
Alright, hey what's up church family? How are you doing? It's good to see you. I want to welcome all of our other campuses right now. So good to be with you. And I want to welcome my man, Petie, right here. If you don't know who this gentleman is standing next to me, this is Petie Kinder.

Petie has served on our team for the better part of a decade and is a really good friend. One thing that you need to know about us if you are relatively new to our church is that we want to be a part of what God is doing all over the world. And we believe that God's not just at work in our church but that he's involved all over the world. We want to be a part of it by investing financial resources, by sharing what we're learning with others just to encourage them, and by sending people. Over the last 20 or 25 years or so that has been one of the defining characteristics of this church. We just raise up and send people out who are literally serving all over the world.

And, we get another opportunity to do it. Several weeks ago I was able to have Petie and his wife, Brittany, up on the stage. If you were not here, if you are not aware, Petie has served in a variety of roles on our team. And God is calling them to move out to Colorado Springs, Colorado where he's going to serve as the lead pastor at a great church out there called Red Rock Church. So, we're sad to see them go but we're excited about what God is going to do in and through them.

Petie and I have been talking about this for a number of years and knew that this was coming, and I've been praying and planning for it. And, Brittany, I just want to thank you for the way that you've served our church so eloquently and with such wisdom behind the scenes. We just love and appreciate you so much. Can we give it up for Brittany? And their three beautiful children as well. We just want to love on them with everything we've got before they leave.

They are going to be pulling out of town November 30th. Today is the last time for Petie to share a message with us. So, I wanted to come up and just pray a prayer of blessing over him and really send him out with our absolute best. Petie, I've said all of this to you privately, but I want to say it publicly in front of our church family, you are a great leader. You're an awesome communicator. And you're a better friend. You are legitimately the same guy on this stage that you are off of it. You yell, "Let's go," just when it was the two of us in a room together.

Petie, I'm really looking forward to what God is going to do in and through you out in Colorado Springs. This is goodbye but it's not see you forever. We're going to continue to be in communication and I can't wait to get the phone calls from you when you're panicking about problems that you're trying to navigate through. I'm going to relish those moments, actually. I will soak that in.

So what I want to do is pray over Petie. At all of our campuses I want you to join with us. Do whatever is comfortable for you. If you want to raise up a hand in his general

direction, if you just want to be open handed, the whole idea is that we are lifting him up. So we just want to send him out with our blessing.

Father, we come to you right now. Thank you for this guy right here and the way that you've worked in and through his life to call him to this place. Thank you for how he has invested into our church. I know that there are literally hundreds, if not thousands, whose lives have been impacted by Petie, his messages, his leadership, and his friendship.

So, God, we just send them out with our absolute blessing and pray that their hearts would be full as they leave and that you would do a tremendous work in and through the church in Colorado Springs. We love you and thank you that you're a God who sends. And so today we send them with our love. We ask this right now in Jesus name and everybody said: Amen.

Hey, would you give it up for Petie one last time as he rips it? Come on man.

Petie Kinder

Good grief. How am I supposed to do this? How am I supposed to do this? Ryan Bramlett, you are too much. Man, church, you all are crazy. It's so good. Yeah, I don't know how to start now. But, just thanks, man. Just thanks for so many good things.

You all by far are the most encouraging and supportive congregation I've ever been a part of. At all campuses, man, this is such a special place. And I've seen God do things here in just the seven years that I've been here that are so incredible that I plan on telling my grandkids one day stories about the church I got to serve in in Indianapolis.

This is just an incredibly special place and I love you guys like crazy. And I'm going to miss you guys a ton. I'm super thankful for you all. You all mean a ton to my family and you really have helped me grow into a better man, a better husband, a better father, leader, pastor, preacher all of that because of my time here. You all have really blessed our family.

And huge props, and we need to celebrate, and I need to thank publicly the guy who was just on this stage. I mean, Aaron, you need to know that he is such a rare leader in the sense that he allows young up-and-coming leaders the freedom and the room to lead and the permission to lead and to grow and to fail. And he's just always encouraging and cheerleading behind the scenes. There is no way that I would be who I am if it wasn't for the investment that Aaron has made into my life. He's just an incredibly special leader. So let's show honor and celebrate our lead pastor.

So this is it. This is kind of like a goodbye tour, like the Goodbye Tour 2019. So I thought of a lot of different ways I could take this message. I thought about doing a sermon about encouragement and comfort, how God comforts those who are hurting.

I thought about going that way because I thought it would give a good nod to the IU basketball fan base that I've poked fun at all of these years. It's a rough life you guys live, and I wanted to make sure to give you a hug before I leave. I thought, "No, no. I won't do that."

I thought maybe I'd do a sermon about spiritual transformation—about how, if you'll follow Jesus, everything can change in your life and years from now you may look nothing like you look like right now.

And in that sermon, if I'd gone that route, I was going to use this illustration and it involved our very own Aaron Brockett. Because if you go back in the years and look at him then versus now—my dude is aging like a fine wine. Age is just a number to that dude. My man went cold dad to cross-fit dad. It's a transformation you all. I'm kidding—you know I had to have a little bit of fun with you before I leave. Had to.

If you have a Bible go ahead and grab it and get to Matthew, chapter 11. Matthew 11 is where we are going to be today. If you don't have a Bible, didn't bring one, no sweat. We'll have the words on the screen for you as well.

The title of the message that I want to preach to you today is a message that God has been working over in my heart the past few months. The title of it is *Descend into Greatness*. Alright? Descend into greatness, because I believe that no matter where you are on the faith spectrum, like no matter if you're here and it's your first time and you aren't sure what you think about God or Jesus or church or any of it, or if you're here and you've been following Jesus for many years and you consider yourself a long-term Christian—no matter where you are on that continuum, all of us are on a great search for significance. We're all on a quest for greatness with our lives.

I think maybe the best way to phrase it is that nobody wants an empty funeral. None of us want to get to the end of our days and no one shows up to pay their respects. No one shows up to tell stories of the life we lived and the impact that we had on them. Nobody wants an empty funeral. And the good thing for us is that God doesn't want you to have an empty funeral either. God actually created you with greatness in mind.

God did not just slap you together with very low attention to detail like I do my kids' peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Alright? Come on. It's like seven o'clock in the morning. You just get bread, slap a little peanut butter, slap a little jelly, put the pieces together, rub it together to even it out and send them on their way. That's not how God created you.

God actually put way more care and attention and detail into you when he made you. Ephesians 2 says that you are God's craftsmanship. You are his handiwork. Psalm 139 says that you were knit together in your mother's womb and that you are fearfully and wonderfully made and that the works of God are wonderous. You were created with greatness in mind. God wants your life to be significant. That's one of the reasons that he made you.

But the problem is that the path we all take to greatness, the path we always travel to significance, always leaves everyone unsatisfied. The path we travel to greatness—it doesn't matter who you are or what you believe—the path we travel to greatness always leaves us unsatisfied. It's an up and to the right mentality.

Our world tells us that if you want to be significant, if you want to be great, you've got to achieve, you've got to earn, you've got to perform well, you've got to be top of your class, you've got to be best in your field, you've got to aspire, you've got to ascend to

greatness. Greatness to the world is about how far up and how far to the right you can take your life.

And we learn this from a young age. I see this because I see it in my eight-year-old son already. Just this last week he asked me an epic question. I will never forget it. It's one of my favorite parenting moments ever. We're driving down the road, listening to music, we weren't talking about anything. We weren't talking about purpose in life, or having some deep, spiritual conversation.

Out of nowhere he says, "Hey, dad. I've got a question." I said, "Yeah, son." He said, "Should I be professional football player first or a rapper first?" I was like, "That's a good question and I love where your mind is going." I said, "Well, son. Here's what you need to do. You need to take advantage of your body when it's strongest and it's not banged up yet. So in your teenage years and in your 20s be a professional football player. Save your rap career for your 30s and 40s." And he was like, "Okay. Okay. Got it."

Then he asked a follow-up question which was my favorite question. He goes, "Okay, okay. Got it. Professional football player first. But question. Can I be a rapper and a preacher at the same time?" Like, "My dude. You are literally living the exact life that I want. I love it. You are shooting for who I wanted to be in life. I love it."

See, he's already got in his mind that he is going to be great. He is going to be significant. He's got to achieve some things. He's got to push his life as far up and to the right as he can. And it leaves all of us unsatisfied.

If you're here and you're young, you're maybe just getting started in your career, you just got out of college and you're in your first big boy, big girl job. You aren't satisfied yet, right? Because your life is not as far up and to the right as you want it to be and you're working, you're grinding, you're trying to go, right? So you're unsatisfied.

But what happens though is that when you're older you realize... Come on, there are those who are up in age in the room, you know this, you didn't take your life up and to the right as far as what you thought you could. And so you ended up kind of adjusting your definition of greatness and you kind of settle for a little bit less than what you previously dreamed of. And truth be told, you're a little bit unsatisfied, you've got a little bit of an unsettled feeling when you think about where your life has ended up.

Even for those of us who have accomplished a ton, right? You've ascended to the mountain of greatness, you're top of your class, you're best in your field, you've made a ton of money, you're a success. Everything is great. Come on, if that's you right now, you know what I'm about to say is true—it's never enough. It doesn't matter how far up and how far to the right that you go, you get to the top of that mountain and you say the same thing every time: Is this it? Is this all that I was made for?

We're all left unsatisfied and we're all left wondering, "Did I fulfill my purpose in life? Is this it?" The good news though, is that Jesus has a way better option for us. In Jesus' Kingdom where everything is backwards—I mean the whole thing, the Kingdom that he invites us into is so different, it's so backwards. Jesus has a path to greatness and it's such good news for all of us today because his path to greatness means that greatness is actually within your reach no matter what your life looks like today. No matter if you're

just starting out and you're trying to push up and to the right, or you're way up on top, or maybe you're down at the bottom left. Maybe life has been crashing down. According to Jesus, greatness and significance is well within your reach.

Let's jump in. Matthew, chapter 11. We're going to start with verse 2. We're going to read a little bit and talk a little bit. You all ready? All right, let's go. Matthew, chapter 11, verse 2—it says this, “John the Baptist,” John the Baptist, “who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, ‘Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?’ Jesus told them, ‘Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor. And tell him, “God blesses those who do not turn away because of me.”’”

“As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. ‘What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see?’” Jesus says to the crowd. “‘Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind? Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people with expensive clothes live in palaces. Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say, “Look I am sending my messengers ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.” I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist.’”

What a line that Jesus says about him. Of all of who have lived none is greater than John the Baptist. We've got a thing or two to learn about greatness from John. Now, if you're not familiar with John, the Baptist was not his last name—the Baptist was a nickname. John got the nickname the Baptist because he baptized people. John's primary thing in life was to get people ready for Jesus, to prepare the way for the people of God to recognize the Messiah—the one who was going to save them—to recognize him when he comes. Prepare the way for Jesus.

John the Baptist was kind of like the ultimate hype guy for Jesus, right? He was a passionate, bold dude and there are a lot of things about John that when you think of greatness... John had a lot of characteristics that we think of when we think of a great leader. See John was a bold vision caster. John would stand up out in the wilderness and thousands would come to hear.

And John had this bold vision that he declared over and over and over. John's message was the same time and time again. He would boldly declare, he would stand up in front of people and say, “...someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I'm not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals.” (Matthew 3:11, NLT)

Someone is coming. You've got to get ready. And he would boldly declare it in front of people. And not only was he a bold vision caster, which is what we expect from greatness, from leaders, he also had this other quality about him. Great leaders have clarity in the midst of uncertainty. Like a great leader, when everyone else is confused, a

great leader can just kind of like cut through it, see through the fog and say, “This is the direction we should go.” See, John had that.

In a time where the people of God were all waiting on the Messiah to come (and there were messiahs popping up to the left and to the right, there were people saying, “I’m the messiah. Follow me.”) John said: Hold on. Hold on. He saw Jesus coming and he said: Everybody stop. And in front of thousands of people he said, right there, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about...”

He just boldly declares it. He goes all in and what a great leader. You would expect that from the beginning of his ministry right when he’s preaching to thousands out in the wilderness, preparing the way, boldly telling people who Jesus is. And then fast forward to the end of his life and here’s Jesus saying to a crowd of people among all who have ever lived, John is the greatest.

You would think that between these two bookends of his life that the life that was lived in between would have been up and to the right. You’d think that if Jesus says he is the greatest, and he started off so strong—surely John just ascended into greatness. Surely he landed the book deal. Surely he wrote about how to be a prophetic voice in the wilderness. I mean, surely, surely he made a ton of money being a consultant of other young and up-and-coming leaders, saying: here’s how you do it. Let me teach you.

Surely John just sailed off into retirement with all of his grandkids around him. All of his grandkids with the first letter of their name being J. Like John the I, John the II, John the III, Joey, Jacob *Jingleheimer Schmidt*, Jessica and like on down the line. And all of his grandkids would be like, “Grandpa, Grandpa,” because their grandpa was the legendary that Jesus said was the greatest, right? You’d just expect up and to the right.

But instead, here’s John at the end of his life about to be murdered, weeks after this he was beheaded for refusing to be silent in the face of injustice, for doing what God put him here to do. Here’s John at the end of his life and it hasn’t gone up and to the right. He’s in prison. His leadership has been taken away. His platform removed. His voice silenced. His effectiveness neutralized. It was not going up and to the right.

And what’s even more than that—here is a hero of the faith who stood up in front of thousands of people and said: He’s the one that I’m talking about! And he’s now alone in a prison cell asking: Are you the one I was talking about? Because I don’t know anymore. Here is a hero of the faith having a crisis of faith at a rock bottom moment and he’s questioning everything. He doesn’t know what is up and what is down. And his life wasn’t supposed to turn out like this.

Maybe you’ve been there before. Maybe you’ve been there when you got punched in the gut with that circumstance in your life that you never expected. Maybe it was when your spouse walked out on you. And your life was supposed to go one way but now all of a sudden it’s all come crumbling down and you don’t even know what’s up anymore. You don’t know how to make sense of it.

Maybe it was when you got called into your boss’s office and you didn’t know what the conversation was going to be about and you found out that you were losing your job. You

had no idea what you were going to do financially. Maybe that was it and you just walked out of there questioning everything, "I'm doubting everything."

Maybe it's an unexpected diagnosis. An unexpected call from a loved one about another loved one and it just rocked you to your core.

Maybe it was the addiction that you promised yourself that you would never go back there. You would never do that thing to cope with stress again but there you are, high again. There you are, drunk again. There you are, binge eating again. There you are, looking at the thing that you said you would never look at again.

You ever been there? Where life was not supposed to be like this. Your external circumstances are nothing like what you dreamed they would be and your inner emotions, your inner turmoil... It's just that life wasn't supposed to be like this. And if you're there right now, or you've been there recently you need to take great comfort in this. The man who Jesus said was the greatest to ever live was right there in that moment.

If you were there and that's happened to you or you are in that moment, that does not mean that greatness is out of your reach. John is in this moment and Jesus says that he's the greatest to ever live.

And I love what Jesus says to the crowd in this moment because this is a real pivotal moment for Jesus. This is a very interesting situation, because here it is, John the Baptist, the hype guy, the guy who was so confident about Jesus, the guy who was supposed to prepare the way and he's having a crisis of faith and Jesus just learned about it and all of the crowd has just learned about it.

All of the crowds of people just heard that a hero of the faith is questioning everything. So I'm sure the crowds are thinking that if John was questioning everything, if John doesn't even know if he believes in you anymore, why should I believe in you?

And Jesus turns to the crowd and I love what he does in this moment. Back up with me for just a second. He says this, he turns to the crowd in this moment and says wait, wait, wait, "What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind?" Was he just pandering to the crowd? Did you expect to see somebody playing politics? Just trying to get your vote. Did you expect to see someone just telling people what they wanted to hear so that he would be liked?

No, no, no, no. "Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes?" Flaunting his success, flaunting his authority, flaunting his prominence—no, no, no, "...people with expensive clothes live in palaces. Were you looking for a prophet?" Someone who is revered everywhere they go so when they walk in the red carpet is rolled out for them?

Well, that didn't happen, but he is a prophet. He's actually, "...more than a prophet. John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say, 'Look I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.' I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist."

It's as if Jesus turns to the crowds in this moment and he's like: Did you expect to see greatness the way the world sees it? Did you expect to see...? The guy I told you was great, the guy you knew... Did you expect him to look like the world finds greatness, like up and to the right? Get out of here, man. That's not how it works in my Kingdom.

See, in Jesus' Kingdom you don't ascend to greatness. It's not up and to the right. See Jesus says that John the Baptist, his purpose—I love how Jesus connects to his purpose—he says his purpose was to come and to prepare the way for me. And he said that none is greater than John the Baptist, because John the Baptist fulfilled the purpose for which he was created no matter the cost—no matter the cost. It didn't matter how hard it got, John the Baptist knew what he was supposed to do, and he sacrificed everything.

We've got to learn from this. If you want your life to be significant, if you want to achieve greatness, if you want to make a difference with your life it will always come at a cost. You cannot achieve anything significant in this world without paying a cost for it. You can't do it without sacrificing.

Go back and look at the greatest things that have happened in human history. They've all come because someone made a sacrifice, someone was willing to pay a price, someone was willing to get uncomfortable and do the thing that no one else was willing to do.

Go back and look at the people you revere from your family, who had the funerals where everyone shows up and tells stories about their life. Go back and look at their lives. They will all have this one thing in common, they were willing to make sacrifices, they were willing to put others first, they were willing to go the distance and do things that no one else would do.

You see, in God's Kingdom, you don't ascend to greatness, you descend into greatness. You open your hands up to say, "God, I will give you whatever I have," more and more, progressively throughout your life, "I'll give you more. God, I'll do whatever you want. I'll do whatever you want, I'll do it wherever you want. God, whatever you want for me, I surrender my whole life to you. God, I'll get uncomfortable. I'll say things that I never thought I would say before. I'll do things I never dreamed of doing. God, you have my whole life and you can take it and do whatever you want."

And in that moment, when you have complete and total surrender, maximum sacrifice, then God can take you and use your life and make an incredible difference. But we don't like that though. I don't like it. I mean, come on, that all sounds like inspirational and good but we don't like that. That doesn't sound good to us.

One preacher I listen to often, his name is Erwin McManus, he was preaching this summer and I was listening to him on my headphones. And I was on my bike on the Monon, I was riding along, and he said this line and I had to pull over. It was just such an impactful line, I had to pull over and think about it. I had to go to the bathroom too so that was part of it, but it was a very well-timed convicting line. He said this line and I've been processing through it all summer.

He said, "We all want maximum impact, but we want it with minimum sacrifice, and we spend our lives negotiating the deal between those two." We spend our lives figuring out, "How little can I sacrifice and still make a difference? How little can I give up and still do what God created me to do? How little amount of pain do I have to endure in order to make a difference?" We want maximum impact, but we want it with minimum sacrifice, and we spend our lives negotiating the deal between those two.

But that is not how greatness works in the Kingdom of God. If you want your life to be significant and to make a difference, you've got to go maximum sacrifice, maximum impact requires maximum sacrifice. But I'm telling you all, we do not like it. We don't like this because the thing we don't like about the church world is that sacrifice super hurts.

I love how we do this... Oh, come on man, I'm a pastor so I'm like guilty of this, I'm just as guilty of this as anybody. We come up with clever phrases to make sacrifices feel better like, "We must give up the things we love for the things we love even more." I love that line. I've used that line. But let's just face reality. If you give up something you love, even if it's for something you love even more—it hurts! Sacrifice hurts.

For those of you serving in Kids' Ministry at any of our campuses you know this. You know this better than anyone. As you wipe the poopy butts of the next generation... You know that sometimes you're serving in a classroom and you're like, "Man, I wish I could do just about anything else with my Sunday morning than this." As you watch the bad parenting decisions of an entire church play out in a preschool classroom brawl over a stupid toy, you're like, "Oh my gosh." Sacrifice hurts.

For those of you who give financially to support the mission of the local church, like right there with you, but I mean that hurts at times. At the end of the year the church will send you your year-end giving statement, like how much you've given over the year for tax purposes and all of that.

And my wife and I will always look at that together and we always praise God for it, we celebrate it. Man, look at what... We were able to give this much and look at all of the life change that happened and we celebrate it. And that's the majority of me. That's like the Christian, Holy Spirit, Jesus loving pastor guy who's like, "Praise God for all the life change that our money was able to do."

But then there's like this other side of me, let's just real for a second, there's another side of me and I'm like, "We could have used that money for many other things. And it would have been nice." Come on. Don't act like you all don't do the same, because sacrifice hurts, right? It hurts to give.

For those of you who are caring for foster kids, if you're a foster family right now you know this. Maximum impact requires maximum sacrifice and sacrifice just hurts, it hurts, it hurts.

I mean, come on. My family's decisions to move to Colorado and to lead a church, to step out and do this, no doubt we're excited about it, oh my gosh I can't tell you how excited we are. So excited and we're praying and believing that God is going to do out there a fraction of what we've seen happen here. Man, I'm praying that happens.

But you're crazy if you think I wake up every day like full of confidence and courage and like, "Everything is going to be fine. The best is yet to come. Onward family." Get out of here, man. There are days when I wake up and I'm like, "What are we doing again? We're doing what?" There are days when I'm consoling my wife through tears and I'm consoling my kids through tears and then there are days when they are consoling me through tears, because leaving your family, leaving your friends, leaving a church like this—it's hard! It hurts. Sacrifice hurts.

And sometimes sacrifice has a way of disorienting you. Like sometimes you give and you give and you step out into God's calling—you do what you think you're supposed to do and there are times that just internally just feels like, "What am I doing?"

And then there are times when your external circumstances go up and to the right. And you're sitting there thinking, "Man, God, I feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to do but I don't know anymore. I don't know what's up and what's down." And we end up in the same place that John the Baptist was.

John the Baptist was sitting in a prison cell alone, about to die. And he's asking: God, am I even doing what you created me to do? Am I even fulfilling my purpose? And don't get it wrong. That's the question that John is really asking here.

You see, when John sends his messengers and says: Hey, go ask Jesus this question. Ask him, "Are you the Messiah we've been expecting or... someone else?" That question is partially about whether or not Jesus is the Son of God, way more so about John saying: Did I fulfill my purpose? Did I do what I was created to do?

You see, John's purpose was told to him at a very young age. His parents, his grandparents, his friends—everyone knew that John's purpose in life was to prepare the way for the Messiah, help the people of God see who God in the flesh is. And John had gone all in on Jesus and he sacrificed everything for him, and it hurt, and it didn't go up and to the right, it went down and to the left. And here he is saying: God, did I fulfill my purpose? Did I do what you created me to do because I don't know anymore.

And I think that is a question that many of us ask. I think all of us ask it at some point in our lives. And think many of you are asking it right now. Like, "God, I never expected my life to end up like this. Am I on the right track? Am I fulfilling my purpose?"

Let me tell you, that's a complicated question. It's a complicated question. A lot of factors. It depends on who you ask. A lot of factors. It depends on who you ask. Like most good questions.

If you want to lose weight, you want to get in shape, you want to be strong big question, a lot of factors. It really depends on who you ask. You ask the Keto crowd, they'll give you one answer, the Paleo crowd, the Whole 30 crowd, the Vegan crowd, the Vegetarian crowd, the Pescatarian crowd, the Beeratarian crowd—is there a beer-based diet?

Asking for a friend, not me.

You want to go CrossFit? You want to go Jazzercise—is that a thing still? You want to go Orangetheory? I don't know. Depends on who you ask. It's a complicated question. A lot of factors.

Maybe you're dating right now and you're wondering is he the one or is she the one? That's a super complicated question. A lot of factors. Depends on who you ask. You ask his friends and they are going to say, "Oh, he's the one. Great dude." You ask your friends they might say, "Eh, you could do better." You ask your ex; he is probably going to say something different. You ask your parents; I guarantee you you'll get a different answer. It's complicated. A lot of factors. Depends upon who you ask.

And your life—are you're fulfilling the purpose of your life is a complicated question. And there are a lot of factors and it really depends upon who you ask. You see, I could paint your life in one of two ways no matter where it is.

Let's say you're up and to the right right now. Let's say you're listening to this and your life is just incredible. I mean, you're successful, you are wealthy, you are set up, all of your relationships are good, and your external circumstances are great, and your internal emotions are just settled and at peace.

I mean you are sleeping so good. You are laying your big ole head on your big ole pillow every night and it's good. Well it could be that you're enjoying the blessings of God because you are right smack in the middle of his will for your life; it could be that you're enjoying the fruits of great decision making because you've been following God and you're just enjoying the peace that God provides.

Or it could be that you've been lulled to sleep by the comforts and pleasures of this world and the enemy has you tricked and God actually has something so much bigger and so much greater in mind for your life, but you're not even thinking about it because you're just living large and enjoying it.

I don't know. It could be either one. It's complicated. A lot of factors. Depends on who you ask.

If you're like at the bottom left—let's say your life is just crashing down right now. Your circumstances are horrible. Everything seems like you are like George Costanza, nothing is going your way, right? And your inner emotions are all over the place. You don't feel at peace, you're questioning things, you're doubting things. Man, I could spin that one of two ways.

I could say, "Well that could mean that God is convicting you and he's trying to get ahold of you, because he's got a different path for you. He has so much more for you and he's trying to convict you." And I'll say "Many of your circumstances that are really bad all around you, some of them might be because you were an idiot and you made some dumb choices, and this is just like what happens when you are an idiot. I'm sorry"

Or I could say, "You've made maximum sacrifices and you've lived exactly what God has asked you to do, doing exactly what you're created to do but maximum sacrifice hurts and it doesn't always lead you up and to the right. You might be smack dab in the middle of God's plan for your life doing exactly what your Creator created you to do, but it's just hard right now."

I don't know. It's complicated. A lot of factors. Depends on who you ask.

See John, John knew who to ask. John knew that with a question this big there is only one person who could really answer it. John knew where to take this big question of purpose and significance.

I had a mentor who I linked up with for about a year. This was during a really crazy year of our lives. We were getting ready to bring our third child into the world, and we were launching the Downtown campus here at Traders Point at the same time and life was crazy. We moved downtown. It seemed like everything was insane in life.

And so I just needed somebody to kind of help me with some wisdom so I asked my buddies, “Hey, man. If you know of a really good mentor, who would you recommend?” and they recommended this guy named Dean. He was a world-renowned speaker, author, all of this stuff. And they said, “Hey, reach out to him and see if he would want to meet with you every couple of weeks.”

So I reached out to him and he agreed. I was like, “Awesome! This is great.” And I start meeting with Dean about every couple of weeks and asking him questions. I’m like peppering him with questions like, “In this situation, what would you do?” “In this circumstance what would you do?” “I’m feeling this way, what do you think about it?” And I would just receive his counsel, his input, his wisdom. And it was great.

But I noticed there were some questions that Dean would not answer. And it really ticked me off. I’d ask him some of these questions, and big questions, some big stuff about parenting, some big stuff I was praying through, some stuff about marriage that I was really trying to figure out, some stuff about ministry—just big questions.

And Dean would respond to these really big questions. He would always say, “Hm. That’s a great question. You should go talk to God about that. Come back and tell me what he says and we’ll talk about it.”

And I would say, “Okay, I’ve got it. I’ll do the Christian thing—wink, wink. Yeah, yeah. I’m going to pray, dude. Yeah, yeah. But like what do you think, Dean?” And Dean would say, “I think you should go talk to God about it. Come back. Tell me what he says and we’ll talk about it.”

See, Dean knew that there were some questions that only God can answer in your life. There are some things that the enneagram test can’t solve for you. There are some things that a personality profile cannot solve and there are some things that your co-workers and your friends and the text thread that you always go to can’t solve for you. There are some things that social media can’t solve here. There are some things that a pastor on a stage cannot solve for you. There are some things that only God can answer in your life. There are some things that only God can settle inside of you.

And I tell you, when it comes to this question of purpose and significance:

Only your Creator can tell you what you were created for.

Only your Creator can answer the massive, complicated questions. And see, John knew that. John knew who to take his question to. And the response he got was such a personalized word from God, it was such a personalized message that John would have just—oh, he would have smiled, he would have laughed, John would have gone to the grave with peace and with rest and with confidence, because the way Jesus answered

him is he said: Hey, here's what you do. Go back and tell John the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame walk, the dead are raised, and the gospel is being preached, go tell him that.

When he heard that, oh my gosh, John would have known that Jesus was quoting an Old Testament prophecy that is very near to the same prophecy that talked about John's purpose in life. It was a personalized message, it was something special from God to God's creation to say: You are right in the middle, I know your life has not gone up and to the right, I know your circumstances are crazy, and I know inside you are struggling, but let me tell you, you are right in the middle, you are right in the middle of my purpose for you—you sacrificed everything and you've done exactly what you were created to do.

See, only your Creator can give you that. That's why I think that if you're here and you wouldn't consider yourself a follower of Jesus yet—yet—if you're here and you don't know what you believe about God, I think you are in such a special place. Because if you will keep coming back here you will learn what it means to have an actual relationship with the God who created you.

I'm not talking about religion, a list of rules to impress a far-off, distant God who doesn't care about you. No, no, no, no—we were created, you and I were created to have a living, active, walking, talking, live relationship with the God who made us. We were created to wake up and give love and to receive love, to ask for guidance and receive guidance. We were created to walk and talk with God throughout our day as if he's real and as if he's right here, because, oh by the way, he is.

You were created for this. And this is how you start to settle some of those big questions in your life. Only God can answer some of this stuff. Only God can settle this in your heart. And I just believe that if some of you would start talking to God about it, if some of you would start taking your problems to him first, start talking to him about them and say, "God, what do you have to say about this?" I think God might tell you what he's already been saying about you behind your back.

See, with John here, come on. John said: Hey, am I living my purpose?

Yeah, yeah, yeah—go, go. Now, turning to the crowd Jesus said: Let me talk to you about John for a sec. And he starts lifting John up and encouraging him.

See, I think right now if some of you would start talking to God about what's going on in your life, you might hear from him what he's been telling all of heaven all along.

See, I think God is shutting down heaven at times: Hey, would you all stop for a second? Would you all stop singing? Can we stop for just a second? I want you to look down right now, because there is something that I want to point out to you.

God's telling the angels and the cloud of witnesses: Hey, would you look at my daughter for a second? Would you look at the greatness? She's in the middle of a marriage where she's not receiving anything from her spouse. She's not being loved the way that she's supposed to be. That guy is kind of off his rocker right now. But look at her. She's faithful. She's committed. She's praying every day. She's treating him like I treat him. She's forgiving him. She's not becoming hard-hearted or bitter. Look at the way she's gracious. She was made for this.

All of heaven stop for a second. Shut it down. Shut it down angels. Stop singing. Look at my son. Look at how hard he is battling through that addiction. Look at the way that he is fighting for his relationship with me. Look at the way he's struggling. Yes, I know he's fallen a few times. Yes, I know he's failed a few times. But look, he's setting up accountability. He's in a group. He's on a team. He's coming to church every week. He's doing what it takes. He's fighting for me. The greatness that I created him for—oh, he's right in the middle of it.

Would you look at my children who are in the middle of a job that they hate, working for a boss who is a jerk, we're working on him, angels. But she's putting her head down, he's putting his head down and they are in that job as if I'm their boss, not some punk. They're faithful and they don't even know why they are in that job. They can't even see what's next. But they are still showing up and they're still believing. They are still trusting. Look at the faith of my people. Look at the greatness.

So even though your life isn't going up and to the right, even though you are in a turmoil, you might just be thick right now and the doubt is there, I think God is up in heaven and if you start talking to him, he might tell you that you may actually look more like Jesus than you can ever imagine.

You may look more like Jesus than you can ever imagine because, oh, by the way, Jesus was betrayed by his best friends. He was abandoned by his best friends. He was arrested. The God who created the heavens and the earth was arrested he was beaten beyond belief, beyond recognition, he was spit on, he was cussed at, he was forced to carry his own cross up a hill, they nailed him to a cross for the world to mock and he died a brutal death.

Oh my gosh, that's not up and to the right. That's down, down, crashing down. It's descending. Going lower and lower. And just when it couldn't get even lower, when there was no way that Jesus' situation could get worse, he breathed his last breath and he descends into the very gates of hell to take on the sins of the world. And then they put his body in a tomb. And they rolled a stone in front of it, because it was over.

I don't care how bad your situation is, it ain't nothing like that. But Jesus, though his life was not up and to the right, though his circumstances were horrible, he was right in the middle of the purpose that God had created him for. He was descending to greatness.

And that might be the same for you. His maximum impact came at a cost of maximum sacrifice. And you might be in a situation where you're making maximum sacrifice and God wants to tell you that you're right where he wants you, but you'll only know that if you talk to God about it.

It's complicated. It depends on who you ask. You've got to talk to him. So, let me give you some space to start that conversation right now.

Let me pray for you guys.

Lord, we love you and we're thankful for your example, for your sacrifice, for paving the way for us to have a relationship with you when you died on the cross. God, this whole thing would not be possible if it weren't for you, but because of you we have access to

God and the freedom to have a walking, talking relationship with you, Father. So, we thank you for that.

God, I pray that you would meet us right now in these moments. I pray that if there is someone in the room at any of our campuses who is struggling, who doesn't really know which way is up and which way is down, whose circumstances and turmoil are just all over the place, God, that you would meet him or her in these moments.

God, we know that there are many of us who have some things in our lives that we need to change, that our lives may not be on track. God, we're open to that. We're open-handed. We'll do whatever it is that you want us to do, but God, we need to hear it from you. We need to hear your words right now.

God, I pray for those in the room who are not sure what they believe about you and they are not sure where they stand with you, I pray that you would give them the words to begin speaking to a God who they don't even yet believe in.

God, I pray for all of us at every location right now. That you would help us to walk and talk with you as if you're really there and to hear and receive from you as if you're really there, because we believe that you really are. But none of that will happen until we quiet everything else out and say, "God, speak to us." So we come to you right now. We come before you and we say, "God speak to us." We crave your words. We crave your direction in our lives, and we surrender to it. It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen.