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When I was in college one of my favorite authors that I read was a guy by the name of Philip Yancey. He wrote an impactful book called *The Jesus I Never Knew*. I don't know how many of you are familiar with this book or if you've ever read it, but the premise of the book is that he said that we, oftentimes, have a tendency—we all do this to a certain extent—that when we think about Jesus, we have a tendency to sort of recreate Him in our mind's eye.

Meaning that when we think about Jesus, strangely, He sort of looks like me, talks like me, votes like me, listens to the same music that I listen to, it's just kind of weird how Jesus and I are so alike. Jesus just kind of agrees with all of my preferences

And Yancey writes this book that basically says, especially to those of us who grew up in church, that the Jesus you heard about in Sunday School oftentimes gets portrayed as sort of a Middle Eastern Mr. Rogers. It's kind of like a sweet, smiling, Victorian Savior who tells boys and girls to be nice to each other.

And Yancey says the more you study the Jesus of the gospels the more you begin to recognize how different He is in your mind's eye. And he says that Jesus actually said some things that are far more comforting than we thought, and He is more threatening than we ever imagined.

I want to read an excerpt that Yancey wrote in his book. He said:

Jesus bore little resemblance to the Mr. Rogers figure I met in Sunday School. He was remarkably unlike the first person I had studied in Bible College. For one thing, He was far less tame.

In my prior image, Jesus' personality matched that of a Star Trek Vulcan, He remained calm, cool, and collected as He strode like a robot among excitable human beings on spaceship earth.

That is not what I found portrayed in the gospels. People affected Jesus deeply. Obstinance frustrated Him. Self-righteousness infuriated Him. Simple faith thrilled Him. Indeed, He seemed more emotional and spontaneous than the average person, not less. More passionate, not less.

The more I studied Jesus, the more difficult it became to pigeon-hole Him. He said little about the Roman occupation, the main topic of conversation among his countrymen. And yet He took up a whip to drive petty profiteers from the Jewish Temple. He urged obedience to the Mosaic Law while acquiring the reputation as a lawbreaker. He could be stabbed with sympathy for a stranger yet turn on His best friend with a flinty rebuke, "Get behind me Satan."

He had uncompromising views on rich men and loose women, yet both types enjoyed His company. As Walter Wink said, "If Jesus never lived, we would not have been able to invent Him." Two words one can never think of applying to the Jesus of the gospels: boring, and predictable.

I pulled this book off my shelf, I've had it since college, and I was just flipping through it and I noticed that at the end of the first chapter, in my college-aged handwriting, which is strangely more legible than my current handwriting—I'm not quite sure what is happening, I'm getting worse—I wrote this on the last page of that chapter:

The person of Jesus is God's ultimate act of love to reach His people. He loved us so much that He wore our flesh so as to effectively communicate with human beings how much He desires a relationship with us. What you do with and how you respond to Him changes everything. No one who truly meets Him stays the same.

For the next several weeks we are going to go on this journey together, between now and Easter, called Jesus Is .

And I just want to welcome everybody joining us at all of our campus locations, those of you online, especially if this is your first time to be with us. We are going to take this journey together through Easter called Jesus Is .

And what we want to do is we want to lay aside what we think we know about Him, maybe even what we've heard about Him, and we want to look at what the gospels tell us about Him. Who is Jesus really? Who did He say He was? And why does that matter? And what kind of lasting change can that present to all of our lives?

One of the things that is really clear about Jesus is that He forces you to do something with Him. There is no such thing as a passive follower of Jesus. You either receive Him completely or you reject Him fully.

Today, I want to start off our journey together by talking about this: Jesus is Healer.

Now I don't know how that statement lands on you. When I think of the word heal almost immediately I think of my childhood. All of the childhood accidents that I had. I was an accident-prone child. One of my front two teeth was gray for most of my early childhood because when I was a toddler I tripped and fell into the coffee table and it killed that tooth, until I lost the baby tooth and got an adult tooth.

I wrecked my bike all of the time. I was really good at it. And when I think of the word heal I think of scraping my knee and then what ended up happening. Mom put medicine on it, and it stung. The process of healing. Then a scab. Then I picked the scab off and it bled again. And the skin around the scab started to turn pink and it was soft, and it was tender to where,

eventually, it began to heal. And then there might even be a scar left over. Healing was always a process.

Jesus came to heal. What I want you to do before we get into our text—our text today is going to be Mark, chapter 9, so if you want to go ahead and get there in your Bible, go ahead and get there—what I want to ask you to do today wherever you are watching from, tuning in from, if you're taking notes, if you've got one of the studies in front of you, I just want you to take a quick few seconds and ask yourself this. This question is for you. This isn't for the person sitting next to you behind you or the person you came with. It's for you.

What is it that you need healing from today?

Could you articulate it? Now it could be a physical thing of some kind, maybe some kind of physical ailment, maybe some kind of chronic pain, maybe some sort of disease—doesn't have to be though. Maybe it's an emotional thing. Maybe a wound in your past that has not fully healed. Maybe it's some sort of a relational thing, there is this rift right now between you and somebody you really care about. Maybe somebody walked out of your life, and it feels like an open wound. What is it that you need healing from right now in your life?

Maybe this is something that you've been asking God to intervene in for a long time. Maybe you've never thought to ask God to intervene for whatever reason. Maybe you thought you did, and it didn't seem as if God answered. What is that thing that you need healing from? And I want you to know, today, Jesus is Healer.

I don't know how that statement lands on you. Maybe some of you have an emotional reaction to it because maybe you grew up in a church environment where this was very heavy handed and maybe you were talked to in a way where you felt less than, or maybe you felt like you were just a real sinner because of this sort of thing.

Others of you, maybe you're real excited about it. I know we have a lot of Baptists at Traders Point; you're already sweating. We've got a lot of people who come from a Pentecostal, Charismatic expression, and you're like super excited right now. You've got the tambourine ready to go.

I just want you to know, personally, from my personal experience, I have always believed in Jesus as Healer conceptually. I've always struggled with what that means theologically and practically. How do we experience it in a way that is consistent with all of what the Scriptures say about Him, and so that our emotional expression doesn't get out ahead of it, either too far ahead or too far behind what Jesus wants to do?

So churches have a tendency to go to one of two extremes. We either never talk about the healing power of Jesus or we talk about it, and we get weird. And I don't want to do that. I think that it is possible to stay faithful to the Scriptures on this in every way.

So, primarily, what I want to do today is remove any sort of unnecessary barriers that may be standing in the way of you meeting, experiencing, and knowing the real Jesus. And it's just undeniable as we look through the New Testament, the biographies of Jesus' life, which are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, it's just undeniable as you read through them. Jesus was a healer.

Here's what I mean. If you go through all four of the gospels—you can count them—there are:

37 unique miracles that Jesus performed.

Out of the 37:

28 are miracles of healing.

So it's just undeniable. Jesus came to be Savior, yes, but He also came to be Healer. What I want you to know is that healing, I think most of the time we think about it, especially when it comes in the context of church, we think about it being immediate. It could be. God has the power for that. Or it could be the process of healing.

I want to walk us through a passage in Mark, chapter 9. To just kind of set this up, many of you may know this, many of you, maybe it's the first time you're ever looking at the gospel of Mark, but Mark is the shortest of the four gospels. He is also the most miracle dense, meaning that per capita, Mark packs in more stories of Jesus' miracles than any of the other gospels. Mark's gospel also appears to be a summary of Peter's sermons while he was in Rome. And Peter really wanted the Romans to know Jesus as Healer.

Before we jump into the text, any good Bible interpreter will tell you that in order to make sense of what the Scriptures say you've got to look at what comes before and what comes after. That's called context.

And just before we jump into verse 14, I just want you to know that Jesus has just come back from a hiking trip with three of His disciples: Peter, James, and John.

Here's another thing that will blow your mind about Jesus, you've heard this ever since you were a kid, to not have favorites, but Jesus did. There were nine disciples He didn't pick to go on the hiking trip.

He picked Peter, James, and John to go up on what's called the Mount of Transfiguration. And this is where Jesus revealed who He is to them. And if you go back, you know the story, go back and read it on your own later today, it says that Moses and Elijah show up. So they're just kind of kicking it. They've got the secret handshake going on. And then the voice of God comes in and says:

"This is My Son. Listen to Him."

And it's like the glory of Jesus shines, they see Him for who He really is. And it is like, literally, a mountaintop experience. They come back down from the hiking trip to a controversy. That's usually how it goes, by the way. And so He's with three of His disciples. They come back and the nine He left behind, the nine He didn't pick, are embroiled in a controversy. Look at what it says in verse 14:

"When they returned to the other disciples," the ones He didn't pick, did I mention that? "... they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them."

So use your imagination. A huge argument had broken out. Can you imagine that? Rarely happens nowadays. But apparently back then all kinds of angry opinions going on. And in verse 15, when the crowd saw Jesus—I love this description—they were overwhelmed with awe. And they ran to greet Him.

It just causes me to wonder if Jesus were to physically show up in the flesh today, would I be overwhelmed with awe? I like to think I would. The Bible says there is really nothing about Him that would draw your attention to Him. There was nothing about Him that stood out. He wasn't physically attractive. I just sometimes wonder if Jesus, Himself, showed up if we'd miss Him.

It says in verse 16, Jesus asked a question:

"What is all this arguing about?"

Such a great question. One I wonder if Jesus is still asking today, "Why are you guys arguing about that?" Have you noticed how much we all love to argue? We all love to share our perspectives and opinions. We're talking over each other.

If you want to start an argument it is easier now than it has been ever before. All you have to do is just tweet something. Anything, it doesn't matter what it is. Just go and tweet, "I like the color blue." You'll start an argument. "What do you have against the color red?" All of these people are expressing their opinions. We just love to argue about everything. It's a result of an anxiety-ridden, anger-filled culture—arguing.

And unfortunately we just reflect it within the church. We are really no different. So we divide into denominations and tribes largely based on secondary issues that are non-essential to salvation.

Here's what I'm saying and what I'm not saying. I'm saying that it is okay to have an opinion. It's okay to express it. It's okay to have a strong opinion. It's okay to give feedback and constructive criticism. It is never fine to divide over it. Why? Because I just wonder if there is this connection between all of our arguing and us not being able to experience the healing power of Jesus.

It was two years ago this week that everything shut down. Do you remember? We were talking about that as a staff this last week. We were just reflecting on what it was like two years ago. Where we've been. We actually kind of flipped it. We said, "Let's just talk about how God has been faithful over the last two years." And it got me really thinking. It got me reflecting. And I even wonder over the last two years.... There has been so much arguing, so much division....

And one of the things that we oftentimes forget is that this guy named Paul writes a letter to a young man who he is mentoring, it's called 2 Timothy, and in it he's giving this list of qualifications for overseers in the church, which by the way is just a list of what every Christian should aspire to. And in that list he says this, "Not quarrelsome." We oftentimes forget that one. We're just quarreling over everything.

This is what is going on in the crowd and then we find out the reason why they were arguing, verse 17:

"One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, 'Teacher, I brought my son so you could,'" and here's the word, "'heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won't let him talk. And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples,'" the ones who didn't get picked, "'to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it.'"

Can I just say this to you today? If you don't pray, you'll start when you become a parent. Largely depends on the kids, alright? But partly because this realization smacks you in the face. You don't know what the heck you are doing.

It's amazing to me that we had to have 50 hours driving time and a permit and driver's ed, and we had to pass a test in order to drive a car. There is no such test with parenting—here you go, totally unqualified.

And then you'll pray all over again when they become teenagers. Different set of prayers. And you just realize, "I don't know what I am doing."

There are all kinds of reasons for this, but mostly because there is this realization, if it hasn't dawned on you already, that there is a very real enemy who hates your kids. That's not fun to hear. It's not fun to say. It's true.

And some of you are like, "Well, I don't have kids." Well, then pray for your nieces and nephews. Pray for the people you know who have kids. Pray for your grandkids.

Listen. Right now it is more difficult than ever to grow up in this world for all kinds of reasons. The last two years have just contributed to this exponentially. The cases of mental health and anxiety have just continued to escalate.

And I want you to hear me in this. I never want to over spiritualize very real issues that need medication and therapy. However, I also don't want to under spiritualize them either. And I think oftentimes we do that. We dismiss the fact: Yes, there are some chemical things going on. There is also a very real enemy behind the scenes who is attacking your kids.

This is what is going on in this passage. This guy comes to Jesus, and he says, "I brought my kid to church, and it didn't work. They couldn't heal him."

And I don't know, take kids out of the equation for a second. Maybe you've got something you came to church for. There is a reason you showed up or tuned in and maybe you're like, "It didn't work. I asked God to come through for me, it didn't seem that He did. Prayed for Him to change things, they didn't seem to change. Begged Him to heal somebody I love, and he was not healed." What happened? Why was that your experience?

Maybe this is where somebody who was well intentioned said something to you in your past that kind of rubbed you the wrong way. Maybe they made you feel less than. Maybe they suggested that there was some sort of unconfessed sin in your life that was blocking what God wanted to do in your life. Maybe you just didn't have enough faith and that's the reason why. The problem is with you and actually you sort of reacted to that and it put distance between you and God.

So, if you've ever heard that before, where did they get that? Likely a misreading of what Jesus said next in verse 19:

"Jesus said to them, 'You faithless people!'"

Faithless. Like zero faith. So it's important to understand that faith is connected to, it's a correlation to, your focus. What are you looking at? What are you trusting in? And for all of us, it's something, even if it's just yourself.

So this brings up an interesting question. How much faith do you have to have to come to Jesus? And apparently, not much. Jesus said this one time. He goes, "All the faith that is required is the faith of a mustard seed." Do you know how tiny a mustard seed is? It is really, really tiny.

Of all of the things that He could have mentioned He didn't say, "Hey you need to have faith the size of a grapefruit," or "You need to have the faith of an apple seed." No, He goes, "A mustard seed." Because it's one of the tiniest seeds. Jesus is basically saying to us, "You don't have to have a lot. It's basically who or what you're looking at."

And then Jesus asked these two questions. And they are sort of abrupt here. We're not expecting Him to say this. He says:

"How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you?" Matthew 17:17 (NLT)

Wow! I mean, how much drama do you and I have to bring to the equation for Jesus to look at you and me and go, "I just can't. I can't deal with you today"? It's not something that you would expect the Mr. Rogers of the Middle East to say. But then He says:

"... bring the boy to me." Mark 9:19 (NLT)

I love that.

"So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion," listen, Satan is not going to let go of you that easily, he threw him into a violent convulsion, "and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth."

This is some freaky stuff. It brings to mind all of the exorcist movies that I spent way too much time watching when I was younger. It's easy to kind of read that and dismiss it as if it is not real. Can I just say this? He says that there was an evil spirit that had come into him. Not the Holy Spirit, but an evil spirit.

What I want you to know—I want you to know a couple of things. I want you to know right now, regardless of what you believe about God, you were made by Him. You were made in His image. You reflect the very image of your Creator, whether you acknowledge that or not. It's called the Imago Dei. This is the reason why every single person you will look eyes with, regardless of who they are or what they believe or how they vote—they deserve your respect and love because they've been made in the image of their Creator.

And we have an enemy... So the battle is not with them. The battle is not with them. They are not the enemy. We have an enemy behind the scenes who hates God, who hates His creation, and since you are Imago Dei, you are the pinnacle of His creation, and he hates you worst of all.

So everything that we would call sin, everything that God warns about with sin is basically an enemy trying to shatter the image of God that is within us. That's the first thing that I want you to know.

The second thing is you are a container. You are a container, and you were made to contain either the Holy Spirit or unholy spirits. And unholy spirits are very real. And this is why you pay attention to what you read and to what you listen to, because you're a container and you were made to be filled with something. So, what is filling you?

So Jesus asked a really great question in verse 21:

"How long has this been happening?"

That's a question that every great physician asks. How long have you been having these symptoms? And the father responds, likely through tears and heavy sobs in verse 21:



“Since he was a little boy. The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him.”

Now I just want to stop right there because I’ve read this passage a whole bunch of times, but emotionally that lands on me when I think about my own kids. If I’m this guy and there is this spirit that was throwing them into fire or water trying to kill them, how emotional that would make me. And yet, maybe it’s not like a literal thing where he’s throwing young people into a fire or water. I can’t help but wonder about the epidemic that I’m seeing in mental health and anxiety issues where we have an enemy who is trying to bring us down.

Can I just say this to all of the young people listening to this right now? You have a very real enemy who wants to destroy you. This is why it is so important what you fill your head with and what you think about and who you listen to. Pay attention to who the real enemy is because when you are the most vulnerable is when you don’t realize that you actually have an enemy.

You ever watch those nature shows? Yesterday I was watching a nature show. I don’t know why. March Madness is on. But I must have been like flipping through games or something and I got caught on a nature show because it was an owl.

Owls freak me out. Anybody with me in that? It was beautiful. It is a bird. It is beautiful, but owls blink funny. That is freaky. And this thing was on the hunt. And it had its eye on its prey in the snow. And the thing had no idea that the owl was hunting it. And it was the most vulnerable when it didn’t know.

Do you ever watch those shows where actually the prey gets away? It’s because it knew it had something hunting it.

Some of you have no idea that you have an enemy hunting you. And it’s very real. And I want you to know that there is a reason why those dark thoughts have entered into your mind and there is a reason why you are filled with rage and there is a reason why you’re growing in cynicism and there is a reason why that thought of you ending your life has popped into your mind.

You have a very real enemy who wants to destroy the image of God within you. And I want you to know that you have a defender in Jesus Christ. You have a defender in the Holy Spirit. And your Heavenly Father wants you to call upon Him for deliverance and healing.

In the father’s desperation he cries out. Notice this:

“Have mercy on us and help us,” Now notice he doesn’t say, “Have mercy on us. Help him. He says, “Us.” Why? Because this little boy’s pain had become his father’s. And if you’re a parent, you know that. You know that pain.

And then what he says next seems to irritate Jesus. He says:

“... if you can.” Mark 9:22 (NLT)

Jesus is like, “Whoa, whoa, whoa”:

“What do you mean, “If I can?”” Jesus asked. Mark 9:22 (NLT)

“Let me take a break from making the world spin and float and see if I can grant a little request to your prayer.” It seems to irritate Him, “What do you mean, if I can?”

And many times we come to Jesus not as a first priority but a last-ditch effort, a Hail Mary pass, “I’ve tried everything else I know. Didn’t work. Let me throw a few prayers at the man upstairs and see if He will work.” And He is offended by that.

I want to say this in love, but I want to say it directly none the less. Oftentimes, I’ve just picked up on this sentiment within the church, it’s usually those of us who have been in the church for a while, there is some significant church baggage, which I understand is very, very real. Maybe you’ve had some internal struggles with mental health and anxiety, that’s usually where it comes from, and people will say to me, “Pastor, don’t you dare tell me to pray this away.”

And I get it. Please understand that I hear what you’re saying. Maybe this is an experience when somebody over spiritualized a very real issue in your life. But can I very lovingly say: Don’t underestimate the power of prayer. Don’t underestimate that there is a loving God who is asking you to call upon His name. He loves to hear from His kids. There is power in prayer.

Notice Jesus’ response. He says:

“Anything is possible if a person believes.” Mark 9:23 (NLT)

Notice He says possible, not guaranteed. Anything is possible if you believe, even if that belief is as small as a mustard seed. And I love how real the father gets in verse 24:

“The father instantly cried out, ‘I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!’”

I love that statement. I love how real and how raw and relatable it is. You might ask the question, “Well, can you say both of those things at the same time?” You bet you can. That’s a pretty good prayer to pray. Just come to God and say, “God, here’s my request. I believe that You can do it. But would You help me overcome my unbelief?”

And that seems to be the thing that Jesus responds to, verse 25:

“When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. ‘Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak... I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!’”

Notice how Jesus speaks with such authority. The Bible says that one day every tongue will confess, and every knee will bow before the Lord. I’d like to start now. For some of you, the first time you will ever bow to Jesus will be the first time you meet Him, and you’ll regret that you didn’t do it sooner.

In verse 26 it says:

“Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead.” Now whether or not he actually died, we don’t know. There are some commentators who debate this, like, “Did he die? Did he just pass out? We don’t know.”

A murmur ran through the crowd because they thought he was dead. It doesn’t really matter:

“Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up.”

The spirit is gone. He healed the boy. Everyone went on with their day. Verse 28:

“Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples,” the ones who didn’t get picked, “they asked him,” I would have asked Him too, “‘Why couldn’t we cast out that evil spirit?’ Jesus replied, ‘This kind can be cast out only by prayer.’”

There is a lot in that passage. Maybe it stirs up more questions than answers. What I want to do is frame up the remainder of our time with this one question. If you’re taking notes, and I hope that you are, here’s the question:

How can I experience the healing power of Jesus?

Is it still relevant for today? How does that happen? What if it doesn’t feel as if I am. How do we experience the healing power of Jesus?

So the first thing that I want to say to you, and I just want to basically come right out of the text that we just walked through, to say, first of all, yes, you can. You’ve got to first believe that Jesus can.

I’ve got to first believe that Jesus CAN HEAL.

In other words, according to Jesus’ own words in the text, “Don’t doubt, but believe.” Now what does that mean? Well, it means that, “I don’t know if He will, or if He will in the way that I want Him to, but I never want to doubt the power that He has. I believe that He can.”

So, “God, we don’t know what You are going to do, but we believe that You can. We never want to speculate what You will do, but we anticipate that You can do it.” Otherwise what hope do we have?

The only thing that seemed to offend Jesus in this passage was the wobbly phrase, “If you can.” So I just want to bring you back to this. All things are possible, not all things are guaranteed. We don’t tell God what to do, but we make our requests known trusting that He knows what to do.

God is not the love interest of Robin Wright in the movie *The Princess Bride*, you know the scene where he’s following her around saying, “As you wish.” I think that oftentimes we think of God that way. We want God to be that way. That’s not how He is interacting with us.

And yet He beckons us over and over again through the gospels. Jesus Himself said, “Would you please ask? I have the power to change things.” Matthew 21:22 is a direct quote from Jesus. He says, “You can pray for anything and if you have faith,” meaning where are you looking? “... you’ll receive it.”

A number of you may go, “No, I won’t because I’ve tried.” And here’s the thing. When it’s your marriage or friendships, when it’s your kids, when it’s your aging parents, when it’s your health and finances—all of those things that are uncertain, the decibel of the question what if and all the things that you could lose gets dialed up in our minds. What do we do in those instances? I think we should just borrow the words of this father in Mark, chapter 9, “I do believe, but would you please help my unbelief?”

You see:

Faith does not guarantee a miracle, but a lack of faith guarantees you won’t get one.

And I’m not saying anything there that Jesus didn’t say in the text. We don’t tell God what to do. But Jesus says, “Make your requests known,” and trust in His sovereignty that He knows what He is doing even if you don’t understand it.

I love the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel, chapter 3 where King Nebuchadnezzar says, “If you don’t bow down to me and forsake your God, I’m going to throw you into the fiery furnace.” And I love these guys. They are so cool. They just sit back, and they go, “Hey, go ahead. We believe that God will deliver us.” But what they say next is so baller. “But even if He doesn’t we’re not going to bow to you. We will trust.”

I want that kind of faith. I want to actually be a part of a church that is a “Hey, we’re so bold we trust that God will come through, but even if He doesn’t we’re not backing down.”

See:

You are not guaranteed a miracle, what you are guaranteed is His presence.

And that is a miracle. And the presence of Jesus heals. So the first step: How can I experience the power of Jesus today? You've got to first believe that He can heal. Here's the second thing:

I've got to ASK!

It sounds so simple. How many of you have ever missed out on something simply because you didn't ask?

Last summer our family went on vacation. We have four kids. We have a big family. And the car that I rented wasn't big enough for our family. Once I got to the airport I realized it. It wasn't big enough for all of us plus our luggage, so we were going to have a hard time getting from the airport to the hotel.

And so I'm standing there with the lady with the little notepad thing, and I saw these full-size SUVs and I said, "Hey, do you think you could upgrade us to one of those for the same price?" It was kind of bold on my part. And she said, "Sure. Just don't tell anybody."

And I was like, "Sweet! I'm glad I asked."

Years ago I was dating this beautiful girl who I don't deserve named Lindsay Adams and I asked her to marry me and after an uncomfortable pause she said, "Yes." It was an absolute miracle. She wasn't going to ask me.

I'm so glad that there are some moments in life when I've had the boldness, maybe even the naivete to ask a question. And Jesus is saying, "I want you to ask." And more so than Him just being a vending machine to give you what you want, what He really wants is conversation. What he really wants is a relationship with you.

And oftentimes we allow all of these other things, these hesitations, these fears, these concerns, these worries to keep us from making our requests. He just wants you to ask.

Matthew, chapter 7, verses 7 and 8, Jesus says, "Don't just ask once." He says:

"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for." So definitive. "Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

That sounds like a promise to me. James, the half-brother of Jesus says:

"Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure." James 4:2-3 (NLT)

So what do we do instead of ask? Oftentimes we worry, we complain, we criticize, we never verbalize it, it just stays inside.

Can I point this out at the risk of maybe offending some of you, but I'm already this deep in so, you know? Meditation and prayer are not the same thing. I'm not against it. Some of you meditate, get into the state of Zen, do yoga—it's fine. It's not going to change anything. You might be more limber. You might be a little more flexible. But God says, "I want you to ask. I want you to verbalize the concerns of your heart toward me."

God is not in the business of doing miracles that are not requested.

So, once again. I'm reflecting on the last two years, the pandemic we've been through, and we were thinking about how faithful God has been, but I started really feeling this last week, because as I was reflecting back on the last two years, and I am honestly a bit ashamed of how much I worried and strategized and how little I prayed and petitioned God's intervening. And I can't help but shake this haunting question over the last two years:

How many of us missed out on miracles that God wanted to grant over the past two years simply because we didn't ask?

Some of us might push back on that, and say, "Would God do that?" Well, according to James, He would. James says, "You do not have because you do not ask." And God is not in the business of answering prayers we do not pray.

Others of you have been in church for a really long time, and you say, "But God already knows what I'm going to ask for before I ask it." Mm mmm. Just a sword drill, alright. Yet He wants His children to ask. Think about that for a moment. God wants to hear from you.

I mentioned all of the anger and argumentation that is going on in the world right now, I mean things are angrier than I've ever seen them. It doesn't take much. We see anger in school board meetings, we see anger online, we see anger in traffic—what is the root of it?

If you put people in a corner and ask, "Why are you so angry?" They will likely say, "I don't feel seen or heard." And I'm just wondering right now if maybe that's how you feel. You don't feel seen by your spouse, you don't feel heard by your boss, you don't feel seen by your government—there is a God right now in heaven who longs to hear from you, and He says, "I want to hear from My kids."

The book of Hebrews says that we can boldly come before the throne of God. I've got four kids. They don't need a reason to call me. I will interrupt any conversation, any meeting, if my phone vibrates and I look at it and it's one of my kids, I don't care who I'm talking to, I'm going to stop that conversation and I'm going to answer the phone when my kids call, because I want to hear from them.

Here's the third thing. We've got to believe Jesus can, we've got to ask, and we've got to:

Trust that Jesus will ALWAYS answer us.

And some of you would say, "But, Aaron, that has not always been my experience because I prayed, and God didn't answer my prayer." And I want to very lovingly saying to you, there is no such thing. God always answers prayer. God is not trying to catch up on his email. He doesn't have His voicemail disconnected so He didn't get your message. John 16 says this:

"I tell you the truth, you will ask the Father directly, and he will grant your request because you use my name. You haven't done this before. Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy." John 16:23-24 (NLT)

Now, Jesus says, "I want you to ask. I want you to ask using My name and you're going to have joy." So He doesn't say anything about what He will say. He doesn't say anything about how He will grant it or when He will grant it. He doesn't say that you will be happy about it. He says that you will have joy and joy is very different than happiness.

So what does Jesus mean by this? Well, there are three ways that He will always answer your prayer.

He can say YES

Which is what we're all banking on, right? I don't know that I've ever prayed a prayer that I wasn't asking God to say yes to it. How many of you love a good no? Anybody just love a good no? Your boss tells you, "No." Your spouse tells you, "No." And you're like, "Thank you, I was hoping for that."

Almost always when we ask, we're asking with a yes and that's great. I know that every time I pray I want to hear a yes from God. Not only that but we worship a God, the Bible tells us, who loves to say, "Yes," to His kids. Here's what you need to know. If God can tell you, "Yes," He will tell you, "Yes."

Jesus would say it this way, "Which of you parents if your child asked for an egg will give him a snake?" Except for you parents who would actually give your kids a pet snake, we're praying for you. And then He goes, "If you being evil," there's a compliment from Jesus, "know how to give good gifts to your kids, how much more will your Father in heaven give to you?"

So, why should we ask God for a miracle in our lives? Because you just might get one. He loves to say, "Yes," to His kids. But here's another way He'll answer prayers:

He can say NO

He can say, "No." And I think oftentimes God says no and we say that He didn't answer our prayer. He heard it. He just told you, "No." And God is sovereign. He is King of kings and Lord of lords, and He owes no one an explanation. And sometimes I think we just assume that He didn't answer, when in reality He just didn't give us the answer that we wanted. I'm speaking from first-hand experience.

Everyone loves a God who says, "Yes." But real worship happens when we exclaim that He is still good even when He tells us, "No." That's hard.

So I don't know who you think you are, but God doesn't owe you anything. You're not Paul. You know this guy named Paul? One time (and Paul actually healed people) Paul needed healing. And he said that he went to God, and he asked God three different times to take it away.

What was it? We don't know. It could have been nerve damage, slipped disc, could have been a hemorrhoid—I don't know. He called it a thorn in the flesh. That's how he called it. Probably something that none of us would really want to know about. And he says, "Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away," and all three times God told him, "No, My grace is all that you need." I need a miracle. Grace is a miracle, "My power works best in weakness," He says.

I'm not quite sure who you think you are, but you're not Jesus. Jesus, in the garden the night before His crucifixion prayed asking God to take away the cross. And God said, "No." And I'm so glad that He did, by the way. Because if He would have said, "Yes," then you and I would be on the hook trying to pay for our own sins and we couldn't do it.

If God can tell Paul no and if God can tell Jesus no, then why can't he tell me no? Here's the last thing:

He can say WAIT

He can say wait. See, we have no idea what God wants to do, and we get impatient and settle for the little miracle and maybe the bigger miracle is on the other side of our wait. But we don't like to wait.

And many of us, we've been waiting for a long time. Maybe many of us... you've been praying for your grown kids to come back to God. You raised them in the church, and they left, and you've been praying and praying and praying and every time you try to have a conversation it just kind of falls on deaf ears.

How about this? You pray, you don't quit, you keep praying knowing that your prayers just might outlive your physical life. What a wild thought to think that after your death your prayers could be working. You just don't know what God is doing in the life of the other person or in the world to get them to the place that they will be open to that request.



One of my favorite conversations in the Bible happened in Daniel, chapter 10 when Daniel prays, and the angel finally shows up. And I think he's out of breath. And he says:

“Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven.” From day one. “I have come in answer to your prayer. But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way.”

Did you hear what he just said? “Because as soon as you prayed I was dispatched to answer your prayer, but I got hung up in battle, but I'm finally here.”

You don't know what is going on behind the scenes, but we hate to wait, we hate lines, we hate delays. Psalm 27 says:

“Wait patiently for the LORD.” And it's going to require bravery and courage to do it, but “wait patiently for the LORD.”

You know, my wife and I love to eat at farm to table restaurants, but the key difference between a farm to table restaurant and a chain is you have to wait longer, primarily because you're eating real food and apparently, a 59-cent burrito, you don't have to wait very long, and there's not even a real bean in it. Kind of interesting.

The point is that oftentimes the things that are worth it, you have to wait a little longer for them. It takes time to produce something of value, so we wait, and we trust God in the process.

I know that it is painful, and I know that it is hard. And this message will be a success if it just encourages you to not let go. Don't let go. I know that you're tempted to. I know that you're tempted to say that there is a God who isn't hearing me, that this world is so messed up, and you tend to go another way.

And I simply want to encourage you to hang on, to keep asking, because, primarily, the thing that God wants to grant you isn't even necessarily the request in and of itself, it's a relationship with your heavenly Father.

So here's what I want to ask you to do today, two things as we wrap up. The first thing is, if you don't already, would you consider just starting a prayer journal? All you have to do is get any old journal and just make it your prayer journal.

And what I mean by that is every time there is a concern, a worry, something that makes you angry, something that is an impasse, and you don't know what to do with it, you simply write it down. It is a request that you are making of God. And then you date it. And then you periodically just read back through that and if the thing that you were concerned about gets

resolved, if there is an answer to that request, you write down what the outcome was and you date that.

Here's what is powerful about a prayer journal. We have a tendency to remember all of the things that we didn't get. That gets highlighted in our minds. But I wonder, at times, how many instances when we blame God for not answering prayer He's going, "Now wait a second. I did answer. You just forgot or it wasn't the answer that you wanted."

Just keep a prayer journal. Maybe it's just between now and Easter, or between now and the rest of the year. Just do that and see how faithful God is.

Here's the second thing. I can't preach a sermon on the healing power of Jesus without offering you an opportunity to be healed. And I'm not trying to get weird, I'm just trying to be as faithful to the text as what we just walked through.

So, today, whatever that thing was that I asked you about a few moments ago that you need healing from, it could be physical, emotional, spiritual, mental, relational—it's an open wound. It's not healing. You've thrown everything else at it. Today would you simply come and make your request known to your heavenly Father?

We will have prayer counselors lining the stage and the walls. I'll be down front here at Northwest. If you're at a campus, our campus pastors will give you instructions on how to do this.

We did this first hour. The aisles were filled. It is one of the sweetest times in prayer that I've had with people where they just literally came up and said, "My name is Sarah and I'm dealing with cancer." And I prayed and she left. "My name is Tom, and we really need prayer for our grown son because he's wandered from the Lord." I prayed for Tom and his grown son, he left.

I had a lady come up and say, "My child is having the hardest time potty training. He's always pooping his pants. Would you please just ask God—I feel silly just asking that."

"You don't need to feel silly. That's real, man. That's real." I just prayed over that. It was an awesome prayer to pray.

And so, what about you? Would you simply come and make your requests known to a heavenly Father who wants to hear you, who sees you, and He wants to be Healer in your life.

So I'm going to ask you to stand to your feet. I'm going to pray. We have provided enough time in this service to do this. We only sang two songs at the front end so that way we'd have some time for you to make your requests known to God.

Lord God, we trust that You are Healer, we trust that You hear us, and You see us, and we are in a world that is unraveling right now and is hurting and there is a lot hurt right now in this very

room. So we want to come, and we just want to make our requests known unto You: mental health, anxiety, cancer, divorce, relationship stuff, fear—God, we just come, and we just want to ask that You would be Healer in our lives.

We know that You can. We want to ask, and we trust that You'll respond. And even if You don't respond in the way that we want You to, we still bow before You because you are King of kings and Lord of lords. And we ask this in Jesus' name. And everyone says: Amen. Would you come?