

## Fresh Faith | What Grace Does

Aaron Brockett | Ephesians 2

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Alright, it's good to see everybody today. I want to welcome all of our guests and first time visitors across all of our campuses. We are one church gathering in multiple rooms and locations around our great city. So I want to say hello to our North campus, Downtown, West, anybody tuning in live online or maybe you're watching later in the week on demand, and those of you here at Northwest. You guys are looking good. How are you doing? It's good to see you today—so glad to have you.

If you have been coming for a while and you've been looking around and you're like, "Man, it's kind of a big place," and, "Where do I go next?" and, "What's my next step toward greater connection and spiritual growth?" the answer is *Growth Track*. I would just encourage you to check that out. You can get all of that information online or at Connection Central at all of our campuses.

It's about a 40 minute gathering after the service with a small group of people. We just want to help facilitate your growth and really all growth is is: what is the next step in front of me? And we want to help clarify that for you and come along side of you and encourage you in that. So I hope that you'll check out *Growth Track*.

If you are just now coming in or just visiting with us, we are in week number two of a series of messages that we are calling *Fresh Faith*. We are actually walking our way through a New Testament letter, because that's what originally what it was. It wasn't a book. It was a letter that Paul wrote to real people living in a real city with real problems and real issues. He's trying to encourage them. He's giving them a fresh faith.

I don't know if you are familiar with this word right here—the word *doldrums*. It's a word that we don't use that often anymore but, really, it was originally a nautical term. Back in the day when people relied upon ships to get merchandise around the world if they ever found themselves in that place in the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean around the Equator where there was a system of low pressure to where the winds were either really, really low or non-existent then they said that they were caught in the doldrums. And if you were there on a ship you could be there for days or weeks or even months waiting on the wind to fill your sails to get you out of there.

Now, we don't refer to this term all that often anymore because of the invention of the engine, praise the Lord. But this term is true today just as much as it was then. In fact, I don't know if any of you ever felt like you've been in spiritual doldrums or maybe emotional doldrums where you're just in kind of a season of maybe burn-out or you feel like you are on a plateau or you're sort of directionless—you're not sure what is next in life.

I've definitely felt this way multiple times in my life. The really difficult thing is when you can't quite fully put your finger on why you feel that way. It's kind of like, when you look at the surface of your life, everything should be great but yet it doesn't feel great, "I don't seem to be having a lot of fun. I'm not happy. What's wrong? I just sort of feel burned out."

I wonder if this is what David was feeling. We looked at this verse last week from Psalm 51 when he says this. He says, "Bring me back from gray exile," that feeling like it's just overcast, "put a **fresh wind** in my sails!" He's just crying out to God: God, I need a fresh wind from you to get me out of these spiritual and emotional doldrums. So Ephesians—the content of Ephesians can give that to us.

But for others of us, maybe it's not so much a fresh wind or fresh encouragement—maybe we just need a fresh understanding or a fresh take as to who God really is and to who we really are. What is the message and the purpose of God for our lives because maybe we just don't fully understand it. Because, listen, there is a lot that can distort that message. There's a lot that can confuse it.

I even heard from a number of you last week who said, "Man, I just needed to be reminded. I knew it but I forgot it, because life can just sort of chip away at my peace and my hope and my understanding."

So some of us need a fresh wind, some of us need fresh encouragement, some of us just need a fresh understanding of something that maybe we never understood or we've forgotten. And Ephesians gives us all of those things.

One theologian, one commentator said that Ephesians is sort of like Paul's theological masterpiece. I don't know if you agree with that or not. Those of you who are Bible students, you might take issue with that because Paul also wrote another tiny, little book in the New Testament called Romans. And some of you are chuckling because you know what's in Romans. Some of you may not and that's totally fine.

Romans: I would call it like the Mount Everest of the Bible. I became a Christian by reading Romans and I've had a number of you over the years ask, "Hey, Aaron. When are you going to just do a series all on Romans? When are you going to teach straight through Romans?" And my response is, "I want to. I'm going to. I'm not ready yet."

I've been following after Jesus seriously for about 25 years. I've been preaching for the last 20 years. I can tell you I think I've written and delivered about 3,000 sermons and I'm still training because it's my Everest. And Paul's content is substantial in Romans but here's where I think Ephesians has a leg up on Romans: Romans is 16 chapters long and Ephesians is six. Some of you are like, "Man. You're talking my language," you Cliff Notes version people out there, alright?

But somebody once said this. If you can really get your head around the content of Ephesians, then you can understand the whole Bible. I would even reduce that to the first three chapters of Ephesians because the first three chapters of Ephesians are all on theology, which all theology is thoughts about God: who he is, what he's done, what his message is, what his purpose is for your life. The last three chapters of Ephesians is all of the application, or a better word is the implication—the implication of these thoughts on God.

So Paul really substantially offers all of this content—he's content emphasized but he's very precise. Paul starts off in chapter 1, if you missed it last week, basically helping us to figure out who we are. It's our identity. See that question: Who am I? is the most important question aside from who God is that you will ever get an answer to. And from the day we begin to take our first steps or begin to form words we begin to wonder who we are.

So can I just ask you today: What informs the answer to the question of your identity? What I mean is, if somebody were to say, not what's your name, but who are you—how do you answer? Do you answer with what you do for a living or maybe you're social status? Many of us, what informs our identity is: who is staring back at us in the mirror? Many of us, what informs our identity is the title that comes in front of our name or the role that we have or how much money we make or on and on we could go.

Listen. Those things are not bad things at all. They're just not substantial enough to build an identity on. And the reason why is, if you build your identity on the shape of your body, or the size of your muscles, or whose looking back at you in the mirror—I hate to break it to you, it's going to change, alright? It's going to change. And all of a sudden everything that you've been building your identity on evaporates.

If you build your identity upon your athletic ability—I know we have a number of amateur and professional athletes in our church—if you build your identity based upon what you can do on a track or a field or a court and maybe you retire at the age of 30, then who are you?

Many of us build our identity on maybe that person who we're in a relationship with or that job that we have, that degree we can get, our social standing—not bad things. But all of those things will slide out from underneath us. Just as soon as we think we know who we are it changes.

And God says from chapter 1, if you remember from last week: I want to give you an identity that you can live from. Don't live for an identity, live from an identity. So we said last week that God has set his love on you from the very beginning of time. God has chosen you in advance. God has adopted you into his family. Get this. Long before God had established the foundations of the world, he had established your identity.

That's amazing. Does anybody agree with that? I'm preaching about 30 percent better than you're responding. I'm going to throw that out there. My gift is humility, alright? That's a good sentence. Let me read that again. Long before God had established the foundations of the

world, he had established your identity. Think about the truth of that. Let that hit you for a minute.

What that means is that your identity isn't based upon your performance. It's not based upon your love-ability. It's not based on what you look like. God already established your identity before you existed. How does that work? I have no idea. I'm not God, thank goodness. But he's established who you are and he says that you are loved, you are chosen. The heart of the gospel message is that God wants to give you an identity for you to live from not for.

Now if that is not enough to stir you, then chances are that you don't really, fully understand the bad news. In other words, in order for the good news to be really good news, you've got to have a good grasp of the bad news.

I don't know about you, but I am a good news second kind of a person. How many of you like to get the bad news first or the good news first? How many bad news people at all of our campuses? Alright, I see all of the pessimists in the room. How many of you are like, "No, no. I want the good news first."? How many of you are there? Not as many. So I'd have to say that I want to get the bad news first for two reasons. Oftentimes the good news helps me forget the bad news and the good news is so much better once I know the bad news.

See, what we would call the gospel message—in other words, the message of God, God's purpose for your life, God's hope for your life—has two elements to it. We can't downplay either one. There's the bad news and the good news. There's the diagnosis and there's the prescription to cure.

We all know that if you go to the doctor and the doctor miss-diagnoses your condition, then you can't get well. If I go to the doctor and I've got cancer all through my body but the doctor doesn't want to hurt my feelings so the doctor tells me that I have a cold and says, "Well, just take some vitamin C and sip on some chicken noodle soup and get some rest and you'll be good—that's not the most loving thing that doctor can do. He might think that that's loving because he doesn't want to give you a bad day by telling the truth, but I need to know the diagnosis if I'm going to get the cure.

So we're going to read 10 verses in chapter 2 of Ephesians and what Paul is going to do is he's going to give us the diagnosis in the first three verses—it's the bad news—and then he's going to spend the last 7 verses giving us the good news. So he spends more time on the good news than on the bad news but the bad news is really, really important because if the good news is going to change you, the bad news has got shape that.

He starts off in verse one and he says this. He goes, "Once you were **dead**," there we go, alright? "...because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit **at work**," he's not passive; he's at work, "in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate **desires** and

**inclinations** of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else."

So that's awesome. How many of you are like, "We shouldn't have come to church today? This is not very uplifting."

I've never seen these first three verses on a coffee cup. Chances are you're not going to open up Instagram later today and see these verses on a beautiful picture with a great filter: #blessedlife, right? You're just not going to see it.

These three verses, as a preacher, are not fun to teach from. And so the temptation is to maybe overlook them. The temptation is to downplay them. In other words, these three verses aren't really good verses to preach from to grow a church. But they are good verses to use to grow people and that's what we want to do.

I love the fact that Paul is just really honest here. He just kind of hits us with the truth. But please understand this; there is a way in order for us to hear the truth that is either hurtful or harmful. This is not harmful. It might hurt. It might be unpleasant to listen to, but it's not harmful. There's a difference.

It's the same thing like—you can't say that somebody with a knife or a surgeon cutting you open with a scalpel is the same thing. You're still being cut open, but one is to harm and the other might hurt but it's for your healing.

I've got people in my life who are willing to tell me the truth and it hurts but it doesn't harm. And I've got other people in my life who want to tell me the truth and their intention is to harm. The difference is in the tone.

And Jesus was a master at this. Jesus could speak the truth in love. Jesus could say to a woman who was hurting who was at a well in the middle of the afternoon... Which, by the way, have you ever wondered why she was there in the middle of the afternoon?

It's because she didn't want to see anybody. You went to go get water early in the morning or late at night. She went in the heat of the day, my guess is because she didn't want to face the looks and the words of the other people who might be judging her.

And Jesus says to her: I want to give you living water so that you'll never thirst again. I know everything about you. And then he says this. Go and sin no more. He gave her grace and truth. He said something to her to help her not to harm her.

So Paul comes out here in verse 1 and he says: Hey, once you were dead. So what does he mean by that word? Well the primary characteristic of a dead person is that they are unresponsive. They can't do anything to save themselves.

My grandfather—when I was growing up I'd always notice that he was missing the little finger on his left hand, the pinky finger on his left hand. And when I would go to visit him he would always like treat it like a puppet, like the little stub saying, "Hey there, Aaron." I had a very weird childhood, alright? It's really messed up.

So I remember one day when I was old enough I said, "Grandpa, what happened to finger? Where did it go?" So he told me the story. He said that when he was a little boy he was chasing his older brothers around and they jumped over a fence next to this electrical field and they were playing inside the electrical field—so great job great-grandma and grandpa. And he said that he had a toy gun that was made of metal and he raised it up in the air and hit a power line and it electrocuted him. They rushed him to the hospital and he said when they got him to the hospital he had no pulse. He said, "I was technically dead."

And I remember thinking as a little boy, "Whoa, that's how close I came to not existing 'cause he died. He didn't have a pulse. And I said, "What happened?" And he said, "They brought me back." He didn't do anything in that moment. He was helpless. He was unresponsive.

This is what Paul means when he says that you and I were dead. He doesn't say that we needed to be edited, he didn't say that we needed to be updated, he didn't say that we needed a reboot; he didn't say that we had 90 percent of it and Jesus kicked in the last 10 percent. He said we were dead, meaning that we were unresponsive and totally helpless and we needed to be rescued.

Why were we dead? Well he answers that question. He says because of sin. Now, I don't know how that word hits you. Many times we reduce the word *sin* to like a list of actions or unsavory behaviors that God doesn't care for because he's old-fashioned, but that's not what sin is.

Sin is actually not as much of an action as it is a **condition**.

We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. We actually have a whole lot more freedom in Christ than what we even realize. So sin is more of a condition. It's not an action. The actions might speak to the condition, but it's the condition that we need to be healed from.

Let me explain it this way. Two years ago I was cutting a tree down in my backyard that was covered in really pretty leaves and I didn't realize that it was poison ivy. I do now. So I cut the tree down with a chainsaw and then I cut it up into pieces. Then I picked up the pieces with the pretty little leaves draped all over my arms and my abdomen and threw them into a big brush pile. And about a week later I had a condition.

I had this condition—in fact I preached in long sleeves that whole month and it was obvious because my arms were covered in poison ivy. Now, you would never say, "Aaron, stop doing poison ivy," because it's not an action. It's a condition that I had.

And the action is oftentimes the symptom of the condition, but no amount of behavioral change: moralism, willpower was going to fix this. In fact, if that's the game that you're playing then it will either lead to thinking too much of yourself and your ability or not enough of yourself and your identity.

So the condition of sin causes me to think that the main problem in the world is other people, instead of looking inside of myself. The condition of sin causes me to say, "Well, I'm basically a good person who occasionally messes up and does some bad things." Or, as I said last week, "I think too lowly of myself."

Sin is a condition that we are all born into this world with that we need to be rescued from. And one thing that reminds me of that all of the time is my four kids, because I've never sat them down to teach them how to sin. They are experts in that all by themselves. I didn't send them to sin camp, alright? They are just sinners.

About 12 years ago when my oldest two kids were two and four I was at a meeting until about 9:30 at night. I came home, walked in the kitchen door, I'm exhausted from the day. Walked in, my wife is standing there holding my two-year-old daughter and they are both crying uncontrollably, which is exactly what you want to walk into late at night.

I got a closer look and my daughter, her hair has been cut but it's like all uneven and splotchy. And her face was covered in some kind of brownish red. I couldn't tell if it was blood. It looked like blood when I first saw it. And the way that they were crying, I thought she had gotten out of the house, got hit by a car, and got drug down the street. That's what I thought. That's how it looked.

And I came to find out when I calmed them down that my four-year-old son, who was nowhere to be found, by the way... I found out that she had put them to bed. She thought they were asleep. She went downstairs and she was talking on the phone with my mom in the kitchen. And my four-year-old son got up out of bed, which he is not supposed to do. He woke his little sister up, which he is not supposed to do. He got her up out of bed, which he is not supposed to do.

He takes her into the master bathroom, sits her down in a chair, gets into mommy's make up drawer, finds some scissors and some make up, cuts off her hair and paints her face. I didn't teach him how to do that. He's a sinner, alright?

It's the condition that we have that we need to be set free from. And Paul is saying that there isn't anything that you can do to set yourself free from it. I don't know if you noticed in that passage, he goes on to say that actually we have an enemy who is at work, he is actively pursuing us. And our enemy is not a cartoon character with a pointy little mustache and horns and a pitchfork who loves to play pranks on us. No, he's a very real enemy. Peter describes him in 1 Peter as a roaring lion who is on the loose, prowling around, looking for someone to devour.



I don't know about you, that should send you on high alert. Like, if you were to go to the Indianapolis Zoo later today and you're walking through with your family and all of a sudden somebody comes over the loud speaker and they are like, "Attention. There is a roaring lion on the loose. Everybody stay calm and file through the front gates. Everybody stay calm." Uh, uh. There's a roaring lion on the loose, I'm alert, I'm running, I'm getting my family and we're getting out of there.

And Paul says that there is an enemy who is at work—he's actively at work right now, meaning that if you're spiritually coasting then you're losing ground. If you're just sort of coasting through this life, if you came in here sleeping today, if you're not expecting a word from God, if you're not looking to take that next step of growth then you're losing ground.

And the two tools, the two things that he loves to use against every one of us are arrogance or anxiety. So he'll try to get you to be arrogant. You don't need God. You're doing pretty well on your own. Everything is great. Or anxiety: I'm not good enough. You look in the mirror and you don't like what you see. You're all bent up and anxious. And God says: I want to free you from this.

He finally says, there at the end of verse 3, that God is angry. And maybe some of you, that kind of alarms you. Please understand that God's anger is not against you, it's for you. It's kind of like whenever your kids, if you were to tell your kids, "Stay right behind me, hold my hand, don't run out into the street," and they ignore you and run out into the street and they get hit by a car—would you be angry? Yeah. Not at them but for them. Like, why didn't you listen? Why didn't you listen?

Listen, that's the diagnosis, those first three verses. Now Paul is going to spend the last seven verses talking about the good news. And I love how he starts off in verse 4. It's with the two greatest words in the English language, as one commentator said:

But God...

In other words we were helpless and hopeless and unresponsive and bound up and kidnapped and captured and dead,

"But God is so **rich in mercy**," he's not stingy with his mercy, he's rich in it. He's not doling it out little by little he wants to lavish us with his mercy, "and he **loved us so much**, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead." And this is one of the greatest sentences in the New Testament, "**(It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)**"

It's only by God's grace that you've been saved. It isn't based upon anything else that you could bring to the table. It's not 50/50. It's not 70/30. It's only by God's grace. When I try to say, "Okay, I understand that, but let me bring something to it, God—let me try to live up to this in



some way..." every single time I do that I mess it up. Every single time I do that it either leads me to be arrogant or it leaves me to be riddled with anxiety, which I would say are the two greatest afflictions in our lives right now.

Several years ago I got really, really sick one week and I was like flat on my back. I had something really nasty and I was on all kind of prescription medications trying to get better. This was back when we were in Saturday night services. So all day Saturday I'm in bed, flat on my back, I'd taken some prescription cough medication to stop coughing so I could get some sleep and it made me really, really drowsy.

My alarm goes off at 2:30 in the afternoon. I had a fever. I wasn't feeling very good. And I drug myself out of bed, got into the shower because I had to preach at 5 o'clock. And I could not wake up. Ever had that feeling when you're all drugged up? Prescription medication, alright?

Can't wake up. I've got to get in front of these people. So on the way to the church I stopped at the gas station and they had those three-for-one five hour energy things. And I thought, "Well, if one works, three is way better." So I slammed all three of them and I got in here and I'm trying to wake up and I'm still feeling kind of groggy—didn't feel right at all. And I'm in the green room getting ready to walk out here and preach and I'm like, "Man, I'm still just not very alert."

Somebody had a big bottle of Mountain Dew back there. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I chugged that whole thing and I got out here and the room started spinning and there were like unicorns bouncing from section to section. My left eye was twitching. I was like, "I don't even know what I am saying right now. I hope this doesn't end up on YouTube somewhere." Every single time I try to bring something into the equation or I try to do something about it, I mess it up. And I've done that over and over again.

And Paul is simply saying: Hey, I've already given you the diagnosis and the cure is just for you to be a recipient of God's grace. Would you just receive it? He is rich in mercy. He's not stingy with it. He loves you so much he's not just putting up with you. Even though you were unresponsive because of this condition of sin in your life, he gave you Jesus.

And some might say, "Well, why was Jesus even necessary? Why did Jesus have to die for us to be forgiven? Why couldn't God just sweep it under the rug or just forgive?" And the answer to that question is because God is a just God and you wouldn't want it any other way. But he's also a gracious God in the sense that he's not leaving us on the hook to pay for it. So, God won't just sweep it under the rug. You wouldn't want a God who operated that way.

A few weeks ago I was out on the west coast for some meetings and I rented a car. When I dropped the car back to the rental agency, you know how they do those walk-arounds to see if there is any damage? I never pay attention. I probably should from now on. I will from now on. But I was standing there and I was on my phone and they were walking around the car and they said, "Sir, what happened back here?"

And I was like, “What do you mean?” They motioned me back there and the back, left quarter panel was all bashed in. And I’m standing there and I’m like, “I really have no idea.” I was like, “I have no idea how that happened.” She looked at me like, “Yeah, right.” And I felt like a liar, right?

I was like, “I really don’t know how that happened. I wasn’t in an accident. I don’t recall any of that.” And she was looking at me like, “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whatever. Sure.” And I was like, “I don’t know. What are we going to do?” And she said, “Well, regardless of whether you realized it or not, somebody has to pay. Somebody has to make this thing right.”

See, God is a just God who says: Someone has to pay. And listen, the payment is way too steep for you to bear. And so I’ll bear it. I’ll bear it in the life of my Son.

He says in verse 6, “For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.” Do you notice how all of this is past tense? And do you notice how many times he says *in Christ* and *with Christ*? “So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the **incredible wealth of his grace** and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.”

Listen. In God’s eyes if you’ve received that gift of grace in your life you are already seated with Christ at God’s table. And that should give you confidence. That should give you confidence that when the heckles of your enemy like: You’re a loser. Or, you aren’t loved. Or, who do you think that you are anyway? Or, you’re damaged goods, you’re a fake, you’re a failure and you’re a fraud you can’t do it—you can confidently tell him who you are.

Because of Jesus, you’ve been brought into the family, that no longer are you dead, you’re alive. No longer are you unresponsive, you’re alert. No longer are you bitter, you’re filled with joy. No longer are you angry, but now you’re filled with peace. You’re no longer homeless, you’ve got a home. Come on somebody... You used to be lost, but now you’re found all because of Jesus.

Did you know that’s what it means to pray in Jesus’ name? Praying in Jesus’ name is not a signal to God like, “Hey, God. I’m about to wrap this up.” So God is like: Oh, he said in Jesus’ name, he’s getting ready to say: Amen. (You zoned out on me there for a minute.) No, when you say, “I’m praying in Jesus’ name,” your saying, “I’m praying from the seat of Jesus.”

So many times we pray and we say, “I don’t feel worthy. I don’t think that God is listening to my prayers. Based on what? “Well, the thing I did last night. He’s really ashamed of me.” Or, “God’s not listening to my prayers.” Based on what? “I don’t have enough faith.” Or, “God’s not listening to my prayers.” Based on what? “I got a divorce.” “God’s not listening to my prayers.” Based on what? “I’m a horrible mom,” or, “I’m a bad dad.”

That's never been in the equation. God does not listen to you because of your performance. God listens to you because of what Jesus did for you. So when you pray in Jesus' name you are claiming his identity and he is listening to you because of Jesus' righteousness, not yours. Jesus is your big brother who saved your life. He's not your homeboy.

I'm already negative one minute, forty-three, forty-five, forty-six seconds over but that makes me want to keep going, alright?

Sandra McCracken, in her album *Live Under Lights and Wires* shares a story of two young boys, brothers, who spent their summers playing near the Mississippi River. And it was during flooding one year and they were around some sandbag levies and they got stranded. And some rescue workers were trying to get to them and when they finally got to them they found only one boy. He was standing in quick sand up to the middle of his thigh. And they said, "Where is your older brother?" And he said, "I'm standing on his shoulders." See, his big brother hoisted him up and said, "I'm going to save your life by sacrificing my own."

Jesus did that times a million. He gave up his life so that your life might be saved. And some of you right now, that does not stir you. You know what we call that? Death. And only the fresh wind of the Spirit can quicken your pulse around that to get you to understand that you have to be saved from something.

I don't know how you feel about that word saved. It pops up a lot in this passage. I've had sort of an on-again, off-again relationship with the word *saved* in my Christian life. There have been some seasons that turn me off because of the sweaty televangelist who turned it into three syllables: Sa-ve-d, right? Or maybe that really super, eager person on your college campus who came up and asked, "Have you been saved?"

But that's the word. Jesus saved you because you needed to be rescued. There wasn't anything you could do on your own. Jesus didn't throw you a little life vest and say: Hey, grab a hold of that and let me bring you in. No, you were face down, floating and Jesus grabbed you and breathed life into you once again—that's pretty big.

So let me finish the passage and I'll be done. It says in verse 8, "God saved you by his grace," not when you performed, not when you got it all together, not when you overcame your addictions, but "**when you believed**. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece." That's your identity. "He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

You and I were saved from something for something. And that's why we gather together as a church family—to be on mission together because there are a whole bunch of God's kids walking around out there who he created for a purpose, he set his love on them in advance, he chose them before the foundation of the world. And we've totally been hijacked by an enemy who wants to confuse us about our true identity when it's been right there in front of all along.

Today I just want to leave you with this little question. I'm talking to you. I'm not talking to your neighbor. I'm not talking to your husband. I'm not talking to your kids. I'm not talking to your co-worker, I'm talking to you. Have you received that gift of grace for yourself?

Many times when I ask people where they are in their spiritual life they will answer with, "Well, I grew up Baptist." Or, "My grandma was Catholic," Or, "I believe in God." That's great. Thank you for telling me that.

That's not what I asked. Have you, personally, received this for yourself? And it's not as hard as you think. It's not some religious curriculum you've got to work through and then be graded on. You can do it right now in the seat that you are sitting in. And you just simply claim it. You just simply say, "God, I come to you just as I am. I trust that the resurrected king is resurrecting me right now. Breathe new life in me." He'll meet you right where you are seated.

So we're just going to spend a few minutes in reflection, taking communion together. The team is going to lead us in another song. I want you to belt it out as if you mean it. I want you to belt it out as people who have come from death to life, because that's who we are—that's what God has done for us in and through Jesus.

So let me pray:

Father, we come to you right now and I'm so grateful. I'm just as grateful for the bad news as the good because the bad news helps me to cherish the good. And forgive us, God, when all we want to talk about is the good news because we've got to understand the diagnosis if we're going to understand the cure. And the cure is Jesus. So we trust you in that.

I pray that somebody's life today would change for all of eternity. And I pray that some would come from death to life. That maybe today's message would be like smelling salts underneath their spiritual noses that would just awaken them up to trust that you have a plan and a message and a purpose for their lives. We thank you, God, for what you've done for us through Jesus. We receive it now. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.