

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

MARCHING ORDERS | LOVE & WAR

RYAN BRAMLETT | MAY 28, 2023

Traders Point, how are we doing? Hey, don't blame me because you didn't get tickets to the race. We're not going to take that out here. Alright? We're here for a good time. We're going to make the most of this.

Traders Point, how are we doing today? With enthusiasm. Good. It's so good to be with you. Excited for this series that we are in that we've just titled *Love and War*. And here's what we're doing. We are just working our way through this small little letter in the back of your Bible. You can go ahead and flip there now. We're going to be in 1 John, chapter 2. The easiest way to get there is to start in the back and just flip over a few pages. If you don't have a Bible, we'll have everything on the screen behind me.

Here's just a little bit of background into this letter, 1 John. Why is it first? Well, it's just the first of a series of letters that this guy named John wrote to early Christians. And John was an apostle. John was one of the first followers of Jesus. One of the first 12 who were there every step of the way through Jesus' ministry on earth. And John was actually a part of the inner three as well, who kind of broke off and got to this unreal place to be with God and to hear things and to see things that no one else did.

So, that's the letter that we're reading. And the reason for love and war is because those are two big things that we see over the pages of this short letter. Love in the sense of loving God and loving others. What that looks like. And then war. It's a very clear picture of the reality in the space and time that we live in. There is a war going on.

And there are multiple facets or layers to this war. There is a spiritual war that is going on that we can't even see. So that's great. And then there's a war that you just see in our world. When you look out. It's external. It sometimes shows up in physical wars, pain, and brokenness.

And if that wasn't enough, just pain and a war out there, he's also going to point to the fact that there's an internal war going on inside me and you. Even when we want to do the right thing or to be that type of a person, we fall short over and over and over again.

It kind of unpacks all of this. And one of the things that I really love about this letter that is unique to 1 John is John actually lays out a series of tests, almost. Or just a thing that



we can put out there and we can be certain of. A lot of times when we talk about faith, we can't be certain about most things. But John is going to say, "Hey, if you want to know, if you're following God, if you want to know if you're in that place and that relationship with God, here are a few things that you can look for."

And he kind of has this moral test. He has this love. He has this doctrinal test. And we'll kind of work our way through all of that. What we have been saying is that this spiritual decision that we made to follow Jesus has physical implications for how we live.

So, I hope you've found 1 John, chapter 2. I gave you enough time there. We're just going to read a little bit, explain a little bit. And I would encourage you to take notes. Alright? Because we're going to unpack a lot in these 14 verses. Take a look at what he says starting in verse 1. John says:

"My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins — and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. 1 John 2:1-2 (NLT)

Let's stop right there and unpack that just a little bit. The first line we have to draw attention to is he says, "I'm writing this to you so that you will not sin." Some of you are like, "Well, then. Stop reading because I'm not done sinning just yet. I did not sign up for this. I'm still continuing in my adventures of sin. It's kind of a big line to unpack. What does that even mean? I'm writing this so you will not sin."

Last week pastor Aaron did an incredible job breaking down chapter 1 where he talked about, if any of us claim that we are perfect, if any of us claim that we do not sin, we're kind of making a liar out of ourselves. We don't have to be that person. No one is asking us to fake it. No one is asking us to just pretend or even be perfect. But he also states there in chapter 1 that confessed sin is always met with forgiveness.

So as he kicks things off here in chapter 2 he's saying. "Hey, God's will for your life and mine is not that we continue to sin, but if we do, remember that remedy for our sin and how we live that out here in life." Another way to say it is, "If you sin, do these things." Right? If you sin: repent, confess, and then continue moving forward, striving for the life that Jesus has for you.

The next thing that I want to draw our attention to is that word *advocate*. That's a new word that John is introducing here in this letter. And here's the way that we're going to talk about it:

Jesus is our advocate.



Jesus is our advocate. And the best way to understand this picture kind of comes from the language that is used here: Jesus is pleading our case before God.

A way to think about this is that Jesus is our defense attorney. Right? There is going to come a day when you and I, at the end of our lives, are going to stand before the judge, before God. And we're going to have to give an account for our lives. That's not great news because if we have sinned at all, sinned once, broken the law just a little bit, then the whole penalty of sin falls on us in the death that is separation from God.

But because Jesus is our defense attorney (and He's so much more than an attorney) if we place our faith in Him, that court room scene looks a whole lot different. On one side you have the devil, the accuser, pointing, bringing blame, bringing all the charges before God of who we are, what we did, and what we did not do. But Jesus is standing right there shoulder to shoulder with us.

And I think it's really important to understand this picture, to understand Christian theology. What's happening in that moment, as Jesus is our defense attorney? He's not trying to get God to look the other way. He's not looking for loop holes. Right? He's standing in truth. He's saying, "Yes they did what they did." Right?

It's not like we're standing there before God and we're just like a blubbing mess. And court has started and we're just like confessing things that no one even asked us about. Like, "And then the one time I stole my mom's car. And then another time I stole a hot dog." And Jesus is like, "Would you stop. I'm trying to get us out of here. You stole a hot dog?"

That's not what this is. In this moment Jesus is not even pleading for grace. He's pleading for justice. Jesus is going before the Father on our behalf and He's saying, "Yes. Look at their rap sheet. They did all of those things. There is no denying it." And as the gavel is about to slam, for our sentencing, a death sentence, what we should get Jesus interjects and says, "But, God. I also believe that you've already charged Me for those sins. I believe I've already paid the penalty for those sins. So I'm saying that it would be unjust of you to charge both of us with the sins. I'm asking you to let them go."

And over and over and over again those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus leave free and get to experience eternal life with God the Father. This is the gospel. Jesus lived the life that we were supposed to live. Jesus died the death that we deserve. And now, because of our faith in Him, He has paid the penalty for our sins. He has atoned for them. And now, with certainty we can stand before God and He sees Jesus and He sees His righteousness, His perfect life instead of ours.



This is what it talks about in Romans, chapter 6, verse 23. Paul says:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23 (ESV)

And please don't make the mistake of this. It's free because Jesus has already paid for it. And now you and I get to live a life that we could not earn on our own.

What John is going to show here is that because all of that has been done, everything that Jesus did was not just for that moment in the court room, Jesus did not just do all of that so that you could experience or I could experience eternity one day—it wasn't just to get us into heaven—it was to get heaven into us. And there are some real-life applications that, if we are going to believe all of these things about Jesus, are going to show up in our lives.

Now John is going to get to this point of, “This is how you can know. This is how you can be sure that you are following Jesus, that you not only believed in Him but there is some proof of how you live your life. So take a look at this starting in verse 3. He says:

“And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments. If someone claims, ‘I know God,’ but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:3-6 (NLT)

So, just a Bible study tip for you. Anytime you're reading Scripture, and you see the same word used over and over and over again, it's not because the author lacks vocabulary. Right? A lot of times this is used to reinforce a point. So here, John uses the same word three times.

Did anyone pick up the word? Obey. Right? Obey. You don't even want to say it out loud. We have a weird kind of relationship with obey and I think it's because a lot of the times obedience is like a last-ditch effort.

We start with love. Right? We start with gentle parenting but eventually we have to get to obedience. It's like, “Hey, hey, No buddy. You're okay. But what have we talked about? You don't set couches on fire. Right? No, no. That's not who you are. That's not who you are. Come on. Get out of here.”

You try and he still is not listening. And you get to this point like, “Hey, listen to me. I don't care that you don't like me. You don't even have to love me. But you will respect

me. You will obey me.” Right? You come down to this last-ditch effort of obedience. Like, “I tried everything else. Now I’m done. You will obey me.”

But the important thing to see here is that that is not the order of things and order matters when it comes to following Jesus. We’re not obedient so that one day we will be loved. We’re not obedient so that we can be loved right now. We are loved out of the overflow of experiencing this kind of life-changing love, seeing God for who He is, trusting Him, not just with my eternity but with my right now. I become obedient to Him. I trust Him with my life. I willingly do this.

Here's the thing:

Obedience is not legalism.

I think a lot of times we hold those two terms together. Legalism is, I become dependent on following a set of rules to receive love or acceptance. That’s not what obedience is.

Obedience is willingly submitting to God’s best for my life.

I have the option. I see everything in front of me and I’m going to say, “I’m going to willingly submit to Your best for my life.” Even when those come in the tension of what I really want to do or what I think is best, I’m going to lay that down and now my life is going to reflect Your best for me, not just what I think is my best.”

And maybe there are some people in the room today watching and you’re like, “That’s just not my Jesus.” Right? “That’s John’s thing, maybe, his obedience thing. But my God is a God of love.” Right? “He wouldn’t ask me to obey.”

I hear you, but I also want to show you your Jesus in John 14 verse 15. This is Him.

“If you love me, obey my commandments.”

It’s this idea that if we’re going to follow Jesus, if we claim to believe in Him, our lives should reflect it. And it’s not that we live this thing out perfectly once we believe. It’s not, like I said, that we never sin again. But it’s as my relationship with God changes, the more that I experience Him from this side, my experience with sin changes as well.

And here are a few things that you can look at to say, “Hey, is my relationship with sin changing?”

How can I know my relationship with sin has changed?



Here's the first one:

I don't plan to sin.

We used to have a word for this, our planning to sin. We called this the weekend. Right? You work all day all week and then you get to the weekend and it's time to reward yourself with some bad decisions. We don't plan to do it anymore. It still happens, but it's not like we are intentionally making these moves. The second part is this:

I don't fully enjoy sin like I once did.

And this one is a real bummer. It's like you begin to believe in Jesus and you still have these old ways of life and these old patterns and things that you used to do and things you used to enjoy. But now they come into contact with God's best for your life and you still do them? But when you get done you're like, "Oh, that doesn't feel as good as it once did." What is that? That's conviction. Your relationship with Him is changing. And then finally you'll notice:

I live a life of confession and repentance.

Most of our relationships with sin if we acknowledge it at all before Jesus bring on condemnation and shame and pain. But with Jesus, now that we have this great advocate it completely shifts. I no longer hide my sin. I no longer pretend. I no longer have to sit in the weight of shame or condemnation. I bring it into the light and I confess it to God and I confess it to others and I live this life of repentance.

It's a very different situation. And just to be overly clear, it is not that you will not sin again. There are a lot of us who are tormented by sin, even the same sin. That's what John is talking about here in this letter. There is this internal war going on in us.

But at the same time, I don't give up. I don't believe that I'm knocked down forever. I believe that forgiveness and love and acceptance are always on the other side of my repentance and my confession. And that changes the way I live, that changes the way that I view myself, that changes the way I see other people.

And this is a really big deal. This is part of the reason why John is writing this letter, talking to people about how they live really matters. A lot of times, I don't know what you think, but we have these letters in the Bible and it's like: where did they come from? They weren't written in a vacuum. They weren't written by some person off on a cliff somewhere sending this to people hoping it connects.



A lot of times letters are a response to what is really going on in culture, what is really going on in the church. That's why John is writing this letter. There was a crisis. There was a split going on in the church. In the early church there was a split that we saw by something called:

Gnosticism

Gnosticism. And here's just a basic idea of what this is and why it was problematic for the church. Gnosticism basically says you have a dualistic nature. That there is a spiritual you and there is the physical you but they are not connected. And the spiritual you is the only thing that matters. The physical part of you is just a shell. So the way you live doesn't matter.

Do what you want with this body. Indulge in whatever you want to indulge in knowing that nothing is going to be able to touch the spiritual side of you.

And you can imagine how that could be pretty problematic for people coming to church and hearing about this life of following Jesus and obeying and dying to yourself and serving others and giving your life as a ransom for many. And on the other side this guy says, "Or, you can do whatever you want whenever you want." And you're like, "He does have a point."

So we are beginning to see this split in the church and John writes to say, "No. Remember Jesus didn't die for you one day, He died for your life right now. And remember your body is not disconnected from your spirit but it's all connected. And your body is worth so much. It's valued. God chose to die for you. And now His Spirit lives within you. Your body is not even your own. It's a house for the Spirit of God. So please take this life seriously and live accordingly to the gospel that you first heard, not from what you are hearing in culture."

And then he has this line at the end. He says:

Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

Right? It's doesn't say believe like Jesus believed, it says live your lives as Jesus lived. And what I'm going to do now is I'm going insert a little bit of a hot take. I'm going to insert a little bit of a hot take. I'm just giving you a warning that it's coming because I think there is so much here that was happening 2,000 years ago that we are still experiencing today.

A lot of the time there is a tension with life and belief—what does it mean to follow Jesus and how does that show up in my life? A lot of times we start following Jesus



and it becomes like this ache inside of us where we just don't feel like there is ever anything...

We come to church. We read our Bibles. We take in this content, take in this information but it's like nothing is answering that ache, "Nothing is doing it for me." And some of us get so frustrated by this that we even walk away from the faith saying, "It's not real. It's not what I thought it was. It didn't bring any life change." And a lot of us, maybe even leave churches because of a spiritual depth that we're searching for. And a lot of times what it comes down to is the sermons, "They are just not deep enough." Have you ever said that? I have. "I just need something a little bit more."

And what I want us to push on there is what is that *more* that we are searching for? And what I want to argue is that the *more* that we are searching for is not going to be found in the intellectual alone. You know what I mean? There's going to be another side to this.

I'm going to be honest with you. I watch a lot of sermons. I learn really well from this art form. I study it. I want to get better at it. I watch sermons most weeks and I listen to people all over the world. I can say with confidence in my voice that Pastor Aaron is about as good as it gets when it comes to preaching and teaching God's Word.

So if it's not the teaching, which I'm not saying it could never be, you know what I mean? Some people leave their churches or leave this church because the teaching isn't deep enough. And then a bunch of people come because they've never experienced such rich and deep teaching.

What do we do with that? Is it stylistic? Some churches are for people who are just starting out and some churches are for people who are a little bit more mature? I don't think it is. Like I said, it could be. And false teaching is one thing. But what I want us to see is that:

The Bible is not a book of incantations.

Right? The Bible is not just Harry Potter's spell book. That if I get alone with it and if I read it just right, if I pronounce it just right, then my life is going to be magically transformed. At the same time, coming in and hearing a sermon, even if we try so hard to string together a perfect set of words, is not going to be the thing that magically transforms you. It's part of it. But it's not a book of incantations.

The Bible is a book of invitations.



An invitation to hear something to believe something but then to do something. First and foremost an invitation to be with God, to be in a relationship with Him. An invitation to walk with Him through this life and into the next. An invitation to love what He loves and to just be more and more like Him as we go through this thing.

I think a lot of the ache that we feel—we have to come to terms that it's not going to be found in just a knowledge piece alone. You see:

Spiritual depth is formed in the tension of knowledge and obedience.

Knowledge and obedience. It's when those two things come together. And I'm going to use this beautiful ball [expandaball] to try and paint this picture.

And just to give you a clear picture of what happens during the week is that we study and we prep and we get ready to deliver a sermon. Really we take as little as three or four verses, usually 12 to 14 verses and study and we pray and we take these few verses and in 15 hours our so we blow this thing up. And we research and we pray and we study and we ask God to give us something, give us something, give us something. And then we take those 15 hours and we bring it back down to 35 or 40 minutes. And we hand it to you.

Now, the hope of this process is not that it would stay like this, it's that as you are here and you're being convicted, not by me but by God's Word, He's saying a few things to you but it doesn't live here. As you live it out this week it goes from here [collapsed] and it begins to expand. It's not just learning something new; it's doing something. Spiritual depth is not going to be found when I learn four new words for love. It's found when I learn to live like Jesus, when I learn to love like Jesus, that's when that ache is going to be filled.

Listen. A lot of times we read Scripture, we read something like, "The Son of man did not come to be served but to serve others." That's inspiring. That's challenging. There is going to be conviction in that. But it really begins to stretch and grow is when we say, "Okay, if that's true of Jesus then I want it to be true of me. I'm going to live my life accordingly. I'm going to start serving people." And then we begin to push some of that ache with the spiritual depth that we desire.

Generosity. When we read things like, "It's better to give than it is to receive." That sounds good. Kind of. But you don't really feel the weight of it or the power of it until you begin to live a generous life that maybe begins to stretch you.

When we serve other people, when we say, "Hey, what does it look like to love other people," and then get face to face with it, whether that's here serving on a Sunday or in



our families when they are coming to us. We live out that conviction. And over and over again, as it comes down and then it gets expanded back out, we begin to experience the life that Jesus has for us.

Hear me. Jesus did not come to bring a way of death but to bring a way of life. This following Jesus is not just for that one moment but it's for all of our lives. He is showing us how to live. And if we love Him, our lives will reflect Him.

Next, what he is going to do is he's going to say, "Hey, if that's you, if you believe, if you confess your faith in Jesus, I want you to remember this new commandment that you are going to be living by. Take a look at it starting in verse 7. He says:

"Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment for you; rather it is an old one you have had from the very beginning. This old commandment — to love one another — is the same message you heard before." Here it is, "Yet it is also new. Jesus lived the truth of this commandment, and you also are living it. For the darkness is disappearing, and the true light is already shining." 1 John 2:7-8 (NLT)

What? He says, "I'm not writing you anything new. At the same time this is new." What is he saying? Well, he's saying that there is a part of this... This life of following God has always looked the same: Love God, love people. Love is God's thing. And it's always been there and always will be there.

But just that part isn't even all that Christian. You can look to other religions for love. Even secularism. There are people who don't believe in God but most people want to live under the umbrella of love.

What changes things is when we look to see how Jesus defined love, because when we follow Him we no longer get to decide what love demands of us, "What does love call me to do? What does it truly mean to love one another?" And He gave us a very clear picture of what it looks like to love one another in John 13, verse 24. He says:

"So now I am giving you," this is what He is referring to, "a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other."

So love isn't just this universal term that we are all passing around. And when you say it you mean this. And when you say it you mean that. And when I say it I mean this. Jesus is saying, "No. What I say it is, that's what it is." And love cannot be removed from truth because then it's no longer love. And at the same time love cannot be removed from living a loving life because it's no longer love. It's this idea that we are going to come to this place and live in this tension of loving one another, "Not how I decide it, not how I

determine it. Not what I say is good enough or is fine. But I'm going to constantly look to the example that Jesus gave and I'm going to live like that.

"It's not like I'm going to walk on water and I'm going to do these miraculous things. No. No. I'm going to do the day in and the day out, I'm going to be obedient to God's call on my life. And every person I come in contact with, I'm going to love them like they were made in the image of God and that Jesus died for them. That's going to be my calling to life."

And then he's going to challenge us. He's going to challenge us. He's going to keep going to say, "Hey, if you still say that you believe, if you're still claiming that you love Jesus, then I want to call you out." And if this is home, it's okay. It should be convicting, not condemning. Look at what he says right after this.

He says, "For those who claim," if anyone claims, "I am living in the light' but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is still living in darkness. Anyone who loves another brother or sister is living in light and does not cause others to stumble, but anyone who hates another brother or sister is still living and walking in darkness. Such a person does not know the way to go having been blinded by the darkness."

Seems like he's probably getting word that people are saying they are Christians, saying that they confess the name of Jesus, but then they are going around spewing hatred, he's saying, "If that's you. If you're claiming it, I don't think you understand what you are claiming. There should be evidence, there should be proof of what is going on internally. It should be showing up externally."

You know, I have a bunch of kids. I have four kids. Some of you guys know this. And they are from 10 now all the way down to almost 10 months. So there's this season in parenting when you have these babies and they can do very little for themselves. They can't do anything. You're doing everything for them and this big thing that you do all of the time is bath them. You have to give them a bath. You have to do it all. You have to get the soap, the shampoo, you wash them, you dry them, you do the whole thing. It's great. And it's made me take fun pictures. And it's beautiful.

But then, they get a little bit older. And there comes a day when you look at your spouse and you're like, "I think they are ready. I think they can give themselves a shower. And you look at them and you are like, "Hey guys. You've seen us do this for years. Do you think you can take a shower by yourself."

"Yep. I've been waiting. I've been waiting to take a shower. I know how to do it. I'm going to do it right. I'm going to do it just the way you say."



And you are like, "Great. This is going to be so much easier." And they go in and they take a shower. I will tell you, their claim does not match their actions. I've never seen anything like this. I've seen this with my eyes. A kid goes in to take a shower and gets out with dry hair. I was like, "What do you mean you took a shower? Your hair is not wet even."

"Yeah, I didn't want it to get in my eyes."

Or, there's the other extreme where one of the girls will take a shower and get out and there is still shampoo and conditioner stuck in her hair." I'm like, "Did you not wash it out?" And she is like, "I didn't want it to get in my eyes."

A couple of weeks ago we had this two in one shampoo and conditioner. And I'm listening to my kids talk back and forth and one of them tried to explain to the other what it is. "Yeah, you put it in twice. You put it in the first time it's shampoo. And then you put it in the second time and it's conditioner." They claimed they understood but the shower experience will tell otherwise.

And here's what John is saying, "I want you to remember. I want you to remember that your life matters. I want you to remember how you live matters. I want you to remember that you have this perfect example of Jesus. Remember how He interacted and the way that He lived and how He loved people."

Is there anyone you hate?

If you are living your life but you're holding on to so much hate... And hate isn't just like I despise. Hate often shows up as indifference, "I don't even care about what is going on over there or with you." That's a tell-tale sign. I don't know if you're walking in the same light that you think you are. I don't really believe the gospel that you say that you believe because there should be more to your life. And it's not out of a drag. It's not out of, "I have to do it," If you got the part, if you knew what was done for you and what Jesus' sacrifice meant, it should be showing up over here.

I love the way that John is going to close out our time here together. He's going to break into a little bit of poetry. Just as you do. You know, you're writing all of these letters, "Let's have some fun." So he's going to write and then he's going to break into some poetry here.

He's going to talk to three different groups of people. He's going to talk to children, he's going to talk to the mature, and he's going to talk to the young. And what I want us to see is that he's going to give everyone what we'll call marching orders. Marching orders. You know that military term where you guys are all together and you're waiting for what

is next. What is my next direction? And then it gets called in. I take it and then I march out with my orders.

So what John is going to do here at the end is he's going to say, "Everyone who has placed their faith in Jesus has marching orders. We all have something to do with the faith and the level of love that we've experienced so far. There's a plan for our lives. Whether you are like, "I just got baptized, just now."

"Yeah. Welcome. God has something for you."

Or, if you are like, "I'm 98 years old." And I say with respect, "God has something for you as well."

There's this life of knowledge and obedience and growing and living out our faith. It's for all of us. So he's going to work through that same cycle talking: bam, bam, bam. And then he's going to reiterate it and hit it again. Talking about the same groups of people.

And here's the thing. It doesn't matter where you fall in these groups. What matters is that you are just honest with yourself and you say, "This is where I am, and this is where I'm going to be going." Alright? So take a look at this starting in verse 12. John says:

"I am writing to you who are God's children because your sins have been forgiven through Jesus. I am writing to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I am writing to you who are young in the faith because you have won your battle with the evil one."

"I have written to you who are God's children because you know the Father. I have written to you who are mature in the faith because you know Christ, who existed from the beginning. I have written to you who are young in the faith because you are strong. God's word lives in your hearts, and you have won your battle with the evil one." 1 John 2:12-14 (NLT)

All I want to do with our remaining time is to just work through each one of these categories. And what I want you to see is, "Where am I? Not where I want to be or where I should be or whatever is in your mind. But where am I really in these stages of growth: children, mature, or young." Right? "Where am I?"

And the first group he talks about is:

CHILDREN

He's saying, "Those who have just come to faith, here's what I want you to do. I just want you to know the forgiveness that you have received, because it has implications for how you will live. I want you to just sit in the weight of all that was done. Jesus' sacrifice for you. And now the freedom that you live in because of what He has done for you. No longer... You don't live in shame and condemnation, you have freedom. I just want you to experience that freedom. I just want you to experience it.

And then he says, "I want you to know God." Basically what he is saying is, "I want you to know the freedom that you have and I want you to know how to use that freedom by being with God. Knowing your heavenly Father. Knowing what His heart beats for. Knowing His plans for your life. Knowing the good plans and the good desires of how He wants you to live your life. That's what I want you to do."

And if that's you. If you are new to the faith or maybe you've been at it for a little bit, the question I want to put before you is:

Are you growing spiritually?

It won't be overnight. It's little by little.

Every May we have this height chart that we measure the kids once a year. And throughout the year I can't tell that they've grown at all. They kind of look the same until they stand in front of that board and over a year this person has grown physically before me. It's the same way that should be true for us spiritually. As we begin to follow Jesus, as His love is lavished on us and His Spirit empowers us, we should be growing spiritually. We should look different this year than we did last year. In five years we should look different than we do today. Are you growing?

The next group that he talks to is the:

MATURE

John is a wise man, himself. He's mature. if you look, he doesn't say *old*. And I won't say old. But mature in the faith. This is the way that we say it: the sages of the faith. You've been around a long time you have seen things. You have stories. You have experiences. And there are so many people who have come to faith, right now, in this season and they see your life and they can't even believe that it's possible.

And you would just share what you've been through and share how God has forgiven you and share how God has shaped and molded you. Is that you? Because we need you in the church. We need your life. There is no microwave button. There is nothing that



we can put a class out for or to help people get to that place where you are at. It only comes through years and years of obedience. So I just want to ask you:

Are you putting your experiences to use?

Are you sharing? There are so many people who need to hear it. And he mentions the older group in this for a reason because we're not done growing. We're not done with our job here. Until we come face to face in that courtroom with Jesus, we have work to do. So I just want to ask you are you using those experiences? It's not just good for you, but it's so good for other people. And as you share them, as you step into more of a teaching and guiding and spiritual mentor role, you'll notice that God can continue to grow you in the season that you are in. Are you using those?

And then, finally, the group that he gets to last is the:

YOUNG

Maybe a better translation is young adults. These are the people who have come up in the faith, they've sat in forgiveness. They know what it is like to live in this freedom and now they recognize the fact that they are soldiers on the front line of a war. And the way that they live matters.

They are ambassadors for God's kingdom. He has lived the way that He has lived and He has brought us into a new way of life. And they are living it out every day.

If you're here and you're in that season, maybe you're feeling some of that weight, maybe you're kind of frustrated, it seems like you're being attacked, it seems like there are so many things that are going up against you, but can I just tell you it's all for a purpose?

Are you putting your strength to use?

In the midst of this season, God is strengthening you through experiences. And you're going toe to toe with the devil. You are literally in a war. But I want you to hear this. It's what John says. You are not fighting for victory. You're fighting from a place of victory. The devil has already been defeated. Jesus has already won. Love has already conquered hatred and evil.

And there are so many in our church right now who are staying as a child because you're worried about what it would mean to step onto that front line. What will it look like to follow Jesus, for people to look to you and expect things from you? But I'm telling you, the reason that you're feeling that ache, it ain't going anywhere until you

step onto the front line and you truly live out God's purpose and reason for your being here.

We're not just waiting for heaven to come. We're bringing heaven with us and we're sharing the gospel with those in front of us. And little by little we get to see God do the miraculous over and over again.

For those of you who are here and you're like, "I would not say that I am in any of those categories, I don't know if I believe. I don't even know if God is for me. This God that you are talking about, I've never heard of a God like this before. What do I do with a message like this?" I just want you to go back to the first verse that we read here in 1 John, chapter 2, verse 2. It says:

"He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world."

God has already decided to forgive you. God has already decided that you are worth dying for. The sacrifice has already been made on His side. What you have to do is believe. You have to believe that Jesus is who He said He is. That He is the Son of God. That He did leave heaven and come to earth. He lived that perfect life that we were supposed to live. And He died the death that we deserved. But He didn't remain dead. Jesus rose three days later, defeating sin and death on that cross.

Now He is extending an invitation for you to come and to be with Him. And what you have to do is believe and then repent. Stop living the way you were once living. Stop believing the things that you once thought were true and saying, "Now, I'm going to give up all of that and I'm going to trust You and I'm going to walk with You and I'm going to follow You. And I'm going to let You decide what love really is. And I'm going to let You decide what my life really looks like because You're not only my Savior but You are my Lord." And it's on the other side of that knowledge and obedience that we get to experience the abundant life that Jesus has for us.

If that's you today, we just want you to know that you can make that decision: repent, believe, and begin to follow. That can all happen now. We're going to have people up at all of our stages on every campus. If you make that decision today to follow Jesus, we'd love to be a part of it. You can come forward and talk with someone. Please do it before you leave today.

But as we go, as we take our marching orders, because, hopefully God has said something to you, one or two things have convicted you, it's not just for you to know but it's for you to do. So before you leave here on your marching orders, I want to ask everyone to stand. Would you stand to your feet?



Before we go and we live out this love that Jesus has laid on all of us, I'm going to pray and then we're going to worship. And we're going to worship like people who know and who have seen and who have believed that God is who He says He is.

And we're going to believe His life for us. We're going to trust and we're going to live lives that look like His. If you are courageous enough and bold enough to pray like that, I would encourage you to pray with me.

God, thank You so much. God, thank You for Your Word. God, thank You even for the challenge, as convicting and as challenging as it is. God, we don't want to just be people with knowledge, storing up more and more and more information. But, God, we know that Your Spirit has called us to live a life that is worthy of the gospel.

So, God, I ask that You would meet us right where we are and that Your Spirit would give us marching orders, whether that's just knowing and being with You and experiencing Your forgiveness and Your life and Knowing you, or whether that's coming from this place and looking at how faithful You've been decade after decade and using our experiences to train up and equip the next generation, or whether it's for those of us who are on the front lines and we've been fighting and we're growing weary, God I pray that You would give a word of blessing and strength and endurance and refreshment to let us know that the battle is worth the fight.

God, we give our lives to You. We trust You with every piece of them. God, allow us to experience more and more of Your perfect love. It is in Your perfect and holy name we pray. Amen.

