



He Never Changes

Matt Chandler – December 31, 2017

Good morning. Almost Happy New Year. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. We're going to look at James, chapter 1, just one verse there, verse 17. Before I dive in completely, and I know this will probably be a little strange to the other campuses, but I believe the Grahams are in here. Will you guys stand up wherever you are so I can see you?

The Graham family is in from India. They've been serving the Lord over there for several years. Welcome home. I know it always feels weird to leave this place and then come back. There's always change going on. We're in the middle of that change, so it doesn't feel stark and crazy different to us, but I know it can for you. I just want to pray a prayer of blessing over them, as they have chosen to forsake some of the comforts of life here and step into some difficult places.

They have been faithfully serving the Lord there through the highs and lows of heralding the gospel in a place where there's a different language and a different value system. So we want to just pray a prayer of blessing over them. We love you guys, and we're glad you've gotten to spend some time back here with us. So I'm going to pray. Join me in praying for them. You can actively participate in this rather than just listen to me pray.

Father, we pray a prayer of blessing over the Grahams. We ask that you would embolden them all the more, that you would grant them power from on high. We pray that as they preach the Word of God and speak the Word of God and love the people of India that you would captivate the hearts and minds of those who will be yours. We thank you that there are men and women in that country who know nothing of you now who will worship with us forever because of the faithfulness of your servants, the Grahams.

We pray a blessing across their entire family, pray that financial needs be met, pray a real sense of your presence and power in their lives, and just thank you for their time with us today and ask that

their hearts might be encouraged as we gather in the name of Jesus this morning. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Love you, guys. So grateful that you're here. The week between Christmas and New Year's we historically have given our staff this week off. We run at a pretty crazy clip, so it's just a way for us to bless our staff and go, "You know what? Breathe. Enjoy time with your family." There are few weeks of the year in which the personality differences between my wife and me are more visible than this past week.

We're cool. We haven't fought, because over the last 20 years we have learned where to just let it be and enjoy the lane God has put us in. This is a season in which my wife is drawn toward puzzles, quiet. She just wants to do a puzzle and maybe enjoy some Meiomis there at the dining room table, where what I want to do is watch college football, which...we have Saturday services...I don't ever really get to do, and I need by God's good design to reflect on 2017 and think about 2018.

There is something in me that needs to plan around the year to come. Those are personal plans. Those are family plans, like how I want to approach the hearts of my children, how I want to build up and encourage my marriage, professionally, about my relationship with the Lord, how I cultivate my affections for the Lord, where I want to grow in regard to perceived weaknesses. If I don't do that, I kind of stress a little bit.

I'm not saying Lauren doesn't have dreams and plans and goals. I'm saying she's an artistic woman, so she would be like, "I want to write songs," and I'd be like, "Praise God, but when are you going to do that? Is there a time in which...? What is your approach to that going to be?" That's not a question. Don't ask that question in my house. Let her do her puzzle. But I'm going to need to go, "Here's when I'm going to work on that, and here's the lane I'm going to get in."

Every year when I do this, I become hyperaware of the billions of variables that laugh at my best-laid plans. I can make financial plans based on what I know, but there's a whole lot coming for me in 2018 that I do not know. I can look at my children, a high schooler, a middle schooler, and a third grader, and I can begin to plan about how I want to cultivate their souls with the Word of God, how I want to cultivate their relationships with Jesus Christ, but their receptivity and what comes into their experience in life is going to dictate whether or not those plans are fruitful.

What happens as we look at the future is there's all of this unknown that's there to sabotage our best-laid plans. So what I want to do today on the cusp of a very icy, cold entrance to the new year is try to root us not in what can change but in what never changes. What I want to do is make the appeal that building our lives on the immutability of God... That's a fancy theological term for God does not change.

Building our lives on the fact that our God does not, cannot, will not ever change is the best way to enter into 2018, that there would be a confidence in pushing all of our chips onto this bet: the God of the Bible is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and to trust in that and lean into that for the good of our own souls. To do that, I'm going to have to say some things you're going to love hearing, and I have to say some things that I think you *won't* love hearing, but it doesn't make it not true.

Here's my simple outline out of one verse of the Bible: *God gives perfect gifts because he's a good Father who never changes.* That's our outline. In 2018, you're going to get perfect gifts...not just good gifts...*perfect* gifts from a good Father who never changes. Let's dive in. Here's our text for the day: James, chapter 1, starting in verse 17. **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."**

I think right out of the gate, if we're going to talk about perfect gifts from God, we need to do some work, because we've been disciplined specifically to think about goodness or think about perfection through certain lenses. You have been disciplined by the day in which you live to believe that what is perfect for you, what is good for you is the immediate lifting of pain, difficulty, and sorrow or the immediate experience of pleasure without cost or consequence.

If you will pay attention to what you're watching, what you're listening to, and the atmosphere in which your life is living, what is perfect, what is good, what is the right gift is that all pain and difficulty be immediately lifted and/or pleasure come without cost or consequence. Our culture, by and large, has said, "This is what's good, and this is what's perfect." The only problem with that is experience, history, and the Bible all disagree with that idea. It's a cute idea; it just doesn't work in the actual world we live in.

What we believe as Christians is that the very best gift, the very best thing you and I could ever receive is to be reconciled to God through Christ and then abide or dwell in his presence. If you're not a Christian, the very best gift you could receive in 2018 is to be reconciled to God in Christ, and

if you *are* a Christian, the very best gift, the perfect gift you could receive in 2018 is to be made all the more aware of abiding in Christ and pleasure in Christ and to be fully known in Christ. Both of those really are the good, perfect gift we should long for in 2018.

If that's true, then anything that befalls our lives, that moves the needle in that direction (reconciliation to God or learning to abide in his presence all the more) is the thing we need most. It's just the thing we need most. So based on the Word of God and the fact that God is going to give perfect gifts to his children, here's what I can say, trusting that you won't take this one sentence and not let me finish the sermon. All 365 days of 2018, God is going to bless you. He just is.

Here's what I know on the cusp of 2018. Some of you (not all of you, but some of you)... Your anxiety and fear is going to be driven out of you and replaced by the peace of Jesus Christ. Some of you are going to have spiritual awakenings this year. You're going to be made alive in Christ in ways that you can't fathom right now.

Where prayer has been difficult for you, you are going to all of a sudden be after it all the time. You're going to worship more powerfully, worship more freely. Some of you who have found the Word of God to be difficult or stale are going to not be able to get enough of it in 2018. You are going to have a spiritual awakening that incites your heart to be more serious about Jesus, and your pastor is going to giddy freak-out dance in his office to it once I hear about it.

Some of you are actually going to become Christians this year. You're going to leave behind checkbox church attendance religion, and you're actually going to fall in love with Jesus. That's going to be awesome. I love that you keep coming. The Holy Ghost is eventually going to get you. You can't just keep coming in here nonchalantly and not expect that the Holy Ghost eventually is going to grab hold of you.

Some of you are actually going to become Christians this year, and you're going to see that this is a lot easier than you've been making it, trying to rely on your own flesh to earn what has been freely given to you. That's going to happen this year to some of you. It's going to be amazing. Some of you are going to be set free from your bondage to sin this year. Not in the way that Christ's death on the cross set you free from those sins in regard to how God sees you, but you're going to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to walk in victory in 2018. That's going to be awesome.

Some of you are going to receive a promotion. Some of you are going to make more money than you ever have. Some of you are going to see loved ones come to know Jesus. You're going to see sick people you know and love, maybe even yourself, healed of diseases this year. All of this will happen in 2018 for some of us, and it happened in 2017 for some of us. See, our years are mostly made up of Tuesdays. Do you know what I mean by that?

I don't mean there are more Tuesdays than there are other days. Tuesday is just kind of... It's Tuesday. The alarm goes off, you get up, you eat whatever you're going to eat for breakfast, and you go to work and do your job the best you can. Then you come home, you have dinner, and you do whatever you do, and then you go to bed, and then you wake up. It's Tuesday. Most of our lives are filled with Tuesdays.

Then every once in a while, the Holy Ghost will break through, and there's this really high moment and this really, really low moment. I'm just laying before you now that in 2018, all 365 days, God is going to bless you with what is perfect. Now don't run off and take me to prosperity gospel land, because that's certainly not where I'm going. This text we just read is embedded in a chapter that's all about the good gift of difficulty and suffering.

It's important for us to know...not *popular* for us to know, but it's *important* for us to know...that sometimes the best gift, the most perfect gift God could give to us is allowing difficulty, loss, and suffering to invade our human experience. Now, again, we're hard-pressed to understand that in a day and age in which we are taught that what is perfect is the quick relief of pain and difficulty and the instantaneous experience of pleasure without cost or consequence.

So this is a foreign concept, but it's not an experiential foreign concept. We know this to be true. We know that in this life we will have trouble. If you don't, you're 2 years old. Who thinks the world is easy but 2-year-olds? If we were to go back and look at James 1, starting in verse 2, it says, "**Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**"

Do you hear the context in which we're reading? Every good gift...no, every *perfect* gift...comes from the Father of lights. That good, perfect gift, according to James 1, is the perfect gift of difficulty. So some of us will be set free from our addictions, and others of us are going to wrestle with our addictions, and in all of it God is at work.

Here's something that can really stir up in me a lot of worship toward the God of the Bible. Suffering and difficulty finds its root in one of three places. Some suffering is demonic in its nature. I know we're way too enlightened to believe in that, but it's true. Some of us are in demonic bondage. That's something that exists. You need only read your Bible and take it seriously.

So some of us, there's demonic oppression that oppresses us and breaks us down, and then some of us suffer because of the sins of others or our own rebellion against God. So it can be demonic, it can be our own rebellion or somebody else's rebellion. Then lastly, sometimes we suffer just because the world is broken. The world is fallen. It is fractured. It is not as God designed it to be.

Here's one of the things that if you'll just spend some time considering it... All suffering, regardless of where it falls, whether it be just the brokenness of the world, whether it be our rebellion against God or another's rebellion against God or even demonic means where it's seeking to devour us, destroy us, all ultimately serve the purposes of God.

How thorough is your victory when the moves of your enemy serve your purposes? You want to think about the totality of victory that God has over sin and death and the demonic realm, that even their activity, their attempts to dismantle, to oppress, and to break, simply, when all is said and done, serve the purposes of God for us. So God does not cause but enslaves and uses all suffering for his glory and our joy.

So when the phone rings, when we enter into those seasons of difficulty, when suffering is no longer an idea but a day in which we're walking, a month in which we're walking, a year in which we are walking, the right play is not to rail against heaven but to wonder what God is up to. If you've ever read the first chapter of Job, it's this fascinating study on God's sovereign rule over the works of the Enemy.

Satan has to ask permission to mess with Job, and when God *gives* permission he puts parameters around it. When Job doesn't break, Satan comes back and says, "Hey, he didn't break because you put the parameters too tightly. Can you expand the parameters?" and then God says, "I'll expand the parameters, but here are new ones. You can't get beyond that."

Do you remember when Jesus says to Peter, "Satan has asked permission to sift you"? Don't run past that. Satan had to go, "Hey, Jesus, do you mind if I mess with Peter a little bit?" Jesus is like,

"That's going to serve my purposes. I'm going to grow him, deepen him. I'm going to encourage his heart, ultimately. So, yes, I'm going to give you permission, but here are the parameters."

Satan might be a lion seeking someone to devour, but he is on a leash. So when suffering occurs in the life of the saint, we don't rail our fist against the heavens; we ask some questions. "What is God up to? What is he revealing in me? What is he removing from me? What is he putting into me?"

I can look back on brain cancer and 18 months of high-dose chemotherapy and a resection of the right frontal lobe, and I can be grateful for it, because I can stand in front of you today and not in some sort of ethereal way but in a very practical way say that God meets us in that space of suffering in a way that is rich and kind and near to the brokenhearted, and he reveals some things about our blind spots in difficulty that are harder for us to see when everything is going our way.

Maybe this illustration would help. If you pick up a soaked or saturated sponge and squeeze the sponge, what's inside of the sponge comes out. In the same way, suffering, difficulty, loss, pain put pressure on the soul and lets us see all the more clearly what's actually inside of us, what's actually going on in there, and then gives us the best opportunity to repent and to cling to that thing with which we most desperately are in need. It is the kindness of God to wound us.

Again, this is not new stuff for us if you're a member. If you're a guest, this might be completely new, so forgive me. God never wields a club against his children. It's always a scalpel. But he does cut, he does remove, he does put in, and he never does so out of wrath. He always does it because of his kindness and mercy toward his children, always because he loves them. So it moves from this place of "Hey, sometimes the perfect gift is going to be difficulty."

Just in case you struggle with anxiety or fear, there's nothing you can do that gets you the perfect gift of more money and the promotion at work as opposed to the difficulty that moves you more and more into a desperate need for the things of God. You don't get to go, "If I just behave right or if I just have enough quiet times, then God will give me the good stuff and not the bad stuff." It's all good stuff if it moves us closer to him. Everything that moves the needle...

In fact, one of my favorite quotes is by Spurgeon. I know we're Baptist, but it's Spurgeon. He was a Baptist, and this is his quote. He essentially said, "God keeps his choicest wines in the cellar of affliction." I've always loved that quote. He struggled a lot with depression. He also said, "I have

learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages," which is far more articulate than me. I'm talking about puzzles and stuff.

Now look at the next line, because the next line kind of builds on our first line. You have this "Every good gift, every perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights." Remember, we're talking perfect gifts from a good Father who never changes. So now we need to get into this *good Father*. In this text he's called the *Father of lights*. These two phrases are connected in their idea. *Father of lights* is not mysterious. It's not ethereal. It's once again pointing to the nature and character of God himself.

These are the first words we ever hear God speak in our Bible. Genesis 1:3-4: "**And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.**" Here's what's interesting. If you've ever read Genesis, maybe you took note of this. The sun and the moon aren't created for a few more steps. You have light now illuminating the universe, but there is no sun. There is no moon. There are no stars. There's just light penetrating darkness, and God says, "The light is good. Darkness is bad."

The light that burst forth on the universe was the very presence in a tangible, manifest form for the universe to declare, see, and marvel at. God himself was the light. Then a few verses later you get the sun, then you get the moon, and moving forward, light is always associated with the presence and power of God made available to his people. If you think about it... We'll just do a quick run through the Bible.

How does God manifest in front of Moses? Is it not a burning bush, a bush that is on fire? Is not one of the plagues on the Egyptians utter darkness, a removal of light from people? When the tabernacle is built among the people of God, are there not 12 lampstands put in the tabernacle among the people of God, where God commands that those lamps should always burn, that those lamps should never go out, as a symbol of his presence among his people?

If we get our way into the Law and the Prophets, constantly, light is equated with righteousness and darkness is equated with a lack of righteousness or a rebellion against God. As we move into the New Testament, in the gospel of Matthew Jesus is heralded in his coming, that a people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

John loves the imagery of light, can't get off the imagery of light, specifically around Jesus. John says, **"In him was life, and the life was the light of men."** Then Jesus himself in John 8:12 says, **"Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"** Then my favorite, Revelation 21:22-25.

If you've been here through our *Advent* series, we talked a lot about the "already but not yet," this space where Christ has purchased for us life and forgiveness and has conquered sin and death, and yet it'll be at his second advent, the second coming of Jesus, that all of that is consummated. So we live in this space between, where joy will always be mixed with a little bit of sorrow. You celebrated Christmas this year, and many of us have that testimony. There was this great deal of joy, and then there was this sorrow.

There are still broken relationships around us. There are still sick people around us. There's still loss. There's still evil. We're still turning on our TV and seeing horrific things. There are still all sorts of things in our culture for us to mourn, and yet we rejoice not as those who are without hope as we wait on the second advent of Christ. Well, Revelation 21, the second advent has come. New heavens, new earth, new city Jerusalem, the new way of life, and here's what we read about it in Revelation 21:22-25:

"And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there."

What's it like when all things have been made new? Not only are there no more tears, no more disease, no more death, no Satan, no difficulty, no sorrow, no loss. All of the things, the former things forgotten. What else? No need for the sun, no need for a temple, and there will be no more night. Why? Because of the presence of God unfettered, unrestrained, the human soul set free into the fullness of what God purchased for them on the cross of Jesus Christ.

The physical body no longer needs to defend against disease, and all the energy given over to that is now given into worship of Jesus who is face-to-face with those who love him. This is hard to even get the mind around. No sun? No moon? No stars? No night? No need, because God himself will be their light. I love this sentence. I wish I could preach a whole thing on this sentence. **"...and there will be no night there."** That's just good.

I know we're like, "I don't sleep well without the night." Okay. You don't need to sleep. What is sleep here on earth except a reminder that you are not God? What is sleep except God showing you every 24-hour cycle that you are weak and unable? Do you know who doesn't sleep nor slumber? God. God is never like, "Okay, give me a minute. I have to lie down for a second." That never happens. That happens to you. It doesn't happen to him.

So we see now this *Father of lights*, how it's tied to the first phrase. You get perfect gifts and good gifts, and what is that perfect gift? It is reconciliation to God transferring out of darkness into light because of Jesus Christ, and then the ability, the capacity, because of the Holy Spirit, to dwell in his presence. We don't get saved by Jesus and then run off on our own strength. We get to abide in the strength of Christ via the Holy Spirit all the days of our lives.

We walk in the light as he is the light. That's what the Bible teaches about us. We become the lights of the world. He is the Light of the World. We reflect that light as we walk in his presence, invited into his presence. This is what the Bible says. "Boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence. Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden. Get in my presence." What does Jesus teach in John 15? "Abide in me, and I abide in you. For apart from me you can do nothing." What is it? It's "Get in here. Step out of the darkness and into the light, and then stay there."

Now how can we be confident that this good, perfect gift is actually doable? Well, we go to that last line there. **"...with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."** Theologically, this is called *immutability*. It's another aspect of God's holiness that sets him apart from us. He is wholly different than you and me in that he never changes. He never changes. You and I are constantly changing. The world we're in is constantly changing.

Everything about our experience and our existence is surrounded by change. If you have lived in this area long, it has changed. If you've lived in your body long, it has changed. We're giggling, but have you ever...? This is a weird thought. I'm just going to throw it out there. Do you realize that God doesn't have any parts, he's just God? We have parts. I'm 43. This right knee is starting to do weird things. I have a part here. It's changing. I don't like it. God doesn't have any parts.

Do you realize God has never matured? God has never had to look back on his early years and be like, "Man, I was a clown." I have to do that. God has never had to do that. God didn't make any 2017 resolutions, and he sure didn't make any 2018 ones. Do you know why? Because he doesn't change.

He's never imperfect. There's no space in which he grows. He is immutable. He never, ever changes, and that's where we want to build our lives, and that's the confidence in which we walk into 2018.

I have a great healthy marriage. I'm crazy about my wife. She is my best friend, a beautiful partner in ministry, but maybe we have some bumps coming this year. Do you know what won't change regardless? God, his grace, his mercy, and the life I've found in him. My children are all three healthy. They're vibrant. They're active. They're beautiful. They love us. They want to be around us.

You can giggle, but there comes a time where that's nothing short of miraculous. That could change in 2018. Do you know what won't? God's goodness, God's grace, God's sufficiency, God's salvation. We don't have any debt other than our mortgage. We are able to be generous. Now I can't guarantee that stays that way in 2018, but whether it does or not, God is good, God is on his throne, he never changes.

I continually get MRIs back that say that God has miraculously healed me from cancer. I might get one back in 2018 that says we're going to have to get back into the fight. God doesn't change in the middle of any of that news. I cannot ascribe to him goodness because of things I deem are blessings of pleasure, nor can I call him cruel for giving me the perfect gifts of difficulty and suffering at times. He is on high, and he never changes.

Now why is that such good news for us? Where men forget us or change their attitudes toward us because of some private interest of their own or our humanity shows, God never changes his mind. If I could simplify that, here's what I would say. There is an innate fear in all of us that our true humanity might be seen and, therefore, we be rejected. Let me talk about that.

Have you ever just for a brief moment lost your mind? You lost your mind at your spouse or you snapped at one of your kids and said something crazy. Not mean but, like, insane. Or maybe you were just by yourself and you were driving your car and you took something personally that was not personal, and you found things coming out of your mouth that you did not know was inside of you.

You just had these moments where you acted in such a way that you were like, "Oh my gosh. I can't believe that's in me." Anybody who would say, "Yeah, I've had that moment"? Now leave your hands up for a second. Look around at the people who are lying. Oh, really? Never, huh? A lot more hands went up after I said that. "Oh, yeah." By the way, that's an illustration of what I'm talking about.

We don't want to be seen as human. We're terrified of being seen as human, because if someone sees our humanity they might reject us. If someone sees our faults, if they see our shortcomings, if they see that we're not all together, then they might distance themselves from us because they see our humanity. This is why you are on your best behavior when other people are around and you're not, necessarily, if you're just at your house or in your car.

My guess is you've never freaked out at one of your kids in a group of friends out at dinner. You save that "I will choke the life out of you" for when no one is around. "Test me and see if I won't. You want me to pile up all your stuff in the front yard and catch it on fire? I don't think you do, do you?" That kind of craziness you save for when no one else is around. If you're at dinner with your Home Group, it's much more like this: "Timothy, will you sit down, please? Thank you. Son, please have a seat. Son..." It's like *that*, but at home it's like, "I will..."

You want to protect people from being able to see your humanity, but here's what's beautiful: God in his immutability has seen all of your humanity and has not distanced himself. He has drawn near, and that's where we get our confidence to keep getting back up, to keep leaning into the gospel, to keep following him with all of our hearts, because he's not going to change his mind concerning us, despite us.

Whereas we feel like we have to manage how other people perceive us, we have no secrets as far as he goes, and he just doesn't change, which leads me into the second thing that's such great news about God's immutability. God, because he never changes, is always receptive and always welcoming of his children's presence. His mood is always receptive.

Do you know who's *not* always receptive? You. Me. Again, let's talk about this. Everyone has that friend that when their phone rings they just know that's not a five-minute conversation. They have that friend that that's not a quick call. That's 45 or 50 minutes. It could have been three, but it's just not going to be that easy for you.

You're in the middle of doing something or you're heading somewhere and the phone rings and you see it's *that* person, and you are not receptive. It's not that you don't love them. It's not that you're not for them. It's just that you don't have 50 minutes. So, *bam!* You screen that mug or you hit "Can I call you back?" You hit something, but you are not receptive at that moment.

I'll out myself. I have found in my own household I could go to each of my children and my wife and just go, "Hey, everything okay? Can I do anything for you? Can I serve you in any way? No? Okay, good. Hey, Aud, anything I can do? Are you good? You doing well right now? What are your plans for today? Okay, great. Hey, Reid, you good? You hungry? No? Okay, Norah, you all right? Don't make any more slime. I can't do the glitter anymore. You have to stop doing the slime thing."

I could do all that. (Anybody else want to "amen" me on that? Is anybody else doing the slime thing in their houses right now? Praise God they have a craft, but, ugh.) Now in the middle of all of this, all it takes is for me to go, "Oh, okay. Everyone is good. Let me answer that email that has been hanging over my head for the last week." Open up the inbox, and the second I start to go, "Thank you for..." "Dad, have you seen my shoes?"

"I wear a size 13-1/2. You wear a 4. I don't know where your shoes are."

"Dad, can you make me a sandwich?"

"Hey, honey? What do you think about cleaning out the garage?"

All of a sudden, it's like a tractor beam of need the second I feel like I have this space to knock this thing out, so I am oftentimes not always receptive. Sorry to disappoint you if you thought Pastor Matt's house was Reid coming in and me going, "Son, the Spirit told me you were coming. What is it? I already made you a sandwich. Blessings." That is not how it always goes. There are times that I am not always receptive. There are times that you are not always receptive.

The immutability of God says that God rejoices over you today, rejoices in your presence today in the same way he did the very first moment you became a son or daughter of the King on high. You are his beloved, and he never cools on you. Isn't that crazy? Is this hard to believe? He just never cools on you, so his perfect gifts to you to draw you into his presence, to usher you into salvation, are always perfect in that it is his kindness to bless you with perfect gifts, ones that you would call good and ones that we might not *call* good but are perfectly good for us.

So here's my invitation at the cusp of 2018. You're going to have a lot of Tuesdays in 2018. You're going to have some high moments and some low moments, and you might, by the grace of God, have life-altering moments. I want to encourage you to step into all that God has for you in Jesus Christ.

How do we do that? I want to encourage you all the more to put yourself in situations where your affections for Jesus Christ might be stirred.

If you think in terms of affection rather than resolution, then we really set ourselves up to experience all that God has for us in Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Well, we have some mechanisms for that, but we always need the Holy Spirit to blow into it. How do you cultivate affections for Jesus? Well, we know in the Scriptures that that involves community, being known by others in a way that we are built up and encouraged in our faith.

We know that always involves an understanding of God as he has revealed himself in the Word. That's a growing understanding of the Word of God. We know it always involves worship, that we are to be a singing, glad-hearted people. How do we give ourselves all the more over in 2018 for affection-stirring activity that incites our hearts with greater zeal for Jesus? All good things flow out of abiding in Christ and enjoying Christ and loving Christ.

Having resolutions that are mechanical aren't the same thing as giving ourselves over to develop greater affections for Jesus. So my question would be...*What does it look like for you to be far more serious than you are today about cultivating a love relationship with Jesus Christ?* If you go, "I just want to learn more Bible," that's a good thing, but it's not the best thing. The best thing is "How do I cultivate a love relationship with Jesus Christ?" Oh, I throw the logs of the Word of God onto the fire of that love and let that fire grow.

"I'm going to be more disciplined in prayer." Okay, how has that been working for you the last 30 years? How about, instead, we cultivate a love for Jesus Christ, acknowledging that we have direct access to the Father and that he actually likes to hear from us? He's the Father of lights. He's a good Father. He loves. He's always receptive to the pursuit of his children.

It's one thing to go, "I'm going to get up at this time and go to bed at this time," and I'm all for that stuff. If you could see my little rule of life planning sheet for 2018 you would realize the level of nerddom I'm walking in right now, but what I want you to give yourself over to is a serious pursuit of cultivating affections for Jesus Christ, growing in your desire to worship him, growing in an earnest desire to just be in his presence.

That always involves community, always involves the Word of God, and always involves prayer. We have mechanisms that can help with this, but you have to lean into this as a man or woman saved by

the grace of God, ushered into the presence of God. A lot of Tuesdays and perfect gifts coming your way in 2018. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for my brothers and sisters in this place and those who you might by your grace usher into being our brothers and sisters. We ask that in your mercy and in your kindness you would awaken our souls all the more.

As we read even as we started our service here in Flower Mound out of the book of Ephesians, "Awake, O sleeper, and rise," that you might awaken our spirits, that you might embolden our hearts, that you might increase our capacity to worship, to love, to have true affection for you, to long to be in your presence, to more fully surrender to your reign and rule in our lives.

God, I just pray against nominal, weak, "box-check" religion. We long to be more than just Southern conservatives. We want to be new, made alive, that in you is the light of life. So we ask... Shine your light on us. Drive out darkness. Establish in our hearts zeal for you as you've revealed yourself to us in your Word. Embolden us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.