



The Hope We Have to Share

Matt Chandler – August 14, 2016

Matt Chandler: If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. If you don't have a Bible with you, let me encourage you to get one of those hardback black ones that's somewhere around you. You know, I always kind of say the same thing. I want you to grab your Bibles so you can see I'm not making anything up, that these are actually the words of God.

Then especially in our time together today, we're going to be looking at 42 verses. If you have a history here, and you're like, "Oh my gosh! We're never getting out of here," I can promise you this service will not be any longer than usual. I do want you to see this long narrative story in John, chapter 4.

In fact, if you've been here with me for the 13 years I've been here, I looked this week, and I've preached through this chapter 17 or 18 times in the last 13 years, so you can tell it's a passage I like quite a bit, although the point of emphasis today will be a bit different. I want you to be able to look at it with me.

A couple of things while you're turning there in your Bible. The first is I want to welcome Southlake on the feed. We launched the Southlake Campus this morning, so this is their first kind of official morning on our stream. We're so glad to have them. God has already begun to do a pretty incredible work out there.

Then for us here in Flower Mound, tonight at five o'clock is Elder-Led Prayer. Here's what we're praying for tonight. We're going to be praying for teachers and administrators and coaches and students going back to school and for moms and dads who just dropped their firstborns off at college. Then we're going to pray a little bit about that card you were handed when you walked in. That will be tonight at 5:00.

Then immediately following that around 6:10 we're going to start our member meeting. There are some pretty big things we want to roll out for you so you can be aware of them. Join us tonight at 5:00. I've said now for 13 years I don't know that there's anything more important we do as a church than to gather and say, "We can't. You can. God, help us." Join us tonight for that.

Now I became a Christian late in my teen years because there was a guy I played football with who feared God more than he feared man. Another way to say that same thing is he loved God more than he loved the perception others had of him. He just shared the gospel with me and was willing to look like an idiot in the locker room and was just willing to pay that price so I might come to faith in Christ.

That idea of fearing God more than we fear man or, to say it positively, loving God more than we love people's perception of us is really the foundation of what I want to talk to you about today. If you have your Bibles, let's look at this together. This is a narrative story that actually happened. It's not a parable. This is a real woman we're about to read about in a real location on earth that really happened, and it's fascinating. Let's look at this together. John, chapter 4, starting in verse 1.

"Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there."

Now quickly, about a month and a half ago, we handed you a reading plan for the book of Genesis, because starting next week we'll start a year in Exodus. Now not to start preaching next week's message, but the book of Exodus starts with the word *and* in the Hebrew. If you turn in your Bible there, it's probably been omitted, but in the Hebrew it quotes the very last verse of Genesis with the word *and* in front of it.

He is tying together Genesis with Exodus as a continuation of what we've read in Genesis. All that to say, if you've been reading through that, you know Joseph and Jacob and this well. If you don't, don't worry about it. We'll mention it I'm sure at some point in Exodus. From there, let's keep reading.

Verse 6:

"Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour [or the middle of the day]. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?' (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.'

Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.'
Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.'

The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.'

Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.'"

I love verses 25 and 26. **"The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.'** Jesus said to her, **'I who speak to you am he.'"** "When the Messiah gets here, he'll straighten all this out." "I am straightening this out." That's just a great moment here. Now verse 27:

"Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you seek?' or, 'Why are you talking with her?' So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' They went out of the town and were coming to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.'" I love the disciples. "So the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest"?

Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.'" Verse 39 to the end of the chapter is where we'll focus most of our time together today.

"Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me all that I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'"

Now four quick things out of this text, right? Surprising things, I think. The first is that this woman is a complete train wreck. Right? There is nothing about her life that we should look at and want for ourselves or to try to emulate. This woman is not sought out in regard to marital advice. What we see is she is a woman so damaged and so overcome with shame and guilt and embarrassment at how her life has turned out that she has withdrawn from society altogether and has made herself invisible to this little community she lives in.

Now we know that because she is at the well in the middle of the day. Nowhere in the world at no period of time do women draw water from a well in the middle of the day. They go before the sun comes up or very, very early in the morning before the heat gets out. Even to this day if you go on a

trip with us and you go to South Sudan with us or Kenya with us or down to Guatemala and you see the wells, they're never busy at 1:00 in the afternoon, at noon. They're always jammed up at 5:30-6:00 a.m.

The women and children go out there, and they gossip. They talk about life, and they catch up. It becomes kind of this social deal while they get water. This woman has avoided all of that. Why? Well, Jesus exposes it to us: Because she has had five husbands, and the man she is living with now is not her husband. She has had five men, and now she is exchanging sex for rent.

Shame has overtaken her. She has withdrawn from society. She is whispered about and belittled. She is pointed to as an example of what not to be. She is dealt with in the culture in which she lives as someone who is unclean and outside of God's good graces and is treated with scorn, whispered about.

This is who Jesus sits down with. This is who Jesus reveals he is the Son of God to. In fact, it's a really important thing to note that the first person Jesus ever confesses to being the Messiah to is this woman with five husbands who is currently whoring herself out for a place to sleep. Let's not ever think too lightly about grace. This is a *stunning* moment.

Now Jesus is ruthlessly going after her heart. I love it! He is ruthlessly going. He is not gently doing it. He is ruthlessly going after her heart. Right? "There's water you can have that wells up unto eternal life. There is water to be had that will satisfy you. There's water to be had where you don't have to be isolated, where you can walk in freedom, that you trying to solve the brokenness in your heart has not worked with men, and there is a way for your heart to be made whole."

You remember her response. "Sir, tell me where this water is so I can stop coming to this well." Jesus, because he loves her, deals ruthlessly with her. "Woman, go get your husband, and we'll talk about it."

"Well, I don't have a husband."

"Yeah, I know. You've had five, and the guy you're with now isn't your husband."

What? Why is Jesus doing this? Because to expose her deepest hurt is to reveal to her that she needs a Savior. Now what does she do in that moment? It's interesting to note that as soon as Jesus does

this, she tries to change the subject to this kind of theological ethereal conversation. She doesn't want it to have to do with her heart. She wants to argue about where to worship. You can see in her some theological confusion and a refusal to surrender her heart once Jesus has exposed it.

Then the debate wages, right? "Well, you Jews say it's on *this* mountain, but we say it's on *this* mountain. Man, who knows what's true?" Well, Jesus doesn't allow her theological confusion and not just her theological confusion but her refusal to kind of surrender her heart to him to stop him. He enters into that theological confusion, and he starts to iron it out for her.

Remember, "Is it on *this* mountain we worship or is it on *this* mountain we worship?" Jesus says to her, "It's not about mountains at all. It's not about places." He deconstructs her temple mindset. See, the temple mindset is, "Where do I have to go and make sacrifice and atone for all I've done?" This is a woman who battles deep, personal shame. "Where do I make atonement? Where do I make myself right?"

Jesus' response is, "No, no, no. I have come to make you right. You don't go to be made right. I am coming to you to make you right." True worshipers worship in spirit and truth. We don't have a mecca; we *are* mecca. You don't have to go to Jerusalem to be made right with God. Christ comes and dwells inside of you, and the Holy Spirit dwells inside of you. You become the very temple of God.

This is what sets us apart as believers in Christ. We don't have a mecca. We *are* mecca. We *are* the holy place. This is what Jesus is trying to get across to her. "No, no, no. I have come to heal you. I've come to fix you." Never be too hard on people who are theologically confused or people who use theology as a means by which to not surrender to God, because look at who else is really theologically confused here.

In verse 31, you see the disciples are. I love the awkwardness of this text, because here's what I know as a pastor. In that moment when Jesus says to the woman, "Ma'am, go get your husband, and we'll talk about this living water."

"Well, I don't have a husband."

"Yeah, you're right. You've had five, and the guy you're living with now is not your husband."

Let me tell you what happened. The Bible is over *here*. This is complete conjecture. At that moment laid bare, there's snot and tears everywhere. "I've been outed." All her shame she has hidden, all the kind of avoidance she has walked in, Christ just brought it into the light. There's snot, and there are tears. Now they're in this theological conversation. Jesus is talking about the heart.

Here's the scene, and then all of a sudden the 12 disciples roll up, right? Twelve dudes just rolling deep will walk up. Here's this woman crying, and Jesus is intensely trying to help her understand he is after her heart and freedom for her heart. The Bible says no one says anything. I love that that's there. They're just like, "Oh."

No one goes, "What's going on here?" or, "Who is this woman?" Literally they say nothing, and the woman leaves. It's some things Jesus said that I think are really important for us to know here. Look there in verse 34. **"Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.'"** I think verse 35 is a real key to this text.

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Here's what's happening. A lot of theologians and historians are going to date this moment to around December or January, which is four months removed from the spring harvest in this part of the world. What Jesus is saying is, "Do you not say that four months from now will reap a harvest? I say to you... In fact, get your eyes up. Harvest time is now! There's fruit to be harvested right now. It's not four months from now. It's not a future happening. It's right now there's a harvest to be reaped."

Then he teaches them a lesson we all need to keep ever before us, that salvation belongs to our God, and there's no one in this room with the power of salvation. What we do is reap where another has labored. We enter into the labor of Christ who seeks and saves the lost. God has been intimately involved in the details of our lives from our highs to our lows to where we live to the times in which we live. That's Acts 17.

Then at the right time and the right moment, someone shows up and heralds to us the good news of the gospel. By the grace of God, our eyes are opened, our hearts are opened, and we believe. God uses this woman with her heartbreaking background and her theological confusion to bring many to believe upon the name of Christ. Then even more would believe upon their testimonies because the Word of God itself came from Jesus' mouth.

You see here (and here's my hope that you would see) that God's big plan to seek and save the lost has little to do with pastors who preach on the weekend and everything to do with everyday men and women bought by his blood who work in all sorts of domains. If you are a Christian, you have a story of where you were when God saved you and what he has done in your life.

I don't care if you grew up in church your whole life. At some point, Christ became real to you, or you would be self-righteous and impossible. But God saves you from that. We all have this story of God's grace and his intersection into our lives and how he has changed us and is changing us and is transforming us.

What I want to do with the rest of our time together is I'm going to pray here. Then each of our campuses has three or four people who are just going to share, "This is how Christ saved me. This is where I was." Here in Flower Mound, Dr. Richard Patterson will start us with his story of where he was when Christ saved him. Then I'll come back out at the end, and we'll talk about that card, and we'll consider how the Lord might use us in the days and weeks to come. Let me pray for us.

Father, thank you that for the Christians in this room we're here because you intervened. You rescued, and at the right time, you sent a person, you sent a situation, you allowed something into our lives that created a clarity of thinking. By your grace through faith alone, you granted belief to us.

I pray you would remind us of your good grace to us in our time together today, and then on top of that, you would create a boldness in us that we might, like this woman, say to our neighbors and family members and friends, "Come and see the man," that many might say, "Surely this is indeed the Savior of the world." It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Dr. Richard Patterson: Well, good afternoon. My name is Richard Patterson, and I am going to share a synopsis of my salvation story, my redemption. Most of it is going to be my sanctification

struggle and walk. I was exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ when I was 10 years old at a Billy Graham revival, and it pierced my heart. It was unusual. I didn't do anything with that.

My family did not attend church and certainly were not Bible readers, but we started attending a small church, and two years later, I heard the gospel again. This time I gave my life to Jesus Christ, and I was baptized along with my family. Then we stopped going to church. There was no mentoring. There was no encouragement for family members. We all went our own way. Basically the next 60 years, I was a Christian pretty much in name only.

I remember there are markers in my life. At age 16, I was working on my car repairing it, and a young man offered to help me. Well, he was a devout young man. He was a Christian, and he made an impact on my life. I don't remember his name. However, he told me, "Richard, you can do better than you're doing. You don't need to speak the way you speak and act the way you act." I said, "You're right. I don't."

He went his way, and I went my way. I reverted right back into my old behaviors, to the point that I was in college, and I was so arrogant and such a blasphemer that I sought out youth groups at churches, and I would debate them about evolution. I was just a fool. I was a very proud fool. Well, I went on to school. I was in a residency program. I was at Ben Taub Hospital in Houston. Same thing. I was living in the flesh.

This young man two years behind me as a resident named Rick Hurst was unusual and peculiar. He was a Christian, and he walked his faith diligently. He was different from the rest of us. We were all telling dirty jokes. We were all doing everything. Rick was different, and that made an impact on me.

Well, about the same time, a young lady who was married to a guy a year in front of me also made an impact on me and on the whole group I was running with. She was such a devout Christian young lady that it was easy for us to make fun of her, and that's what we did. You know? We talked behind her back and stuff like that.

Well, about that time, I got married. I was married for 14 years, and my marriage failed. Out of that marriage, I had two good sons, Jared and Joshua. I was trying to raise them as a single father for many, many years. I was trying to raise them in my own strength. Of course, I failed. They struggled, and I struggled.

Well, I remember I was age 46. I was driving down 15th Street in Plano, and I was angry at God. That was the only time in my life I've ever wailed and wept like that. I was shaking my fist at him, and I said, "Look. You take this mess, because I've messed it up." He said, "Good! It's about time, Richard. I've got it. I've got it." Do you know what? It was a tremendous weight off my shoulders.

Well, at that point, I finally came into the light. Man, I chased after Jesus. Everything I could read, everything I could do, was all Jesus (and it still is all Jesus). It's a triune God who saves and chases us down and is faithful. It's not me. Well, I was doing reasonably well. My next big marker was my oldest son, Joshua, came in one night at 11:00 and said, "Dad, let's talk." I thought, "Certainly it's about him." I said, "Sure." He said, "No, it's about you." I thought, "Why, I dare you."

Anyway, I said, "What do you want to talk about?" He said, "I want to talk about your hypocrisy. You're a hypocrite." Yes, I was. He said, "You know, you're living in your flesh. You're not living in the new spirit, new creation of Christ. You can do better." It was a challenge. From that point forward, I started really turning a corner.

About that time, I met Janie, my lovely wife, who is a godly woman and another big sanctification marker in my life. I was very much in love with Jesus. At that point, the next big marker in my life was I became an elder in this church. I really felt I was absolutely the least qualified, but I did eight years. I learned humility in that room and was rebuked in that room. I learned I'm in this process right now, and my pride is a daily battle. My judgmentalism is a daily battle.

I have learned in this time that I'm not very smart. I don't know anything. I don't! I just don't! It's just like my hand across my mouth. I have really nothing to say. It all begins and ends with Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father. It's all the work of salvation...every bit of that is their work in my life. It's not about me. It's not about you. It's all about him and his glory.

Well, the end of my story basically is rather recently. My friend, who was a year ahead of me in the residency program, has a terminal cancer. We were estranged for a lot of reasons. I reached out to him recently. Lo and behold, the first person to answer the phone was his lovely wife. I spent the next hour on the phone weeping and apologizing to her. I told all of the gossip, all the backstabbing, all the stuff I did against her. She is a lovely Christian woman, and all she could do is extend grace. She is now a very dear friend to my wife and me.

It's interesting how God just does stuff. You know, it's an ongoing situation every day. You know, you have to try a little bit better and fail. That's all we can do. But in this, I know God is steadfast. He is patient, and he is righteous. What he says will happen. I have an unbelievable assurance in my heart of my salvation...a proud blasphemer against him. He loves me, and he is patient, and he has assured me in so many different ways, "I've got this, and I love you, Richard." Thank you very much.

Rachel Sennott : Hello, my name is Rachel Sennott, and I'm going to share a little bit of my story with you guys today. About five years ago, the Lord just turned my world upside down. Previously I was a self-centered, attention-seeking, disrespectful high schooler, and I was really just drowning in the guilt and shame of trying to find all of my worth and all of my identity in what guys thought about me and just chasing after their affection and their attention.

I got to a place where I was just really lost and broken. I didn't really know how to get free from just the enslavement I felt. By the grace of God, I met a girl who was working for a program that officed out of the same church building my mom worked at. I met her, and she was older than me. She was seven years older than me, so I thought she was cool. At the same time, I knew she loved Jesus, so I thought she was a little weird for that. But I kept on hanging around her.

Over the next couple of months, I just began to share things with her I had never told anybody before. I don't remember a whole lot of what she said in response to what I said, but I did know she loved me, and I knew she loved Jesus, and I knew I had the freedom to say whatever I wanted without her judging me for that.

About six months into knowing her, she was a member here, but she got asked to go on a mission trip with the church she was officing out of. She went, and I went as well. I remember on the last night I had this conversation with her. I just basically told her, "Hey, I don't understand this whole Christian thing. I don't know why they serve. I don't know why they fix roofs and paint houses." I just told her, "Hey, frankly, I'm not really a fan of the whole nice thing. It's not really what I want to do. I don't really want to serve people." I was just trying to understand, "Hey, why do they do this?"

In the middle of the conversation, I just stopped and said, "Hey, I need to go get a drink of water really quickly." I went over. We were in this big youth room. There were air mattresses everywhere, and people were sleeping. I came back to her, and I said, "Hey, this is the best way I know how to describe to you what's going on in my heart and in my life right now."

I said, "I walked over to the refrigerator. Yes, it was dark, and yes, I kind of had to navigate my way through the air mattresses, but I was able to see in the dark. I opened the refrigerator, saw that light, and once I closed the refrigerator, I could no longer see in the dark. That's about how I feel right now. I'm drowning in all this guilt and shame. I don't know how to escape from that. At the same time, I don't understand this whole religion thing and Jesus and all this kind of stuff."

I just told her, "Hey, I'm going to go to church this Sunday, and if I don't think that pastor says anything, then I'm never going back." She was like, "Okay." I went that Sunday, and as I was walking out, I texted her. I said, "Hey, I want to come to church with you at The Village." She said, "Ask your parents." The next weekend, I was here at The Village.

Once again, I don't remember a whole lot of what went on that first service, but halfway through that week, she texted me and said, "Hey, are you going to come back?" I said, "To be honest with you, it was a little uncomfortable. I'm not sure why the lights were out. I have no idea why people's hands were in the air. I think I'm good." She just said, "Okay. That's fine. You don't have to come back." I texted her, and I said, "Hey, can I please come back?"

I was here the second weekend, and Bleecker was leading worship. He just stopped in the middle of the song, and he said, "Hey, I want everybody to take a look at the cross. All of your sin...all your past sin, present sin, future sin...was paid for on that cross. All of your guilt, all your shame, was nailed to the cross of Jesus, that upon believing in him, you would have freedom in life and joy in him."

That just broke me. That was truly good news to somebody who was in the place I was in, where I just didn't see a way out. I would lie in bed at night just wondering, "How do I escape from myself?" That was really, really good news for me. As he led back into the bridge, it says, "I thank you for the cross. I love you for the cross." That was for the first time in my life the overflow of my heart. Like, "Yes, thank you that you died in my place. I know I didn't deserve that. I know I should take the penalty for that, but you took that." That was just the overflow of my heart.

Since then, in a lot of ways my story is similar with the woman at the well. He just made my desire to go back into the city and say, "Hey, come and see this man Jesus who knows everything I've ever done, knows all the ways I've tried to quench my thirst, and yet his invitation is still to come and to be satisfied with Living Water."

That's my hope for us as a church, that we would go beyond the walls of this building. That we wouldn't just gather here together and gain a bunch of knowledge but that we would go out and say, "Hey, are you thirsty? I know Living Water. Are you hungry? I know the Bread of Life. Are you lost? I know the Good Shepherd." That's just my hope for us, that we would consider what Christ has done for us and that we would just be eager to see the Lord do what he says he wants to do through his people. That's a little bit of my story. Thank you so much for letting me share.

Craig Holleman: Good morning. My name is Craig Holleman. I'm going to share a little bit of my testimony with you. I think it's important for me to cover a few things really quickly. I want to bring everybody up to 2008, but in my childhood there were some things that were pretty significant. I grew up in a home with no faith. I grew up in a home with a lot of divorce.

My parents divorced when I was 18. My mom remarried when I was 7. The man she married was on his third marriage. There were kids from that marriage, from previous marriages. My dad did the same thing, so I had a lot of stepbrothers and stepsisters, and holidays and birthdays were always confusing.

The advice I got from my parents, not being of faith, was to pursue worldly things. The advice particularly from my father (the stepfather who raised me) was not good in regard to women. It was, "Get as much as you can, and get all of it you can. Because once you get married, that's it." Of course, he was on his third marriage with my mom, which later seemed a little bit odd.

I graduated high school and went into the navy at 18 armed with pursuit of the world and women. That's what I did for almost nine years. I pursued partying and finding as many women as I could. Toward the latter part of those nine years in the military, I did meet my wife. We both were discharged pretty quickly after that, just by coincidence. We lived together for about a year and then got married.

We lived in Nevada. We never really found what we were looking for in Nevada, so we moved to Florida. We never really found what we were looking for in Florida, so we moved to Colorado. Then after Colorado, we moved to Texas. In about five years, we had two kids and found ourselves living in Flower Mound.

Five years later in 2008, I had an 8-year-old son and a 6-year-old daughter. We'd been married for 10 years, together for about 13. By all standards, we were living the American dream. Great home.

Great schools. Great neighborhood. Good jobs. Everything should be fine. There was still this stirring in me that, "There has to be more. Hobbies don't satisfy. Nothing really satisfies."

We had been busy with the kids. Our marriage was kind of waning at the point, so I started to think, "Well, maybe my marriage is what's wrong." I started to compare my marriage to other people I knew. I started to compare my wife to other women I saw, in particular a woman I was working with at the time. That didn't go well, particularly because she was having the same issues I was having in my marriage.

We began to confide in one another, began a relationship. In a matter of, I think, maybe two weeks or a month, my hope was in her. I had turned everything over to her. I felt a lot of guilt and shame, particularly with coming from a divorced upbringing. I didn't want to do this to my kids. I knew what I was doing was wrong. I felt it was wrong the whole time, but the sin in me was winning.

I decided, "What I'm going to do is I'm going to convince my wife (because the marriage is already not that great) the marriage is over. If I can kind of create an uncomfortableness, if I can be a jerk, if I can prove to her she would be better off or this would be better off if it didn't happen, then that's what I set out to do."

Given my wife's background, I thought this was going to be easy. She is from a rough part of San Jose. She grew up to a heroin addict mother who sold herself to pay for her addiction. She saw things by the time she was 8-10 years old most people should never see in their life. Knowing that and seeing how that had hardened her and seeing the reactions she would have to people we knew who would cross her, even people in our family, I figured this was going to be pretty easy. I would act like a jerk. She would've had enough fairly quickly, and that would be it.

The problem was Jesus had a different plan. About a year before, my wife had started to go to church with a friend of hers who was her manager where she worked. I had to work weekends, so I couldn't go to Sunday church. She was going to church. I thought, "That's great. Everybody in Texas goes to church. Something good will rub off on my kids. I don't have a problem with it." But I wanted nothing to do with it.

She was saved and got baptized. I remember when she told me about baptism. I thought that was weird. "Whatever you want to do, honey." She was also attending a ladies' Bible study across the street where we lived with a different group of ladies than the one lady she was going to church

with. This group of ladies was in a Home Group from this church, and that would eventually be our first Home Group.

As I started this downward spiral, she was being encouraged by the ladies who were laying hands on and praying for her, "Be steadfast in the Lord." They were praying for my salvation. I was not getting anything near the reaction I was expecting to get. It was not moving along quickly enough for me. I decided after some liquid courage one night, "I'm just going to lay it out, let her know another woman has my heart, and this is going to be it. If I don't get literally chased out of the house, it's at least going to be the straw that breaks the camel's back."

That's what I did. I told her I had given my heart to another woman and it was over. Through a lot of tears and a lot of anger and a lot of...you can imagine...she extended grace. She said she wanted to fight for the marriage. She said it wasn't over. She said, "This is not the plan the Lord has." I was in a state of frustration beyond what I had imagined. I was lucky. I felt good I was not being chased out of the house and getting my butt kicked. I was heartbroken over the fact that I just ripped my wife's heart out. I mean, I still loved her, but this sin in me was calling to this other woman.

I agreed in a moment of emotions that I would stay and work on the marriage. Part of that for her was for me to come to church. She had been to a few services here on Saturday night, so Saturday nights are where we've always landed. Although my heart still wanted to be with this other woman, I agreed to come to church. I was going to use it against her. I was going to come to church with the intention of proving to her that this thing was not going to fix our marriage. I'd give her a couple of months, and this would be over.

The first few times I came into Saturday night service, I had never been to church before. The music started off. The music was great, but then the lyrics showed up, and people were talking about being washed by blood and blood of the Lamb and slaying animals. I was literally looking around like, "This is really not what I expected." It really freaked me out.

Then a couple of services after that, they had Celebration Weekend in the old Highland Village Campus. It was up tall, and people were standing up there sharing their stories like I am right now. I was thinking, "I would never do this. This is insane." Our Saturday nights started to look like going to service, putting the kids down (they were 6 and 8 at the time). I'd have a couple of drinks in the kitchen, and we would argue about the sermon.

I would try to disprove the sermon, try to find some reason it was invalid, flip out my phone, look something up on Google. The whole time the Lord was wooing me. The whole time the Lord was causing me to read other Scripture. He was having me dig in. That led to some nights me actually agreeing. Some nights I'd be so convicted I wouldn't go back for the following weekend or two, but I always kept coming back.

I think about six months into a yearlong walk, Matt was in the book of Luke. It was like a five-year odyssey through the book of Luke. I came in on the last year of that. About six months into me coming fairly regularly, I think cognitively I understood the gospel. I got it in my head, but my heart was still being ruled by sin. I still wanted to be with this woman, but I felt the truth in the Scripture.

So I really was in this place of not knowing what to do for about three or four months before I think the Lord finally by his grace just allowed me to submit. I equate my behavior to how Jesus interacts with the demons in Scripture, when the demons recognized his authority, and they knew he was the Son of God, and they were fearful of his power, yet there was no submission to that at all. They didn't call him *Lord*. I think for four months or so, that's really where I was at.

Thanksgiving of 2009, Matt had a seizure. That weekend, Josh Patterson got up on stage. I was ready to be entertained. I was ready to listen to good music, and I was ready to hear a comical sermon. Josh got up and said, "Man, I've got nothing. I've been up for two days straight with Matt at the hospital. So we're going to pray." Praying was terrifying to me. I had not done it. I think I had probably yelled a few things or grumbled a few things at the Lord, but there was no prayer in my life whatsoever.

Josh went through, and he said, "We're going to pray these three or four things" (Elder-Led Prayer style, I think). I huddled up with my wife. Holding her hands, the only thing I could think of that was playing over and over in my head had nothing to do with Matt. It was what Matt used to say from the stage quite often, and that was, "If you're coming to church and you're not pursuing a relationship with Jesus and you're not giving your heart over to him and you're not pursuing the things of the kingdom, then this is the lamest hobby you could possibly have."

That really was resonating with me, maybe because I had had so many failed hobbies before. I don't know. That was my prayer. My prayer was, "If you are real, if this is real, I want this to be real. I don't want this to be a hobby." I don't remember anything else that happened that night. I talked to

my wife a couple of weeks ago when Matt asked me to stand up here. She said she just remembers sobbing. That's all she did. She didn't pray at all.

It was about two weeks later I was sitting at home. I was probably watching a Francis Chan sermon on the Internet. I remember having my Bible open to Genesis 3. I just called my wife in. I just remember saying, "I believe." There was no more. It wasn't a cognitive like, "I got it." It really was my heart surrendering to his grace. I couldn't run from him anymore. I was just worn down with not submitting to what he was calling me to do.

The next Celebration Service (the first one here) I was in the water sharing my story like I am now. You know, I just really pursue the things of the Lord. This is the only church I've known. They really push here making disciples, sharing your faith. For me, I think that's where it really starts. You know, the woman at the well goes in, and she shares her testimony.

I think so many of us want to play this game that the Lord has brought us into where you can bring people to faith, and we can experience the joy of our salvation and share it with another, yet so many of us aren't prepared to share our testimony. I think it has to start there. Evangelism is not just going up to somebody you see hurting and explaining to them what the soils in the parable of the sower mean. Right?

It's about having a relationship with somebody, sharing your heart with them, being vulnerable, explaining what the Lord has done. I think that would be what my encouragement is. It's to really ask yourself what your story is if you don't know. Are you prepared to share that with somebody you know is hurting and who doesn't have a relationship with Jesus? Thank you.

Matt: You know, one of the unique things about all three of these that they really didn't share about themselves is not only were they and have they been the recipients of other people's courage and other people's willingness to share the gospel with them, but each of them, now having received that, have in a very real and beautiful way extended it to others.

Dr. Patterson, rather than retiring, works at a hospital in Fort Worth where he works primarily with internists and residents, training them in oral surgery but mainly sharing the gospel, having them into his home, helping them understand, answering their questions.

Sweet Rachel almost every week walks into that trailer park across the street from the Whataburger here in Highland Village (or maybe it's on the Flower Mound side of the road; I think it's the Highland Village side of the road). She just walks in there and talks and prays and is about to start a Bible study in there with almost complete first-, second-generation day laborers. I mean, she is sharing the gospel with people.

Craig, I mean he has been working in Kids' Village since not long after his salvation. He has such keen insight in what's going on around here. I mean, he would say the guys he gets the opportunity to share the gospel with ask the same questions our fourth grade boys ask. Again, no one you saw today has any formal theological education. No one you saw today has been trained in evangelism. What they have is the story of God's grace on their lives and a willingness to share it with others.

Man, I'm hungry for The Village Church to be a place where there's healing and a place where we care deeply about one another. More than anything, I want you to walk in the joy of knowing that God ultimately is not about your moral embetterment but rather the mission of God for the name and fame of Christ to be known and worshiped.

That has not been given to professionals but to you. You rob yourself of joy and you rob yourself of the chance or the opportunity to mature in Christ when Christianity is boiled down into, "Stop doing *this*, and start doing *this*." Rather to surrender your life over to Christ in such a way that your fear of God grows past your fear of man, and your love of Christ grows past your love for other people's perception of you is where a type of freedom and joy is found that will not be found in you trying not to do bad and instead do good.

Now one of the other strains you heard through all of that is in surrender to Christ, those aspects of their life started to change. It started to change when they surrendered to the Lord and began to believe the mission of God was a high-level priority in their lives. One of the ways we want to help you do that is via handing you this card, to not keep this in some sort of ethereal, high-up way, but to give you an opportunity to take a second and to write out a name of someone you want to pray for and you want to seek an opportunity to share the gospel with.

That's why we've given you this card. We'll pray over these cards even again tonight when we gather at ELP, if you're going to come to Elder-Led Prayer tonight. We'll pray some for these cards. I want to give you just a moment or two to take your card and to write out the name of someone you would like to begin to pray for and look for an opportunity to share the gospel with.

I think what you'll find is some of us are going to write down a name. In the next couple of weeks, something really kind of crazy and supernatural is going to happen. We're going to show up at work and go, "Hey, Bill. How are you?" Bill is going to say, "Well, all I have is my soul, and nobody wants that." You're going to be like, "Oh wait! No! Actually..." I mean, there's just going to be a wide-open door for you to step in and share the gospel.

Yet for most of us, that's not how this will go. For most of us, the conversation is going to look more like this: "Hey, can we get together? Man, I need to let you know something about me, and I haven't shared it. I've just been an idiot. I should've told you about it five years ago. I'm a moron. You know I'm a moron, so I haven't. Man, could we get together at some point this week? I just really would love to share something with you."

Then at that meeting, say, "Here's what God has done in my life. Here is what Christ has done. That same opportunity, that same salvation, is available to you." You can do that. If they say, "Well, what happened with the dinosaurs?" you can say, "I don't know."

"Why did God create evil?"

"I'm not sure, but my pastor is about to speak and begin to preach through the book of Exodus. Maybe you can stick your head in, and maybe he'll talk about that. I don't know."

I want us to be serious about you being used by God for the purposes of God. This is a way to get it on the ground and not it to be like this ethereal, "I know I need to share the gospel," but, "Okay, who is that?" For a couple of you, let me just say this. Don't lose heart in God's ability to save, because for many of us, we've been praying for the same person for a decade. They just haven't seemed interested, and they don't want to talk about it.

I want to just encourage you that the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 59:1 that the arms of the Lord are not too short to save, nor are his ears inattentive to the cries of his people. The Lord hears you. As Christians, we play the long game. We're not putters, right? We play the long game. We wait and are patient and pray and cling and pray more and pray more and pray more. Then we pray some more. We pray more, and we look for more opportunity to walk in relationship, to share the good news, to be salt and light.

Who is it you would write in this place? If you're not a Christian and you think this is like, "What? Is this a pyramid scheme?" No. It's really not. In fact, if we weren't doing this this morning and we really believed what we said we believed, how evil would we be... If we believed you were actually stuck in your sin and hell was a real place and we weren't adamant about praying for you and longing to see God open your heart, wouldn't we be far more wicked and evil than maybe even you think we are in this moment?

Unbeliever, we're writing out names. We're praying for you. We're earnest to see God move because of our deep love for you. My first prayer meeting as the pastor of The Village Church was a Wednesday night. There were 25-30 people there. Here's who we prayed for. I said, "Within a 10-mile radius of this building..." We were in the old red, brick building.

"Within 10 miles of this building, there are hundreds if not thousands of men and women who want nothing to do with Jesus Christ. They either have a skewed picture of who he is, or they just aren't interested because they have found some semblance of satisfaction in their own deity. They're not interested in Jesus.

They don't want anything to do with him. Surrender to him sounds like death, and yet in the next six months, the next year, the next two years, the next five years, the next ten years, God will save them because Jesus didn't die for those who *might* be saved but for those who *will* be saved. We're going to pray God saves men and women via the testimonies of our lives, and we're going to pray and expect that God would be mighty to save."

Now here's why this weekend has been so encouraging to me. Two of the people we were praying for at that time gave their testimony this morning. We didn't know Rachel's name, but we prayed for Rachel. We didn't know Craig's name, but we prayed for Craig. Men and women we prayed for 13 years ago...

This is still a pretty consistent way we pray at The Village. "All over the Metroplex, there are people who don't know you who in the next year will worship you." Here's what's great about Craig: Watching Craig raise his hands and sing songs about the blood of the Lamb. Right? To stand up here today and say, "I thought those people were crazy, and I'd never do that." He has done it twice now (when he was baptized and then this weekend). Believe God is able. You don't have to believe in you. Salvation belongs to God.

So who will it be? Will you write down a name? Let me give you a moment to do that, and then I'll pray. As I pray, men and women are going to begin to move to get ready to serve us the Lord's Table, and then I'll dismiss us with a benediction. Let me just give you a moment or two to pull out that card, to write out a name. We need a name to be actively praying for, to be seeking opportunity to share the gospel with. Who will that be? Let me give you just a moment or two to consider that, to write down a name.

Father, we thank you that you are mighty to save. In fact, this room is filled with those who you intervened somewhere around our lives at some point. You showed up through a family member or a friend or a coworker or a neighbor. Someone walked up to us and said, "Let me tell you what Christ has done in my life. That same salvation is available to you."

Because of some event or some difficulty or some spot we were in, we were able to hear. You opened up our hearts, and here we are as trophies of your grace. I am excited about what might come from these little cards, how far we are away from someone saying, "I wrote a name on this card on a Sunday morning, and here's my friend here to be baptized today."

I thank you that you're mighty to save, that you do save, and that there's no one so far gone as to be past your saving grace. Where we've lost heart, forgive us. Renew our faith in your power to do what you say you do. Make us bold. Give us a love for you that transcends and goes past our fear of what others think of us. I thank you for what will come from all of this, just being fully confident that you work through your people, not through professionals. Thank you for your mercy and grace. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.