

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

HEART SURGERY | SHOULDERS OF SAINTS

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Well, it's good to be with everybody today.

We are in week two of this series called Shoulders of Saints. And if you missed it last week, the big idea behind this is that every single one of us, regardless of who we are, needs somebody at some point in our lives—actually at various points in our lives—who will choose to believe in us before we believe in ourselves. Somebody to call out something in us before we can see it in ourselves. Somebody to give us an opportunity to step into something before we are ready to step into it. And we not only need that one time; we need it through various times in our life.

I remember one of the first times for me that I was aware that this was happening was when I was in the 5th grade. I was on the 5th and 6th grade basketball team. We were playing a tournament in a neighboring town. The coach of that team was a friend of mine's dad, who was a real prominent leader in the community. And we just thought really highly of him, a lot of respect for him.

I was sitting on the bench next to him. He put his arm around me and said, "Aaron, I want you to get ready to go into the game." And I asked him a question. I don't really know why I asked him the question. But as soon as I asked him I regretted it. I said, "Could I go in a play point guard?"

Now, there is a reason why I should have never, ever played point guard. But, in my mind I thought—I'm in 5th grade—that is the guy who seems to have all of the action. He dribbles the ball a lot, he gets to run the floor, I'd like to try that and see if I could do it.

I should have never, ever, ever been allowed to play point guard. That's just not my thing. But there are a couple of ways you can figure out whether you should play point guard and one of them is trying it.

I'll never forget. Like I said I regretted it as soon as I asked it. And I was expecting him to say, "No." Unfortunately because—I don't know if this is funny or not—at that point in my life most adults told me no. Maybe that's why I'm in counseling right now. I don't know.

So, it was like, I asked the question. I thought he was going to turn me down and say, "No." But, instead he looked at me—and now all these years later I know what he was doing. He looked right at me, and he said, "You want to play point guard?" And I was like, "Yeah?" And he goes, "Go in and play point guard."



That's a good leader. He knew this wasn't the NCAA final four. This was a 5th grade basketball tournament. And so, he said, "Hey, I want you to go in." Now, I don't remember how the game turned out. I would imagine, not well. But I learned something that day. And what he was doing was he was inviting...

Every single one of us will need to stand on the shoulders of someone else to give us an opportunity to believe in us before we are ready to be believed in, to open up—figuratively speaking—doors to rooms that we didn't have access to.

We see this all over the pages of Scripture. We see Moses investing into a leader named Joshua, gradually giving him more responsibility so that he was prepared to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land in Deuteronomy 31. This is Elijah finding Elisha plowing in the fields and he throws his cloak over him in 1 Kings 19, which was a symbolic act inviting him to become his successor.

And I want that for you. Whoever you are. By the way, however old you are. Young or not so young. I want you to have an opportunity to get into the game, to see what it is that God is calling you to do in and through your life. I want you to give that opportunity to as many people as possible, understanding the power of speaking words of blessing and encouragement over someone else.

And, by the way, recognize that we are all in desperate need of it. All of us are thirsty and hungry. I don't know how many people I'm praying with right now where they are just like, "I feel like God's got me at a crossroads and I'm praying for direction for my life, what is it that He wants for me?" I believe that God is stirring all of this up in us and we need one another.

So, I would even say this to you. If you have a prompting of the Holy Spirit to encourage people, don't bypass that prompting. You just take action on it right then and there. And if your thumbs are cramping up from texting, send an audio text. I find that to be even more personable. It's like, "You know what? You came to mind today. And I don't even know if you need this or not," chances are they do, and you say, "I just want to speak a word of encouragement into your life," or "blessing into your life."

We live in an age of chronic anxiety. Do you know what that means? It means anxiety is settled in and we are all in fight or flight. We're all anxious. We're all on guard. We live in this cancel culture and what we need now more than ever is the church of Jesus Christ to be a light and actually begin to speak words of blessing and to pull people up rather than pushing them down.

This is the way that our church has existed for nearly 200 years. And it is the only way we will exist, if Jesus carries, for another 200 years. Now is our time to pass the baton of



the light of Jesus Christ on to future generations who are going to take it further and faster and be more effective than we've ever been.

In other words, what Awaken is about is saying: Now is our time. I want you to get in the game and play point guard. I want you to step out in faith, whether that's in vocational ministry or the marketplace and say, "Now is the time for me to live as a representative of Jesus' kingdom coming." It's what the world needs now more than ever.

If you weren't here last week, I want to invite you to our Awaken page. You can find it at this link behind me, [vision.tpcc.org](http://vision.tpcc.org), you can check out the vision video on the front page. We are at the mid-point of a two-year generosity initiative—we started a year ago—called Awaken. Now, a whole bunch of you were here for that. A whole bunch of you have come to the church since then. So, I want you to get acquainted with Awaken and what it is that we are seeking to do in the name of Jesus in the world.

I want to cast a little bit of vision. Really, what Awaken came out of was during COVID when we were all locked down, we were just trying to survive, we really didn't know where we were going. We finally began to reassemble and gather together in person. And I just remember that we kind of circled up as leaders and we were like, "Okay, we made it through that crisis, now we've got to move out of survival, crisis mode into vision mode. What is it that God wants us to do next?"

So, we began to have hours of prayer, conversation, and discussion in early 2022 about, "God, where are You leading us?" And that's what Awaken came out of. He brought us to this passage in Ephesians:

"Wake up, O sleeper. Rise from the dead. Christ will shine on you."

Now is the time.

And so, we just said, "God, what is the vision that You want for us in the next three to 10 years, as a church?" Awaken is the first step to that. And vision is so important because most of the time—I don't know how many visionaries we have in the room—most of the time many of us have kind of got our heads down and we're just trying to survive, we're just trying to provide, we're just trying to keep our head above water. And every now and then God wants to pull our heads up and go, "Hey, look out at the horizon. This is where I'm leading you."

The book of Proverbs says, "Without vision the people perish."

So, I want you to understand what vision is and what it is not. Vision is not us—and I've certainly been guilty of this in my personal life, maybe you have too—vision is not us going to God and saying, "God, this is really what I want to do. Would You please bless it?" You ever prayed prayers like that? Yeah, me either. I've never done that. I can't imagine the people who would. No. Vision is, "Hey, God. We want to know where You want us to go so would You please reveal it to us a step at a time?"



And I think most of the time our vision is too small for what God wants to do in the world, “So, God. We’re not asking You to bless what we want to do; we’re asking You to reveal what it is that You want to do in and through us. What courage? What boldness? What faith? What generosity is going to be required for us to make Jesus known in future generations in this cultural moment in which we live?”

Two weeks from today, November 24, we’re going to have our mid-point commitment Sunday. Please don’t miss it. This is just a galvanizing, worshipful time for our whole church. This is for those of you who made commitments a year ago and those of you who maybe weren’t here and you want to jump in and for those of you who like my wife and I are trying to discern—we made a big step of faith a year ago and we feel like God’s moving us to make an even bigger step this year. So, you pray big prayers, you make bold moves, you step out with courage, faith, and conviction.

And I just want you to know the kind of church that we desire to be. We desire to be a church that is not just trying to draw crowds or even make disciples, we are trying to be a church that makes durable disciples in this cultural moment in which we live.

This is a Venn diagram. I’ve brought this up before in previous years. This is going to be a good revisit for all of us. These three circles [Movement of God, Word of God, Mission of God] represent, you could say, the three members of the Trinity: God the Father, which would be representative of the Word of God; God the Son, which would be representative of Mission of God—the Great Commission; and then, the Movement of God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “It is better for the Spirit to be in you than for Me to be with you.”

As you look at that Venn diagram, two things I want you to examine. Which of those, as an individual Christian, do you gravitate to the most? You probably gravitate toward one of those circles the most. A lot of it could be your personality, wiring, your Enneagram number, Working Genius—whatever tool you want to use, and you kind of gravitate to that.

I’ll just be really honest with you, the way that I’m set up individually is I really drift toward the Word of God circle. That’s when I feel the closest to God, when I’m reading the Bible, when I’m taking in content, podcasts, processing things—that’s when I feel the closest to God.

Others of you might be more like Mission of God kind of thing where it’s like, “You know what? I want to serve others a cool cup of water in the name of Jesus. I want to meet people’s needs.”

Others of you maybe you’re more like, “Put on some good worship music and you’re Spirit of God, you feel really at home in a more of a charismatic expression.



Now, here's the tragedy in this. We, as Christians, have a tendency, whatever circle we're in, to maybe shoot at the others and say, "Well, it's not as good, it's not as holy." What we need to understand is that really what God desires to do is that we would be people who are in the Word, on Mission, and empowered by the Spirit.

I would say that, right now, the churches that are making the biggest difference and growing and reaching more people for Christ with an empowering of the Holy Spirit, an anointing of God, is when they are right there in the middle [where the circles overlap]. We don't do this perfectly. I just want you to know that's what we aspire to be: a Word of God church, on Mission with God, empowered by the Spirit of God.

And more and more, I'm just convinced that I want you to be—this is the word that keeps coming to my mind more and more—a durable disciple. Instead of deconstructing you're reconstructing and coming back to Jesus. When life knocks you down, you're not a cardboard Christian, you pop right back up because you're a durable Christian.

And Jesus said that in this world you're going to have trouble. If you're a durable disciple you can discern what is the truth of God and the deceptions of an enemy.

When we come to our New Testament, we see that Paul is encouraging real churches, people with real problems like you and me, real issues they face like you and me, living in a hostile and joyless culture like we do today. And it's important to understand that in the New Testament—most of our New Testament is made up of letters written to real people springing out of problems they were facing.

So, Karl Barth, the great theologian said, "The letters to the churches in the New Testament sprung out of the problems found within those churches." And that's important for us to understand. They were struggling in their cultural context just like we are.

So, I want to read the last 10 verses of chapter 1 in Philippians, and I just want you to let Paul's words wash over you. These are the words of God. He says to you and me... His first, primary audience was the Philippians, we're the secondary—he says:

"For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ,"

That's an interesting phrase. It is going to require us to be bold for Christ. Now, not jerks for Jesus, that's a different thing, man. Not abrasive. Not legalistic. Not mean. But bold. And you can be bold and humble, bold and gracious, bold and loving. In fact, I would say that the anointing power of God requires it. So, he says:

...bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, because that's what I'm living for, and then he says, "whether I live or die."

So, Paul is struggling here, man. Because life was really hard for him. He's facing lots of persecution, lots of hardship. So, he says in verses 21 to 24:

"For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better."

Some translations say:

"To live is Christ to die is gain."

What does he mean? Life is really hard. It would be much better if I could just go and be with Jesus. Have you ever had those thoughts? "Gosh, man. Life is so hard. It would be so much better if I could go and be with Jesus. The Bible says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

But now, he's going to start talking to himself here in the next couple of verses. He says:

"But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So, I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live." Philippians 1:20-24 (NLT)

Verse 25:

"Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith."

You know those two things go hand and hand. Our personal growth in Jesus and the joy that we have in our faith.

"And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what he is doing through me." Philippians 1:25-26 (NLT)

Live as Citizens of Heaven

Verse 27:

"Above all," this is top shelf priority, "you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ."

Man, what a great reminder after a contentious election. Above all else we are citizens of heaven; we conduct ourselves in a manner that is worthy of the Good News. And then he says:

Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together," speaking to the church here, "with one spirit and one purpose, fighting,"

So, keep in mind, not fighting against each other, but fighting together. "We are in a battle, a love story unfolding within a war," as John Elder says. The battle is just not with

people. It's against the principalities and powers of darkness in this world. So, we're fighting:

"together for," for what? "the faith," which is what? "the Good News. Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed," in other words their destiny is sealed by Satan and the demons, "but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself.

"For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him."

I don't know how many of us actually recognize that that would be a privilege.

"We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it." Philippians 1:27-30 (NLT)

That's how Paul ends chapter 1. He springs into chapter 2 with a series of rhetorical questions I think are meant for their personal reflection. He says:

"Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?"  
Philippians 2:1 (NLT)

What he's doing is he is trying to remind them of the day of their conversion and who they were when Jesus rescued them, which for many of these Philippians wouldn't have been that long ago. This letter was written roughly 20 years after Jesus' resurrection so many of them would have been relatively brand-new Christians. He's just calling them back to the day of their conversion.

And, oftentimes, I have to remember that as well. I was six years old when I acknowledged Jesus in my life. I have very vague, hazy memories of it. It was 1982, so a lot of that whole season of my life was kind of cloudy. But I remember I knew enough about Jesus that I wanted Him. Let's just say I didn't know enough about the finer points of sound doctrine and theology at six years old. I just accepted Jesus with a child-like faith. And I remember getting baptized.

And then I remember as an 18-year-old I had what you might call a reawakening. (By the way, I think all of us will have a series of re-awakenings through life.) And where it stemmed from as an 18-year-old, I was scared out of my mind knowing I was getting ready to graduate from high school. I didn't know what I was going to do next, so I ran to the Word of God. And I started reading the book of Romans chapter by chapter by myself and God smacked me with His mac truck.

I'll never forget where I was. I was on a park bench by myself. And if you've read the first couple of chapters of Romans, it's pretty rough. This is Paul at his best making a case to

help us see that we need a Savior and we're not it. It's not good guys and bad guys, it's all bad guys. There is only one good guy and His name is Jesus.

So, I got into chapter 5, and I was stunned by this reality. It says, "For a good man somebody might possibly dare to die, but God demonstrates His own love in this, while we were still sinners..." in other words, while we were in the act of being an enemy of God through our sin, "Christ died for us."

That was enough to open my eyes to the reality of what Jesus had done for me. He didn't wait for me to come to Him first. He died for me without any guarantee that I would ever turn to Him.

And then in chapter 8 it says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation in Christ Jesus." That was enough for me, man. That's what I wanted it. And I gave my life to Jesus. And you know what? When I go through a dark night of the soul, when I go through valleys, which I go through lots of them, I lean back to that day when I remember that Jesus got a hold of me.

Can I just very lovingly say this to some of you? I want you to go back to that time in your life and if you don't have a memory of that time in your life, it is not too late for you to have one. I love it when we baptize 90-year-old people. I'm a little concerned for them, honestly. But I love when we baptize 90-year-old people because it shows me that God's not finished with anyone yet. It is never too late. So, I want you to have that experience.

Paul is bringing them back. He's like, "Hey, man. When life gets hard I want you to rehearse all of this? Do you have any encouragement for belonging to Jesus? Do you remember what He saved you out of? Do you have any comfort from His love? Remember the fellowship together with the Spirit. Who are those people who kind of fanned the flames of faith in your life? Is your heart tender and compassionate from the hardships that you have gone through?"

Then he says this in verse 2:

"Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose." Philippians 2:2 (NLT)

That's a loaded passage and we've got to unpack what it means and what it doesn't mean. It's important to understand that whenever we read, primarily our New Testaments, that first and foremost, the epistles were written to communities of faith called the Ecclesia, which is where we get the word for church. It just means gathering.

So, we've got to understand when we read our New Testament it was written to we first not just me. The reason why I point that out is because you've got to discern the application of the Scriptures in the context of community first then the secondary application is to your personal life. Now, the reason why I point that out is because most



of the time we flip those. We read our Bibles, most of the time, individually. So, we're asking God, "What word do you have for me?"

And I'm not saying he doesn't have a word for you first, I'm saying it's probably second. So, you've got to ask yourself, "How does this apply to the gathering first and then to me?" We have to do that with verse 2. And very clearly what was going on in Philippi was that there was a disagreement going on in the church. That's not too hard to imagine. Disagreements happen all of the time.

I would even say that part of the fall is a severing of the connection in our vertical relationship with God. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, the first question God asked was, "Where are you?" And it wasn't because God didn't know where they were. He wasn't playing Marco Polo. It wasn't like His Find My Friends app wasn't working. He knew where they were. Because of their sin and rebellion, it had severed communion with God. That's what sin does. And it severs our horizontal relationships with one another.

This church was experiencing extreme pressure from the cultural moment that they lived in and all of the pressure was threatening to crush them like an empty aluminum can. So, they were turning on each other.

What I want you to know is that Satan will try to confuse, water down, or distort the truth to get the church to cave to external pressure. He knows that he usually can't get most Christians to recant their faith, so what he'll do is he'll just slyly slip behind enemy lines to stir up distortions and slight falsehoods from within.

This is why the term likeminded is used. This was a big deal for Paul. He uses it 10 times in the four chapters of Philippians. He uses it about 23 times in the New Testament. I want you to be likeminded, likeminded, likeminded—wholeheartedly agree with each other.

We've got to ask: What does that mean and what does it not mean? It doesn't mean that we will always agree. It doesn't mean that there will never be conflict or difficult conversations. What it means is that we have to understand the truth of God's word and be uncompromising on that and fight for the unity of the gospel message, because it's the only thing that will set people free and release them from their chains.

So, when we go back to this war that we are in, we've got to recognize that Satan isn't some cartoon character that just runs around trying to play mischief. Satan used to be an angel. And he had a bunch of buddies that he somehow convinced, "Let's throw a political coup and try to overthrow God from His throne. It didn't work. They got kicked out of heaven. His buddies are now demons. Satan is condemned. And because of that, he hates God. He hates God's creation. He hates the image of God upon His creation, which by the way is you.

And he deceives. The first question he tried to deceive with in the Garden was, "Did God really say?" So, what he'll do is he'll get in there to try to twist and distort the truth of the gospel, to rip the transformational power out of it. Just read through the whole book of Acts. In the book of Acts we see what Paul is doing. He's going from place-to-place contending for the faith.

So, in Acts, chapter 17, a great picture of this, he walks into a city called Athens and it says that he was deeply troubled by all of the idols that he saw everywhere in the city. Now, we don't have little idols, like little gold statues, today we just have materialism and ideologies.

And he goes into the synagogue and he's trying to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and it says that he spoke daily in the public square, and he debated the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the heartbeat of the gospel message, their response was to slander him. And they said, "What is this babbling trying to say?"

And then, in verse 21, he goes to this place where they discuss all of the latest ideas and ideologies of the day. It was a little piece of real estate in Athens called the Areopagus. Now the Areopagus was this rock hill and that's where all the philosophers, all of the influencers, all of the thought leaders of the day got together and were talking about the latest ideas. And that's exactly where Paul went to contend for the faith, to address reverse discipleship and confusion.

Now, we do not have an Areopagus. Today, the Areopagus has made its way to our phones. The average American spends 21 hours a week on social media, not including podcasts, news media, and radio. YouTube, Instagram, Tic Toc, and X are where the modern-day Areopagus is. In the vacuum of faith, what we've done is we've gone to thought leaders and podcasts and we're looking for spiritual fulfillment from cisterns that cannot fully fulfill.

In other words, there is a wolf in everyone's pocket. We've got a steady drip of all of that. And one of the things that we've got to do as biblically astute, Spirit of Christ followers is to recognize: What are the subtle deceptions of an enemy and what is the truth of God? And contend for the faith, both the truth and the grace of the gospel message.

So, as Christians, we love Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17, don't we? What's not to love? It's right before Jesus gets ready to go to the cross, and He prays for His disciples, and He says, "God, may they be one," why? So that the world may know. And we love that passage. And we should love that passage, but we oftentimes forget that the same Jesus who prayed a prayer for unity for us in John 17 prayed this in Matthew, chapter 10.

In Matthew, chapter 10... Leading up to this Jesus talks about how the kingdom of heaven is here. He says, "I'm sending you out as sheep among wolves. So, I want you to



be shrewd as snakes but as innocent as doves.” He says, “You are going to see trials before governors and kings, not because you violated anything, but simply because you are following Me. But this is going to give you an opportunity to tell them about Me. And if that causes you to worry, don’t worry. Because it won’t be you speaking, it will be the Spirit of God who will give you the right words to say when you need the words to say.”

And then He says, “All nations will hate you because you follow Me. But everyone who endures to the end will be saved.” And then He says these two things in Matthew 10 that are both encouraging and sobering. He says, “Everyone who acknowledges Me publicly on earth, I will acknowledge before My Father in heaven.”

Do you know what that means? Do you know what Jesus is doing right now? The Bible says He’s mediating on your behalf. If you’ve trusted your life to Jesus as Lord and Savior, He is at the right hand of God the Father mediating for you.

Here’s what that means. Sin—hang with me, I’m saying a lot of stuff right now—sin is not just a list of naughty things that God gets disappointed about when you do them. Sin is moving in the opposite direction of the formation of Jesus Christ in the character of your life. So, when you give your life to Jesus, you’re still going to sin. But every time you do, when you have a prick or a conviction from the Holy Spirit, what do you do next? That’s crucial.

So, when you are a Christian and you sin, you don’t excuse it, you don’t sweep it under the rug, you don’t deny it, you actually confess it, repent of it, and turn back to Jesus. What happens is that you are getting reformed into the image and likeness of Jesus. When sin is unchecked and unrepented of and unconfessed, played out to its furthest degree, it deforms the image of Jesus within you until you are too far gone.

So, Jesus is in heaven and when you sin and you turn your life back to Him, here’s what He does. I just get this picture in my mind. I think He taps God on the shoulder, and He goes, “Hey, you see that? He just cussed somebody out in traffic. But immediately he felt convicted of it and he confessed it, repented of it, did clean up, and he’s turning back to You. I’ve got that one. My shed blood on the cross just covers that.” That is what Jesus is doing right now.

So, He says when you acknowledge me publicly, that is more than with your words, it’s your life. It’s your confession and your repentance. Then He says, “I’ll acknowledge you before God, My Father, in heaven. What He says next is really sobering, “Everyone who denies Me on earth, not just with your words, but through your lifestyle, I will deny before My Father in heaven. That is a loving warning. That is not a threat.

And then He says this. The same Jesus who prayed for unity in John 17 also says this in Matthew, chapter 10, verses 24 to 36:

“Don’t imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth!” There is a difference between unity and peace. “I came not to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household!” (NLT)

And you’ve got to read that and go, “What?” How appropriate two weeks before Thanksgiving. What in the world does Jesus mean by that? That seems so far removed from His prayer for unity in John 17. Please understand that He is using hyperbolic language here. He’s not wanting you to literally turn against your family. Of course He doesn’t want that. But He is saying, “I’m warning you against false teaching, or putting up with false teaching in the name of unity, even if it’s within your own family.”

In other words, unity that is untethered to truth drifts into heresy. And so, division is bad, yes. Distinction is often necessary. That’s why Jesus would do some of His teaching in His parables between the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats.

See, there are twin errors that we can make as Christ followers that rip the transformational power out of the gospel. One is when it is all truth and no grace. Or all grace and no truth. All truth, truth, truth, truth, truth—legalism—then they can’t hear you. All grace, grace, grace, grace, grace—easy to believe with some tolerance—it won’t change them.

It’s grace and truth. And we do that through tears. We do that through humility. We do that through recognizing as the Psalmist says in chapter 130, verse 3 in the Psalms, “God, if You kept a record of our sins, who could stand?” and the answer is: nobody. But in verse 4, out of His mercy and compassion he says, “But You forgive sin.”

Martin Luther said it so well, “I look at myself, I don’t see how I can be saved. But when I look at Christ, I don’t see how I can be lost.”

Paul goes on in verses 3 through 4. He says:

“Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.” (NLT)

Man, if we could just figure out how to apply those two verses right there, immediately our lives would be better.

We can be so entitled, and I’m so struck by my own entitlement. I was at the airport last week. I was tired. I was taking a red eye home. I don’t know why I do that stuff. But I was taking a red eye home, and I had a larger bag, so they told me to go over to this other line to check larger bags. And they were just letting all of these people go right in front of me. I was just standing there. Nobody would acknowledge me. And I started to get hot under the collar and I started to feel so entitled. And I was like, “What in the world is that?”

Earlier this year I was listening to a leader, her name is Tara-Leigh Cobble, she's got Bible Recap on Spotify. I highly recommend it. You read through the Bible in a year and then you listen to Tara's thoughts. She unpacks what you just read in five to seven minutes with some application—really solid stuff.

And earlier this year she came across—I don't think it was this passage; it was another one talking about humbling ourselves and she talked about this spirit of entitlement that kept coming up in her.

And she said, "You know what?" In order to do a spiritual discipline, a spiritual practice to try to address it, she was going to try this all year long (this was at the beginning of the year). Every time she was in traffic, and somebody was trying to merge in front of her, she was going to let him. And I was like, "You know what? I think I'll try that too." It lasted maybe a day. What a great practice to go, "You know what? I'm going to let you go first. I'm going to be a door opener."

See, here's the dilemma that we find ourselves in. I think most of us are afraid of living insignificant lives and so we elevate ourselves because we want people to see us. And God says, "No, no. Take on the nature of a servant. Let Me elevate you." You can get low or be made low. It's much better to make yourself low and let God lift you up.

And he ends the passage in verse 5 through 11 by saying this is what Jesus was like. He says:

"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

"Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (NLT)

What a great passage. He is our King. He is our example. Here's the translation of that. If there was anybody who had the right to feel entitled, it would have been the Son of God. And yet He laid down His rights. He died a criminal's death. It wasn't the nails that kept Jesus on the cross, it was your sin and mine. It was the love that He had for you. He laid it down. And now He invites us to do the same.

John Stott says in his book Basic Christianity, "When people understood who Jesus really was, they always had a strong reaction to Him. You either love Him or you despise Him. You were either changed by Him, but you're never indifferent toward Him."

That simply means that if Jesus is who He said He is and died the death that we deserved to die to give us a new identity, what that means is that as long as there is breath in your lungs, you can change. I know some of you feel stuck right now in your spiritual life. Some of you are pinned down by your shame. There is hope. You are not too far gone.

At the end of that passage it says, "Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord." That is a promise. Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess, either on this side of eternity or the next. And it's far better to bow your knee and to confess with your tongue that Jesus is Lord on this side of eternity.

I was sitting at the feet of a retired pastor this last week, he's getting ready to turn 70, just drinking from the wells of his wisdom. And at one point he was sharing with this group of pastors, we were around him. So, he kind of understood this. He goes, "You know, you guys know what it's like, you know all of the pastor jokes, the ribbing that you take."

He said, "I was in a post office a few years ago and there was a man who recognized me in line, and he said, "You know, I've always wanted to ask you this. I've never gotten the opportunity. What do pastors do all day anyway? I know you work on Sunday, but what do you do the rest of the days?" It's a funny joke. Ha ha ha. I love it.

And I loved his response. He said, "You know, every single person that you've ever locked eyes with, is going to die. And when a person dies, a few seconds after death, he or she is going to come face to face and have a conversation with Jesus. My job is to make sure that conversation goes well."

Hey, guys. I want you to know that that is in front of me every day. I don't want to disqualify myself. Every day, I am constantly in a state of repentance. Daily. Hourly, "God search my heart. Is there anything in me? Correct my path." Because I know I'm going to come face to face with Jesus one day and I want that conversation to go well.

And I want to lead a church, knowing that every single person that I come into contact with is going to have a conversation with Jesus one day and I want that conversation to go well. That's what Awaken is. That's our mission. That's the purpose behind what we are doing. That's what we want to see happen in future generations.

So, let me give you a little bit of vision for where we are headed and then I want to come back and leave you with a devotional thought and then we'll be done. Here's a little bit of vision that I cast with all staff last month in an all-staff meeting.

I'm going to nerd out with you and show you some charts. Okay? This right here is our capacity chart at three of our campuses: Northwest, Carmel, and Plainfield. I'm not trying to leave the other three off. These are just the ones with the most pressing needs.



These are real numbers from August of 2023. And what we can see is, for us, we know that we need to pull a lever on adding another service whenever we hit 80 percent capacity. We don't wait for the room to get 100 percent because the only people who love 100 percent full rooms are worship teams and pastors. Nobody else does because it's a mess in the parking lot, mess in Kids' Ministry.

So, we know that at 80 percent, 80 percent means full. And that's when we need to add more services, more buckets to reach more people. So, you can see these hard numbers. A year ago, we had room at Northwest. Carmel was in the red.

These are actual numbers from August of 2024. So, you can see the growth rate. And if we did absolutely nothing by August of 2025, here's where we would be at three of these campuses. So, prime hour at Northwest we'd be above. Carmel is just imploded at that point. And we see Plainfield is above capacity.

We know, at least, that we need to begin to pull levers to add service times. So, our staff has begun to pray over that, look at options. And I just want you to know nine months in advance, that we are going to be adding a Saturday night service to the Northwest and Carmel campuses, Plainfield to be determined—that's simply to make room for more anticipating the more that God wants to bring in to reach more people.

Here's what this means. We want to resource our staff and volunteers so that this is a life-giving thing and not a burn out thing. So, we have nine to 10 months to prepare for it. I want to ask you to be praying over this. And I want to ask you to be considering, "Would I be willing to give up my seat and become a Saturday night person and come with lots of enthusiasm and energy on Saturday night to make room for more because most people who are coming from a non-believing standpoint to a church are going to come to a prime hour on Sunday morning.

That's the first thing. The second thing that I just want to share with you is a map of where all of our campuses are in our city. And the reason why we go multi-site is because we love every part of our city. We try to help people be on mission where they live. So, these are the six areas where we have campuses. In the next three to 10 years, hopefully sooner rather than later, here's where we are envisioning and seeking that God might call us to start campuses around the state.

This is around our city [east, south, and north sides of Indianapolis]. I especially want to point your attention to the fact that because of what God is doing in the next generation, our heart is beating pretty quickly for what it would like for us to start locations in college towns around our state to try to help infuse into the next generation [five areas more remote from the city]. That's simply a vision. We're not asking God to bless what we want to do; we're asking God to make it clear what He wants us to do. We will move at the speed of your generosity.



And right now, more than ever, there are a whole bunch of people who are thirsty for the gospel of Jesus Christ and thirsty for a new sense of hope. I think right now the world is largely losing its mind because all of the things that it said we could find fulfillment in are coming up bankrupt and empty. And right now is the time for us to live this out for others.

I want to close with this. My wife and I just recently listened to a book by Chuck DeGraw called *Healing What's Within*. I highly recommend it. He's a Christian therapist who does a lot of his counseling out of Genesis 1 through 3.

He says that most of our addictions, most of our interpersonal conflicts, most of our destructive habits all come out of the fall. So, therefore, we have to go back to that to find healing there before we can move ahead. So, right after Adam and Eve sinned and rebelled against God, God asked two questions: Where are you? What were you looking for?

I think when it comes to the attitude of our hearts, when it comes to our big mess ups and our sin and our shame, those two questions God is asking of you, "Hey. Hey, hey, where are you and what were you looking for?"

And most of the time we were looking for good, godly, holy things from the wrong cistern. That's what sin is. That's a bad trade. And obviously Adam and Eve had to face the consequences of their sin. Part of that meant that they had to be removed from the Garden.

Chuck does a really good job just helping me see and read through that. Most of the time when I read through the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin, it's hard to separate myself from the consequences and then really thinking about the tone of God as He doles those out to them. You almost get this idea that God would have been really angry with them, "Get out of My sight. Get out the Garden." But then there is this little verse in chapter 3, verse 21 that I've read one thousand times, but it's never landed on me quite like this. It says:

"And the Lord God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife." (NLT)

I love how Chuck said it in the book. He goes, God is a seamstress. He is patiently and lovingly beckoning you back to Him. In other words, "God could have said to Adam and Eve, you disgust me in your sin, get out of the Garden, you deal with your own buck-naked selves." But instead, He clothed them first. How tender is our God?

Can I just leave you with this question? Where are you right now? Heart check moment, attitude of the heart. Where are you with God? Are you in fight or flight? Are you in chronic anxiety? Are you in a rage? Are you in fear? Are you in entitlement? Lay that all down. Follow the humble posture of our Savior.



Where are you? What are you looking for? That can only be found in the truth of Jesus Christ. The truth will set you free. And now is the time for us to have the chains of that slavery, brokenness removed by the truth of the gospel, the grace of the gospel. There is a loving God who is a seamstress who wants to cover your nakedness and shame and give you a new identity in Jesus. Respond to Him today. It is not too late.

Let's stand to our feet and pray.

Father, we come to You right now and we are so grateful that You love us enough to tenderly speak truth into our lives. Father, I pray that we could discern what is the voice of the Holy Spirit and what are voices of unholy spirits that are trying to stir up dissension and division.

And that we would recognize that the only truth that will set us free is when we hold on to the truth of the gospel and the grace of the gospel, to be compassionate, bold truth tellers for the sake of Jesus and the sake of Your kingdom because we are citizens of heaven. We ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.

