

## Base Camp | Take the Next Peak: Healthy Culture

Aaron Brockett | Acts 15:1-20

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Happy Labor Day weekend. Are you guys good? I want to welcome you if this happens to be your first time or maybe your first time in a long time to be in church. My name is Aaron. I'm one of the pastors here. I hope to get a chance to meet you sometime soon.

For those of you here at Northwest, there are a whole bunch of people joining us on the other side of the camera. So can we put our hands together and give them a big shout out? So we want to welcome our church family at North, Downtown, West, and anyone who may be tuning in online. There are usually about 1,000 of you every weekend watching online. There might be a few more, given it is Labor Day weekend. Wherever you are joining us from, we are so thrilled to have you.

We are about half way through this series called *Base Camp* and if you're kind of coming into this for the first time, this is your first time to be with us, we are unpacking the seven values we have as a church.

And our values are different than our mission. We have a mission as a church. It's not something we came up with. Jesus gave it to us. Some of you are familiar with the passage that can be found. It is Matthew 28. Jesus said to us: I want you to go and make disciples everywhere you go. That's our mission.

We want to not just have a general belief that there is a God somewhere, but we want to trust Jesus. And the thread that's kind of been woven through every week of this series is that believing in God and trusting Jesus are two different things. Just because you believe in God doesn't mean you fully trust Jesus in every area of your life.

I want to introduce you to Him and I want you to learn to trust Him, to really believe what Jesus says is good, right, and true. You can trust Him with your life. As you begin to follow Him, you're going to live your life in such a compelling way that others are going to be intrigued by that, they're going to ask questions, and they're going to want to know what you have. You can introduce them to Jesus as well. It's called making disciples, and it's our mission as a church. It's what we're striving for.

Our values are different. Our values help get us there. So if the mission is the what, then the values are the how. We've been using this analogy of mountain climbing, base camp. So if I could maybe use this analogy, the values are the tools that are in our packs, so to speak, to help us in accomplishing this mission.

I've said our value statements are not just true for us corporately as a church, but that our

values should help you. They should be practical in helping you grow as a follower of Jesus. What that means, and the reason we preach through these every couple of years, and the reason they are hanging on the wall isn't because they are true for us as a church, but when you take these values and apply them to your life, you begin to grow as a Christ follower.

So we've just been working our way through them one at a time. We've got a few left. If you were here last weekend, or if you weren't and you caught it online, you might have noticed I got a little emotional. I got a little choked up in the message. It was not planned. It came out of left field and sort of blindsided me a little bit.

In fact, I had a number of you come up to me this last week or you emailed me and said, "You know, Aaron, can you settle a debate for us we had at lunch? There were half of us at the table who thought you were crying, and there were half of the table who thought you were tired. Which is it?" So I just want to clear that up. The answer is neither. I had something in my eye, both of them, every single service.

Actually I did, I got a little choked up. The reason why is because what we talked about last week is something I feel a great deal about. In fact, there have been a number of times over the past 20 or so years of fulltime vocational ministry, ever since I stepped into this, there have maybe been... Like I love what I do and I love who I get to do it with. But there have maybe been two or three occasions in the last 20 years I wanted to quit.

I'm not talking like Monday-morning quit. I'm talking like I really want to quit. I just want to walk away, wave the white flag. I don't think I'm being effective enough. I don't know if I've got what it takes. I don't know if the criticism is worth it. But the thing that keeps me in it, almost every single time is what I talked about last week.

If you missed it, we talked about this guy named Matthew who was a tax collector in the first century. It's almost impossible for us to understand how hated and despised they were. They cheated people out of money, and people just despised them. And yet that was one of the guys Jesus chose to be part of His inner crew. And Jesus said: Listen, I want you to follow me Matthew. And Matthew does.

So Matthew is fresh out of the baptistery, he's got his all-in tee shirt on. He is excited and raring to go. The very first thing Matthew decides to do is he decides to throw a party at his house for his former colleagues and drinking buddies. That way they can rub shoulders with Jesus because he wants them to know the Jesus he knows. I love Matthew's heart.

We talked last week about how each campus, every single weekend, we want to create an environment that looks and feels more like a Matthew party than it does a Bible study for Pharisees. We want to foster, develop, and guard the kind of warm, welcoming environment around here that will magnify the message of God's incredible grace that none of us deserve as opposed to permitting the kind of toxic, cold, you should be ashamed of yourself, why don't you get your act together like the rest of us kind of environment that ends up muting the

message of that incredible grace.

And it struck a nerve with many of us. And I'm glad that it did. My email traffic tripled this week. It was all positive so far. Many of you were just sharing your heart with me saying, "We feel that way too," or "Wow, we needed that reminder."

I shared with you the fact that I had a friend who visited two of our campuses this past summer. She and her husband serve in a great church that is in another state. She just came in through the eyes of a secret-shopper kind of deal. She shared with us a whole bunch of great things that are going on at our campuses, but she shared some things that are pretty sobering. I read a few of them last weekend.

And really, the big idea is that as we've grown and as we've added these other campuses, I think it's easy for us to assume that it's somebody else's job or the church is something else. The church isn't really me. I don't own it and somebody else will take care of it.

She just basically pointed out that we could be friendlier than we are; that we could be warmer than what we are. We don't want to send a different message with our body language than the message of the gospel that is coming from the stage. We all need to own that and step up to it. It's not that it's bad; it's that we need to be better. We need to be reminded. I know I do all the time.

So the value we're going to look at today is a continuation of last week's value. In fact, these two kind of go hand in hand. Last week was **Outstanding Environment** and this week is **Healthy Culture**. Here's what we mean.

Healthy Culture: we will stay **humble and hungry** as we relentlessly focus on accomplishing the mission together.

So I've already identified what the mission is, and we want to stay humble and hungry as we seek to accomplish this together at all of our campuses. We say humble because we don't think we have arrived. We don't think we're all that. We are not impressed with ourselves, we recognize how completely dependent upon God's grace each and every one of us really are. And anything good that comes out of our church or anything we accomplish together is directly connected to God. He gets all the credit and all the glory. We want to stay humble.

But hungry—because our job is far from over. Jesus has not yet returned, so He says: Listen, I want you to stay passionate. I want you to lean in. There is still so much to do. There is still so much hurt, brokenness, and pain in this world. And My answer is the church.

There are thousands of people who are disconnected in our city, and billions around the world. So we're going to continue to lean in. We are not going to take our foot off the gas pedal. We're going to continue to plant churches, start campuses, and no that new tee shirt is not a code as to where the next one is. A few of you have asked. You've got way too much time on your

hands.

We want to equip parents to be disciplers of their kids, because they're the best disciplers of their kids and you don't outsource that to the church. We want to pour into the next generation of leaders. We want to extend hope, bind up wounds, pray for marriages, defend the defenseless, care for widows, feed the hungry, push back darkness with light, and charge hell with a water pistol. That's what we want to do. Hey, that's not a bad Labor Day clap. Thanks. Thanks for that.

What I mean is there is never going to come a time on this side of eternity where we're going to give each other a high five, chest bump, or a bro hug and say, "We did it." We continue to have more ahead of us to do.

So let me define what I mean by the word culture.

Culture: the beliefs, behaviors, and customs that a group of people accept, generally without thinking about them; **that shapes who we are and how we will interact.**

That's kind of the formal definition of culture. All of us grew up in a culture or we are immersed in a culture, and we usually do not fully understand the kind of culture we're immersed in until we get outside of it.

And so if you've ever gotten on an airplane for the first time and gone to a different country, you know what I'm talking about. There is a term they use—culture shock, when you find yourself in a different culture.

So the culture we live in is largely invisible to us until we get outside of it. I grew up in southwest Missouri in this town called Joplin. It's a great place to grow up. Many of you have been there so many of you know. But there are a few cultural oddities to where I grew up, and I had no idea until I moved out and then I was able to see them.

There's a long list I could describe to you, but people from Joplin watch so I won't. But I'll maybe point out a couple of them. I love Chinese food. I'm a big Chinese food fan. But southwest Missouri has its own brand of Chinese food and I had no idea. They cut the chunks of chicken into blocks and deep fat fry it, and then smother it in gravy. It's delightful. But it's not what I would imagine the Chinese people thought of when they invented cashew chicken. That's just not what they thought. I didn't realize that until I had moved away. Everyone in Joplin refers to carbonated beverages as pop instead of the God-ordained soda. So there are just a lot of cultural oddities.

The same thing is true of church. It's like, if you've grown up in church or have been in church I would say for any length of time beyond a year, the culture largely becomes invisible to you. It just sort of becomes expected. Periodically we need to look at it through the lens of an outsider, or somebody who doesn't yet believe, or someone who is coming into it for the first

time to see where we need to get better.

We see this in the book of Acts. We have been studying the book of Acts every single week. So pull out a Bible app if you have one and get to Acts 15. If you want to get on our church app you can click on the live notes and all the passages and the main points will be right in front of you on your device. You can interact with it and take your own notes.

Last week we looked at Acts 4 where we saw the culture of the first century church, and it was great. Things like unity, compassion, and generosity, the early church had. But you have to be intentional about those things to get there, and then you have to be intentional about maintaining it. And by the time we get to chapter 15 of the book of Acts, all that healthy culture was being threatened.

So to help you understand what is going on, what we're going to read is about 20 years after Jesus' resurrection. So the church has about 20 years of history under its belt so far. And some of you know this, it will just be review. But for others this may be new information.

In the first century the early followers of Jesus were all ethnic Jews. So that meant they had a Jewish Bible, it was the Old Testament Scriptures. They had Jewish customs and a Jewish diet. Jesus Himself was a Jew. Therefore it made perfect sense to the Jewish people in the first century that if you wanted to be a Jesus follower, then you needed to become Jewish first.

So the message was not: You're saved by grace through faith alone. The message was: You are saved by grace through faith and... And, memorize these 600 laws. And, go to the temple regularly. And, abide by these Jewish customs. And, have a little surgical procedure. And the Gentiles, their eyes are about as big as saucers: You've got to be kidding me. We had no idea.

And the Jewish believers were like: We know it's inconvenient. We know it's uncomfortable. We know it's a little awkward, but we've been doing this our entire lives. It's time for you to step up, Gentiles. That's what was going on. And it was creating this division in the early church that was creating sort of a toxic vibe to their culture.

Look at what it says in verse 1 of Acts 15. "While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch," and Antioch was actually where a whole bunch of Gentiles were hanging out, "of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the believers:" so they were already believers. They had placed their faith in Jesus. "Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses," and notice how definitive this is, "you **cannot be saved.**"

Now it's one thing to recommend something. They could have recommended circumcision. They could have recommended some of these things. But to require them for salvation is an additional thing they're attaching to what Jesus died to give to everybody.

And Peter and Barnabas had a significant problem with this. Look at what it says in verse 2, how they reacted. "Paul and Barnabas **disagreed with them**, arguing vehemently."

So they recognize what is at stake. They decide to have this meeting in Jerusalem. This is actually one of the very first congregational meetings the church ever had. If you grew up in church you know congregational meetings aren't usually a whole lot of fun. This is the first one. This is the first one that ever happened. They're going to talk about this issue, and there is a lot at stake.

And the results of this meeting will determine the future of the church. It is not too dramatic to say that. The result of their conclusions at this gathering as to whether or not they should include the Gentiles by grace through faith will determine whether or not the church will ever get outside of Jerusalem, and expand to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

The result of this discussion, I don't think it's too melodramatic to say, would determine whether or not there would be a Traders Point Christian Church here in 2017. Look at what goes down starting in verse 6.

“So the apostles and elders met together to **resolve this issue**. At the meeting, after a **long discussion**,” so this meeting went many, many hours, “Peter stood and addressed them as follows: ‘Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles **so that** they could hear the good news and believe.’”

Now, some of you might remember this. We covered this in week one. In Acts 10 Peter goes to the house of this guy named Cornelius to share the gospel. This is what he is referring to.

Verse 8, “God knows people’s hearts, and He confirmed that He accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for He **cleansed their hearts through faith**. So **why are you now challenging God** by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? We believe that we are all saved the same way, **by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.**”

May we never forget that, that alone right there should be a culture shaping statement.

At the end of that speech, at the end of that meeting, there is this guy named James who stands up. James is a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church so his words carry a lot of weight. James also happened to be the half brother of Jesus.

So just imagine the stories he could share. Jesus is like: James, we don't need to share that in church. We don't need to talk about tipping the neighbors' camel. Let's just not do that. It's not helpful. Just imagine what James could share.

James stands up, and I love what James says and this informs our culture as a church. Verse 19, “And so my judgment is that we **should not make it difficult** for the Gentiles who are turning to God. **Instead**, we should write and **tell them to abstain** from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming

blood.”

Now this right here was a culture-defining statement. When James says, “We should not make it difficult,” it might be tempting for us to assume that what he means is that we should make it easy, that we should sort of water things down, or lower the bar so as to attract more people to our church. But that’s not what James is saying. If you notice in verse 20, James says, “Instead, we should tell them to abstain from some things,” and I’ll unpack what he means by that here in a moment.

But you might kind of read that and say, “Okay James, what are you saying here? It kind of sounds like you’re talking out of both sides of your mouth. We shouldn’t make it difficult, but you’re also asking them to abstain from some things.”

Let me try to be as clear as I can. Here is what James is saying. Since we are all saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus, there isn’t anything we can do to earn it or be made worthy of it. Salvation can’t be worked for. You’re not born into it. It’s not inherited. You can’t re-up it, like HOA dues. It’s a gift that’s been given to you and me by a gracious God who loves you, and it’s been secured for you by the shed blood of Jesus when He defeated death and walked out of a grave.

Therefore, we should not make salvation any more difficult or convoluted than that. So what that meant for them is that they should not burden the Gentiles by adding anything to it, requiring anything else for salvation. So circumcision, it’s not required. Jewish practices? Not required. Maybe recommended, but not required, because that’s a barrier.

Now for us today it’s a different set of issues. It’s not those issues, but it’s other things. And we should not burden anyone who isn’t yet sure of what they believe, who didn’t grow up in church, or who has got some questions and reservations. Maybe they’ve had a bad church experience in their past, so now they’re slowly trying to rebuild trust. Anyone who walked in here on their last leg, so to speak, looking for hope, we should not burden them by making it any more difficult than it ever should be—placing barriers in the path that would get them to Jesus.

I want you to hear me really clearly, and somebody needs to hear this today. There isn’t anyone who is outside of God’s grace and Jesus’ reach. Nobody. And some of you, some of you just really need to hear it. And some of you might be like, “Yeah, I know that.” No, I want you to feel it. There’s nobody outside of God’s grace and Jesus’ reach. You’re not damaged goods. You’re not too far gone.

And maybe the words you need to hear more than anything else from a loving God is just these two simple, disarming words that might surprise you. It’s just these words right here: I know. You don’t need to keep faking it. You don’t need to keep wearing the mask. You don’t need to keep running away. I know.



I know you're hurting. I know about the abuse you experienced as a child that you don't want anyone to know about. I know about the neglect. I know where your thoughts go when no one else is around. I know about the depression. I know you feel guilty when you promise Me you're never going to do that thing again, and you end up doing that thing. I know you feel alone, tired, and bored. I know you wonder if you truly have what it takes. I know you wonder if you're ever going to find the one, or if you'll ever find the one again.

I know you say you don't believe, but I'm still here. I know about the addiction. I know about the little white lies. I know you still have his number in your phone. I know you're hiding that fifth of liquor in the floorboard. I know about the tattoo—no, the other one. I know you're hurting. I know you're upset. I know you feel betrayed. I know when you walk in here you're on your guard. I know.

And none of that can keep you from God. You are loved. You are accepted. You have a purpose. There is hope. There is hope and that hope has a name. His name is Jesus. This isn't just a feeling. This isn't just a vague belief in a God somewhere. His name is Jesus, and He tells you definitively who He is and how you can be reconciled to God.

You see, here is the deal. We live in a world where man looks at outward appearance and **makes an assumption about your condition**. Isn't that true? Have you ever walked into a room and immediately felt judged? Immediately felt like people were sizing you up and automatically putting you in a category? Sure you have. We all have.

Have you ever done that? Yeah, I have. We've all done it if we're being honest. We have a tendency to look at peoples' outside appearances, the color of their skin, what they are wearing, how they carry themselves, and their personality. We just automatically make some assumptions. But here's what's fundamentally different about God. God looks at the heart and makes an announcement about your status.

And what it says here in the passage, James stands up and says: God looks at the heart, and makes an **announcement about your status**. What is the status? Well, you are an adopted child of God. You've been grafted into the family by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. You are loved.

And the culture of a church gets really, really toxic when we forget about this. When we forget about our own adoption and we start walking around like we are entitled to it. We sort of close the door behind us and say, "I got in by grace, but you need to work for it." When we make it difficult for anyone to see, hear, and experience that announcement, then our culture goes bad really fast.

But I want to be really clear about this. Not making it difficult to come to Jesus does not mean, and will never mean that we're going to make it easy like we're going to water it down, lower the bar so as not to offend and to grow our church. That's not what it means.

James handles that tension so, so well. I've used this analogy before of a rubber band. A rubber



band is only useful when there is tension on it. When you let the tension go from the two points, the rubber band is just this floppy piece of rubber. It doesn't do anyone any good. But when you pull on it, that's when it's useful. And the tension points for us are grace and truth.

You can be loved as you are, but we're also going to communicate truth. Not because we think we've got it all together, because we don't, but there is a Jesus who does and we want you to know Him. And James comes in verse 20 and says: Listen, we should not make it difficult, but instead we should tell them to abstain from some things.

Now three of the things he mentions are all related to Jewish practices and convictions. Basically, what James is saying to the Gentiles in Antioch is: Listen, you may not need to participate in some of these Jewish practices but you need to be mindful of the fact that you've got brothers and sisters in Christ who are Jewish and they have those convictions. Just be mindful of that.

Then he talks about abstaining from sexual immorality, which is just good for all of us. Have you ever noticed this? Our culture celebrates sexual liberty until you mess up, and then it crucifies you. And James is saying: This isn't to ruin your fun. This is for your good.

He says: Don't make it difficult, but we'll also tell you to abstain from some things. There will be a bar here. And listen. I think a lot of people hear the message of grace, and maybe you've heard it here—we receive you as you are and you're saved by grace. And maybe you've begun to think, "That means Jesus accepts anyone and everyone, and God loves me as I am, so sin really isn't that big of a deal. Or, there really is no such thing as a sin. Even if it does exist, it really doesn't matter because grace will cover it at the end of the day. God will forgive, so I don't really need to worry about changing anything or getting it out of my life."

But I want you to know that authentic, safe, grace-filled me-too kind of a church culture means this is a Matthew party, this is a safe place for you to come and rub shoulders with Jesus, and then allow the Spirit of God to do what only the Spirit of God can do—I mentioned it last week, to dig into the soil of our hearts, bring conviction, and reveal some things we either are not aware of or we simply have not wanted to face, and get it out of the soil of our hearts so our lives can bear fruit.

When Lindsay and I were first married, the first house we rented was a little fixer upper. The couple who lived in it prior to us did not take care of it, not inside or out. The day we moved in it was so filthy. We had to rip up the carpet and put new carpet in. We had to get a power washer and power-wash the walls on the inside of the kitchen. It was just in that bad of shape.

The yard was in equally that bad of shape. It was just dirt and weeds. There was nothing growing in it. So I started putting that Turf Builder fertilizer stuff on it. Nothing was happening. No grass was growing. So I ended up renting a tiller and I started tilling up the yard, and pretty quickly I learned why the yard wasn't growing any grass. I was digging up all kinds of stuff from the soil. There were beer cans, bottle rockets, trash, Lynyrd Skynyrd tee shirts. It was like Ricky

Bobbie lived there before us.

And I was like, “Oh, this is why the fertilizer and the water wasn’t working.” There were some things under the surface I couldn’t see that had to come out first before anything would grow.

The same thing is true for the human heart. And some of us have maybe kind of hit a wall. True love is not, “You’re so great, so great, so great, just keep doing what you’re doing.” Sometimes true love hurts. But it’s not like a hack saw. It’s like a surgeon’s scalpel. It’s designed for your good.

We want you to feel loved. We want the barriers to come down. We want you to build some trust, so the spirit of God alone can dig into the soil of your heart, and if there’s anything toxic in there God’s like: I want to remove that. I want to get that out of the soil of your heart so your life can begin to produce fruit.

So when you hear me say we want to remove barriers that keep people from Jesus, that does not mean (and it will never mean) that this is a place to overlook the things God wants to reveal in your life and in mine, and call out the sin only He can do anything about. It does not mean you can safely keep on sinning because God accepts you and will always bail you out by grace. That’s not what it means.

In fact, Paul addresses this so well in Romans 6:1-4 after explaining the gospel when he says, “Well then, should we keep on sinning **so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace?**” Do you see the logic? If God gives us grace when we sin, and grace is a good thing, why don’t we keep on sinning so we get more of a good thing?

And then he answers his own hypothetical question in verse 2, “Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death?” That’s why we immerse people under water. It’s symbolic of being buried with Christ and coming up as a new person. It says in verse 4, “For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, **now we also may live new lives.**”

So here is the equation we talk a lot about as a staff that I want you to be aware of:

environments + content = healthy culture.

If we have a warm environment and we’ve got substantial content from God’s Word, that’s going to equal a healthy culture. It’s not just grace, grace, grace because there is a message that needs to be communicated. And it’s not just truth, truth, truth because there are people who need to be loved, and their wounds need to be bound up first.

So I just want you to know: We assume guests are in the room.

We assume guests are in the room. I am amazed at times how so many churches just don't acknowledge that there may be a guest joining them for the very first time. I'm always thinking of that. I'm always going to teach from God's Word, but unapologetically I am teaching with the guest in mind first.

I'm teaching with that person who is far from Jesus in mind first, not because I want to neglect the needs of other Christ followers, and not because I'm not interested in you growing deeper. I'm just saying this is the very heart of Jesus. He came to seek and to save the lost.

You know if Lindsay and I were to have you over for a meal at our house, I would want you to know our house would never look better. If you were to come over to our house, we would hide all the Lynyrd Skynyrd tee shirts, the landscaping would look pristine, there would be no laundry in the living room, and there would be no moldy food on the kitchen counter, because if all that stuff was there, you'd walk in and go, "You obviously weren't expecting me." Or, "You really don't care." We'd make sure our house was comfortable so you would feel comfortable coming into our home.

When we would prepare a meal we would prepare it with you in mind. Our kids would eat it too, and they would probably object ahead of time and say, "Why don't we have this instead?" And my answer to my kids is always, "You are loved. You are part of the family. You will always be here. You will always receive nutrients, but right now you need to pick up a dish and serve." That's what I'm going to say to my kids.

And I would say to those of you who consider Traders Point your home and those of you who have been following Jesus for a long time, listen, I want to feed you but the best way for you to grow deeper is to invite someone to get to know Jesus. You are only as deep as the last person you introduced to Jesus.

We're not going to water anything down. We're not going to lower the standards by any stretch of the imagination. But I'm going to teach to that person who doesn't yet know Him. I'm going to teach with that person in mind first. I want to teach in such a way that you would have a curiosity and even a confidence to go and read the Bible on your own.

The way I would teach it would not impress you with my knowledge of it or confuse you with the nuances of it. But that you would walk away and say, "That was significant, but it was simple. I understood it and I know how to apply it to my life. And you know what? I want to start reading the Bible on my own as well."

Here are a few questions we are asking as a staff. This is what I want to cover as we wrap up. I just want you to be aware of these because you are our church. Here is the first question. When it comes to someone visiting with us for the first time,

What did they **see**?

So someone coming into one of our campuses, right from the moment they pull into any of our campuses, even if it is a portable setup like it is at West right now, we want to send a message, “We were expecting you.” We won’t assume you know where to go. We’re going to have people in the parking lot directing you. We’re going to have signage. The Kid’s Ministry is going to look clean and inviting.

What do they see when they look around? Do they see somebody who is like them? Do they see diversity in the room? because we want to be as diverse as heaven will one day be. That’s not a politically correct statement, that’s a biblically correct statement.

Here’s the second question.

What did they **hear**?

What did they hear in the parking lot? What did they hear in the hallways? What did they hear on stage? Did they hear that message of grace and truth? How about this? What do they hear out in the community?

We’ve thought about this a lot. When anybody hears the name Traders Point Church in our city, I don’t want them to think, “I know where that church is. I’ve heard about that. I have a friend who goes there.” I want them to think, “I’m so thankful that church exists in our city. I go to a different church, I don’t go there. I don’t believe what they believe or value what they value. But you know what? I’m really glad Traders Point exists in Indianapolis because of the needs they meet and the influence they have in our community.” That’s what I would like people to think of when they hear about our church.

So I want you to represent this church well in our city. One of the things I’d like to ask you to do is grab one of these stickers and put it on the back of your car. This is my truck. We’ve got these at Connection Central if you want to grab one of these. I know some of you right away dismiss this and say, “Aaron, I’m not going to do that. That’s not my thing,” you’ve told me. You’ve told me you don’t want to do this. Some of you are like, “Aaron, I’m aggressive on the road. I have a lot of road rage and I don’t want anybody knowing I’m a Christian.” I get that. I get that. God’s got some work to do in the soil.

Hey I know this kind of sounds gimmicky to some of you, and it used to feel that way to me. Here’s the reason I slapped one on the back of my truck. Just imagine there are a bunch of these all over the city and somebody comes up to you in the Meijer parking lot, or you get pulled over by a police officer. What if they were to say, “I’ve been seeing those all over town!” what in the world is that?”

And it gives you an opportunity, a natural invitation to church or to talk about the Jesus you know. I know for some of you that’s not your thing. But if it is your thing, grab one of those at Connection Central and slap it on the back of your car.

Here's another question.

What did they **experience**?

Was it genuine? Authentic? Friendly? Did they need to initiate, or did we initiate with them?  
Here's another question.

What did they **feel**?

Did they feel welcomed and acknowledged?

I love this email I got from a lady this past week, and I just want to read an excerpt of it. She said, "Aaron, I was so convicted by the message this past week. It is the heart of our church that draws people. And the message is certainly a big part of that, but if we are indifferent and unwelcoming, I know I wouldn't come back."

I love her heart. She said, "Would you please pray I wouldn't miss another opportunity to be kind, warm, and welcoming to another visitor?" I really appreciate her. Here is the last question.

What's my next **step**?

How do I get connected around here? How do I be known? How do I grow in relationship with Jesus? Ninety-nine percent of the time it's going to be to get in a group, to get in a smaller environment. Because right now we're all sitting in rows, and this is important. Something significant happens here but life transformation doesn't happen best in rows. It happens in circles. And you can get in somebody's living room or a coffee house. You can get face to face with somebody and we want you to get into a group, to be invested in somebody's life.

So I want to wrap up with this passage that's one of my favorites. I think we might do a sermon series on this next year, this very passage. Out of 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 Paul writes, "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself through Christ." We've already talked about this. It's the gospel message.

Now notice what he says here, "**And God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him.** For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And He gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. **So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making His appeal through us.** We speak for Christ when we plead, 'Come back to God!'"

If I could take those two sentences and kind of say, "This is how I want the culture of our church to be defined," it would be those two sentences right there. We are Christ's representatives and we've never forgotten what He has given to us. And now God is making His appeal through

our words, our lives, and our actions so that others can come to know God as well.

So listen, our church is not the buildings, it is not the website, it is not the people on stage. Our church is you. And I know that oftentimes you don't think of it that way because you've got another fulltime job and a busy family and all that. There is no such thing as the peanut gallery here. You are the church. We want to take this mission and we want to take it into where we live, work, and play.

Father, we come to You right now and we thank You for Your love and Your grace and this message that we never, ever want to get tired of hearing or forget to live out.

Father, I pray that if there are some listening to this right now who are searching for some hope and looking for some answers, that maybe today they would be in this place, this position where they are ready to trust You and to give their lives to You.

I pray they would know they could do that right where they are seated, just acknowledge they've got some things in the soil of their heart they need You to reveal to them, some sin they need to confess. And they just want to begin to trust You as Lord and Savior and follow you in every area of their life.

And I pray that they find someone. Maybe there is somebody they came with, maybe there is someone they can meet here down front, a prayer counselor or a pastor, that they could just share with and somebody to pray with them about that decision.

God, we want to be a people who reconcile others to You. So, do that through us. And may we never ever forget that we don't deserve it, but You've given it to us graciously. And we ask the in Jesus' name. Amen.

Just in our remaining moments together we're going to do this thing called communion, which is a piece of bread and a cup of juice that represent the body and the blood of Jesus. And I just want you to spend a few moments reflecting. Take it in your own time. If you're not a follower of Jesus or maybe your heart is just not in it today, just feel free to let it pass. That's totally fine.

But just spend a few moments just thinking about what message God wants you to hear, what you want to take from this, what you need to do with it. After a few moments our team will come out and lead us in another song. So ushers, you can come now as we spend this moment allowing God to work on our hearts.