with others and engage one another in our shortcomings and failures as those who have been redeemed by the gospel. If we could be honest (and my expectation is that you will be), being a Christian has not saved us from conflict. Would anyone say, "Being a Christian has saved me from conflict"?

In fact, I have found sometimes my Christianity has actually caused a little bit of conflict. Ultimately, how do I interact with those who have harmed me? What do I do with the fact that I have most definitely harmed others? How do we walk? What does it look like to be reconciled to people? What does it look like to make amends? When should I absorb? When does it have to be held onto? When do I let go? We'll discuss all of these things in the next couple of weeks.

Make sure you're here for that, especially if your history is littered with dead bodies. I don't mean that literally. If your literal history has dead bodies in it, then go turn yourself in to the police. If you have a lot of busted-up relationships presently or behind you, I think the next two weeks will be extremely helpful in regard to how we approach and look at those things moving forward.

I want us to just kind of rehash some things and reset some things so we can kind of take the last seven weeks and kind of drive a single stake in the ground that can then serve as our compass moving through the last four weeks of this series. Really, I'll tell you that this time of the year has served me well in prepping for this sermon. What I mean by that is what I want to talk to us about today is the reality of an ongoing ethic, not a type of silver-bullet mentality, but actually an ongoing ethic and understanding ongoing ethics.

Here is what I mean by saying this time of the year is helpful. I am 39; I'll be 40 in June. It's hard for me to get my mind around that, but trust me. I'm okay with it. I'm perfectly fine enjoying getting older. I'm not liking this. There is no sports car in my future. I'm doing fine, but being the age I am, I don't remember (maybe it was there) people getting as geeked up about Halloween as they currently do.

We're decorating at a clip and at a pace that, for only the past couple of years, on the night before Halloween we're putting our kids in the car and driving around listening to Halloween music while we look at decorations. If you've demoned up your house, I'm not judging you. All right? I'm just saying it's new or I'm just now noticing it. Maybe people always did it, but I haven't seen giant inflatable Frankensteins in people's yards until recently. People haven't cobwebbed up all their trees and then put floating heads hooked to chains on the trees out front until recently.

Am I wrong here? I'm willing to be wrong. I had part of my brain cut out. Maybe I don't remember, but it appears that we're really buying into this Halloween thing. Why shouldn't you buy in? Free candy? Hello? Listen, as a parent, I don't really like the holiday. I think it's cute that my kids get dressed up, but I have found a direct correlation between the amount of candy my kids consume and my ability to parent righteously. The more they pour sugar into their bodies, the harder it is for me to parent in a way that is righteous.

It's really not a great holiday for us, because I just feel like we can't ever get through the night without me threatening someone, and not an adult. I'm threatening like a 7-year-old. "Do you want this night to get really scary? Because Daddy can make this night scary. If you shove your sister one more time, I'm going to show you what really scary looks like." Right? It always turns into that, so it's not my favorite.

As I'm driving home, there is a yard that is going full-on, like a scarecrow vomited on the yard. There is a giant werewolf there. Werewolves go way back. They're not an American folklore idea. In fact, they go back thousands of years. Early on, werewolves were to blame for any unsolved grisly murder. If someone was murdered and they couldn't solve it, it was the werewolves that did it.

If you're a nerd, what I'm talking about is a Lycan form, a Lycan. There is only one way to kill a werewolf. Werewolves are human beings who, upon a full moon, shape shift into a half-wolf, half-man kind of creature of destruction. Now how do you kill a werewolf? No, not a stake in the heart. That's a vampire. I'm proud of you that you didn't know that. All right? That's a win. You kill it with a silver bullet. You would have learned that when you were playing Dungeons & Dragons if you were paying attention.

The idea is no matter what kind of trap or what kind of thing you do to try to kill the werewolf, the only way to actually kill him is to shoot him with a silver bullet. We are a culture that is obsessed with silver-bullet fixations. We want everything to be fixed with a silver bullet, and we spend billions of dollars as a society a year trying to find the silver bullet. Do you want me to give you some examples?

You know that belt that fits around you is not going to give you six-pack abs, right? You see that dude in the commercials who is just all yoked up and chiseled? "I wear this for six minutes every day, and look." That's not how he got that. You know that, right? You that's not how... He's eating a pie. That's not how that happened. Do you know how that guy got like that? Ongoing ethics. He was very careful about how he ate. He lived in the gym. He probably never strapped that thing to his body until somebody gave him \$40,000 to do it.

We're dumb. We're going, "Oh, abs. I'll do 6 Second Abs." You're not getting abs in six seconds. You know that, right? There is nothing you can do in six seconds that is going to chisel up your body like those dudes you're seeing on television. That's not our culture. Our culture is, "Give it to me easy. Give it to me now. If I'm sick, give me a pill. If I'm poor, tell me how to not be poor now. If I'm out of shape, tell me how to look like I'm in good shape now." Not, "What does it take to get there?"

That question hardly exists. That sad irony of our culture is that what is folklore (silver bullet) is actually reality and what is reality (ongoing ethic, discipline, reverse engineering) has kind of become the legend. It has become what is silly. Not how to kill a werewolf. How to get things done. What I want to talk to you about, the stake I need to drive into the ground in our time together so we can finish this series well and reconsider what we have covered is that the Christian life is a life that is ongoing in its ethics of renouncing what is old, rerooting in what is new, and perpetually asking God for help. That's the stake we need to drop in the ground.

As Christians, there are some of us who have had silver bullet-type moments. We even heard some in our baptism services last weekend, where there were people who said, "I struggled with this. I really wrestled with this, and when Christ saved me my desire for these things vanished." Praise God for that, but that is not most of our experiences, is it? What I want to try to do in a roundabout way here today is encourage you. The Christian life is a life of ongoing ethic. It is a reverse-engineered life that is lived a day at a time.

Are there silver bullets? Occasionally. Is that the norm? No, it's not. Just by way of... I always think this is just helpful. How many of you would just say, "Post-conversion, I've had seasons that I have been very frustrated with myself and very frustrated with God." Okay, so that's almost unanimous. The dude in here who has been saved a week didn't raise his hand, but the rest of us are kind of going, "Yeah, I've been there." It becomes imperative, of utmost importance, to understand and get our minds around what God is doing and how we should approach what God is doing.

With that said, let's get into Ephesians 2, starting in verse 1. And please don't feel bad if you decorated your house for Halloween. Don't. I think it's great. It's strange, but great. Ephesians 2, starting in verse 1. **"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked..."** Let's read that first

sentence again. "And you..." What's that third word? "...were..." Let's do some English. Is that past tense or present or future? I'm proud of you. You got the silver bullet wrong, but you've come through in actual English. We're moving here.

"And you were..." This is speaking to what we were, not what we are. I'm talking to Christians in here. We were. All of us. It doesn't matter what our background is. If you got saved when you were 5 years old, your birth through age 5 is what we're about to read. All right? If you were saved just recently... All of us were. There isn't anyone in this room that wasn't *were*. I don't know if that works, but I just made it work. Ready? Let's go.

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all..." You can circle that word. **"...once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."**

There are two things I want you to see here. In these first four verses, he's talking about what we were. Now we're Christians, but this is what we were, and there are really two things I'll highlight here. There are several I could, but I want to highlight two. First, it says that every one of us was dead in our trespasses and sins and we followed in the way of the world.

If you'll remember back to the beginning of the series, I said we have a tendency to walk on four broken paths. Those four broken paths represent what it's like to be dead in your trespasses and sins and walk in accordance with the way of this world. Let's go through those again. The first kind of crooked path so many of us found our lives on when Christ rescued us is the myth of the better version of us.

Do you want to know what it's like to be dead in your trespasses and sins, to follow in the way of this world? Just perpetually believe that what you need that is going to finally satisfy you is a better version of you. If you're the problem, a better version of the problem is still a problem, correct? I'm looking around. We're all over in regard to age, but at some point you have to wake up to the reality that this is a lie.

You were frustrated with you 10 years ago, and you might even be now where you thought you were going to be, and you're frustrated with you now. See, what it means to be dead is to be unable to move. If you're perpetually believing the lie, the myth, the folklore, that a better version of you is going to make you happy with you, then you're dead in your trespasses and sins, then you're following the course of this world. You at your best will still disappoint you.

Maybe that's not where you were. Maybe you were on the crooked path of others. The crooked path of others is, "I need other people to validate me. I need other people to give me worth. I need other people to ascribe value to me. I need other people to tell me I'm doing great, that I matter, that I'm worth it. I need that from other people." This is being dead in your trespasses and sins. This is following the course of this world.

Maybe that wasn't it. Maybe it was just the world. You just, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow, we die." Maybe that was you. That's what dead men do. That's what it means to follow the path of this world, to expect something out of common grace that it most definitely will not bring. Then we looked at the crooked path of religion, an incessant pursuit of evening out the scales so that we might put God in our debt. There are no scales, so a life spent in active busy-ness to try to tip the scales in our favor that don't exist is a life wasted.

This, dead in our trespasses and sins and following the course of this world, these shape an identity, and an identity really gives fuel, legs, and traction to everything we do. How we see ourselves and how we understand ourselves affects everything. Let's walk through that grid one more time. If I think a better version of me is ultimately going to satisfy me and bring me life and make everything line up like I want it, then everything from relationships to how I spend my money to how I approach work to how I engage neighborhoods will all be built around the fleeting belief that I need to be a better version of me to ever be satisfied. It'll affect everything.

If you believe other people are going to complete you (thank you, Jerry Maguire, for hijacking a generation), if you think someone else is going to complete you, there is some sort of inner ring you can get into that if you were just into that inner ring then you would finally be with the cool kids. Oh, for adults who have left junior high. Please, God, give us adults who have left junior high. "If I could just be in the right group, if I just had a wife who appreciated me..."

Men, can I give you just a kind of a quick heads up on why your wife is the slowest to pull the trigger on your awesomeness? Are you ready? Because she knows you. Can I tell you the basis for most men's frustration with their wives? The wives know them the best. It becomes nearly impossible to hide everything from your wife. Can you hide some things? Sure. Can you hide everything? No.

If you're a jerk, I have found plenty of men who can come off as nice and pleasant in a crowd of other people and only be a jerk to their wife and kids at home, because there are stressors at home that aren't anywhere else. Listen. Here is what I mean by this idea of identity shaping how we engage life. If you need others to validate you, if you need others to speak into your worth, then you're never going to let anyone know you.

All of your relationships are going to be shallow relationships, because to be fully known is to have our weaknesses shown, and if our weaknesses are shown, men, we will not be validated like we want to be validated. It's a weird type of mental disorder that would have us desirous of affirmation that runs contrary to who we actually are. It completely enslaves us. I'm telling you. This is what it means to be dead in your trespasses and sins.

Do you see how this is slavery? No deep relationships, because you have to protect yourself from being fully known, which leads to all sorts of conflict, because nobody actually knows who you are. It really puts a damper on your ability to receive love, experience love, enjoy people, enjoy yourself. Do you know how much self-hate is birthed out of this little trap? That's what it means to be dead in our trespasses and sins and have our identity being in, "People need to like me. People need to let me know I'm worth it." Right?

Maybe your identity of being dead in your trespasses and sins works out in this, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow, we die." Let me say this in a way that's fair. My experience is that there is a lack of integrity intellectually among a lot of people who pursue worldliness as a means to self-satisfaction. What I mean by that is the eye is never full of seeing (this is Ecclesiastes) and the ear is never full of hearing. That means you can be satisfied for a moment, but it never lasts longer than a moment.

When you pursue the things of the world outside of God's parameters for those things, the good common-grace things God has given you, when you pursue those things outside the bounds of what God gave them to you for, they're always going to lead to a ceiling, a type of bankruptcy, in those things to where the fullness of enjoying those things is no longer possible.

Oh God, help those of us who are dead in our trespasses and sins under the banner of church activity and religious fervor. If external religion is how you're working out how the world works, then you have forced yourself into perpetually comparing where you are spiritually with others. Then you have yourself a competition. Who can know the Bible best? Do you know how much idiocy goes on because of that? Do you know how much truth gets handled poorly because it's handled unlovingly because of this game?

"Let me show you I'm more mature than you. Let me be a better person than you. Let me..." Right? You see, you're sowing into your world a type of discontentment and frustration that is certainly not what God has for you in Christ. He says here, "All of us, every one of us, baptized as a believer in Christ when you were 5, baptized as a believer in Christ when you were 50, all of you were dead in your trespasses and sins and followed in the way of this world."

Then he says this other statement I want to talk about here that is wildly unpopular. He says we were by our nature objects of God's wrath. We were by our birth... The fact that we were breathing his air made us an object of God's wrath. Just so you know, the Bible unpacks wrath a bit differently than we unpack it. I think of wrath as in, "Wow!" But *wrath*, according to the Bible is steadily building opposition against. It's not a lightning bolt. It's not a tsunami.

All of those things are a part of the fallenness of this world, but the wrath of God is most often seen in the Bible as God allowing men to pursue the very thing they want to pursue that will kill them, all the while patiently waiting for them to realize it's a dead end, and they'll return to him. This is what Romans 8 means when it says God subjected the world to futility in hope. Even in God's wrath, is not his mercy astounding? Let me unpack that.

People who hate God shake their fist at him, blame him for everything that is wrong, give him no credit for anything right. Are they able to eat good food and drink good wine? Do you know the answer to this question? Yes, they are. I know plenty of people who hate the Lord who eat very well. Are they allowed to laugh and enjoy sport and entertainment? Are they able to walk at some level in friendships? Yes. Can they enjoy the physical act of sex? Yes.

God's goodness and common grace is lavished upon even his enemies, but his wrath is steadily building up against. What does that mean? All of those common graces are bankrupt outside of knowing the Lord. I'm not saying lost people can't enjoy sex. I'm not saying they can't enjoy good food. I'm not saying they can't even enjoy marriage. I've been very honest about one of our old neighbors in their 60s. They want nothing really to do with Jesus outside of Christmas and Easter. That's kind of their "Jesus" time. The rest of the year there is no interest in a relationship with him that forms their lives.

They've had as strong of a marriage as anything I've ever seen. They love each other. They would flirt with each other while they gardened. It was gross. Now I'm 40, and it's stopping to be so gross. The older I get, it's like, "That's awesome." At the time, I was like, "Come on, Rich. Are you kidding me right now?" All right? What was happening? They had a good marriage. "I thought you had to have Christ to have a good marriage?" That's not true. You just can't have all there is to have outside of him.

Can you enjoy life and not be a believer? Sure. Being an unbeliever doesn't automatically equal rehab and busted-up relationships and marriages. That just simply not true. Can you enjoy the common graces of God to the level at which we are to enjoy them as those things roll up unto worship of the Creator? No, it's impossible. I've already said this in this series. A man who does not know Jesus Christ will never partake of a filet, medium rare, and an amazing cab and go, "Isn't God good?"

Will they take a bite and go, "Mm!" Yes. Will they swirl that thing around and smell it and drink it down? Sure. Will they ever feel the building inner joy toward a gracious God who would graciously bless them with such a thing? No. He has no ability. Will a man enjoy his wife? Sure. Will a man be able to enjoy his wife as a good gift from God? Will it terminate just on the wife or roll past the wife to the God who granted him the wife? It can't. That's what I'm saying.

Even as God's wrath steadily builds toward an individual, there are common graces that are given to that person hopefully so they might come to the end of that and realize there is something beyond that. That's the whole point of the book of Ecclesiastes. It's not a chipper book, but it's an important one. Now, this is who we were. This is where our identity was found before Jesus. That's why we'll pick this up in verse 4.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

In verse 8, he's going to repeat himself, because it's important. **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."** Then marvel at verse 10. **"For we are his workmanship..."** His *poetry* is how that could read. **"...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."**

This is now who we are. We just covered who we were. We were dead in our trespasses and our sins. We were following the course of this world, and we were, by our nature, objects of God's wrath, but now, because of God, not because of us... **"But God..."** Not, "But we..." He says, **"But God..."** So now we're no longer past tense. We're past, present, and future tense. We're ongoing action. "But God made us alive." No longer are we dead. Now we are alive.

What does that mean? It's the reverse of what we just covered. It means all of those things roll up now. Perfectly? Absolutely not. We said a couple of weeks ago that really the systemic issue in fear and anxiety and guilt and shame isn't that those things need to be tackled. Rather, we need to be reconciled to our Father, because being reconciled to our Creator begins to uproot those things and the fruit they bear.

The problem was we were dead, and dead men have roots that go deep, and those roots are the roots of guilt and shame, of fear and anxiety, and then the fruit of those roots bear in all sorts of different ways: anger, abuse, self-hate, hate of others. All of that stems from the failure to be connected to our Creator,

therefore, giving good soil in our hearts and souls for roots that lead to destructive behavior. It's not the behavior that needs to be modified; it's the uprooting of not being reconciled unto the Father.

We have been made alive with Christ, which means those roots are being pulled up. This becomes imperative. This is the stake we're trying to drive. We're talking about ongoing ethic. Here is what you need to hear. One of the things that has come out in this series is I have said on repeat, "Don't despise difficult days." Here is what I'll contend. If you've come into this place today, you have walked in here, you're sitting down, and you're struggling with fear and anxiety, guilt and shame, here is what I want to lay before you might just be happening.

If you are a Christian, it is most definitely happening. Your loving heavenly Father is pulling upon the roots. Are you feeling a little guilt, a little shame, feeling a little anxiety, a little bit of fear? Take heart, brother. Take heart, sister. Take heart. God is tugging on the roots. How else do you think those things get pulled up? That silver-bullet nonsense. They get pulled up by being exposed. Do you want to kill a root? Drag it into the sunlight. Lay it on the concrete there and let the sun fry it.

God so loves you that he will ruthlessly garden in the depths of your heart. Don't despise it. You've come in here, and you're wrestling still with fear and anxiety. Don't fall into the trap of, "Well, I guess I'm not saved. I guess God doesn't love me." No, brother. No, sister. That might be evidence that he most definitely does. Wouldn't it be easier for him to just prune the tree? Yes. "God, why don't you just cut off the fruit and leave me alone?" He loves you too much. He's not going to play it that way.

For you to just have the fruit of sin removed while the plant remains is no good for you and brings no glory to God. In this moment of hardness, the Holy Spirit of God has his hands around the base of that fear and anxiety, that guilt and shame, and with all the power that exists is uprooting those things that derail and destroy you. Don't despise it; learn to enter into it and thank God for it. Confess it. Walk with others. Do business with it, but don't despise it. It is God at work for you.

"Well it stinks." I would agree. I've been there. I'm 20 years in. I thought all of my roots would be up by now. If you've gardened, have you ever uprooted something and just had it grow right back? I was talking to my neighbor, and he talked about killing these plants and putting other things down, and that weed still finds a way to get up. That's kind of Christian life. "I thought I beat that. There it is again." Anyone? Yes. So don't despise that. It's God at work, God ripping up, God digging up. Why? So good fruit will grow. You have been made alive.

I loved this one. He raised us up with him. We saw a lot of testimony about this in our baptism service, didn't we? Just a lot of people who renounced their old way. "I used to do this, but that's not who I am

anymore." They stood in the water and were buried with Christ in his death and raised to walk in the newness of life. See what God has done. He has not only made you alive but empowered the strength of your legs to head in a new direction. We have been raised with Christ, seated up with him in the heavenly places.

Now the illustration I used several weeks ago to try to send this one home is that last October, a little over a year ago, we moved. We didn't move far. I'm ferociously committed to this part of the Metroplex. We live here. Our kids go to school here. We cheer for the football teams here. (I'm not letting you know.) We're in. I don't plan on living anywhere else other than this area unless God profoundly changes that, as in my dresser burns and is not consumed, and an audible voice says, "Let's go." Then I'm not arguing. At that point, I'm not arguing.

I feel like I'm here for the rest of my days. We're not moving farther away. We actually moved equidistant from our last house. We just moved to Old Highland Village. What that meant is I go the same route home, but I have to make a right versus a left. The first three months (maybe you're just smarter than I am), I would just instinctively make the left and go to the old house. What's happening since I have been resurrected with Christ, I have been made alive, is now I know I don't live over there anymore. I live over there.

This is a rerooting of who I am, because that used to be my identity, but that's not my identity anymore. That's not Matt Chandler. Matt Chandler doesn't live over there; he lives over there. He doesn't walk down that road; he walks down there. He doesn't drive down that road; he drives down this road. Being rerooted. I love this. This is such a cool statement he makes here. He says that in the coming ages, God will reveal to us the immeasurable nature of his grace.

I was reading to prepare for this, and I read in an excerpt from something that in 1990 the queen of England was worth \$4 billion. That's a sweet gig, I'm guessing. I don't quite know what she does. If you're English, I'm not trying to be offensive. I'm just showing you I'm ignorant as an American. I don't know what she does. But \$4 billion. That's a "B," not an "M." What if the queen of England said, "You know what? I'm going to lavish my wealth upon you." I'd be in for that. I'd be in for that gig. Anybody else? You want to lavish your wealth on me? I'll take that. Just adopt me. I'll be Prince Matt. I would love that trash.

Here is what is true about her \$4 billion. She'll only be able to be generous for a period of time. She can't be generous forever, because \$4 billion runs out. Listen, I know. That's nearly impossible for us to get our minds around. Has anybody watched the *30 for 30* documentary "Broke"? How many of you guys watch that? Okay, twelve men and one woman. Excellent. I thought I saw a woman. ESPN did this series of documentaries called *30 for 30*, and one of them was called "Broke."

"Broke" was about professional athletes who made millions, sometimes hundreds of millions, of dollars, and then just a few years after they were out of the league they had to declare bankruptcy and were broke. For me, I'm going, "How?" I'm being straight. How do you blow \$100 million? I am not a math guy, and I'm thinking, "If I could get one percent of that, I could live happy forever...one percent of \$100 million." I'm not even quite sure what that is, but I think it's more than I'm making. I just think I could live well on one percent of \$100 million. How do you blow all of that? It's possible.

God isn't like that. The point here is not that in the coming ages, you'll finally come to the end of God's goodness. Rather, throughout the ages, you'll see that he's inexhaustible, that there is never a moment where there is not more of him to know, more of him to be experienced, more joy to be had. Do you know how joy kind of loses its strength here on Earth? That's not to be for those who are children of God. There are things we really enjoy, so we just do them over and over and over again, and then you kind of lose zeal for it. That's not how our relationship with God will work.

In the coming ages, God will just continually show us that there is more and more and more and more to be had of him. This is who we now are, sons, daughters, co-heirs with Christ. We were made alive. Our ongoing ethic is that we have to renounce who we were, because some of that is going to feel natural to us, and we're going to have to guard against the drift to do exactly what the Israelites did when they said, "Wasn't Egypt better?"

As God leads them out of slavery and toward the Promised Land, they got to the desert and were like, "Really, this? God just brought us out here to kill us?" That's what happens when we run back to self, back to others, back to the world, back to religion. No, we renounce our former ways ("I don't live there. That's not who I am.") while simultaneously rerooting who I am. I am a son of God. I am forgiven. I am delighted in, and God is lavishing his love on me in joy and in sorrow. In difficulty and in ease, God is lavishing his grace upon me.

My sorrows are almost all tied to my sinfulness or the fallenness of the world, and in both God will show himself to be sufficient. I want to point out verse 10 to you, because verse 10 is just a spectacular, spectacular verse. Let's look back at it. **"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."** Let me tell you why this is important. I have found that a vast majority of those who claim to know and love Jesus Christ believe God is unable to use them in significant ways until they grow to a certain point.

Is anybody guilty of believing that? "Surely he can't use me yet. Surely I'm not where I need to be for God to use me significantly yet." Listen. The Word of God just says we renounce the old ways, reroot in the new,

are constantly laying ourselves bare before God, and he has good works he prepared in advance for us to do. You don't have to be an expert. That's the beauty of the gospel.

I think back to earlier in life in ministry when I was just so ignorant of what the Bible said. I loved Jesus, but I couldn't really explain it well. The first person God ever graced me to ever actually win to the Lord one-on-one just sharing the gospel was done so poorly that I'm embarrassed to even talk about it. Jimmy Hereford is his name. He's still a strong believer. He actually lives in the Metroplex. He lives down in South Dallas. We still chat often.

I gave Jimmy a tract, one of those comic book ones called "This Was Your Life." I handed him that tract, and Jimmy read the tract. I had gotten sent out into the hallway. I don't want to talk about that. I'm sitting in a desk out in the hallway. Jimmy walks out. He lied and said, "I need to go to the bathroom." He comes out and just tears down his face, said, "I need something like this, Matt, but I can't quit smoking weed, and I have...." He just begins to pour out his heart to me.

I didn't even know how to comfort him, didn't even know what to say, had no kind of theological grid in which to engage him. I was just like, "Man, I'll be praying for you, Jimmy, and your weed habit." I'm just being completely honest. A few weeks later, we're at a junior varsity football game just kind of watching the JV play. We're sitting there, and a guy in our school walked up. He was just kind of a "thug life" kind of guy. He walked up, and Jimmy leaned over and was like, "I hate that guy. I would really like to fight him." I was like, "Jimmy, that dude might actually literally murder you."

He says, "I'm not afraid to die." Here is my response. "Remember what we've been talking about? You probably should get that straight before you risk your life." Third, and worse, a couple of weeks later I'm sitting in class. I'm eating a Jolly Rancher. You have to suck them for like a day and a half for them to disappear.

I'm eating Jolly Ranchers. I have a handful. Jimmy walks by and goes, "Can I get a Jolly Rancher?" I was like, "What do you want?" He was like, "What do you have?" I was like, "Oh, it looks like all I have left is Fire." He was like, "I hate Fire." Wait for it. My response is, "Oh you don't like fire? Remember what we've been talking about?" How dumb is this?

Listen. God drew Jimmy to himself. He saved him. He rescued him. Jimmy was instrumental in seeing a lot of other people come to know Christ. Do you want to hear the kind of punch line? Carl Brower was told the gospel by Jimmy Hereford. The man right now right across this hallway praying for your birth through 5-year-olds, the man who ministers to you as parents and leads teams, engages, was won to Christ by a man

who worked at a restaurant with him who I got to share the gospel with in eleventh grade knowing nothing but hell has fire in it.

Look at me. Get over yourself. It's God who does the good work. Don't you see that the point of the text is that God does the good works? He has prepared them for you. You don't have to be an expert. Just trust and believe that God is going to use you. Surrender yourself over to this. Reroot in this. See your neighborhood like this. See your workplace like this. See your hobby time like this. Why? Because you're a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come. Reroot in that.

Let me read you some of those verses that are just so rich and good. I just quoted 2 Corinthians 5:17.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Galatians 6:15. **"For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."** Whether you do these moral things or don't do these moral things is of no consequence if the heart isn't changed. Believers in Christ have been made alive from when they were dead. It's new creation. It's not modified behavior. Does behavior get modified? Absolutely, via the relationship of being born again.

Then Ephesians 4:24. Go ahead and flip over there. We're actually going to start in verse 20 and read through 24. **"But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self..."** Listen to this. **"...created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."**

This becomes imperative. This becomes important. This ongoing ethic of renouncing and rerooting and asking God to save us and help us and move in us and strengthen us and grant us resolve and grant us discipline and stir up in hope. What has happened in being made alive is not that we take off and then we put on, but that we take off by the power of God, and then we put on the clothes *he* has given us. He created. We didn't create. He creates what we wear now. He has us looking fly. All right?

I want to just look at this verse together, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. I think it's great if you want to turn there in your Bible and write in it. **"So we do not lose heart."** We've already said some of you are in danger of losing heart, and we had a lot of people who just said, "I've been there." Some of you are there this morning. Some of you are just so tired of the battle against sin, so tired of wrestling with depression, so weary of messing around with lust. You just want freedom.

He says, **"So we do not lose heart."** I love that he's honest. **"Though our outer self is wasting away..."** Some of you don't know what that's talking about yet. It's coming. Then you'll start lying about how good you used to be. **"Though our outer self is wasting away..."** Listen to this. **"...our inner self is being renewed..."** How are we renewed? **"...day by day."** One of the most common phrases in Pauline literature, in our New Testament is "once and for all." That's not on that text.

Oh, I would love it if it would say "once and for all" on that, that we're renewed once and for all, like God fills up my tank and then *bam!* Done. No more struggles, no more running on fumes, no more growing weary. That's not the text. The text says, "Don't lose heart. The outer man is wasting away. The inner man is being renewed day by day." This is an ongoing ethic. The pain points of wrestling with your sin are the holy God of the universe uprooting the plant that will destroy you. Don't despise those difficult days. They are a gift to you. You will be renewed day by day. He has not abandoned you.

Pray and plead for the silver bullet. Do you hear me? Ask for it. Why would you not? He's able. Why would you not? If that's all you're doing, you're walking in sin. If all you're doing is going, "Please, God, change this while I sit on the couch," that's not what we do. Day by day, being renewed in the inner man, renouncing the old ways, rerooting in the new, we ask and plead with God to strengthen us for the day, to give us victory over our sin in the moment.

We have covered this. Win the day. That's what you do. You win the day. That's all. Don't get caught in your head 10 years from now, 5 years from now. I wouldn't get caught a month from now. Today. Are you depressed? Let's walk through today. Struggling? Take each struggle as it comes. If you start thinking, "Oh, God, if this is the next..." Listen, this is real stuff guys. Some of our pastors responded this morning and went out with the police officers this morning on a run for a wife in Highland Village who took her own life this morning. Her husband found her.

This is despair, depression, broken. It is real stuff. This isn't ambiguous, ethereal spirituality. This is win the day. Trust him. Renounce it. That's not who you have to be. It's not who you are. Root yourself in God's forgiving delight for you. Ask him to be enough in this moment. Ask him to get you through. Cling to others. Make the gathering an important thing. Don't punt on today. Don't leave here. Cling to other believers and go, "Help me." You're here for a reason.

Look what he says, because what he says next is absurd if this isn't true. **"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."** Do you hear that? I'm going to be renewed day by day by day by day until...what? Until all the struggles of today seem light and momentary.

Is that a reference to eternity? Absolutely, but I can also say this. The struggles I had when I was 19 seem like they were light and momentary at 39. I just have to believe the struggles I have at 39 are going to seem light and momentary when I'm 79. Ultimately, this reference is to eternity. We've covered this in this series. Regardless of the sorrow of today, it'll seem momentary 20,000 years from now.

Nothing today, no matter how devastatingly complex, no matter how difficult, no matter how soul-crushing, won't seem light and momentary 20,000 years from now, for today, we renounce, we reroot, we plead with God, we pray. We don't just get up in the morning and have our quiet time. Somebody rename that. That's kind of like punishment. "You sit there and think about that." Right? No, we get to commune with the King of Glory and plead with him.

Are you being tempted? There is nothing sinful about being tempted. This is where we cling. "That's not who I am. God, help me. That's not where I live. I live down there. God, you be my strength." You're not being tempted beyond what you can bear. It's a promise from the Lord. God hasn't ambushed you or set a trap for you. That's not what's going on here. He will deliver you if you cry out, if you renounce, if you reroot, believe, trust, cling. Let's pray.

Father, we live in a broken world, even as a few of our pastors had to go with the police this morning to comfort a man and his children. The despair and brokenness is so great. I thank you that you have shone your light into darkness. I thank you that the darkness will not overcome it.

I pray for my brothers and sisters, my friends, my family members, God, that we might renounce our former ways, that we might be rerooted, rewired, reorganized by an understanding of the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to be used as vessels by your Holy Spirit's power, fragile as we are, to shine light into the dark places, to push back what's dark in the world.

We just have to believe there are more women like this woman, there are more men out there struggling like this woman struggled. God, you've placed us here to be heralds of the light, not to pursue our own comforts, not to pursue our own plans or desires, but to be used mightily by you for the glory of your name and the good of the world around us. Help us, Holy Spirit. It's for your beautiful name, amen.