

Base Camp | Rare Air: Outstanding Environments

Aaron Brockett | Acts 4:32-33

How's everybody doing? Good. It's good to see you all. I want to welcome those of you here at the Northwest campus. Would you please put your hands together and show some love for everybody on the other side of that camera right now? North, Downtown, West campuses and anybody tuning in online, we are so glad to have you.

We are in week number four of this series called *Base Camp*, and we're walking our way through and looking at the seven values we have as a church. Base camp is the analogy we are using to help us understand what we mean. If you were to ever climb a mountain, base camp is a place you stop and stay a few days to acclimate to the altitude and to regroup with friends before you head to the summit.

And if any of you would ever climb a mountain, you would quickly discover or learn that base camp isn't an option, it is absolutely necessary if you're going to arrive at the summit safely. However, we would never stop at base camp and celebrate and say, "We did it." That's not the destination, but it's there to help us get to the destination.

In many ways, when it comes to what we think of as following after God—maybe we think church attendance and believing in God—we think that is the summit. Actually it's just base camp and it's just there to help us get to the summit.

And we've identified what the summit is for all of us in our lives. It's personal transformation. We don't just want to believe in God, but we want to follow Jesus. Those are two very, very different things. I don't want to just trust Jesus with my eternal life. I want to trust Him with my here-and-now life.

So our church values not only define and describe who we are as a church, they also inform and inspire who we are becoming as people. Here's the thing I want all of us to understand at about the halfway point in this series. These seven values are not just the corporate values for us as a church these values should help us, be applicable in helping us learn to follow Jesus in every area of our lives.

We've already covered three values. I just want to go ahead and give you a heads up. The value we're going to take a look at this weekend, out of all the values in this series, this one is going to sound the least "churchy" of all of them. What I mean by that is when you look at some of the other values and you see evangelism, discipleship, and biblical authority, you're going to go, "That sounds churchy. I can see why those are values."

But when we look at this one in a moment or two, especially for those of us who have been

attending church for a while or maybe have grown up in church, we might be tempted to look at it and be a little surprised and taken aback, “I don’t understand the connection here.”

About a year-and-a-half ago when I taught through our church values the last time around, I looked on social media and there was a comment about this particular message I preached. I try not to read comments on social media very often because it’s bad for your health. It’s a scientific fact. Somebody hadn’t listened to the message yet, they just saw the title and they said this, “What does that value have to do with church?”

Chances are, when you look at this you might be tempted to ask something very similar. But I want you to know this value is extremely close to the heart of God. And when we read through what Jesus said, what He did, and the people He interacted with in the gospels, this was a huge, huge deal to Jesus—therefore it is a huge deal for us.

If you have a Bible app in front of you, and I hope that you do, would you please at all of our campuses get to Acts 4 with me. We’ve been looking at this book of the Bible. If you’re new to Bible study, it’s written by a doctor named Luke and he’s describing how the early church got started. We’ve been seeking to see how each of our seven values can be found in the Book of Acts.

Now in chapter 2 there is this day called Pentecost, where about 120 fear-filled, apprehensive followers gathered together. The church just explodes overnight to about 3,000 people. It was just a systems nightmare. They ran out of volunteers in Kid’s Ministry, the Kid’s Ministry check-in computers all crashed, it was just a mess after just one day.

You would think they would go, “Wow, we’ve arrived. We finally did it. We reached 3,000 people.” But they didn’t. They continued to follow after God. By the time we get to the beginning of chapter 4, they’ve grown to 5,000 people. You would think that at that point they would say, “This is smooth sailing,” all the way to the end of the chapter, but with additional growth comes additional problems. That’s usually how it ends up working out.

And in chapter 4 this group of believers, they gather together and they say: What we are a part of right now is really unusual and very rare, and we can’t do this without the Holy Spirit. They gathered together and began to pray and seek after God. They said: God, will you please guide our steps. And it says literally, “The ground underneath their feet shook and the Holy Spirit filled them and they continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.”

That leads us to this little statement right here in chapter 4, verse 32 that informs the value we’re going to look at together.

“All the believers were **united in heart and mind.**”

What this doesn’t mean is that they agreed on everything. What this doesn’t mean is that they never struggled, they didn’t have insecurity and pride issues, or that they always had the same

opinion. That's not what this means. Even though they were very different people and they had different perspectives and opinions, weaknesses and strengths, they still managed to be united not only in what they knew but in what they felt.

It goes on in verse 32 and it says, "And they **felt** that what they owned was not their own, so they **shared** everything they had." Now this isn't first-century socialism. This is the demeanor they had because their lives had been informed by the gospel message, which is John 3:16, God is a giver. "For God so loved the world that He gave."

And so they realized they had been saved by grace through faith, not because of anything they had done. They said: We can't just know this in our heads, we've got to know this in our hearts and it's got to translate into the way we live. So they shared everything they had with everyone they met.

Here's what I want you to see. Check this out in verse 33—it's the result of this. "The apostles," and the apostles were just the early church leaders, "**testified powerfully** to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus," that was their message, "and **God's great blessing was upon them all.**"

And here's what I want you to notice about what we just read. I want you to notice the order of it. It almost seems to be backwards. You would think the results of their unity of heart and mind would be the apostles would just crush the sermon, and that the worship team was so anointed that morning.

They actually sang the song you love to sing when you're in the car and nobody else is in the car. They sang that song. You're like, "Wow, that's incredible," and the Kids' Ministry was exceptionally well done. It was clean and it was fantastic. Therefore the result was the people were united in heart and mind.

But no, it says the people were united in heart and mind first, which then set the apostles up to testify powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In other words, the unity and the warmth of the people, the generosity of the believers, is what set the stage for the message of Jesus to be communicated with power, clarity, and effectiveness.

If I could say it this way, I would say: The environment **magnified** the message.

It was the attitude and the disposition of the people. It's not just that they knew they were saved by grace, they were gracious. It's what set the stage for God's message of grace to be so effective.

So with that understanding, here's our fourth value as a church. It might be surprising to some of you to see this.

Outstanding Environments: we will remember that **kingdom purpose** wins over **personal preference** as we create environments for people to meet Jesus.

Now what I mean by kingdom purpose is the very purpose why God sent Jesus into this world, which would be the very next verse after John 3:16, John 3:17. “God does not desire to condemn the world, but to save the world through Jesus.” It’s His kingdom purpose through His people.

It always wins. It always takes priority over my personal opinions, preferences, and likes. My personal preference or your personal preferences, there is nothing wrong with them. But kingdom purpose is always going to take precedence over them.

Now what we mean by the word environments is the feel, the vibe if I could use that word. When you walk into a specific place the vibe communicates what is truly important, not just what we say is important. So when I say environments I’m not talking about the cool factor, I’m not talking about lights and haze on the stage, I’m not talking about concrete floors. I’m talking about the disposition we have as people.

It’s the answer to this question by people who join us for the very first time. Are these people warm, or are they cold? It’s their opinion, not ours, because we’ll have a tendency to look through rose colored lenses. Are we real, or are we fake? Are we genuinely excited to be here, or are we just kind of going through the motions like spiritual zombies. Are we gracious and hospitable, or are we rigid and unwelcoming?

The reason this statement is so true, and the reason why we know it so well is because it’s so true, you could probably finish it with me: Actions speak louder than words.

Several years ago when our kids were much, much younger we were traveling on the west coast. I needed to book a hotel room. So several weeks out from the trip I got online, I did kind of a cold search for a hotel. I found one that looked decent enough. It was reasonably priced. So I booked it.

The website made it look pretty great, but when we pulled into the parking lot of the property we realized the website made it look better than it really was. Have you been to that hotel? Yeah, me too.

So I pulled into the parking lot and was like, “This isn’t impressive. The building looks dated and the landscaping is not well kept.” We walked into the lobby and the girl working behind the desk was making a personal phone call. She stayed on the phone for another 10 minutes before she helped us. She acted annoyed that we were standing there. She couldn’t find our reservation.

Once we got into the room, it was really dated and didn’t feel very clean. There was an air conditioning unit in the window that was making a lot of noise. It had that kind of dripping goop thing underneath it on the floor.

Our daughter Campbell, at the time she was not walking. She was crawling around. And because it was a hot summer night, we just did like we did with all our kids, we just put her in a diaper, that's all she was wearing, and let her go around the hotel room.

I looked over and asked Lindsay, "What is on her knees and her feet?" They were black from crawling around. Yeah, it was as gross as it sounds. You see, the website of the hotel said: You are welcome here. But our experience said: Don't ever come back. So we didn't.

Environments matter. We have a tendency to say, "That didn't sound very spiritual, Aaron. You're talking about a hotel, and we're talking about a church." I would say it is 1,000 times worse when the experience somebody has with a church is bad. The reason why is because of what is at stake.

I want you to kind of go there with me today, and for some of you this is going to be easy for you because you are newer to church or maybe you just started attending. For some of you it's going to be more difficult because you've been attending for a while and haven't thought of this for a while.

I want you to ask yourself this question: Why did I come here today?

What is the reason or the motivation? Some would say, "It's because I want to connect with God." Or, "It's because this is the best part of my week." Or, "I want to get filled up." Maybe others would be a little more honest and say, "I just came because my parents dragged me here." Or, "Somebody invited me." Or, "I'm really into this girl and she comes here. I'm with her." You're just being honest.

What I want you to think about is this. Maybe somebody invited you, invited you, invited you, and invited you. Why did you finally one day come? You can watch the service online right now streaming. Some of you are like, "Really? What are we doing here?"

So why did you get up, fight the traffic, find a parking spot, get into the building you're sitting in? Why did you? I would say we might give a number of reasons, but I would say deep down inside, whether you would articulate it or be courageous enough to admit it, we're looking for hope. We're wondering if we might experience something or hear something that would give us hope.

Maybe we've had a bad church experience in the past. Maybe we've been burned by the church in the past. But we're like, "You know what? I've been looking for it somewhere else and I couldn't find it there either, so I'm willing to give it another shot."

I would say deep down inside we're looking for hope. You can dodge invitations all the time. And you do. So I want you to go there with me today. What would happen if some finally stopped making excuses, they accepted an invitation, they overcame their fears, their hesitations with church, and they mustered up the courage to come looking for hope? Then

they pulled into the parking lot and had no idea where to go? And there wasn't a parking spot available because everybody parked as close as they could. And they walked in and the building didn't look very clean. It had that musty church smell.

Maybe some of you know what I'm talking about. I know. And the signage isn't very clear. Nobody acknowledges you. Nobody says hello. Everybody seems to have a friend except for you. You ask for directions and somebody half-heartedly points in a generic direction and then they walk away. You walk in and overhear a group in the corner kind of grumbling and complaining about something they don't like. You sit down and someone walks up to you and condescendingly taps you on the shoulder and tells you that you are sitting in their seat, which has happened. It better not anymore.

You look around during the worship time and people don't act like they want to be here—stone faced, not singing, coming in late, leaving early. Everything being communicated up front is given in this sort of Christian-eze, insider language. You have no idea what the guy is talking about. People around you kind of pretend they know what he is talking about, so you nod your head. It seems like it's really, really deep but you have no idea what to do with it.

You leave feeling worse about yourself than when you went in. Maybe you went to church looking for hope, but all you got was a good dose of, "How could you do that? You should be ashamed of yourself. You'd better watch out. You'd better not cry. You'd better not pout, because I'm telling you why. Jesus Christ is coming to town and He's mad at you, so mad. So you'd better get your act together. I hope you come back next week."

I was thinking this last week about how many services I've done at Traders Point, how many sermons I've preached from this stage. I lost count at over 1,000 sermons. The only reason I'm telling you that is because of how common this is for me. Already I'm thinking about next week's sermon that I have to preach in six days, so it better be good. It's just that mounting pressure.

And our team is constantly preparing worship services. The Kid's team is constantly recruiting volunteers and new curriculum. Here's what I'm saying. This can become so common that if we're not careful and we're so comfortable with it we can just go through the motions. The thing that will bring me back is the purpose of why I stand here, and every single time that I'm tempted to just phone-it-in up here, I think to myself, "This may be my one thousandth time, but this might be someone's first time." And they're looking for hope. I'd better not phone it in.

Here's the challenge I want to give to all of you, especially to those of you who just say, "We just kind of attend here." It's easy after your third, fourth, sixth, seventh, or one hundredth time to know where to park, what door to go in, how to check your kids in, what seat you want to find. And you walk in with blinders on.

I want you to just think about this. It's somebody's first time. We want to be on our game, so to speak, because somebody is looking for hope. Will they find it? Or will they drive away and go,

“Nope, not there.” And that’s what I mean by outstanding environments. It has nothing to do with being cool. It has nothing to do with growing a church. It has everything to do with giving somebody hope and getting him to the person of Jesus, getting all the junk out of the way so he can see Him.

A passage I want to look at today that captures this heart is in Matthew 9. I want you to flip over there with me really quick. I want us to see this is the kind of environment we desire to have as a church.

“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector’s booth.” That’s what he did for a living. “**Follow me and be my disciple,**” Jesus said to him.” We talked about this last week. Jesus isn’t so impressed with your belief; He wants you to follow Him. And disciple just means a learner, somebody who says they are not perfect, but they want to follow Him the rest of their life. That’s what Jesus wanted Matthew to do. “So Matthew got up and followed him.”

Here’s the thing. Matthew has been following Jesus for like a day. What do you think his first move is going to be as this new follower of Jesus? He’s like all in. He’s got the all-in tee shirt. He is in. What’s he going to do? Here are his options. He could join a Bible study, he could go to another church service, he could start a prayer group, he could lead a mission trip, or he could help little old ladies across the street. There are a number of options in front of him that are all wonderful options.

Here’s what Matthew decides to do, and it might surprise you. Verse 10, “Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, **along with,**” and I think those two little words, along with, are two of the most important words in the whole passage, “**many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners.**”

I’ve got to tell you I love Matthew’s heart. He has just started following Jesus and the first thing he does is he is like: I want to get my former colleagues and my drinking buddies together to meet the Jesus I’ve met. So he decides to throw a party.

Here’s the question I have for you. Does that sound very spiritual? Of all the spiritual things he could do as a follower, do you think that is a spiritual thing for him to do? to have a party?

Well apparently some didn’t seem to think so. Look at verse 11. “But when the **Pharisees,**” they were just the religious leaders of the day, “saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with such scum?’” This is tragic. He just got his friends into this house with Jesus, and that’s all they had to say? They just completely missed it.

And due to our brokenness and sin... My human heart always puts people into categories. So those people are in, those people are out. Those people are acceptable, those people aren’t acceptable. We’re up here, you’re down there.

Now the Pharisees say it out loud, but you and I are capable of communicating something very similar just with our body language and lack of presence contaminating the very environment.

God says: I want my Spirit to be there to transform people's lives and to give them hope through you.

Tragically, in so many churches... And listen to me I'm not talking about other churches. I'm talking about this one. Several years ago there was a young lady who attended our church. She grew up in a great Christian family and she was a wonderful girl. She went off to college, her first year of college, and she ended up getting pregnant by her boyfriend. She was embarrassed and ashamed of it. The guy took off leaving her with the weight of the responsibility of it. People began to talk. They were gossiping about it.

She wasn't trying to make any excuses. She knew what she had done was wrong. She wanted to do the right thing and was determined to do so. But she was afraid to show her face back in her home church. So she stayed away.

Due to the encouragement of family and friends, they encouraged her to come back. "Man, people are going to love you there. We understand. God is a God of second chances. We know you're not trying to dodge the consequences. We love you. Let's come around you." She decided to come back. At that point she was showing. She slipped in the side door and took her seat quietly in the back.

I'll never forget somebody coming up to me after the service. He walked up and in a condescending tone said, "Pastor, somebody should go tell her."

I was like, "Tell her what?"

"Oh well, somebody should tell her she shouldn't have one foot in the world and one foot in church."

I was like, "Oh. Let me see if I can get this straight." And I was escalating at this point. "You want me to go tell her, this girl who is looking for hope, looking for redemption, and not making excuses by the way—you want me to go tell her she can't have one foot in the world and one foot in church?"

I looked at him and said, "As your pastor, you are hereby ex-communicated." I didn't say that. I wanted to say that, but the filter caught it thankfully.

Here's what I said through a broken heart, "If she can't find hope here, then I can't either. Because, I'm no different."

Different sin, different consequences, sure. There are not degrees of sin, there is just sin. There are not categories of people, there are just people, people Jesus loves and He is the only One

who has the power to free us from our sin and bring redemption. Therefore, we've got to do everything we can do to get as many people as possible to Jesus.

Does she have to deal with issues and consequences? Absolutely. But we serve a God of second chances and Matthew got it. The question is, do we? Do we forget it? That's the thing. I don't think we don't get it. I think we forget it. That's what happens. We lose the wonder.

Here's what happens. I'm speaking from experience like an old pro. I was born a day after Easter, so my mom had me in church the very next day dressed like a blue egg. So I've been around the whole gambit. This is what can happen.

The longer we attend church the more at risk we are of becoming **preservers of personal preferences** and **religious customs** over getting people to Jesus with **passion and purpose**.

Is there anything wrong with personal preferences? No. Is there anything wrong with religious customs? No, unless they get in the way of getting people to Jesus with passion and purpose. What happens is that they corrode the environment of the church and we mute the message instead of magnifying it.

I've seen it over and over again, and I've seen it in my own heart. We don't necessarily mean for it to happen. I think what happens is that we get busy and we get comfortable, and we lose the wonder. We forget what it's like to be a brand new person in a church. We forget what that felt like the day our eyes opened up and we realized we are saved by grace by faith, and we just start going through the motions.

Or maybe we remember the way the church used to be, all those years ago, when we bumped into Jesus so we assume that's the way it should always be. So instead of being humbled by what God is doing now in the world and who He is reaching now, we allow our hearts to foster come resentment over how our church has changed. It's just not the same church it used to be.

Or we forget how grace radically rescued us from our situation, and we begin to walk around like we're entitled to it. We don't like the new songs because they just don't sound as reverent and as sacred as the old hymns, failing to realize Psalms tell us over and over again to sing new songs.

Do we all realize Jesus and the disciples did not write the hymns? Do we realize that? Sometimes I wonder if we know that they came much, much later. The hymns came because there were some guys like Martin Luther, some church reformers, who really wanted to get their buddies to Jesus. So they were in a pub and they heard a tune that sounded really good. So they took that tune and changed the lyrics to Christian lyrics because they thought their buddies would sing along to the tune because they heard it in the bar. *Amazing Grace* would be one of them. That's how sacred those are.

Listen, it's not that your personal preferences are not important, it's just they're not biblical

issues, so don't confuse them. See it happens when we can no longer see that God might use methods we may not personally prefer to reach all kinds of people. And I'm thankful He does.

One of the things a lot of people think is that because I'm the lead pastor I get all of my personal preferences granted. Like I have a wand and I walk into people's offices, and I'm like, "Personal preference, personal preference, personal preference. That is not how this goes down.

I'll go into the worship team's office and I'll be like, "I've got an idea. Why don't we sing this song?"

"Aaron, we're not doing that."

"Alright, have a good day."

That's pretty much how that goes down. We've got to give that stuff up and realize God may use a method we do not prefer to reach a person we could never reach.

An author by the name of Sheldon Vanauken said this. This is so convicting. He says, "The best argument for Christianity is Christians: their **joy**, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians—when they are **somber and joyless**, when they are **self-righteous** and **smug** in complacent consecration, when they are **narrow and repressive**, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths."

I couldn't agree more. I think Jesus does too. Check this out in verse 12. The Pharisees ask the disciples the question, but notice Jesus doesn't let the disciples answer. My guess is Jesus is in the kitchen drinking something and overhears them. He just walks right over: I'll answer that.

So Jesus says this in verse 12. "When Jesus heard this, he said, 'Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do.'" Now maybe you've heard that sentence before. Matthew says this. We sort of forget this part, and I love this. I love that Matthew included it. "Then he added, 'Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: I want you to **show mercy**, not **offer sacrifices**.'"

What does that mean? My hunch is the Pharisees came to the party with their big scrolls. They didn't necessarily have Bible apps like we do. They just had their Old Testament Scriptures in big, old scrolls, and they showed up to the party: We didn't bring drinks, we brought our scrolls.

And Jesus is like: Fantastic. You guys are wonderful Christians. I've got a Scripture I want you to look up. Look up this Scripture, and He's quoting from Hosea 6 in the Old Testament. He says, "I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices."

What does that mean?

Well if you look at Hosea 6, God is confronting His people for their lack of love. And He says to them: What am I going to do with you? You're like the morning dew that evaporates before lunchtime. In other words: You started off loving well but you got busy, comfortable, entitled, and you stopped loving people.

Then He says: I would much rather you love people than attend another religious function. That's what He was saying. Then He finishes it in verse 13, He says, "For I have come to call not those **who think they are righteous**, but those who **know they are sinners.**"

You see, when religious traditions and preferences get in the way of sick people getting to Jesus, He has very little patience for it.

So why is it so important that we get this? Number one, I've already mentioned it, people are starving for hope right now because we live in a pretty hopeless world, and we've got the answer. We've got to get them to it.

The second is this: Church, when we mess this up, it messes people up. And some of you know this all too well. You see, the message of the church is hope. In a world shrouded in darkness that is constantly knocking you down, the church will stand as a beacon of light that gets you back up on your feet.

The job of the church is to say and to demonstrate that Jesus is available to any and to all, and the good news, if you've never heard it before, if this is your first time to be with us, if you are just hearing all this for the first time, the good news is that Jesus loves and accepts you as you are. The even better news is that He refuses to leave you the way He found you.

Jesus wants to get His spade into the soil of your heart and dig around. I'm not saying it won't be uncomfortable. I'm not saying it won't be convicting. Because Jesus wants to dig around in there a little bit, and if He finds something that's toxic He says: I want to remove this toxic thing for your wellbeing and your good so that some fruit can be produced in your life.

Contrary to what you might think, God is not mad at you and somebody needs to hear that. God is not angry with you. God is not disappointed with you. God loves you and He sees you've got some toxic junk in the soil of your heart and He wants to remove it so you can yield some fruit.

God's like: I'm for you and I want you to have a better life, better relationships, experiences, finances, and sexuality than you ever dare dream. Would you trust Me?

The problem for many of us is that we went to church sometime in our past and we saw, heard, and experienced everything but this message. And we never got a good glimpse of Jesus because of all the stinking nonsense that was standing in the way. And we never had a chance to see or experience Him. There were a lot of things that were communicated, but hope in Jesus wasn't one of them.

Jesus, before He made His first public appearance had a cousin named John the Baptist, and John's message was just very, very simple. We find it in Mark 1:3. He simply said this,

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths **straight**.”

What's John saying? John is saying: Listen, I've only got one message. It's Jesus. It's not my job to convict anyone, change anyone, convert anyone, only God can do that. My only responsibility is to clear the path and make it as straight as possible from point A to Jesus, to get as many people as possible to Him.

I don't know who coined the phrase first, but I really like it. God draws straight lines with crooked sticks. And all of us are broken and messed up, but God still wants to use us to get our friends and family to Jesus.

Another author by the name of Madeleine L'Engle said this. “We draw people to Christ not by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by **showing them a light** so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the **source of it**.”

Guys, that's what I'm talking about when I say outstanding environments; it's the light that's within us that changes everything about us. It's the attitude and the disposition when we realize that we are no better, we are just sinners saved by grace and we want as many people as possible to meet the Jesus we have met. It's the heart of Matthew that says: We want to throw a party for our friends so they can meet Jesus.

And we need everyone in on this because there is a spiritual battle that is going on any time someone steps foot on any one of our campuses, whether you realize it or not. And if Traders Point is home for you, if you look around and say, “This is home for me,” then I want you to know you never just attend church. You are either contributing to this environment, or you are detracting away from it.

Outstanding environments does not mean the church budgets for it, the staff creates it, and you're the recipients of it. That's not what that means. It means this is an all-hands-on-deck thing.

So I think about my friend Brittany who, when the Downtown campus was meeting at the public library, was in the ladies' restroom washing her hands at the sink. There was another lady beside her she had never met. And she could choose to engage her, or just dry her hands off and leave. And she chose just to turn and smile and say, “Hello,” and that was that ladies' first weekend. Nobody had talked to her yet.

She ended up making some introductions. A couple of months later that lady and her husband got baptized, and they're now in a group. I wonder if Brittany would have said, “Ah, she's

probably been attending here for a while and she probably doesn't want me to bother her," and just walked out of the bathroom what might have happened.

I think about the single mom several years ago who I was talking to. She said she came here with her young daughter all by herself. She said, "I didn't know anybody and I was super-intimidated to walk into the building." She said, "I wasn't quite sure where to go and finally figured it out. I got my daughter into her class, went into the worship service, and enjoyed everything about it. My daughter loved her class. She couldn't wait to come back. But I thought to myself as we were walking out the doors at the front that we probably won't come back."

That kind of surprised me. I was like, "Why? Why would you feel that way?"

She was like, "Aaron, it took every ounce of courage I had to walk into this building by myself as a single mom." She was like, "I didn't know if I could do it again the next week." Some of you know what I am talking about.

I was like, "Why'd you come back?"

She was like, "Funny thing, but I heard my name."

"What do you mean?"

She was like, "Somebody called out my name." Isn't it powerful when you hear your first name when you're in an environment where you don't expect anyone to know you? She turned around and there was this warm lady standing behind her with a big smile on her face. She called her by name, because they worked in the same building.

She introduced herself to her daughter and said, "Why don't you let me show you around? Why don't you come over to my house right now? My husband and I have more than enough food. Why don't you eat lunch with us?"

And that single mom looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "No offense, Aaron, you were good that day but she's why I came back."

Now here is the thing. I think there's a lot we have going on at all of our campuses that is really good in this area. I think our connections guests are fantastic. But can I just say to you that my heart is heavy because I think we've got a ways to go? I do not think we're there yet. We need everyone in on this. This is not just the staff's responsibility. This is not just the hard-core, committed, been here 30 years category. This is every single one of us.

This summer I was at a convention in Kansas City and I was talking to a friend of mine. She had served in, led in many great churches. She lives in Cincinnati and she was on her way to Chicago last month, in July, for some business. She texted me and said, "Hey Aaron, I'm rolling through Indy and I'm going to visit one of your campuses."

I said, “Hey, that’s fantastic. Why don’t you hit two of them? Why don’t you go to the early service of one and the later service of another one? I’d love to hear your thoughts.” That was a mistake. I’m just kidding.

She ended up sending me (a few weeks later) four pages of her impressions. It was like one of those secret shopper kind of deals, where nobody knew who she was. She just kind of walked in and then told me what she observed. I wish I could read all four pages to you, but you wouldn’t.

She had some wonderfully glowing things to say about our church. She really did. But, she said a couple of things that really just convicted me. Let me just read a couple of them. She said, “I received a couple of smiles on the way in, no warm greetings, handshakes, or welcomes. It was easy enough for me to guess where the worship service was, but wasn’t really offered any help navigating the building.”

“I tried to identify myself as new. I asked for directions to the restroom. I received a point and a hand gesture. That was it. Upon leaving, I lingered a bit in the lobby and walked by the welcome desk to grab materials. I wanted to see if anyone would connect with me if I didn’t initiate,” that’s key, “and no one did.”

No one spoke to me. Outside of directions to the restroom and a handshake during meet-and-great, I had no human interaction. Overall this was a great church experience with a wonderful service, but I would have loved to have more warmth and human connection. It’s what would have increased my chances of returning.

We are not there yet. Can I just say, “I own it?” It’s all on me. I need to do a better job of casting this vision. I need to do a better job of informing you as to why it matters so much. And I need to be reminded once again to never lose the wonder of God’s grace in my life.

Listen, we have been given something we don’t deserve. And God says: You don’t just sit on that. You’ve got to give it to as many people as you possibly can. You see, the church is not a business so we don’t run it like a business. The church has something that is more eternal than any business, so we should be the most attractive, joy-filled, warm, hospitable people on the planet.

Why? Because we want to grow a bigger church? No way. Bigger churches are just more problems. I know there are some looking for hope. If they are on their last leg and they give the church a shot and we fail at this, the consequences are big time.

I want to be the kind of church that has more the heart of Matthew than the Pharisees. Do you? That wasn’t very convincing. Let me hang it up here. I want to be a part of a church that has the heart of Matthew, not the Pharisees. Do you?

Let’s pray.

God, this particular topic moves me maybe more so than most because I know that when the church has been transformed by You, it's the best thing in the world. I've seen it—I've seen glimpses of it. I also know how hard this can be because we're all hurting, we're all broken, we're all selfish at our core.

God, we can mess this up if we're not careful. I'm astounded that You've given us such an incredible message and entrusted us with it. We don't want to mess it up, God. The most powerful sermon preached at all of our campuses every weekend is not from the stage or the screen; it's in the parking lot, the lobby, and the hallway. And it's in the seats if somebody looks around and says, "I don't know if I believe what you believe, but I see something you have that I want."

So God, may we have the heart of Matthew to throw a party for our friends who don't know You, that we might connect them to the Jesus who has changed our lives. If there is anybody here who doesn't know You, I pray they would know they are welcome here. We're so glad they're here and we just simply want them to know the Jesus we know.

We ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.

Right now we are going to take communion together, which is just a piece of bread and a cup of juice that represent the body and the blood of Jesus. If you're not comfortable with this, you're not a follower of Christ, just let it pass. But here's what I want you to do. I know there's kind a rustle around the room. I just want you to be quiet for a minute and I want you to ask God, "God what did You want me to know and hear from this message and push down into my life? Maybe I don't want to hear it. Maybe I don't want to know it."

But that's what this time is, it's just a time for us to re-center and re-focus in the midst of a very, very busy world. And after a few minutes, when we take this and pray and ask God to speak to our hearts, the team will come out and lead us in another song. So ushers you can come.