
Trader's Point, our Northwest campus, our North campus, West, Downtown, online, how are y'all doing this fine weekend? Good. Good. You look beautiful.

If this is your first time with us, welcome. We're so thrilled to have you. My name's Petie. I'm one of the pastors around here.

We're really, really excited about this series that we've been working through to start the year called *Under Review*, where we've been working through a book of the Bible called Ecclesiastes. Now, if you're not familiar with the Bible, if it's not really your thing, it's all right; don't worry. We're going to really talk about it in such a way that it's very easy to understand.

Before we jump into this week of that series, I think we need to stop and pause for a second because this series has been incredible, and a lot of that is due to the preaching of our lead pastor Aaron Brockett. Can we show him some love for the teaching he always brings and continues to bring in this series? Absolutely. We are so blessed and fortunate, man, I'm telling you. His preaching is changing lives across this city, and it's really cool to see and cool to be a part of.

We're working through this book called Ecclesiastes. Now, the reason it's such a pivotal big deal is what Ecclesiastes is is sort of a journal. It's a journal written by a man in his old age, and he's reflecting on what he's been through in life.

The reason that's so important for us is that the guy who wrote this journal, his name was King Solomon, and King Solomon had a wealth of experiences to draw from. He's actually one of the wisest and wealthiest men to ever walk the face of the earth, so what he says is actually really important.

I actually think that Solomon was the original Dos Equis guy. He's the original most interesting man in the world, and his experiences were some that you and I will never have just simply due to the resources he had. He was able to experience some things that we will never get to experience, but from that, he then shares with us a lot of wisdom that he gleaned from those life experiences, so we're learning to start our year off from him.

If you have a Bible or a Bible app, go ahead and turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 7. Ecclesiastes 7 is where we're going to be living today. If you don't have a Bible, if you don't want to download an app, and you're a complete rebel, I got the verses on the screen for you right here, all right?

As we jump into Ecclesiastes 7, as you're turning there, I need to kind of gauge the room at every campus right now, so I need you by show of hands at every campus, if you would identify

yourself as a feeler, as someone who wears their heart on their sleeve, maybe you cry easily, I want you to raise your hand. All right. Y'all are so much more honest than the other crowds that we've had. I applaud you.

I'm right there with you, okay? I would self-identify as a feeler. That's nothing to be ashamed of, but it is a little embarrassing at times, and you just know that.

For me, I cry at weird things. I don't cry at just your normal ordinary things; I cry mostly at sports. Sports cause me to get very emotional, so like when my beloved University of Kentucky Wildcats pull out a big win, like they did last night, I get a little misty-eyed and I get emotional. When they lose, I throw things. It's a real love-hate relationship I have here.

I cried during the births of all three of my children. My wife did not even cry on the births of all three of our kids. I think by the third one, she was like, "Really? You're still crying?"

"Yes, I'm still crying."

I have a theory. I think that it's genetic. I think I get it from my momma because my momma is a big crier. Her brothers and her sister nicknamed her Boo-Boo growing up and it stuck because she cries at the drop of a hat, so I think it's genetic.

Now, I have learned to mitigate it because it is definitely an embarrassment and is an obstacle at times when you cry all the time and you can't control it. Feelers in the room, you know that. So I've learned to mitigate it by following a few simple rules in life.

Rule #1: Avoid all movies about dogs. Off limits. So about 8 to 10 years ago, somewhere in that range, I went to the theater and saw a movie called *Marley and Me*. Now *Marley and Me* was billed as a comedy. It was released on Christmas Day: Go enjoy it with your family and laugh about this great relationship between owner and his dog. It has Owen Wilson in it, one of my favorite actors.

I'm ready to laugh. I get in there and I watch the movie and, spoiler alert, the dog dies! And there I am as a grown man in a movie theater with a full crowd and I'm just like weeping, like what am I going to do with this now? So no more movies about dogs.

Rule #2 is I avoid any dramatic television shows involving family dynamics, so I, yes, avoid *This is Us* like the plague. I don't care how Jack dies, okay? I just don't want anything to do with it. If you want to tell me how it ends, tell me, but I'm avoiding that at all costs.

Now if you're not a feeler in the room, if that's not something that's your thing, it's okay, but you understand this truth whether you're a feeler or not: We all tend to avoid sadness, really at all costs, right? We've learned through our life experience and through the culture around us that life will be better, or so we think, if we can avoid sadness. If we could just stay happy, life will

be better, and so we've learned to manage it. We've learned to kind of keep sadness at an arm's length and kind of stiff-arm it from our lives.

I know for me, and I've seen it in many others, that we've learned to say some things once sadness comes our way that just kind of push it away, like whoa, whoa, whoa. Back up. It's like for instance you're presented with something sad, maybe it's something that happens in a coworker's life or a family member or a friend. We'll say things like, "Well, it could be worse."

Number one, that doesn't help anyone. If someone's dealing with an injury or a sickness, "Well, it could be worse; you could be dead." That is a fact. You could be dead. Also not helpful.

If you don't like your job. Your struggling to like your job. "Well, it could be worse; you could not have a job." Also a fact. Also not helpful.

All that is is us saying, "I don't really want to think about that."

"It could be worse. Stop being so sad."

Or we say things like, "I hope it gets better." That sounds good. Like you think about the drug problem in our state right now or the education problem in our city. There might be some sadness that comes to your mind, and the first thing we think is, "Oh, that's awful. I hope it gets better."

Really what that is is us saying, "I don't have the mental space to deal with that. I don't even know what I would do to help. I just hope it gets better and I just don't have room for that sadness right now."

Or, if you're in Christian circles, if you're in the church, we don't say, "I hope it gets better." What we say is, "Prayers. Prayers to you."

C'mon. Let's cut through it for a second. Y'all ain't praying for that. You know you're not. You're going to bed praying about you and yours most of the time. When we say prayers, it's just like, "I don't want to deal with that sadness, but, hey, prayers to you." We move on because it just makes us uncomfortable.

We would rather avoid sadness if we could, and we'll go to great lengths to get there, which is a very interesting notion for those of us in the room who have decided to follow Jesus, that we would be so uncomfortable with sadness.

Yet, Jesus was seemingly very comfortable with sadness. In fact, if you read through the life of Jesus, you see multiple instances of him expressing emotion and him weeping. In fact, Isaiah would write these words about Jesus in chapter 53 of Isaiah. He said, "He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with the deepest grief." That was Jesus.

Jesus, when he sees sadness, he's like: Oh, we've hung out plenty of times. I'm very comfortable with sadness. I'm very well acquainted with deep grief. So he was very comfortable. His followers are like, "Ahh. It makes us feel awkward. We'd rather avoid it."

King Solomon experienced great sadness. The man who writes the book of Ecclesiastes that we read, he writes these words in here that we read over and over. He says meaningless, meaningless. Everything is meaningless. You don't write those words without experiencing some sadness, and we know he did.

By this point, he's likely outlived most of his friends and his peers. He's been through multiple relationship failures; he had hundreds of wives and hundreds of girlfriends, so you can imagine not just the drama, but the sadness that came from that.

He's raised children, so he's gone through the pain of what it's like to raise children and see them not turn out the way that you hoped they would.

He made a ton of money, which you might go, "Wait a minute, that's not sad." Actually, if you would listen to the wise Mase and P. Diddy, they said *Mo Money Mo Problems*, so factually correct. Mo money, mo sadness.

Money didn't fix anything in his life. Money just brought on more problems, and so yes, Solomon dealt with a ton of sadness.

So what Solomon's going to do now is he's going to give us a perspective on sadness. He's going to advise us to take an approach to sadness that the next time sadness comes up in your own life or it's presented to you in the life of someone else, Solomon's going to say instead of stiff-arming it, instead of walking away from it, that you should take a different approach.

In fact, that's why I'm calling this message *The Surprise of Sadness*. I know that sounds like such a contradiction, but what Solomon's going to show us is that if we'll let it in, there are actually some surprises that sadness has in store for us.

Ecclesiastes 7:1, we're ready to jump in. If you're ready at all campuses, say, "Heeeyyy."

Everybody did it. It amazed me, y'all did that. That means I could say do anything. Next time it'll be jumping jacks; we're going to do jumping jacks—If you're ready, do jumping jacks. It's great. I love it. I love the participation.

Let's go. Chapter 7 verse 1. Here we go. It says, "A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. And the day you die is better than the day you are born." Welcome to church. "Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies—..." It just keeps getting better. "...so the living should take this to heart."

Now pause for a second. I love that Solomon just cares not about our feelings. He cares not about stepping on our toes. He's just like: Hey, the day you die is better than the day you're born. I dare you to put that on the next sunset pic that you take and put on Facebook, right? Like, beautiful sunset—"The day you die is better than the day you were born." Post that as your next update, I dare you.

Solomon just doesn't care. And he keeps going. He expands on it. He says: Actually, you should spend more time at funerals than you do at parties.

I don't know how many funerals you've been to. I've been to several and I've preached several. They're not nearly as fun as parties, but I think we understand what he's getting at here. We've never left a party and thought, "Man, that thing was awesome. All my friends were there. The food was great. The drinks were great. The dance floor was popping, and I got really introspective and pondered some deep meaning-of-life stuff at that party." That never happens.

But now, it happens at funerals every time, every single time you're at a funeral. It doesn't matter if you even really knew the person that died, if you're just there to support a friend or a loved one. There's just something that happens in the face of death. There's like a quiet reverence and respect for it that just makes you evaluate things. You walk out of a funeral and you're just thinking like, "Man, am I spending this short life that I have the way that I should?" There's just something that happens.

So Solomon's going to take this the day you die is better than the day you were born. You should spend more time at funerals than at parties, and it's all leading up to this big observation he's going to make about sadness in verse 3. It's where we're going to spend the rest of our time together. Here's what he says. He says, "Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us."

"Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us." That sadness, if we'll let it, if we'll not stiff-arm it and push it away and put a quick Band-Aid on it and just move on, if we'll actually sit with the sadness for a little bit and feel it, sadness can actually make us better. It can actually refine us.

I want to share with you some of the surprises that sadness has in store for you if you'll let it, things that I've seen in my own life, things that we've collectively seen in each other's lives, and things that the Scriptures point to.

You see, sadness can surprise us with some things like, for instance, sadness can surprise us with **empathy**. Sadness surprises us with empathy.

It's one thing to feel sad over something that happens in our country. If you're like me and you see what happens on the news and you see that basically every other month for the past several years, it seems, something happens in our country, a tragedy happens that highlights

the fact that racism is still alive. There is no denying it. Something happens that brings that racial tension to the forefront.

If you're like me, I see that on the news or I see it on my Twitter feed and my heart just breaks for it. And there's sadness right there. But oftentimes, if you're like me, sometimes I just say, "Ah, I hope it gets better."

It's a whole different deal when instead of just looking at it from a distance or kind of stiff-arming it, it's a whole different deal when you pull up a chair next to someone who maybe looks different than you or has a different experience than you and you learn what it's like in someone else's shoes.

It was totally different for me when I got to pull up a chair next to my friend James and learn about what life has been like for him and what his experience as an African-American man in this country has been like versus what my experience as a white man in this country has been like. To feel the sadness in that.

And sadness, it surprises us with this empathy, this ability to relate and connect and have a deeper, more meaningful friendship and relationship; like to just understand what life is like outside of your shoes.

I've always had sympathy for single moms and single dads, but it wasn't until one of our good friends became a single mom and my wife and I pulled up a chair next to that sadness and really felt it that I could truly have empathy and truly understood what it's like to raise a child, or children, alone.

This is just what empathy does. It connects us. This is actually very near to the heart of God. Paul writes it like this in Galatians chapter 6. I love this verse. He says, "Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ."

Obedying the law of Jesus, like if you want to obey Jesus, it's not just about avoiding a bunch of bad things. If you want to obey Jesus and be near to his heart, you gotta like shoulder other people's burdens. Get in there and share. Get up close to that sadness and experience what someone else is feeling.

I actually think this is a pretty easy one for us. This is not something that's going to require you altering everything about your life to live this out. I think it's actually something we could do with just three simple words. The next time we see sadness, the next time we see brokenness or heartache or we're confronted with it, instead of saying, "It could be worse," or "hope it gets better," what if we just pulled up a chair and said these three words, "Tell me more."

Tell me more...

If you have a friend or a coworker who just lost a loved one, if you pulled up a chair and said instead of *I hope it gets better* and *prayers*, if you pulled up a chair and said, “Tell me more. What’s that like for you? How are you doing? Tell me more,” I think you’d start to have greater empathy because you’d start to understand what it’s like to realize that when they pick up that phone and pull up that text message, that there’s no one on the other end to receive it.

I’ll never forget when one of my good friends, Joe, died in a car accident. This was seven or eight years ago. That was one of the first times that the sadness of losing a loved one really hit me. I’d lost loved ones before, but not someone that was that close, that I talked to that often.

I’ll never forget pulling out my phone and typing in Joe’s name to send him a text message about fantasy football and then it just hit me, like, “Oh no, he’s not there anymore.” The sadness that comes from that.

If you just ask the question tell me more. You see, because here’s what tell me more does. Tell me more puts us in a posture of learning. It puts us in a posture of actually being open to be able to receive and feel what other people feel, to feel what life is like on the other side of the table.

Just imagine what might change in our world because here’s the thing. I’m not advocating for empathy just so we can all sing *Kumbaya, My Lord* around the campfire.

I do think that God wants us to have deep and meaningful relationships with one another. I think that’s at the heart of God, but there’s a much bigger purpose that empathy serves in our society. I believe that empathy leads to compassion.

If you can truly understand what life is like and truly feel the sadness for a little bit and let sadness refine you, like it does, and let it surprise you with empathy, you’ll actually start to have compassion for people who experience things that you haven’t experienced.

I don’t know about you, but as I look at the world around me and I see all the brokenness and all the horrible things that are happening, I think the world could use some more compassion. I actually think it would solve a lot of the issues that we’re experiencing right now. If we could just have greater empathy, that would result in greater compassion.

But you can’t do that when you’re at an arm’s length from the sadness. You can only do it by pulling up a chair and saying, “Tell me more,” and feeling the sadness.

See, sadness has got surprises for you. It’s kind of like the gift that keeps on giving because there are many other surprises that sadness has in store for you. Here’s another one that’s a big deal for us. Sadness surprises us with **motivation**.

Sadness surprises us with motivation, so it's not until I feel the sadness of my clothes not fitting anymore that I will have the motivation to say no to the almighty Oreo. It's sitting right there. There's a whole pack. It's got the easy-open lid now. It's right there.

We see this on the surface level all the time, like you're not going to make any change until you feel some pain, but we see it on a grander scale in history, right? I mean, some of the greatest change that we've ever seen in all of human history was born out of the greatest pain, the greatest sadness, because if you'll allow yourself to come up next to sadness and feel it and not stiff-arm it, it does something inside of you. It motivates you to do something about it, to actually take action.

This is why we just celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, birthday and why we celebrate it every year. Our country obviously still has a long way to go when it comes to racial reconciliation, but can you imagine what this place would be like without his influence? Can you imagine what our world would be like right now without his action that led to the Civil Rights Movement?

I want you to understand that that great action that we all celebrate and applaud was born out of great sadness and great pain. I want to read you an excerpt from a letter that he wrote from a Birmingham jail. It's a little bit of a lengthy thing, so just kind of buckle up, but I want you take this as an opportunity for you to kind of slow down and to feel the sadness and to feel the pain that stirred him to do what he did.

He says this. "We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jet-like speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, 'Wait.' But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: 'Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?'; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading 'white' and 'colored'; ... when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of

'nobodiness'—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience."

Do you feel that sadness? Yeah, powerful words. But do you feel that sadness? I mean, there's such deep pain in that. There's such deep heartache in that that not only he, but all people of color at that time were feeling and many are still feeling. There's such pain there, but that pain is what motivated him to take action. That sadness refined him and had an influence in his life that motivated him to do great things that impacted our entire country and the entire world.

You know, King Solomon is very similar in this boat, that King Solomon actually took action because of the sadness in his life that what he endured and what he went through and all the things he saw in his life that oftentimes he was probably the cause of, the pain and the sadness he saw led him to write a book called Ecclesiastes so that he could share what he's learned so that future generations wouldn't make the same mistakes.

It compelled him to action. We see this happen all throughout. This is Jesus. Jesus modeled this for us. You see, before Jesus would go into Jerusalem during the last week of his life and do these great things like turn over tables in the temple because he was so disappointed in what the Church had become, before he would go to a cross and let people nail him to it and die for the sins of all humanity, all in the name of love, before any of those great actions took place, look what happens in Luke chapter 19 as he's going into the city. It says this. "But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep."

He saw the city and the people in it and the condition of their hearts, the condition of the people, and it broke his heart and he felt sadness. It stirred motivation in him to continue staying the course and doing what God had put him on this earth to do, God the father.

And this is true of us. I know I'm talking about big grand history examples. This is true of us in our daily lives. I see this happening all over Trader's Point. God is breaking our hearts for what breaks his heart, and action is happening. I could tell you story after story from every campus to show you how this is happening, but one of my favorite stories is the story of Kevin from our North campus.

You see, Kevin is a firefighter for the city of Indianapolis, and Kevin's job has him right up next to the sadness of our city every day. He's responding to things left and right that just show him some of the most tragic areas and tragic events that are happening in our city, and so he's seeing this over and over and over. This sadness and this brokenness is welling up inside of him over what he sees every day.

Then he hears about this ministry we have at Trader's Point called *Live 1:17* that's there to support families who are becoming foster families and adoptive families. We know that's one of the most difficult things to do. In fact, most foster families quit after the first year because of a lack of support, but they're caring for the most vulnerable children in our city.

Kevin felt that sadness when he saw what was happening with these vulnerable children, and that sadness of what he saw throughout his week motivated him to take action. So now Kevin, along with a group of guys he's recruited, they go to these different foster families' homes to do handyman repairs to their home because they know that one of the last things that gets attention, because you spend all your time and all your energy on the kids, one of the last things that gets taken care of, that often doesn't get taken care of, is the stuff around the house that has to get fixed.

So Kevin says, "You know what? I can't become a foster parent right now, but I can lift up the families who are," and his sadness has motivated him to take action that is actually having an impact in our city.

Again, this is not difficult for you and me, but I know where you are right now. I'm with you. I can step into your mind for a second because I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "All right, Petie, that's great for the firefighter, but for the average person in the room who's nine-to-five doesn't get you up close and personal to sadness, what are we supposed to do with that?"

If you're nine-to-five doesn't have you out seeing the worst of the worst and you don't get that sadness, "What if my nine-to-five just has me in a cubicle working at a computer and then I go home at night and I pull in my garage and I close the garage door behind me and I go in my house and I watch Netflix and eat Lucky Charms? What if that's my life? What am I to do with that?"

Again, it doesn't take a reorienting of your entire life. I think it's a simple response change. The next time you see sadness in our city, in our community, in your workplace, around you, instead of saying things like *Man, I hope it gets better* or *it could be worse*, what if you just pulled up a chair and asked this question: How can I get closer?

You see X-issue that happens and you just go, "Man, that is awful, but how can I get closer? How can I interrupt my schedule, cancel a meeting, move something around, how can I just interrupt my world for a second and get closer to that problem so that my heart can actually feel the sadness that leads to motivation?"

I used to be a student pastor here at Trader's Point. I used to work with teenagers, and it was interesting. I used to always have adults in the church and in the community who would come up to me and say things like, "Petie, thank you so much for what you do, working with our teenagers", and they'd follow that with some statements like, "You don't know how bad this sounds. I just don't see how you do it. I just don't get it. I don't get teenagers. I just don't have a heart for that ministry. I just don't understand them."

Just so you know, as a side note, they feel the same way about you. There is a gap in communication between the two sides. We're working on it. We're getting there.

Anytime someone would say that to me, I'd want to respond with something—I never would because I try to be a kind and decent person—but anytime someone would say that to me and they'd say, "My heart just doesn't break for that ministry. It's just not for me," I'd always want to say "Have you ever actually spent time with a teenager?" because I think if you'd just get closer, you might have a different perspective.

I think if you'd pull up a chair and just get a little closer and you started to see what social media has done to teenage and student culture and how different it is than when you were growing up, how much harder it is to be a teenager right now, I think if you pulled up a chair and got just a little closer and started to see what drugs are doing in teenage culture, you started to see what it's like to sit there and watch your friends get picked off one by one to peer pressure decisions and lifestyles, I just think if you pulled up a chair and got closer, I think you'd have a different response.

In fact, my prediction is that if you got closer to it, your heart would start to break for the next generation and you'd be stirred to take action. You'd be stirred to do something about it. But that doesn't happen if you don't get closer. That doesn't happen if you just read a news article about cyberbullying. That doesn't happen if you just see a news report about a school shooting and feel sad about it. It only happens if you get closer and you allow yourself to feel that sadness.

You see, sadness will surprise you. I'm telling you, we could call it a day right there and just like go and release y'all to an early lunch. Think about that. This is how wise King Solomon was. He takes something that every single one of us experiences day in and day out, sadness—you can't escape it—and he just puts a little different twist on it. Instead of running away from it, instead of stiff-arming it away, he says just run to it.

It'll surprise you. It'll refine you. It'll make you better. Just that one little thing. Imagine if we were to go out right now and to live this out in the city this week, that instead of responding with *well it could be worse* or *I hope it gets better*, we just start saying, "Tell me more," and we start developing empathy and compassion.

What if we just said, "Hey, how can I get closer?" and we start taking action? Do you understand the city of Indianapolis would feel the change if just the people listening to this message right now went out and lived out those two things?

But sadness ain't done with you. Sadness has got another surprise in store for you, and I found it to be the most personally life changing. It is this, that sadness can lead you to **Jesus**.

If you're not a follower of Jesus, you wouldn't consider this your thing, you're probably like, "That's a stretch."

Just go with me for a second because you need to understand that if you ever want to truly understand Christianity and what it is and what it isn't, not what the culture tells you it is, not

what you see on the news; if you want to understand what Christianity is really all about, it requires a necessary date with sadness.

I'm not talking about the sadness in the world. I'm not talking about a necessary date with all the brokenness you see around you or in other people. If you want to understand Christianity, you have to pull up a chair next to the sadness that exists within every single one of us. It's not an external sadness; it's an internal one. It doesn't matter if you've been in church one day or 80 years, it's all of us.

You see, there is perhaps no greater sadness to ever experience than when you come face to face with the reality and the truth, when you get honest about it, that all of us know the right thing to do, but we lack the heart to actually do it all the time. What's wrong with us?

We judge other people by a certain set of standards and morals and values. Again, if we just get real about it, we fail to live up to our standards and morals and values. This isn't like a you've-been-in-church thing or a church thing, this is all of us.

When you come face to face with that sadness within, that darkness of the human heart, the human condition, only then can you truly understand Christianity.

King Solomon would end chapter 7 with these words: "...God created people to be virtuous, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path."

God created us to know what to do. We know it. But yet we each turn to follow our own downward path.

We call the message of Jesus around here the Gospel. You probably hear that word thrown around a lot, like Gospel, the Gospel of Jesus. When you hear Gospel in our culture today, we think like a style of music, right? There's gospel music. And yes, there is gospel music and it's incredible, but Gospel just means good news, so that's why we call the message of Jesus the Gospel, because it's good news.

But the good news of Jesus only makes sense and only pops off the page as good news if you're very comfortable in the sadness of the bad news.

The good news that Jesus came to this earth and he was tempted in every way that you and I were tempted, yet he was without sin, he set the perfect standard of what it's like to live this life to the fullest.

The good news he came and lived the life that we could never live and then he died the death that we should've died, that our sin, our rebellion against God deserves, this punishment of being separated from him forever, but because Jesus loves us so much he would stretch out his arms and die for you and for me so that we could be reunited with our maker, not just when we die, but like right here, right now, we can live life to the full in unity with God, walking

alongside him every day; that good news that Jesus didn't stay dead, that he rose from the grave three days later. He conquered death, that one thing that every single one of us is scared of. Jesus took care of it for you. That good news. It only pops off the page if you also understand the darkness of your own heart, when you sit with sadness.

John Calvin, famous theologian, he put it like this. He says, "Only those who have learned well to be earnestly dissatisfied with themselves, and to be confounded with shame at their wretchedness truly understand the Christian gospel."

This is why we sing so much. If you're new to church, if you're like your first few times here, I know one of the things you probably are thinking but you're afraid you're going to offend somebody if you say it is like, "Man, y'all love to sing." We do it so much, so much singing. And you're right, we do, and it's because it's one of the only things we know to do in response.

The Christian experience is this interesting thing of just walking circles around these two realities. Monday through Sunday we just walk circles around it, and we're constantly shocked at how bad the world is and we're constantly shocked at the evil we see and we're constantly shocked at more so the evilness that we see in ourselves.

It just blows our mind how bad things have gotten in the world and in us, and then Monday through Sunday we just keep walking around and seeing this good news that Jesus loves us in spite of it and he offers forgiveness and freedom. He still wants to use us, and he has purpose for our life in spite of that rebellion.

We just keep going around this bad news and this good news, this sadness and this joy, and we just don't know what else to do other than get everybody in the room together and start clapping and singing and drumming and playing guitars and shouting because we're just so filled with gratitude. We believe it, but we can't believe it. It's so shocking to us. It's why we sing together every week, because Jesus has changed everything for us.

I want you to know that he wants to change everything for you.

If you're here and you would not consider yourself a follower of Jesus, you need to know that Jesus experiences great sadness over you. Jesus longs for the day that you'll come home to him. Jesus longs for the day that you'll turn from your own downward path and start following him.

He experiences great sadness over you, but I want you to know that sadness motivates him and propels him to keep going and doing whatever it takes to reach you, even if it means dragging you in the doors of a church that you never thought you'd attend to hear a sermon that you probably didn't think was for you, all so that you could understand that Jesus is actually for you, and not just is he for you, he's crazy about you. He loves you more than you could ever imagine, and he'll change everything for you if you'll trust him.

I want you to know that that's not just one man's opinion; this is written all over scripture. It's been the heart of God for thousands of years. He's been doing it since the dawn of creation, changing everything for us, and he still wants to do it today.

The way I want to do this, I want you to stand up at every campus right now and I want to read you some of these verses to close out our service that show you the heart that God has for you and the way that he has changed everything for us for thousands of years and he still wants to do it today.

Psalm 30 says it like this. It says, "You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy." You see, right now, there are people in the room at every campus who can attest to this truth, that Jesus has turned our mourning into joyful dancing.

There are people in the room at every campus who have experienced freedom from the chains of addiction, who've had marriages restored, who've had broken hearts healed. So you need to know right now if you're in the middle of it, you need to know that he is not done. He wants to change everything if you'll trust him.

Jeremiah 31 says it like this. "Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow." You see, it doesn't matter how old you are or how young you are, Jesus is for you and he's crazy about you. It is never too early, and it's never too late to begin following Jesus because you need to know if you're not dead, he is not done in your life.

It's this joy that Jesus gives you when you start following him. He puts life back into every step you take and it lights you up like nothing else this world has to offer.

Psalm 126 would say it like this. "Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy." You see, you need to know right now if you're in the midst of heartache right now, if you've cried over your children, if you've cried over your marriage, if you've cried over your failures, your addiction, your loneliness, if you've cried over the death of a loved one or a lost friendship, you need to know that if you'll trust Jesus, he is an expert at taking the tears you've shed and turning them into a harvest of joy.

Revelation 7 would say it like this. "For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes." You see, it's a beautiful picture of the world that God is working through his followers that one day everything that's made you sad, everything that's made you cry, everything you think is evil, Jesus is going to make it right by his power through his grace.

Lastly, Isaiah 51 says it like this. "Those who have been ransomed by the Lord," those who have been rescued by the Lord, those who have been redeemed by the Lord, "will return. They

will enter Jerusalem singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be filled with joy and gladness.”

Jesus, we love you. We’re grateful for you changing our lives. You’ve changed everything for us, God, but we know that you’re not done, and so we’re going to ask you to meet us where we are right now.

The people in the room who are struggling to follow you and trust you, I pray that you give them courage, that you give them confidence to trust you, Jesus.

God, let us step back and watch you do what you do best as you conquer every fear, as you break every chain, as you give hope to the hopeless and you heal the broken hearted only by your power.

It’s in Jesus’ name the church prays this. Amen.