

Stories that Change Everything | From Riches to Rags

Petie Kinder | Luke 16:1-13

What's up, Church? How are we doing? Good, good.

If this is your first time, we're thrilled to have you. My name's Petie. I'm one of the pastors here, and I hope you had a great Fourth of July celebration. I hope you blew some stuff up.

I'm originally from Kentucky, and so I got a little bit of redneck in my blood. Blowing stuff up is just part of our life.

I always joke about how I'm from Kentucky and I love it because it creates a fun little back-and-forth with all of the Indiana folks. In fact, just this past week, I was out at a restaurant with my family and ran into somebody from our West campus. We were talking, just talking about church—great conversation—and he ends it. He's walking away. He's like, "Bye, Petie. See you later," and he turns around and he goes, "Oh, Petie, by the way, Kentucky's garbage." It was great! It was like my favorite interaction of the week. It was just talking trash.

Now I just want to remind you in the spirit of celebrating our country, this great country we live in, that one of the things that makes it great is the great state of Kentucky because it's the gift that keeps on giving. Kentucky gives us things that no other state gives us, so I want to give you exhibit A of something that you need to be reminded of that happened this past week.

This is in Madisonville, Kentucky. Now if you're wondering what this is, it looks like a whole lot of fireworks and you'd be right. This is a fireworks tent where they sell fireworks to the public that someone lit a firework inside of in the middle of the night and all the fireworks went off at once.

If you watch the video you can find online, it's like a full five-minute fireworks show of every firework going off at once, so I would just like to say, from my state to yours, you're welcome! You're welcome.

Grab a Bible, get to Luke chapter 16. Luke 16 is where we're going to live today. We've been in this series called *The Stories that Change Everything*. We've been unpacking the stories that Jesus told to explain to us who we are, who God is, and how he works in the world.

Next week, our lead pastor, Aaron, is going to be back in the saddle preaching, so can't wait for that. It's going to be a big weekend. You want to make sure that you're here for that.

But this weekend, I want us to start this story off a little bit different. I want us to start by reading the ending of the story first, so if you're one of those crazy psychos who likes to have

movies ruined for you or if you like to read the last chapter of a book before you decide if you're going to read it or not, if you're one of those weirdos, you're going to love this.

There's a reason that I want us to start by reading the ending first. I want us to see where Jesus is going to take us before we actually get to the story that he tells us.

So let's look at verse 10, and we're going to read the last four verses of our time today. It says this: "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?"

Here it is. "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other." Here's the kicker. "You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money."

Now, I know what some of you may be thinking at every campus right now. "I chose the money day of all days to come to church? Really? Of all the weekends, I picked this one." I know some of you maybe have some really skeptical views of the church and some trust issues there and you're thinking, "See, here we go. Church is out to get your money, out to get in your wallet. They're out to make me hate my money so I'll give it to you so you can love it."

There are all these kinds of skeptical things. Maybe you're sitting here today, maybe you've been tracking with us through this series and you see that last verse, "You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money," and maybe you've already cooked up the story in your head that Jesus is going to tell to get to that end.

Maybe you think it's a story about a rich old man or a guy who spends his entire life just making as much money as he can, working 80, 100 hours a week. He has all the money you could imagine but his wife ends up leaving him and his kids abandon him, want nothing to do with him, and then he dies and at his funeral the only person in attendance is his administrative assistant, and he's only there per contractual obligations.

And then he gets to heaven and he stands before God, and God says: Hey, you were enslaved to money, you didn't serve me, so your banished to hell. I'm super sorry. The end. Therefore, you cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.

Maybe that's the story you think Jesus is going to tell to get to that end. And that's where I get the privilege of telling you that you're dead wrong because the story Jesus tells to get to that ending, that you can't serve God and be enslaved to money, is such a weird story, it is a shocking, scandalous story. It is hilarious. It's slightly immoral, but it packs a powerful punch.

In fact, I believe that some of you today are going to walk out with some fresh vision and fresh purpose for your life. That's what the words of Jesus can do, that just by the powerful words of

Jesus, you can walk out of here today different and changed, and I believe that's going to happen for many of you at every campus, so let's pray and ask God to teach us today before we jump into verse 1.

God, we love you. We're here. We've got coffee in us. It's another good day. God, we're just right now going to kind of exhale everything else, just phew, forget all the other stuff that's going on in our lives, and, God, we want to focus on you. We want you to speak to us today, to teach us from your Word. God, open our minds and our hearts to what you would have to say today, and, God, change us from the inside out through the power of your Word. We ask this in Jesus' name. The Church prays together. Amen, amen.

Let's jump in verse 1. Here's the story Jesus tells. "Jesus told this story to his disciples: 'There was a certain rich man who had a manager handling his affairs. One day a report came that the manager was wasting his employer's money. So the employer called him in and said, 'What's this I hear about you? Get your report in order, because you are going to be fired.'"

So pause for a second. It's a bad day for the manager. Now just so you know what kind of manager this is, you'll see it kind of in the next few verses, but what's happening here is there's a rich man and there are a bunch of people around town that owe him debts, and this manager is going from person to person and collecting on the debts, collecting on the interest, collecting payments for this rich man, so he's managing his financial affairs.

But the rich man finds out that the manager has been a bum, been wasting his money, not doing a good job, and so this is pink-slip day for the manager.

Now, his response to this is one of my favorite responses. It's hilarious. There's no way Jesus tells this story without smiling. There's no way Jesus tells this story without a great smirk on his face. He's got the crowd rolling at this point. Look at what he says.

"The manager thought to himself, 'Now what? My boss has fired me. I don't have the strength to dig ditches, and I'm too proud to beg. Ah, I know how to ensure that I'll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.'"

His response to losing his job is not to secure other means of gainful employment. His response is, "Well, I have zero strength. I didn't go to the gym like I'd always wanted to, and so I can't join the ditch-digging industry. I have zero marketable skills to find another job," and so his solution to getting fired is not find another job, it's find a couch to crash on. That's all he cares about. "I'm going to make some friends so that I've got somewhere to go, so I've got a couch to crash on when I get fired."

Now the way he goes about it is so crazy. Look at the next verse. It says this. "So he invited each person who owed money to his employer to come and discuss the situation. He asked the first one, 'How much do you owe him?' The man replied, 'I owe him 800 gallons of olive oil,'" which,

pause, side note: That is so much olive oil. If you have one gallon, that should last you such a long time. That is a lot of olive oil.

“So the manager told him, ‘Take the bill and quickly change it to 400 gallons.’ ‘And how much do you owe my employer?’ he asked the next man. ‘I owe him 1,000 bushels of wheat,’ was the reply. ‘Here,’ the manager said, ‘take the bill and change it to 800 bushels.’”

My man is cheating his boss out of money to gain friends. Honestly, the rich man is probably so removed from his affairs that he doesn't know if they owe him 800 gallons of olive oil or 400; he just knows they owe him a bunch of olive oil. He's trusting his manager to take care of it. So he knows he can probably get away with this. He's cheating his boss out of money to make friends so that he has a couch to crash on.

Now, at this point when Jesus tells the story, can you imagine how the audience is responding? The religious, uptight crowd is like folding their arms and thinking, “Oh, he better have come down on them. He better. The next part of the story better be Jesus punishes the manager because this is sinful. This is wrong.

Then you can imagine the other side. The kind of irreligious crowd is sitting there thinking, “Man, this guy's kind of like me. I've done some similar stuff before. What is Jesus going to say? Is Jesus going to drop the judgmental hammer on this dishonest manager?”

But let me tell you, religious, irreligious, none of them were prepared for how Jesus would turn the story upside down on its head. Here's the response. “The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd. And it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light.”

And every jaw in the room hit the floor. “You just told a story about a guy who's cheating his boss out of money and you said we've got to admire him? You called it shrewd. What is happening here?” Everyone would've been so shocked and so confused.

And then he turns the knife a little further, especially for the religious crowd. He says: Hey, and by the way, children of this world, people who don't follow God, people who don't want anything to do with it, they're actually a little bit more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light (then are the people who follow God).

Come on now, Christians in the room at every campus, it's okay; we can admit this. It's true. Sometimes we let compassion and mercy and grace and forgiveness keep us from being shrewd, keep us from getting a little mean and getting a good deal.

This is why, all cards on the table, I have never bought a car in the city of Indianapolis. I don't do it. Because I need to be able to go into that car dealership and I need to be able to be shrewd; I need to be able to like play hardball and I don't need to worry about inviting this person to

church. I don't need grace and compassion getting in the way here. I'm trying to get a good deal on this car.

So Jesus is making these points, and Jesus knows at this point that the crowd is confused. He knows at this point he's just told the story about a guy who's cheating people out of money and he called it admirable and shrewd and Christians don't get as good a deal as that. There are people in the audience who are thinking, "What is Jesus saying here?" So he knows he's got them a little confused.

So he comes in with the next verse and he says very clearly what he wants them to take away from this story. Here's what he says. "Here's the lesson:" I love it. That's like the admission that he's kind of lost the crowd and they're confused. He's like: Okay, let me cut through it. Here's what you need to know.

"Here's the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home."

Here's the lesson, Jesus says, that you'd be wise and I'd be wise, we'd be wise to use everything we've got, every worldly resource, our time, our energy, our skills, our strength, our money, every worldly resource to benefit others and to make friends.

Because Jesus knew that you and I would need to have this principle drilled deep into our hearts. It's simply this: Relationships are the only currency that will matter at the end of your life.

When you get to the end and you die and your funeral happens, your bank account will not be in attendance. Your home will not be in attendance. The decorations in your home will not be in attendance. Your vacations will not be in attendance. Your clothes will not be in attendance except for the clothes you get buried in, and just a little warning, the chances are that your family's going to pick out the wrong outfit to bury you in. You're going to think, "Really? You chose that? That makes me look fat. Why would you bury me in that?" They're not going to get that right.

None of this will matter at your funeral. No one gets to the end of their life and thinks, "You know what one of my biggest regrets is? I wish I had splurged and went the extra \$20 and gotten the premium cable package. I really wish I had done that. I missed having that." Nobody does that.

You see, you get to the end of your life and you realize that the only thing that matters is relationships. It's the only currency that holds its value to the very end, the people that you've invested in. Jesus knew this, so he tells this story.

Now don't miss the connection here. Don't miss the connection. Jesus told a story about the dishonest manager and then he gave us an application point. He said: Here's what you do with this story. Use everything you've got to benefit others and build relationships.

Remember the ending though. Let's go back to it for a second. Remember how he ends this whole deal. He says this. "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money."

So don't miss the connection. He tells a story about the dishonest manager and an application point—use everything you've got to benefit others and to make friends—because he is trying to protect us from becoming enslaved to money.

See, Jesus knew that the temptation to become enslaved to money would be so strong and so fierce and that it would attack us from every possible angle that we would need a practical weapon, a practical application to use to protect ourselves from being enslaved to money.

Jesus knew that the devil was in a full-on attack against your heart and against my heart, that he's doing everything he can. He throws the whole kitchen sink at us to try to get us wrapped up in money, wrapped up in our worldly resources, to find our comfort and our security and our satisfaction and our stability and our peace in our worldly resources.

How many of you at every campus right now by show of hands would identify yourself as a video gamer either currently or in a former life? Talking former life, like before you had kids because we all know that that kind of like took all those fun hobbies away for a little while.

How many of you have ever played the old school game called Galaga? Galaga. Great game. Old school game. Galaga. You had the little ship, right? You're trying to kill the little aliens as they come down, but in the beginning of the game, it starts off pretty easy; you got one guy coming.

Except for that one. He really got hosed there. It's fairly easy in the beginning. Whoever's playing this one, not a good Galaga gamer.

It's fairly easy though. In the beginning, it starts off and there's just one ship kind of coming at you at a steady pace. Easy. You can move your ship over and shoot the thing. Then it gets crazy. By the time this thing gets to level 5, level 10, level 15—I hear there are like 80 levels of this game—by the time it gets up in levels, it gets crazy. All of these aliens start coming at you at once. They start coming fast and they're shooting at you. It's going nuts and you've got to keep up.

That's kind of what it's like when the devil is attacking you and attacking your heart and trying to get you enslaved to money. In the beginning, when you're a student, like a high school student or a college student, it's not that hard. Honestly, how could you get enslaved to money as a college student or a high school student? You don't have any money. You're eating ramen

noodles. All you want is to put a tank of gas in the car. You're surviving from gas tank to gas tank.

But then you get thrown into adulting, like full-fledged adulting, and the devil throws everything he's got at you. He'll use everything. Because it's not just about having a lot of money. That's not really the only way that he enslaves you to money. It's both when you have a lot of money and when you've got next to no money.

He either gets you enslaved to the satisfaction of having money or he gets you enslaved to the pursuit of money. And he'll use everything. He'll use a raise that you get at work to get your heart wrapped up in money. He'll also use when a peer gets a promotion over top of you to get you enslaved to money.

He'll use everything from a neighbor who has more than you and so you compare up and you get envious and jealous and you think, "Man, must be nice," and then he'll use a family member who has less than you, so you start comparing down. You start having some pity on them and you start feeling a little bit superior and arrogant. All the while, what he's doing is getting in your heart and getting in your mind to get you enslaved to money.

He'll use everything from the desire to provide a good life for your kids, so you'll work your tail off to make as much money as you can so you can provide a good life for your kids, but then once your kids are gone he'll change that desire to not be a financial burden to your kids when you get older, so you need to keep making money and keep working and keep going.

He'll use everything. He'll throw the whole kitchen sink at you. He'll use a pastor who preaches a sinful and unbiblical message on money to you, which I know by talking to many of you at every campus that you've come from a church experience where a pastor preached a message about money to you that was not biblical. It was sinful. It was abusive, and it's in your heart. And the devil's used that.

The devil will use a panhandler on the street begging for money and the type of thoughts that you think about that, what happens in your heart when you see that happening. He will throw *everything* at you to try to get you to think some type of way about money in your heart and to feel some type of way about money in your heart. He'll throw everything at you.

So Jesus knew that the attack was nonstop, 24/7. It is a war for your heart, and so you and I needed a weapon. We needed something we could do. We needed something practically, tangibly to guard our hearts from being enslaved to money, and so Jesus says: Here's your weapon. It's simply to roll out of bed every day and to ask this question: How can I spend this on them? That's it.

If you'll wake up every day, roll out of bed, and say, "How can I spend this, meaning everything I've got, my money, my time, my energy, my relationships, like how can I spend this not on me, which is where we typically land—our default like roll out of bed mode is "how can I spend this,

everything I've got, on me? I need me some me time. I want to spend this on me. What can I get for myself?"

But no, no. Jesus says if you want to protect yourself from being enslaved to money, you roll out of bed and say, "How can I spend this on them?"

Now, everything up to this point, this so far is not a story that changes everything. In fact, this message right here, like how can I spend this on them, this is not a uniquely Christian teaching. You can find this message anywhere in the world.

Turn on a daily talk show. Turn on the evening news. In our culture right now, we celebrate generosity. We celebrate selflessness and people who don't act selfish. We celebrate this. This is not a uniquely Christian message. This is not a story that changes everything.

The key, though, is defining *them* and that's where this story changes everything. Because there's a unique detail that Jesus included in this story to clarify *them*. Who is the *them* that I'm supposed to spend everything I've got on building a relationship with *them*, making friends benefit? Who is the *them*?

If the them is my kids, that's easy. My kids are a money pit. I could spend everything I got, every last bit of energy and money, everything. I could spend it all on them. If them is my family, the people I love, easy. I'll spend everything I got on my family and people I love. That's easy.

But Jesus actually clarifies this for us. Go back to the passage for me. Remember what he said. This was the lesson. "Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends." And here's the qualifier. Here's where the story changes everything. "Then, when your possessions are gone," meaning your resources, right? When your time, your energy, your skills, your strength, your money, when it's all gone, which is, by the way, when you are dead; that's when all those possessions, all those worldly resources are gone, then "they will welcome you to an eternal home."

See, that's the qualifier. And that's where the story changes everything. Because Jesus doesn't say to spend everything you've got on just anybody. The vision here is much bigger than simply a couch to crash on. The vision here is much bigger than even like who's in attendance at your funeral. The vision here is of a day when you get to heaven and you walk through the gates and God says, "Well done, good and faithful servant," when you walk in. The vision is that there are people there to welcome you to an eternal home. The vision is that there are people lined up in heaven waiting on you to get there because they want to welcome you and they want to say thank you.

Jesus clarifies this. He says that we should spend everything we've got on building relationships with people whom their eternities could change. That the way we invest our time and our money and our energy and our resources should actually increase the population of heaven and decrease the population of hell.

Jesus knew that you and I would have to be reminded of this: that our relationships should serve—now they don't always—but your relationships should absolutely, 100%, every single one of them, they should serve an eternal purpose.

And y'all know I'm right there with you. Not all of our relationships serve an eternal purpose. Many of them serve very little to no purpose, a very temporary purpose. But Jesus is saying no, no, you should actually have a mind, an eye towards heaven. You should be spending your time and energy and resources to benefit others and make friends with the goal of changing eternity for them.

You know, I can't help but think of this principle and tell the story and not think of our Downtown campus pastor, Ryan Bramlett. Ryan Bramlett is one of my favorite people and my best friends. He's an incredible, incredible leader.

The cool thing about Ryan is that he's like Traders Point born and raised. He was born and raised in Indianapolis, then came to faith at Traders Point when he was in his early 20s and then started in ministry here at Traders Point. Now he leads our Downtown campus. It's an incredible story.

But Ryan sets the pace for us in a lot of ways when it comes to this principle. Ryan just told me recently that he has made it his goal to invite every Uber driver that he gets a ride with to church. He told me last week he was three for three. Three for three on Uber rides and Uber drivers being invited to church.

I love that because I mean that's normally a time when you and I would say, "Oh, that's me time. How can I spend this on me?" A taxi ride, an Uber ride. "I can finally like have some quiet. I can finally catch up on email and just be silent. Yeah, the driver can listen to his weird radio station, but I'm not going to talk to him. Let him do his thing."

Ryan's like, "No, no, no. I'm going to use this as an opportunity. I'm going to spend everything I've got, my time, my energy, my relational capital, everything on a relationship that could serve an eternal purpose," and I've just got to believe that one day Ryan's going to get to the gates of heaven and he's going to be welcomed in by a whole crew of people, and among that crew of people is going to be a little huddle of Uber drivers. They're like swapping Uber stories and then they see him. They're like, "Hey, there's the guy! C'mon in, man. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you."

He's changing eternity for people because he's being intentional with how he spends what he has on developing relationships that have an eternal purpose.

This is why we do things like bless your community. We're not just trying to get you to throw an ice cream bar in your neighborhood to spread the gospel of ice cream. I love ice cream just as

much as the next guy, cookies and cream all day long, but that's not the point. The point is to equip you to develop relationships that serve an eternal purpose.

This is why we're doing Sunday night services at three of our campuses—at Northwest, North, and Downtown. We're starting Sunday night services on August 5. It's so that we can spend everything we've got, every bit of time, every bit of energy we have on creating opportunities for more and more people to come and hear about Jesus. We spend this on them to create opportunities for you to invite your neighbors, for you to invite your friends who may not come on a Sunday morning but may come on a Sunday night, so that we can develop relationships that serve an eternal purpose.

This is why we launch campuses. Make no mistake about it. This is why we've done multi-sites. This is why we'll continue, by God's grace and by his leading, to launch more campuses. Because what we've found is that when people are driving 15, 20, 30 minutes to church, and then we take church to them and put church in their community, what's happening is that they're inviting their neighbors. They're able to more easily develop relationships that serve an eternal purpose. And God's using it to change lives.

We've seen these campuses start off as groups of two and three hundred and they've turned into campuses of 1200 and 1300. It's insane the way that God is using this to bless the community and to bring people to him to develop relationships that serve an eternal purpose.

So I just simply ask who is it for you? Who is it? Is it a neighbor who you know that you're supposed to start spending more time with? Maybe you don't know them that well, but maybe you're supposed to start spending more of your time, more of your energy, more of your resources on developing a relationship with them that serves an eternal purpose.

Is it a family member? I mean c'mon, family is like the hardest group in the world sometimes to talk to about faith, especially if you haven't broached that conversation yet. You know, the family, you've got like your set six topics that you talk about and you talk about the same ones every time you see them.

Maybe it's time for you to break the mold and to spend some of your relational capital and to spend some of that awkward relational tension that you're going to have to spend to get to a place where you say, "Hey, here's why I love Jesus. I've probably never told you this, but here's why I follow Jesus. Here's why I love Jesus, and would you come to church with me or would you consider faith? Would you just have that conversation with me?" Maybe you need to do that.

For some of you, maybe it is your money. For some of us, it's simply going from putting 20 bucks or 10 bucks in the offering occasionally to being regular in your giving. Regular. I'm going to give this amount every single month towards God's mission.

Maybe for some of you it's going from regular giving to tithing. You're going like, "Man, I'm actually like setting aside 10% of everything that I make towards God and his mission and his Kingdom." Maybe if you're tithing, you need to sit down and think about "can we give more?"

I'm telling you, I think every Jesus-following family should on a very regular basis sit down, look at their finances, and say, "Is there anything else we can give? Is there anything more we can squeeze out of this? Is there anyplace we can sacrifice to give more to God's mission?" because nothing is more important than starting churches and launching campuses and reaching more people with the Gospel.

We've got campuses that we want to launch all over the city, but we will get to that vision that God has given us at the speed at which we are willing to give. For us as a church, like all of us, we've got to get in and get sacrificial in our giving if we want to continue to reach the people whom God is calling us to reach.

Maybe for some of you, maybe you need to open up the space in your heart and the space in your home to become a foster family or an adoptive family. Maybe you need to link up with our Live 1:17 ministry and start exploring that and change a child's life and change their eternity. You'd best believe they'd be at the gates of heaven waiting on you to say thank you.

I'm telling you, the potential in this room at every campus is massive. The potential is massive.

I pray for my kids all the time. I pray it out loud and I talk to them about it. I always use this phrase when I say, "God, will you raise my kids up to be world changers?" and they always kind of look at me like, "Ah, dad, how can I change the world?" No, I believe that God can raise my kids up to be world changers, but I'm telling you right now, I'm looking at this room, at every campus. There are world-changing people in this room. There is the capacity to change the world with the people in this room at every campus.

Now I say that not because of how special you are, not because how special I am, not because how special we are. You have the capacity. There is world-changing capacity in this room at every campus because of who is in you, because of the power of Jesus that resides within the heart of every believer.

Because you want to talk about somebody who has spent this on them? You want to talk about somebody who has paved the way for us and given everything he has for the sake of developing relationships that serve an eternal purpose? No one's done it more than Jesus.

2 Corinthians chapter 8 says it like this. It says, "You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich." Rich in God's love. He gave up everything.

You've heard the phrase *from rags to riches*? Jesus flipped that up and said: No, no. I'll go from riches to rags for a relationship with you. I'll give up everything. I'll bankrupt heaven.

Is there anybody that's grateful that Jesus gave up everything to love you, to make you rich, to give you everything you'd ever need in this life? It has nothing to do with money. It has everything to do with his love.

He's given up everything. He's paved the way. He's done it more than you and I could ever possibly do it, and that same Spirit is alive and well within the heart of every believer and so yes, I believe there is world-changing capacity here.

Now, I know that if you're here and you wouldn't consider yourself a follower of Jesus, can I just like step into your world for a second? If you're here, like maybe you're here today and you were invited by a friend to come. I know what you're thinking and it's a very honest and good question. You're probably thinking, "Does this mean that I'm a project? Does this mean like the reason you developed a friendship with me was to like fix me or to convert me? Am I a project?"

Let me just clear the air on that with you right now. You are not a project. You are a person to be loved. You are someone who God is crazy about, and you are someone whom we love.

And let me clear the air even further. We will love you regardless of what you choose to do with Jesus. If you choose to not follow Jesus, we are still going to love you. You are still welcome here. You can belong here even if you don't believe what we believe. We're going to love you no matter what you do with Jesus. Our love is not conditional on that.

You're a person to be loved. It's rooted in a love. You are not a project, no. This is coming out of love for you. Can you imagine how unloving we would have to be to truly believe that we hold the keys to eternal life, to truly believe that the only way to get to God is through Jesus, and to truly believe that the only way to experience life to the full here and now is through a relationship with Jesus, can you imagine how unloving we'd have to be to not share that with you? To not do everything we could to get you here?

We say all the time around here that our mission is to remove barriers that keep people from Jesus, to remove unnecessary barriers, and let me tell you, there are a whole bunch of unnecessary barriers out there that stand between you and getting a clear picture of Jesus. So we're just trying to remove all of them so that you can see Jesus for who he is, and then what you do with him from there, that's between you and God. We're going to love you no matter what you choose to do with it. You are not a project. You're a person who is deeply, deeply loved.

Now, I want you to know that this is my story. What you're feeling right now, what you're experiencing right now, this is my story. You see, I didn't grow up in church. I didn't grow up knowing the Bible stories. My family was sporadically in church here and there—Christmas, Easter, and a few other times, but for the most part, we weren't in church.

By the time I was 17 years old, my life was a mess. I was involved in things that no 17-year-old should be involved with. I was hopeless, helpless, and on a crash course headed to hell. But God intervened in my life and he put someone into my life and his name was Ben.

Ben was in my junior Spanish class, and Ben was one of these people who, looking back, he spent everything he had on developing a relationship with me. Not just any relationship, a relationship that served an eternal purpose.

Now, I didn't know it at the time—I just thought he was a nice guy—but he was being intentional about this and he would encourage me and he would ask how he could pray for me and he would talk to me about Jesus and get to know me.

Then he kept inviting me to church. I swear if he invited me to church once he invited me a hundred times, and if I said no once, I said no a hundred times. Until I found out that there were a couple cute girls at our school who went to his church, and then I said, "I will go with you one time and try it out." By any means necessary God had to get me there.

I'm telling you, Ben never gave up on me. And once I finally said yes and I got to church and I started to hear who Jesus was and what this whole thing was really about, my life changed forever. I'll never be the same because Ben didn't give up on me.

So do I look back on that and think that I was like Ben's project? No. I look back on that and think that was the grace of God at work in my life. And guess what. Ben wasn't the first person who God used to get through to me. No way. Ben was actually one of many.

When I look back on my life, there were ball coaches, there were teachers, there were friends, there were family members who God had put in my life, but I had just rejected them all, and for some reason, Ben broke through to me.

But guess what. If Ben hadn't broken through to me, God would've kept sending people into my life. He would've kept knocking on my door trying to get me to church. There would be people in my life left and right because God was pursuing me. It was the work of the grace of God in my life.

So no I don't think of myself as a project. I look back on that and say, "I am so grateful that Ben didn't give up on me. I'm so grateful that he spent everything he had to develop a relationship with me that served an eternal purpose,

And you best believe that if I beat Ben to heaven, which chances are I will—he's one of those guys who's probably going to live until he's like a hundred; he's like super healthy, one of those guys. I'm probably going to beat him there, and if I do, when Ben does get to heaven and there's a line of people waiting to welcome him in, you best believe that I'm going to be elbowing people out of the way. I'm going to toss people onto the sidewalk. I'm going to be blocking people out. I'm going to get to the front of that line and I'm going to tackle Ben and

I'm going to say thank you. I'm going to kiss him on the cheek. It's going to be a beautiful scene. Because I'm so grateful that he would reach out to me, that he would spend whatever he had to get me to Jesus. It's changed my life.

So I just want you to know that if you're here and you were invited by a friend, maybe you're feeling like a project, you are not a project. And I want you to know that if you say no to following Jesus now, God's not going to stop pursuing you. He's hot after your trail because he is crazy about you. He'd bankrupt heaven to build a relationship with you. He loves you more that you could ever imagine and he's never going to stop pursuing you.

But I think for some of you it's time for you to actually say yes to him. I think for some of you, today could actually be the day that you start following Jesus. And you don't have to have it all figured out. You don't have to have your life cleaned up. All you have to know is that you need him and that you believe that he is the way, the truth, and the life.

So I want to give you the opportunity to make that life-changing decision today. At all campuses would you bow your heads and close your eyes? This is a private moment between you and God. No one else is watching. This is between you and him.

If you've never made the decision to start following Jesus, to surrender your life to him, you've never been baptized, you've never done this whole deal, and you may not know what it means all the way, you may not exactly have it all figured out, you may not know the Bible that well, your life may be a mess, that's okay. But if you know that the grace of God is pursuing you and you're ready to say yes to him, you're ready to walk away from your old life... You know, the Bible says that if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come. If you're ready for the new to come, and to start a relationship with Jesus, to start following him today, I want you to raise your hand on the count of three at every campus.

One, two, three...

You still got time. Keep your hands up. Awesome. You can put your hands down.

Everybody look up for a second. Can we celebrate the fact that there are people across every campus who made a life-changing decision to start following Jesus today? It's incredible. Incredible. It's awesome.

You need to know your best next step, if that was you, is to come up front after service is over. Our response teams are down front. We just want to get some basic information from you so we can follow up and help you get started in this whole journey, but the most important thing you can do right now is go to your heavenly father in prayer. This is one of those things you've got to celebrate with him.

Before you start celebrating with other people, before all that happens, you need to just celebrate with him and have a moment with him, and for all of us at every campus, we need to

talk to God and celebrate with him what he's doing in the life of our church, so let's pray right now and have some time with him.

God, we love you. Thank you for salvation. Thank you for helping people have the courage to cross over from death to life and start following you.

God, I pray that you continue to give them the boldness to continue their next steps in that journey.

God, thank you that you spent everything you had to come and find us, that you spent every last resource at your disposal to rescue us from our sins. We operate out of gratitude for that today.

And God, in these next moments as we pray, God, meet us here, but more than anything, God, feel that gratitude. We hope you hear that gratitude from us. We would be nothing without you. We're so grateful for your love and your grace. Meet us in these moments, and it's in Jesus' name the Church prays together. Amen.