

## Evergreen | Stump

*Aaron Brockett | Matthew 1:6*

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What's up everybody? How are you doing? It's good to see you today. I'm so glad to have you. We are one church gathering in multiple rooms and locations in our city. I want to give a big shout out to each and every one of our campuses.

I also know that on any given weekend we have any number of people who may be experiencing this for the first time. Maybe you got an invitation to come. Maybe you wanted to come and check this out for a while and you came today. I know to be a new person in a new place, regardless of it being a church, can be a little bit of an uncomfortable thing. Everybody else seems to know where to park, where to go, and how to do the kids' check-in thing. And maybe you just feel like you are trying to catch up.

I just want you to know that if that happens to be you at any one of our campuses, this morning I spent some time praying specifically for you. We go into these weekends really thinking about you. So we are really glad you are here. I know our campus pastors likely already welcomed you. Let's do it again. At all of our campuses give a hand to all of our guests. We're really glad you are here.

It's hard to believe that our Christmas services are coming up in a few short weeks. There are always two big services every year in which about double the number of people who come on a regular weekend show up for. That is Easter and Christmas. Christmas means a lot to me for a lot of different reasons. Throughout the year I oftentimes run into someone somewhere or I even am leading them through a prayer in the back before they get baptized and I say, "Tell me about your story."

And it is not uncommon to have somebody say to me, "I got an invitation to a Christmas service and that's where it began." So I'm sort of learning at this point that it's what God does. I'm expecting that in another couple of weeks people will enter into the doors of any one of our campuses for the very first time.

I just want to encourage you. If God's sort of placed somebody on your heart and mind to invite, have the courage to do it. You just never know what that might do to change that person's life or their eternity. So go ahead and do it.

I also want you to remember that we don't want to just invite people to a Christmas service, we want them to have a great experience when they get here. This is an all hands on deck and we are anticipating 18,000 people or so will come to a Christmas service. We can give it up for that. It's a little terrifying, actually, because I've not started working on the message. I'd better get on that.

When they come, I want them to have a really good experience. That means we need hundreds and hundreds of people who will step up to serve, not just in a role, but step up to serve in a way that gives people a really, really good experience.

I don't know about you but for the last couple of weeks around our house Christmas movies have been playing on a constant loop on our television. The classics like *It's a Wonderful Life*, *A Christmas Story*, *Elf*, and my personal favorite and the one that really captures the essence of the Christmas season, *A Christmas Vacation* are playing. You either love that movie or you hate it. What I'm coming to learn is you are likely married, at least that's what is true in our house.

We'll watch these movies and here's what I've noticed in watching these movies that are familiar and are watched over and over again each year. As different as they are, they have these similar elements to the story line. There is this dysfunctional relationship. There are unmet expectations or this hopelessness that is involved, whether that's George Bailey facing financial ruin in his business or Ralphie Parker who really wants a BB gun and everyone keeps telling him he is going to short his eye out.

Then there is Buddy the Elf leaving the North Pole to find his real dad only to discover that his real dad is a real jerk. And so we just see this kind of story line. All the great Christmas movies seem to have these three elements.

Challenges to the relationships

Threat of unmet expectations

Feelings of hopelessness

As I've been watching these movies again this year, one of the things that jumped out to me is that this is part of what makes them so great. There are a couple of reasons. As I watch them in their challenges, unmet expectations, and hopelessness it makes me feel a little better about my situation. That's kind of the twisted way I operate. "My life isn't perfect, but at least it's not like that."

But the other thing we see, the other reason I think these movies are so popular is that oftentimes by the end of the movie we see a resolution to the relationship, their expectations get exceeded or at the very least reordered, and we see they do find the hope they are looking for in a place where they weren't expecting it. And so we see this lesson reinforced through all these movies.

Last week we began our Christmas message of sermons called *Evergreen*. What we said is that Christmas trees are a big deal this time of the year. They are sort of like the centerpiece of our decoration. I love it. I love the look of the Christmas tree with lights strung around it.

But what we also said last week is that trees play a big role in the Bible as well. So from cover to cover we see trees play this prominent symbolic role, both literally and metaphorically. We see

in the Book of Genesis that God places a tree in the middle of a garden. We see in Revelation that God places a tree in the middle of a city.

Trees are used as symbols of connectedness, growth, stability, and even hope all through the Scripture. When we come to the first chapter of the first book of the New Testament, Matthew 1, we find a different kind of tree. We read about Jesus' family tree. It's just a list of names and it doesn't really seem all that interesting.

Anytime I'm ever doing a Bible reading plan or I come across Matthew 1, I don't know about you but oftentimes I'm so tempted to skim it because I don't think there is anything in this for me. I'm not going to put any of these verses on a coffee cup or a t-shirt. There is nothing motivational about reading a bunch of names I find hard to pronounce. At least I thought that.

Here is what many of you know, or maybe some of you need to be reminded of, the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are an introduction of Jesus the Messiah. And each of these four individuals is giving us his understanding, his perspective, his story of who Jesus is. The way they introduce him tells us a lot about who they are.

And Luke does the best job with Christmas, don't you think? Luke is where we get our nativity scene. Luke's description of Christmas is usually where our minds go. It's so picturesque and perfect. Luke does Christmas really well. That is the Christmas party you want to go to.

Matthew, on the other hand, stinks at it. I'm just going to say that up front. Matthew stinks at Christmas. At least we think so. You don't want to go to his party. "Matthew, tell us who Jesus is."

"I'm just going to give you a bunch of names."

"Thanks, I'll come again next year."

So last Sunday afternoon my mom texted me this picture right here. And I think it's because of the series we are in. This actually is a picture of my great-great grandparents from the mid-1800s. This is my great-great grandmother, Edna. She looks like she is having a rough day, maybe a rough life. This is my great-great grandfather Danville Durham. I actually have his wooden rocking chair from the late 1800s in my home office and that's one of my favorite pieces of furniture. This is my great grandpa Albert Durham. I actually knew him. He passed away when I was 18 years old.

So let's just say you and I go to have coffee sometime and we're trying to get to know each other. You start asking me the typical questions you would ask as we try to familiarize ourselves with each other. And you say, "Where are you from? What do you like to do?"

If I were to stop you and say, "How about if I just show you a picture?" And I slide this picture across the table and say, "This are my great-great grandparents, Danville and Edna, and they

met and begat a son named Albert. And Albert met a young lady by the name of Ola and they begat a girl named Thelma. Then Thelma met a boy named Lloyd and they got together and they begat a daughter named Linda. And Linda met a boy named Michael and they got together and they begat Aaron.”

How do you like me now?

I’ve managed to work that phrase into two sermons back to back and that is amazing. That is some skill right there, somebody owes me \$50.

If I were to just do that, give you a bunch of names and go, “That pretty much tells you all you need to know about me,” you wouldn’t know me any better at all. In fact, you would begin to question if you wanted to know me.

This is what Matthew does. Matthew is like, “Let me tell you about the Messiah, the one who has been prophesied for hundreds and hundreds of years, the one who is to come. We’re like, “Tell us,” and then he just gives us this list of names.

Last week I said that it’s not surprising that Matthew would begin his introduction of Jesus like this because in the first century Jewish world your genealogy was everything. It was your birth certificate, your social security card, your background check, all of that wrapped up into one. It gave you your identity and credibility. It was a big deal.

So it is not surprising that Matthew would tell us who Jesus is by giving us some names, but what is surprising is who Matthew chooses to include in it because oftentimes you would leave out certain people. But Matthew does not edit it or eliminate anybody. He includes everyone in Jesus’ family tree. He includes all the cousin Eddies. The people who you would think would discredit Jesus, Matthew puts them in there.

Who am I talking about? There were typically three groups of people you would often leave out of a Jewish genealogy. You would leave out, and I mentioned this last week, women due to it primarily being a patriarchal society. You would leave out foreigners and outsiders, anybody who did not come from a Jewish line. And you would leave out notorious sinners. Anybody who had done anything really bad, you would leave them out because that would discredit the person.

But Matthew includes, and get this, all three of these groups multiple times. It’s not like he slipped and accidentally put it in there, it’s almost as if he is intentionally doing it. He wants us to see those three groups of people because he mentions them multiple times within the first six verses of his writing his introduction.

So last week we talked about one of the limbs of Jesus’ family tree, this guy named Jacob. Jacob tried to control his circumstances, he tried to control the people in his life, and God invited him

into this place of rest. I think many of us need to hear that this time of the year. There is a whole flurry of activity going on.

And rest does not mean you back away from your responsibilities. Rest does not mean that you abdicate what it is that's in front of you to do. Rest is not inactivity it's a condition of your soul. You can actually be very, very productive and yet be at rest. And that's what God is inviting us into.

We learned these words from the prophet Isaiah last week. "Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength and they will mount on wings like eagles." You'll do more flying than flapping.

So today I want to look at another one of Jesus' great-great grandfathers, this guy by the name of King David. There is this real interesting description found in Isaiah 11:1. It says this: "Out of the **stump** of David's family will grow a **shoot...**"

That's a really interesting way to put it, don't you think? Out of the stump, but a stump is not exactly a picture of life, is it? You don't come across a stump in the middle of the woods and go, "Huh, I wonder what is going to grow there?" You're not going to say, "I wonder what kind of fruit this tree is going to produce."

One of my favorite things to do on the weekends, like on Sunday afternoons after church, is get my chain saw. My chain saw is one of my favorite things I own around the house. That will tell you a lot about me. You can pray for your pastor. I know I'm kind of dressed like it today, as people have pointed out.

I'll get my chain saw and I love to go in my backyard and I just will clear brush in the woods behind my back yard. I'll do it for hours and hours. It's like therapy to me. I think part of the reason why, and I thought about this, what I do I never fully feel a sense of accomplishing anything. And it doesn't matter how well I think the message came out or connected, I'm like, "I've got to do it again in seven days." It doesn't matter how many programs we launch, how many initiatives we have, it just never feels done. There are just more people I want to meet and interact with.

Here's the thing. When I've got my chain saw and I'm cutting down things in the woods, I can work for two hours and turn around and say, "Progress. I actually accomplished something." I love to do it. I'll likely be out there this afternoon if any of you want to join me.

The day after Thanksgiving I had a couple of friends over and we were walking through the woods behind my house. They had noticed some of the brush that I'd cleared. One of them said, "Have you capped those shoots?"

I had no idea what he was talking about. "Why do I need to cap those shoots?" I know that is really bad, but I think it is funny. Why would I do that? What he meant was, "We need to seal

them. All that brush you just cut, you need to seal it with something because they will just send new shoots and grow back next spring.” I don’t want to hear that.

Here is what he was saying, “You don’t have to do that with a stump.” You don’t water a stump. You don’t fertilize a stump. A stump is a picture of something that once was but is no more. A stump is not a picture of hope and yet Isaiah chooses to introduce us to the coming Messiah by saying, “Out of the stump of David’s family will come a shoot.” What in the world does he mean by that? Why would he say it that like that?

As I told you before there are three groups of people you would never include.

Women (due to patriarchal society)  
 Foreigners and outsiders  
 Notorious sinners

Matthew includes all of them. We see that in the first six verses. Let me read them for you. It’s just a list of names. Here’s what he says:

“Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah,” and I want you to pay attention to the parentheses because they are the message, “(whose mother was **Tamar**). Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was **Rahab**). Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was **Ruth**). Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of King **David**. David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was **Bathsheba**, the widow of Uriah).”

That’s at least certainly one way to put it. And if any of you know that story you know that was a messy, messy deal. David is primarily known for two events in his life. David is known for taking down Goliath and David is unfortunately known for sleeping with another man’s wife.

And we see that in this list we find a great big mess. To you and me it is a long list of names and it’s easy to zone out, and some of you did, when I was just reading through those names. “This is nothing I feel I can apply to my life.” What I want you to know is that to the first century Jewish crowd, this would have been compelling and even stunning.

If this would have been read aloud to them, you would have heard audible gasps from the crowd because they knew these names, they were familiar with them. I could throw out some names to you today like professional athletes, actors and actresses, or celebrities—people we know but we don’t really know. We would all be familiar with them. It’s not just a list of names, we know them.

That was true in the first century. Whenever you throw out these names to us, we may know a few, but a Jewish crowd would have been very familiar with them and they would have known

the stories behind the names. They would have been like, “What good could come from their stories in this situation?”

Here’s what I think is the difference between Matthew’s introduction of Jesus and Luke’s introduction. Luke tells us what happened. Matthew tells us how it happened. That’s oftentimes what I missed when I was growing up as a kid. I heard the what, I knew the what. As a kid I always loved Christmas. Anytime it would roll around I would love the decorations, food, gifts, and Santa. I would get all excited. I couldn’t contain my excitement.

Inevitably I would have someone in authority over me, maybe like a Sunday school teacher or somebody like that who would say, “Aaron, Jesus is the reason for the season.” And I was like, “That’s right. That’s the real reason.” I would feel all bad about it. I knew what happened. For the life of me I don’t remember knowing the lesson of how it happened.

Understand this, how it happened connects you to the why. I would say that to the first century Jewish crowd Matthew’s version of Christmas meant more to them because they knew these names and the stories associated with them. And it begins to make a whole lot more sense what Isaiah prophesied to us hundreds of years before: that out of a stump of David’s family line would come a shoot.

What does he mean by stump? Well in that paragraph of names I just read we find these experiences right here. Here are a couple of observations. Did you know that two of Jesus’ great, great, great grandmas were involved in prostitution? Like one of them was a prostitute. She was a foreigner, a woman, and a prostitute. She was all three of the categories. Her name is Rahab. We’ll actually talk more about her next week.

But then there is this other one. It is the first name mentioned in the passage we read. Tamar didn’t intend on being a prostitute. She found herself in a desperate situation where she was widowed at an early age and she was childless. To a Jewish woman in the first century that was a really bad situation to find yourself in. If you didn’t have kids you missed out on the Levitical blessings. You wanted to have children to pass on the family line. You would lose some of the rights that came if you did have a child.

It’s hard for us to get our minds wrapped around it, but to her she was in a desperate situation. Desperate times call for desperate measures. And she knows her father-in-law’s weaknesses so she pretends to be a prostitute so he will sleep with her. She gets pregnant with twins. I don’t know about you, but I don’t remember that lesson in Sunday school. That would have been a very awkward flannel graph.

But one of those twin boys was King David’s ancestor. So we see here that God took that very messy situation and said, “That’s not the end for you. Watch me redeem this. Watch me do something through this.” That’s what God does. I’m just wondering here today—is there anybody at any of our campuses and you are facing a very messy situation of your own in your personal life? Maybe it is in your marriage, with your grown kids, or maybe it’s at work.



Here's what I mean by a messy situation. It doesn't come up in small talk. You're not going to post this on social media because you're afraid of what people would say and frankly it is none of their business. But you are thinking about it every day. It is right here.

Have you ever had this moment where you're like, "If this person knew what is really going on with me, they probably wouldn't want to be my friend." And if we're being honest, all of us have found ourselves in this situation. It's just embarrassing, messy and maybe we didn't ask for it. We didn't do anything to deserve this, but here we are.

And if that is the case, God is closer to you than you think. You are not damaged goods. God is not ashamed of you. God's like: Hey, I did it once. I can take any situation and work through it. I can do it again.

Let's look at another observation here. Matthew includes five women in Jesus' family tree from beginning to end and three of them were not Jewish, they were foreigners. We have Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. They were all outsiders who had been grafted in to Jesus' family tree.

In addition to that, there are several women who are not explicitly mentioned, but they are inferred in there because their husbands are so prominently displayed in the passage. You have Sarah who is the wife of Abraham, and Rebecca who is the wife of Isaac, and Rachel who is the wife of Jacob.

One of the things all these women have in common is that they struggled to get pregnant. A case could be made that you could put Ruth in there as well. Ruth was married for ten years before her husband passed away, and they never had a child. It was very unusual in the first century so it is likely she struggled with infertility as well.

So here is one of the things we see that is easy to miss. Several of Jesus' great, great, great, great grandmothers struggled to get pregnant. They didn't know if there was a future beyond them, yet God used them in Jesus' family line.

While this sermon is not about this, I know this is a very, very real subject. I bet there is somebody here today who really wants to be a mom, but it is not happening. Maybe you are in the middle of your greatest struggle with infertility or maybe you just found out that you are having a miscarriage. That pain feels lonely and isolating and it strikes you at the core because it is really all you want. You are like, "What is happening here?"

It may feel like in your worst moments that God is punishing you or God has forgotten about you. Can I just say that you're not alone? There are multiple women who have gone through this. My wife, Lindsay, and I—we've gone through this several times. There are people right now who are experiencing this, and it was in Jesus' family tree too. And if God could work then, God can work today. It's not the end of the road. There is hope beyond what seems hopeless to you and to me.



And then let's look at King David himself, the king who did not behave very kingly. We see that David just made a big mess of his life. We come back to the way that Matthew states it: "Jesse was the father of King **David**. David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was **Bathsheba**, the widow of Uriah)."

Many of us know this story. David stays behind while his men go off to battle. He sees a woman named Bathsheba bathing on the rooftop and he wants her. So he takes her and she gets pregnant. In order to try to cover up his sin, he doesn't come clean with it but covers it up and he brings her husband back from battle for a weekend. He is such a man of integrity he won't be with his wife and David in his frustration sends him to the front lines so he will be killed. He basically murders her husband so he can have Bathsheba for his own.

That's exactly what happens. Without any sort of guilt or remorse he just takes Bathsheba into his household. But God is not going to let him get away with it. So God sends someone from David's life group, a guy named Nathan. That's what he does. He says: Nathan, you've got to confront David in his sin.

That would have been a really intimidating place for Nathan to be in. Have you ever had to confront somebody who is in authority over you? That's a very tricky deal. So Nathan comes to King David and he's like: David will probably either kill me or flat out lie about this if I come at it head on. So this is brilliant. Nathan goes: Let me just tell a story and see if I can get into his heart through the side door.

That's exactly what he does. He says: David, let me tell you a story. And David just takes it hook, line, and sinker. He tells him about this man who steals another family's sheep that they love and takes it as his own. David is just furious and says: That man will pay back four times the amount of what he took.

Right then and there I think Nathan had tears in his eyes when he realized David was so blinded by his own sin that he couldn't even see it in his life. I think Nathan grabbed David by both hands and said: David, look at me. You're the man. You're the guy who took the sheep.

In that moment David finally sees it for what it is, and the shame drops square on his shoulders. I think when David writes the Psalms, I think he taps back into that moment. He goes back to that place when he feels the guilt, feels the weight, and stops trying to compromise. And he stops trying to make excuses.

Have any of you ever been there? I have. The moment where I've been sort of lying to myself about how I'm really doing, and then there is just this moment of God's grace where he just gives me a glimpse of my reality through the loving confrontation of a friend.

It's in that moment when you can feel really hopeless. You can feel like things are a stump, "What in the world can God do through me now? This is hopeless. I don't know how God can take anything as messy, broken, and imperfect as me."

That is David. We see here in Matthew 1 that God uses David in the midst of his shame, brokenness, and sin. Through all these stories of Jesus' ancestors we see these:

Challenges to relationships  
Threat of unmet expectations  
Feelings of hopelessness

It's all in there. Hundreds of years before the Messiah would be born, it looked like Jesus' ancestors were going to mess it up. It looked as dead and hopeless as a stump. Yet, here is how Isaiah says it in chapter 11, verse 1.

"Out of the **stump** of David's family will grow a **shoot**..."

And that shoot has a name. His name is Jesus, a child who would be born to a bewildered couple on that fateful night in Bethlehem. He is saying that out of the challenging, messy relationship and unmet expectations of women struggling with infertility and the hopelessness of sinful men would come a Savior.

Jesus came from imperfect people for imperfect people so that he might continue to work through imperfect people. That's the message of Christmas. It's not just meant to be this picturesque thing of Mary, Joseph, and the barn animals in a stable. It looked so perfect, but it was far from perfect. It was messy.

I love what Isaiah says later in chapter 9, verses 6-7. I came across this last week and it just jumped out of my Bible. He says this. "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government," and he is not talking about the U.S. government, but the orders of this world, "will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice," and he could have stopped right there but he doesn't, "from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity."

And I've read that before but this last week it jumped out of my Bible. And I thought, "He didn't have to include that last part, but he did." And that shows the gracious, second-chance kind of God we serve. God says: Yeah, I know David was imperfect. I know David really messed up. I know out of David's situation the whole thing could have come to a screeching halt. But I specialize in taking things that seem broken, dead, and hopeless and breathing new life into them. So I can take something as imperfect as David, and I can perfect my plan through him.

And if God could do that then, God can do that today. I think part of the reason why he did it this way is it demonstrates this had to come through God's power and not ours. God is at his

best in our weakness. God is at our best at our worst moments. And God says: I just want you to come to me and I just want you to be open and real. Don't sweep it under the rug. Come to me just as you are. Christmas is all about light invading dark spaces. Christmas is all about hope invading the hopelessness of this world.

David would write in Psalm 119:49-50 this: "Remember your promise to me; it is my only hope. Your promise revives me; it comforts me in all my troubles."

That's what Christmas is. Christmas is a promise. It was a promise given to us first through the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before a Messiah would be born. If Jesus came once, if he fulfilled those promises, he will do it again. Christmas is all about God doing unexpected things at unexpected times through unexpected people.

God is not surprised by your sin. Your spouse might be, your friends might be, your kids might be but he is not surprised by it. He saw it a long time ago and he made provision for it. God is not stumped by your situation. He anticipated it a long, long time ago and he has made a way.

God is not stupefied by that challenge in your life right now. He has seen it all along and says: Watch this. Watch what I might do. He saw it coming and provided an answer. And his name is Jesus born on that fateful night in Bethlehem to a bewildered couple, a shoot of new life springing out of what we thought was a stump.

That's part of what we do at the end of the year. We come together as people to remember that. We can hold onto that. God wants to work on and through our lives so we can bring that sense of hope into the lives of others. That's what our year end giving is all about, to give a real shot in the arm to that.

I want to show you this video of a story of a guy by the name of Chris. Chris and his wife were involved in our West campus and I want you to let his story speak for itself. Please turn your attention to the screens.

Video:

We'd move into a house and we'd start to get things from Goodwill or Salvation Army or something and then we'd have to leave it because the doors were locked and there was a padlock on them. The houses that we lived in were often for one or two months and then we'd move because we had to move from eviction to eviction., went from school to school in a lot of different places.

I felt a lot of that change was normal. I thought, you know, living in different houses was normal. I knew the school thing wasn't normal but I kind of thought, "You know, I'm poor, I may smell a little bit more than the other kids, I may look different or not have a hair cut like the other kids." There were many more nights going to bed hungry than with a full stomach.

I was starting to really notice some of my parents' downfalls and at that point I realized that my mom was selling herself just to make money for drugs and then my dad would beat her—to go out and sell herself. And when she came back and the drugs ran out he beat her again because he cheated. It was just kind of a repetitive cycle over and over again.

Oftentimes there was like abandonment. I didn't know what it was as a kid. It was just like a sadness of like, "My life is not normal, my life is not real."

At 12 years old, Chris and his younger brother were removed from their home by the Department of Child Services. For the next few years, Chris lived in 11 different foster homes. He was eventually placed in a group home.

During that time I met a family there that was in charge of it. Their name was Dave and Toni. They were the first people who really showed me the love of Christ, even though I didn't love them or care about them. They kept saying things like, "We love you and we care about you." I was very confused because I just didn't hear that.

The whole time I'm trying to fix myself. I'm trying to say, "Everything is going to be okay." Like, "I've got this. I'm strong. I've got it." And all throughout that time I had moments where I said, "I hate you. I can't stand you guys. You're the worst people in the world," even though they had been in my life the most consistent of anybody."

At about the year mark I really started to ask more questions about Christ, what he really meant, did he really care about me and did he care about my brothers in the group home? I just kept hearing the gospel presentation, I kept hearing home compared to church. And finally I just decided it was for me. I just accepted Christ.

Chris continued to grow in his faith, guided by Dave and Toni. When Chris was 16, Dave and Toni decided to retire and leave the group home.

I remember sitting down and looking at the table when they told me that they were going to leave. You know, I felt devastated. I'd been there two years. I was another person.

You guys were the solids. After a while they sat me and another youth down and said, "Hey, look." We want you to come with us if you're okay with that. I'm like, with tears are running out of my eyes, "Absolutely. Where are we going?"

"We're going back to Indianapolis." It was like my dream at the time. And so, "We're going to Indy and we're going to take you to Ben Davis where you can be in ROTC and all of this fun stuff that you want to do." They really changed my life. You know, I probably would have stayed in that institution until I turned 18 and then moved on to another institution for however long. And they just still love and still care for and care for my wife. You know, I now call them Mom and Dad.

The decision we made as a couple before we were going to get married was, “We want to foster. We want to bring kids into our home who need love, need care.” You know, maybe their path is headed to where mine was going instead of going the other way—going towards Christ, going to understand what love is, understand what stability is, strength is.

Without Dave and Toni, I may have never have reacted that way. Because of their ability to be uncomfortable and their willingness to be uncomfortable, my life is forever changed.

End Video

Wow! Can we give it up for Chris? That is a miracle right there, it really is. I pray that we would never get used to stories like that, never get numb to them.

I was thinking of this last week. What do I want you to take from this message? The last thing I would want from you is for you to say, “You gave us a really good history lesson to us today. You taught us about some people in Jesus’ family tree that we didn’t know before. Look at what God did then.”

But you would totally miss what he wants to do now. Because that is the whole point of it, you and I are in Jesus’ family tree. We are right there along with Tamar, Ruth, and Rahab, and David and all these people who lived imperfect lives.

God now says, “It’s your turn. Why don’t you bring to me your mess? Why don’t you bring to me what you feel is hopeless? Why don’t you bring to me your stump of a situation and see what I might do?” And then you can’t hold onto that. You’ve got to pass it on. You’ve got to give it to someone else.

I love stories like that. We just see there is this couple and I don’t know them, I have not met them and I don’t know anything about them other than what we just saw on the video. I’m sure they had their issues and their marriage wasn’t perfect. They probably felt like they were failing most of the time. They were just willing to bring to God who they were.

That’s all God is asking of you right now. Just bring to him who you are. Not who you want to be, not who you are pretending to be, not the perception you are giving to others, but just who you are. Just watch what he will do through that imperfection. Amen? Anybody with me in that? That pumps me up. I’m excited about that. That gives me hope. I don’t want to just blindly walk through the holiday season and miss that message, and I don’t want you to either.

So in these next few moments I want you to open yourself up for a moment or two. I don’t know where you stand with God. I don’t know where you are in your spiritual journey. I’m under no illusion that everybody here is tracking with God. I’m under no illusion here that you have the perfect spiritual life. I’m just going to go out on a limb here and say you don’t. That’s why these next few moments are our most important time together.

Would you just open yourself up? If you are not sure where you stand with him or it's been a long time since you've talked to him, just pray this prayer:

God, if any of that is true would you please just reinforce that truth in my heart for today. I don't know if it's true. I don't know if that lumberjack up there is crazy. God, if any of that is true, will you meet me in my mess? Will you meet me in my stump of a situation?

Just see what God might do. It's what he does.

Father, we come to you right now and I pray that today someone would find hope. That today someone who walked here in darkness would have a light flip on. That today some would come in here feeling hopeless about their situation, that they would find hope and better yet they wouldn't even be able to explain it because it's not something they can figure out. It's only something you can give. So I pray that they would experience the power of your spirit. That's the essence of Christmas.

I thank you for all those names in Matthew 1. I thank you for all the stories behind those names because they give me hope that if you can work through them, you can work through anyone. There isn't anybody exempt. There isn't anybody too far gone. There isn't anybody too broken. There isn't anybody too hopeless. It's what you do.

So God, do it again. Do it again. And Christmas isn't just a story, it's a promise. We hold onto that promise and we thank you for it. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.