

Fight of Your Life | Fight for Your Heart

Aaron Brockett | 2 Samuel 11-12

All right, how's everybody doing this weekend? Doing good? That's good to hear. It's so good to be with all of you, and I want to welcome all of our campuses right now, wherever you happen to be gathered, so North, Downtown, West, our online crowd, and those of you here at Northwest. You guys are looking good. It's so good to have you.

If you are a guest or a first-time visitor at any of our campuses, we're really thrilled to have you here.

I've got a question for you. How many of you have ever felt this sort of desire to cover something up in your life that maybe you were ashamed of or maybe you'd like to change? Anybody? Yeah, I didn't know if you wanted to answer that question or not, so I'll go ahead and answer it for you. Absolutely.

In my life, I've felt the desire to do that. I've done that. In fact, I was trying to think of several examples. One example of this is several years ago my grandparents offered to take our entire side of the family to vacation down in the Caribbean. It was a very generous offer for them that they extended to us, and so I was getting ready to go.

At that particular time, we'd had a really long winter, very similar to the one we are just now coming out of. As a result of that, my skin had this pasty, mayonnaise-white thing kind of going on. So I was like, "I know that the sun's really intense down there. I don't want to burn. I'd really like to look good with my shirt off for my wife," not that she ever noticed this. But anyway, I go to this tanning bed salon place and walk in. It was very embarrassing. I had like sunglasses, a hat, collar up so nobody would see the pastor going into a tanning bed salon.

So I walked up to the lady behind the counter and I was like, "Hey, can you help me out?" She's like showing me all the options. And honestly, all of them took too long. I didn't want to keep coming back every day. It was only like two weeks until we were to go on vacation, so I go, "Is there any shortcut? Can we get to this any faster?" and she goes, "Well, you can do the spray tan."

I was like, "Well, what's the spray tan? Tell me about that?" She's like, "Well, you go into this booth and we like spray you down. We cover up all that pasty, mayonnaise-white skin with this kind of chemical. We don't know what it's made out of."

So I don't know if spray tan's your thing. If it is, I'm not knocking it, but it was an experience for sure. I just want you to know your pastor has done the spray tan, all right? This was 12 years ago. It was a long time ago.

So I walked into the booth. I felt very vulnerable. I had like a hairnet thing on. I had the little glasses, so I couldn't see, and I didn't know how you're supposed to stand. She didn't tell me, so I automatically went into the gunslinger pose and I'm waiting for the little spray to go. I didn't know when it was going to go. I was like, "Is it going to go now?" and it didn't go then. "Is it going to go now?"

All of a sudden it was like pfft. And then I turn around. I'm like waiting for it. It doesn't happen, so I turn back around. Pfft. It hit me again on the front, like twice on the front, nothing on the back, and I ended up going home to my wife. She's like, "Why is your skin so orange?" and I told her I did the spray tan. After she got up off the ground from laughing so hard, we had a very nice vacation.

We can laugh at stuff like that, but have you ever been tempted to maybe cover something up a little more serious? Maybe something that you wanted to change, something that you weren't proud of, something that you were embarrassed by? If that's the case, that's a very similar situation to what we see in the life of King David. We see David wanting to cover up some things in his own life.

If you are just now coming in on this series, we are wrapping up today a four-part series of messages called *The Fight of Your Life*. The big idea is that we want to fight for the people who we love rather than against them.

We've been walking through King David's story in the Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Samuel. We've looked at his marriage relationship. We've looked at the connection that he had with his kids. Last week, we looked at his very best friendship with a guy named Jonathan.

Today we want to wrap up by looking at David's most formidable adversary to date, the guy that would be the fiercest opponent of David, a guy that he would go toe to toe with, that would give him the biggest fight of his life. It was not a giant named Goliath and it was not the Philistine army and it wasn't King Saul. David's fiercest opponent he would ever face would be himself. And it wouldn't be on a literal battlefield; it would be on the battlefield of his mind and his heart.

In fact, I want you think about—I know it's not fun to think about, but I just want you to go there real briefly with me—just think about the end of your life, whenever that day may come; maybe that's a day from now, a year from now, 10 years, 50 years from now—and what do you want said about you?

As you look back upon your life, do you want to have any regrets? Do you want to look back on your deathbed and say, "Man, I covered a whole bunch of stuff up," or can you say very confidently, "Hey, I wasn't perfect, but I didn't conceal anything. I was honest and I was real about who I was."?

If we're going to get to the end of our life and be proud of the life that we lived, we've got to fight for our heart. And it's not going to be easy. In fact, the prophet Jeremiah says it this way in chapter 17, verse 9. He says, "The human heart is the most **deceitful** of all things, and desperately wicked." And then he asks this question. "Who really knows how bad it is?"

Now, I don't know if you are anything like me, but you can maybe read something like that and sort of push back inside and challenge it and go, "Well, I don't know about that. I mean, I know that my heart's not perfect, but I don't know that I would describe my heart as desperately wicked. I mean, I don't know that I would say that my heart is deceitful."

If that's how you're kind of processing that passage, I totally get that. But I just want you to consider this, even briefly: Doesn't the word deceitful mean that something can be misleading? That you're not even maybe fully aware of what's going on? That's why he poses this last question? Maybe there are some things going on in there that you're not even fully aware of?

Has there ever been a moment in your life when you surprised yourself by something you said or did? You're like, "Man, where in the world did that come from?" It's almost as if there's like two different versions of you. There's the healthy you and the unhealthy you. There is the gracious, kind, well-balanced, patient version of you and then there is the unhealthy, stressed-out, short-tempered version of you. It's almost like we've got this Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde kind of thing going on. In those moments that you've even surprised yourself by some of the things that you think or say or do, you say, "Man, where did *that* come from?"

I think this is what a guy named Paul was wrestling with when he writes this in Romans chapter 7. I wonder if anybody can relate to this. I certainly can. He said, "I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, **but I don't do it**. Instead, I do what I hate."

Can anybody right now relate to those words? Has there ever been a time in your life when maybe you tried to present yourself as one thing in public and you know that's not you? You know that you're pretending. You know that you're hiding and concealing some things.

Has there ever been a time in your life when you were really irrationally upset with a customer service rep on the other end of the line? They're just trying to help you with your problem.

There have been times I've said something dismissive or insensitive to my wife or my kids and I think, "Brockett, what is your problem?" I didn't mean that. I didn't want that. I know that that wasn't the wise, loving, or kind thing to say, but I said it anyway. Why did I just go there?

Those moments—and we've all had them—reveal some things about the condition of our heart that maybe we've been covering up and maybe we've been concealing, but eventually those things will come out.

The Bible speaks to this often. When it says in Proverbs 4, verse 23, "**Guard your heart...**" that's actually better advice than *follow your heart*. And we hear that said all the time in society and I

get it. I think I understand that whenever somebody says *follow your heart* that's well intentioned, but the better counsel would be to guard it "...above all else," Why? "...for it determines the course of your life."

In other words, the life that you're going to live is all the result, not of your circumstances, not of the breaks that other people give you, but of the condition of your heart. Therefore, the writer of Proverbs says guard it, like above all else, so the clearest indication of what's going on in there and the battles that you need to be prepared to fight all exist within your heart.

This is why we're going to have to fight to say the right thing even though it would feel really, really good to say the wrong thing. We're going to have to fight to do the right thing even though we would like to do the wrong thing and justify it later. We're going to have to fight to keep those thoughts pure even though we are lonely and stressed and feeling rejected.

We're going to have to fight against that temptation, whatever it is, even though it would be easy to slip and do it, and you're pretty confident that nobody would ever find out.

Unfortunately, it's all too common to read in the news or to hear about on social media nowadays some personality, maybe a prominent leader, whether it's an athlete or a politician or even a pastor who has a moral failure or a secret life or an indiscretion that they've been covering up rather than coming clean on it for a really, really long time and eventually it comes out into the light.

It's easy to point fingers and to act shocked at that, but honestly, it could happen to any one of us. One of our elders says this quite frequently. He says, "We're just one decision away from stupid." We could all end up in the ditch. We never intend for that to happen, and this occurs all the time as soon as we let our guard down in our heart.

This is certainly what happens to David. Now David didn't start out that way. Actually, David's heart is described as being a heart after God's early in his life, as a young man. In fact, in 1 Samuel chapter 13, God sends Samuel to tell Saul: Saul, you don't have the job anymore as king. I'm actually replacing you. And he says, "But now your kingdom must end, for the Lord has sought out a man after his own **heart**."

So God tells Samuel: Tell Saul that he's out of a job. Now go to the house of Jesse because one of Jesse's eight sons is the next king. And so I'm not going to tell you who it is. I want you just to go and as you see the young man, I'll reveal it to you that that's going to be the next king.

So Samuel goes to Jesse's house and he says: Hey, congratulations. One of your eight sons is the next king. I don't know which one. I gotta see them.

So Jesse marches his sons out in front of Samuel, but he doesn't march out all of them. He marches seven of them out because he's thinking there's no way that David, the youngest one, the smallest one is cut out to be a king.

And so Samuel looks at these young men. In fact, they look very, very impressive. Several of them are tall, dark, and handsome. They look like kingly material.

Listen to what God says to Samuel. He says, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance,” isn’t that the truth, “**but the Lord looks at the...**” What? Say it out loud. “**...heart.**”

So Samuel says: Man, I’m really sorry, Jesse, but God has rejected all seven of these boys. They’re not the next king. Do you have anymore?

And he goes: Well, there’s David, but I think you’ll be disappointed. I mean, he’s not really the kingly kind of type.

He brings David in, and God says: Yep, that’s the one.

In fact, God describes David by saying that he is pleased with his heart. So that’s how David’s story starts out. But soon enough, the enemy would surround David’s heart and would begin to advance upon his heart. And so you fast forward into David’s future.

In 2 Samuel, chapter 11 David is enjoying his time as king. He’s experiencing all kinds of success. His army is off at battle but David stays behind in Jerusalem, which would be very unusual because kings always went with their men to war.

Look at what it says. Many of you have probably heard this story before, maybe bits and pieces of it, even if you’re relatively new to Bible study, but it says in 11:2, “Late one afternoon, after his midday rest,” so David’s taking a nap, “David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he **noticed a woman** of unusual beauty taking a bath.”

Now at this particular point, it doesn’t seem as if David has done anything wrong. It doesn’t feel like he’s crossed any moral boundaries. It doesn’t feel like he’s up to no good. It just seems like he woke up, he’s like: I need some fresh air. He goes up on the rooftop, and then oops, he accidentally sees something that he shouldn’t.

But I think there’s actually more going on here than what we might think. As innocent as David appears, what we need to understand is that during this particular time period, women would take their ceremonial baths late in the day, so usually late in the afternoon or early in the evening, for the reason that there was no modern-day plumbing during the first century.

So instead of turning the little knob that says “H” for hot in your bathtub—or if you’re in my household with six people, “H” stands for hope you like it cold—they would have these like containers on the roof. When it would rain, they would gather the rain and then, during the

day, the sun would heat the water up so that way, late in the afternoon or early in the evening, the baths would be ready for the ladies.

So there was usually like a four-foot privacy wall around these tubs. However, David is the king who lives in the palace. The palace is on a hill overlooking all the rest of the houses. David knew that.

In other words, on the palace rooftop, David gets all the channels and the internet filter is turned off. I think David knew exactly what he was going to see up there. In fact, I think that's why he went up there. In fact, I don't think this is the first time.

There's no way for me to even prove this, but I even wonder if this is part of the reason why he stayed back in Jerusalem while all the other men went off to battle. See, David walked up onto the rooftop. He walked right into the trap. The trap was set, he walked right into it, and he put himself in a vulnerable position that made him vulnerable to his weaknesses.

See, if you and I are going to fight for our heart, if we're going to guard our heart, we've got to avoid the "rooftops" and I'm talking figurative rooftops here, but this is the principle. I realize that what we're talking about with David is his issue with sexual sin and temptation, but this principle of the rooftop applies to you and to me regardless of whatever it is that you're wrestling with in your life, regardless of whatever weakness or vulnerability you might have, and by the way, we all have them.

So if you know something is an area of weakness for you, whatever it is—maybe that's alcohol, maybe it's envy, maybe it's greed or pride or materialism or lust or anger, whatever it is—the principle avoiding the rooftops simply means this: Don't put yourself in an unguarded position that will make you more vulnerable to your weakness.

Psychologists who help people kind of navigate their addictions will oftentimes say you really need to identify—and they use this term right here—you need to identify the "triggers." Like what is it that triggers the vulnerability? What is it that triggers the temptation?

Maybe it's when you're really, really stressed. Maybe it's after you got into a fight with your spouse. Maybe it's when you've just achieved a moment of real success. And these are triggers that you've got to be really, really careful about and you've got to put up the guardrails to make sure that you don't fall into temptation.

Now for David, one of his triggers was that he was experiencing an unprecedented time of success, and you're oftentimes more vulnerable to failure after a success because you let your guard down.

Verse 1 tells us that it was the springtime; it was warming up. Kings usually were at battle with their men. David stays back in Jerusalem. He's taken a nap in the middle of the day, which tells me that he doesn't have enough to do, that he's bored.

He's alone. I don't know, maybe he got into an argument with his wife and he's feeling lonely and rejected, and all of these things lead him up to the roof, and the trap was set and he walks right into it.

By staying off the rooftops, you are proactively fighting for your heart, or, as Proverbs tells us, you're guarding your heart from the things that you know can take you down.

So David hasn't initially done anything wrong. I mean, David's on the rooftop. He sees Bathsheba, and he's got a decision to make. He can go ahead and pay attention to the guardrails and he can say: You know what? I shouldn't be up here.

He could guard his heart and go back down, but he doesn't do that. However, he doesn't go headlong into sin. Here's what David does. David compromises with a half-step, which is what we oftentimes do. Check it out. "...David sent someone to find out about her."

In other words, he's not going to put himself in an exposed position to go down and knock on her front door and everybody sees King David at the door of a married woman. Instead, he sends someone to send her a message as kind of like a floater to see what might happen.

Check this out. The servant immediately gets a little suspicious and he tries to warn David as much as a servant can. He says to him: Are you sure about that, David? Because "'She is Bathsheba, the **daughter** of Eliam and the **wife** of Uriah the Hittite.'"

You see what he's saying? It was like: David, she's more than just a beautiful body. She's more than just something for your pleasure. David, she's a daughter. She's got a father somewhere. David, you have kids. David she's a wife, not only the wife of anyone, but Uriah the Hittite, who is one of your most honored warriors, David. He's like your first in command, so if you can't control your urges, David, at least, out of respect for this man who fights so valiantly for you, stay away.

He warns David. David doesn't listen. David could do the right thing at this moment, but his heart grows harder. He doesn't guard it, blows right through that. It says, "Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her."

Many of you know how the story goes. Bathsheba sends word back to David not long later. She says: I'm pregnant with your child. David's got a decision to make. He can go ahead and keep covering up or he can come clean.

David chooses to cover up, and so he invites Uriah back off the battlefield. He says: Hey, Uriah, man, you've been doing such a good job. Why don't you spend a weekend with your wife, a little bit of R&R. And he's thinking for sure they'll be together and then, you know, he'll just think that it's his baby.

But Uriah was a man who I think practiced guarding his heart because he's got a lot of integrity, so much integrity that he says: David, the only reason why I came back is because you ordered me to, but you can't force me to be with my wife. In fact, I refuse to be with her because my men are off at battle, so I'm sleeping outside.

I think that that just ticked David off for two reasons: It messed up his plan, and secondly, it would've been an affront to the lack of integrity that David had. Here's a guy who has every right to be with his wife and he chooses not to. David had no right to be with her, and yet he was.

David's got a decision to make. He can cover up or he can come clean. He chooses to cover up and it just takes him deeper and darker into this place that he never wanted to go, and he orders Uriah back to the battlefield except this time he puts him on the frontline so that way his odds of being killed go way up. It's a planned murder, and that's exactly what happens. Uriah's put to death.

David's not broken by it at all, he just kind of sweeps the whole issue under the rug. He brings Bathsheba into his home and takes her as his own, and he's content to just sort of live with that cover-up.

But a little while passes, and in 2 Samuel, chapter 12 God sends this guy named Nathan to confront David in his sin. How would you have liked to have that job?

And Nathan is a smart cat because he knows that he can't just come right at David and confront him with it because David will likely get defensive. He'll likely dodge it. He's already killed one guy. What's to say he won't arrange Nathan's death?

So what Nathan does is really, really subtle. Nathan's like: Hey, David, let's go hang out. Let's go get a cup of coffee. Let's go hit some golf balls. Let me tell you a story.

He's like: David, there was a rich man and a poor man and the rich man had all these sheep. The poor man only had one lamb, and the lamb was like a family pet, David. He brought it home when it was small, fed it. It slept in their beds.

David, this lamb was like a daughter to this family. They loved this lamb. And one day the rich man just came and took the lamb as his own, and the poor man had nothing.

David just doesn't see what he's doing. In fact, check out David's response. "David was furious. 'As surely as the Lord lives,' he vowed, 'any man who would do such a thing **deserves to die!**'" David said it, not me. "'He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity.'"

Right here, David is completely blind to the fact that Nathan's talking about him. All of a sudden, Jeremiah's words that we read just a few moments ago from chapter 17 seem to make a whole lot of sense.

The heart is the most deceitful of all things. It is wicked. It misleads you. You can't even see what you can't see in your own heart, and David doesn't see it.

Nathan, I think, at this point, looks right at David and he says these words. He said: David, **“You are that man!”**

That was enough to break David's heart, and in the following verses, Nathan just lets him have it. He just gives him a tongue lashing, and David comes to see this principle that you and I, the sooner that we can come to see this the better in our lives, that sin will always take you **farther** than you wanted to go, it'll keep you **longer** than you wanted to stay, and it **costs** you more than you ever would have wanted to pay.

And David finally gets it, and it says, “Then David **confessed** to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’” And I love Nathan's response. He “replied, ‘Yes, but...’” One of the greatest *yes buts* in all of Scripture. “Yes, but the Lord **has...**” What? “**...forgiven you**, and you won't die for this sin.” That's incredible.

Right there in that statement is one of the clearest summaries of the message of Jesus, and I don't want you to get out of here right now without hearing that. Now you could reject it. You may say you don't believe it, but I don't want to be guilty of not being clear about it because there are a whole bunch of people who have grown up in church and they've never heard this—worse yet, they've never seen it or experienced it.

Maybe you grew up in a legalistic church that never got around to this. In fact, they just gave you a whole bunch of rules and regulations and judgments, but they never gave you this.

Or maybe you've never been in church and you don't really know what this whole Christianity thing is about. In fact, your picture of Christianity is what you see on TV, which is usually inaccurate—oh, like all the time.

See, the message of Jesus is yes, there is such a thing as sin, and all you have to do is turn on the TV and see it. That's why the 24/7 news exists. Because of our sin. People are messed up in this world, and you're messed up and I'm messed up, and it creates all this havoc and destruction in our hearts and in our lives.

But here's the message of Jesus: When you acknowledge your sin rather than deny it, when you turn from it rather than embrace it, when you walk away from it rather than just going with it the response of God through Jesus is always: You're forgiven. Man, just come to me.

Forget Chip and Joanna Gaines. God is in the restoration business. God takes fixer-uppers like you and me and he does this restorative work in us. He rewrites your story. He redeems. That's what he's come to do, and that's what we mean when we say you can be saved by grace through faith. God says: Man, all you need to do is just come to me and stop covering it up. Stop saying it's normal and just give it to me. You're not going to shock me.

You're not going to give God a gag reflex. God's not going to reject you. God's going to say: Finally, you got real. Now, come here. We can start with that. We can be doing some transformational stuff with a heart that's ready to be real instead of covering up.

David had been sitting on this secret for a really, really long time, and it finally comes out—they usually do—and David's heart was broken. The reason why it was broken is because it was hardened. That's what happens when you conceal stuff. It's like calcification. It just hardens and hardens and hardens and God finally has to just do something that'll break your heart.

David writes about it in Psalm 32. He says, "When I refused to confess my sin," it had physical effects. "...my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat."

That is one of the best descriptions of conviction I've ever read. Anybody ever been there? Nobody knows that thing you did, but man it's just eating you alive from the inside out.

But then David says in verse 5, "Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and **stopped trying to hide** my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is **gone**."

That's all confession means. I don't know what comes into your mind when you think about that word. Maybe you think about crawling into a dark little booth with a guy with a collar on the other side of the curtain and you just kind of confess all of your sins to them. Or maybe you stand up on a stage and you confess all of your sins to a group of people, but that's not what confession means.

Confession just simply means this: I'm going to stop faking it and I'm going to start getting real with God. "God, I'm not going to cover up anymore. I'm just going to give it to you. I'm just going to come openhanded to you." And God's response to anyone who genuinely does that, it's always 110% of the time: You are forgiven.

Now there might be some lingering consequences to that sin, and I think that that's a big part of the reason why we cover up, because we don't want to face the consequences. There still may be some consequences, but get this: God is so good and he's so big and he's so powerful and he's so sovereign, he can even work through those consequences that are painful to guard up your heart and to develop you as the type of person that he wants you to become.

So imagine this next week a publishing company contacts you and they want to write a biography on your life. That may be hard to believe for some of us, but let's just say they come to you and they say, "Man, we think that other people need to hear your story, and so we want to write a biography. Is that good with you?" and you're like, "Oh man, I'm very flattered by that."

And then they say, "Well, for the next three months, we're going to be doing a pretty intensive background study on your life, and we're going to talk to former coworkers and neighbors and family members, and we're going to be doing all this checking into your past."

Would you get a little nervous then? I would. I'd be like, "Oh man, are they going to uncover something that I'm ashamed of?" You're like racking your brain trying to figure out all the stuff that you've forgotten that maybe they might find out, or those mistakes that you've managed to kind of move on from. Are they going to drag that up and bring it all up again for other people to read?

See, David didn't have to imagine that; that was David's reality. We've been studying his biography over the last several weeks out of 1 and 2 Samuel, and there are some pretty embarrassing, shameful moments in David's life that are printed, by the way, in the bestselling book of all time for millions of people to read.

In Matthew chapter 1, Matthew is actually giving us the family tree of Jesus, which, by the way, I don't know if you know this, but David was Jesus' great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great-grandfather. So that was the family Jesus was born into.

Here's how Matthew describes David in verse 6. "Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon..." Now he could've stopped right there, but he adds the parentheses "(whose mother was Bathsheba, **the widow of Uriah**)." I would imagine when David read that he's like: Ah, come on. Really? I mean, man, that was like a really bad moment in my life and God, by the way, has forgiven me of it, so why'd you have to include this, Matthew?

I think the reason why Matthew included it in parentheses is because the answer to this question of why is the very message of Jesus, that out of this horrible mess that David had made, out of something as shameful and destructive as an adulterous relationship that produced a child and a gruesome cover-up that involved a murder, came the hope and the salvation of the world, Jesus Christ.

The reason why Matthew included that is that this is a picture of what Jesus came to do. Jesus came to redeem what was lost and to restore what was broken and to make right what had gone wrong. And if Jesus can do that for David and through David, there isn't anybody listening to this right now he can't do that for and through, which I don't know about you, but that gives me confidence for the fight.

If this was all about my willpower, then I'd give up right now because I don't have the willpower. In fact, I've tried to fight temptation through willpower. All that happens is that I just give it more power.

You can't white-knuckle morality. It just doesn't work. That's why some of you resent religion honestly; it's like why you resent the church—because you tried to willpower your thing through this. You couldn't do it and you felt bad about yourself. So instead of walking away from sin, you normalized it and you said, "Well, this is just me. Just get over it."

But see, this right here gives me confidence for the fight. God says: Aaron, get in the battle and fight for your heart, and then when the enemy gets one through your shield, trust that I'm there to pick you up and I'll get you every time. I've got you every time.

That's the finality of the cross, and Jesus says: You keep coming back up. All that is required is that you keep staying real before the Lord. Don't cover it up, just come clean. See, when we **get real** about our sin, when we **drag it** kicking and screaming into the light instead of covering it up, we are always **embraced** by his **grace**.

And that's why Jesus came to this earth. God says in John 3:17 that he did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but he sent him to save the world through him. Jesus didn't come into this world to condemn you. He actually came down off his throne in heaven onto a cross at Calvary to free you, so fight for your heart with that confidence in mind and don't ever give up.

Know that there is a heavenly father who will be there to make things right when they go wrong. Just be transparent and don't hide. Don't fake it and don't pretend. Don't conceal and don't cover up. Man, just come clean.

That is what the word repentance means, and I think it's really unfortunate that a lot of over-wet, sweaty TV preachers have high-jacked that word. Maybe when you hear the word repent, you hear somebody say ra-PEY-ent and it's rightfully turned you off. And that's unfortunate because repentance is a beautiful word.

Repentance is an invitation, not an accusation. It's an invitation from your heavenly father who just says: I already know all that stuff you're covering up anyway. And all that stuff you're covering up is just hardening your heart. Would you just please come and give it to me?

Our responsibility and our mission, and I think even a stronger word, our passion as a church is to make sure that the entire city of Indianapolis knows about that kind of grace.

I love how the author of Hebrews puts it. He says, "Look after each other so that none of you **fails to receive** the grace of God." I love that verse because he's basically saying to us as Christ followers and collectively to us as a church that it's our responsibility to make sure that everybody who we interact with, everybody who we come into contact with, when they walk

away—and even though they might reject it, they might say they don't believe it—at the very least we were clear about what the grace of God is. Make sure that they don't fail to receive this.

Make sure that it is crystal-clear in our words, in our speech, in our actions so that they experience it. In other words, I do not think this is an overstatement: God does not send people to hell; we allow them to go there when we no longer care or when we play church or when we come in here and we just play religion. I think it's a tragedy when somebody might finally muster up the courage to accept an invitation and come to church and they don't hear about the message of God's grace and, worse yet, they don't see it, hear it, or experience it because the message of grace is what the message of Jesus is. And it's the only thing that's transformational.

I am way beyond the days of being able to help my kids with their math. I was never very good at it to begin with. And right now I feel so helpless when my kids come home. They're like, "Dad, can you help me with this math problem?" I look at it. I'm like, "Nope. I can't help you. Why don't you ask Alexa?" I'm sorry to say Siri and Alexa are practically raising our kids right now.

I don't know math very well, but I do know this symbol right here. Maybe you do too, ">". Greater than—can I just tell you that's what the grace of Jesus is? Don't miss grace. Grace is greater than whatever it is that you're facing. Grace is greater than whatever you're trying to hide. Grace is greater than whatever you're covering up.

Grace is greater than your shame. Grace is greater than your addiction. Grace is greater than that affair. Grace is greater than that second affair. Grace is greater than whatever it is that you might be dealing with in your life right now that keeps taking you down over and over and over again and you're ashamed of it and you know you shouldn't have done it and so you end up concealing it and all you do is you just give that thing more power.

I know that some of you right now, like some of the stuff that you've done or the things that have been done to you in your past are brutal. And that's why the cross of Jesus was so brutal. Jesus nailed whatever it is that's accusing you to that wood on that cross. Why do you keep taking it down?

In Philippians, it says, "Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything **we can understand**. His peace will..." Say it out loud with me. "...**guard your hearts** and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

In other words, that's the way you fight for your heart. It's not your own strength and willpower; it's through the peace of God that comes through the grace of Jesus. That's how we get prepared for the battle.

And when you don't understand how that works, that's when you've got to trust him. That's why obedience is so important. Obedience wouldn't be a thing if we felt like doing it. See, most of the time, we're like, "Well, let me feel like doing it. Let me have the emotions, and then I'll obey." That's not how it works. You obey, and then your emotions catch up to your obedience.

Right now today you may be like, "I have no idea how that works. I have no idea how that grace-of-God thing works, but I'm going to choose to trust. I'm going to choose to obey. I'm going to let my emotions catch up later."

So where do we go from here? What do we do when we realize that we're guilty and that we need the grace of God and the peace that comes in to guard our hearts? Well, in the book of Acts, Peter preaches this message on the day that the church got started, and when he was done preaching, the people realized that they needed this and it says, "Peter's words **pierced their hearts**, and they said to him and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we **do**?'"

Translation: How do we receive this peace of God that will guard our hearts? And Peter answers it very clearly. This is not up in the air. This is not vague. He is crystal-clear. He says, "Each of you must **repent of your sins**," which we've already said is just be real before God. Don't cover up, just give it up. "...and turn to God, and **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ for the **forgiveness** of your sins. Then you will **receive** the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Now, here's what you have to understand. Peter said this to a group of people who already believed in God. Peter said this to a group of people who already were attending church that day. They were already religious, and yet he says to them it's still necessary for you to confess your sins, to profess your belief, to turn away from this sin, and yes, to actually do something physical—to be baptized.

The act of baptism doesn't save you, but it does provide a picture of what does. So why be baptized? Why do that? I think for two reasons. I think number one: Jesus commanded it and he did it himself. The second reason is that it requires courage to do so. It always does.

You've got to do something tangible to actually back up that internal decision that you made. This is true in every area of life. There's something tangible.

There's a picture of something physical that we do to represent a decision that we've made, and baptism serves as a mile marker. It's sometime in your past when you go, "Man, that was the day that the old me died. That was the day that I chose to no longer cover up, but I got real not only just between me and God, but between me and other people. Other people could actually see that decision that I was making."

Some of you, I know this is your story. Some of you were sprinkled as an infant and so you're wondering if you should be immersed, and I would say if you were sprinkled, I think that that is fantastic. I think that you should thank your mom and dad or your grandparents or whoever it was who had you sprinkled because they were doing something really, really good for you. They

were basically saying, “We want you to grow up to know Jesus and so we’re going to start this off at a very, very early age,” and I don’t think that there’s anything bad about being sprinkled.

I would just simply pose this in front of you. Do you recall making the decision for yourself and do you have a memory of it? And if you don’t, I think that that’s sort of missing, that there needs to be a moment in your life when you can articulate very clearly that testimony when you came to know Jesus and that you actually have a memory of that particular day.

I know some of you might push back on that and say, “Well, that came later. That came with my confirmation. I feel like I did that with my confirmation.” And once again, I would say that a confirmation, I think, is a really great thing, but I don’t necessarily see any biblical example of it.

All seven examples of conversion in the book of Acts that we have details of, these were people who were old enough to make the decision for themselves and they believed, they confessed, they repented, and they were baptized at the time of their salvation.

Some of you might say, “Well, Aaron, I’ve been baptized. I’ve been immersed before. Do I need to do this again?” Let me try to be as clear as I can on this. If you have no memory of your baptism, if you feel like you did it for the wrong reasons, if you feel like you were pressured to do it by your parents or because maybe your older sister did it and you felt like you needed to do it because she did it, if you know you did it for the wrong reasons, then yes, absolutely you need to do it again.

If, however, you’ve been baptized before and maybe it was six months ago, a year ago, five years ago, and you know you did it for the right reasons, you had a good handle of what the message of Jesus was, it’s just that you’ve made some mistakes since then or maybe you got out of attending church since then, then no, you don’t need to do this again.

Some of you are like, “Well, what’s required? Do I have to be a member of the church before I do this?” No. You don’t even have to go to church. This could be your first time in church in a really, really long time and you can do it today. The only biblical requirement is what we’ve been talking about: You recognize that you are a sinner, just like me and everyone else who you’re sitting around, and you’re going to choose to get real about your sin and confess it and turn from it, and then you’re going to trust that through Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection you can have new life in Christ and you are transformed now by his grace.

Now here’s the great thing. This oftentimes get missed because I think sometimes we’re really fearful of doing this because we think that when we come up out of that water that we’ll be like this religious weirdo. We’re like, “Oh, I’m going to miss my old self. What about all the things I used to enjoy doing?”

You still get to be you, just the better version of you. Actually, the healthy you and the redeemed you and the you that God always created you to be with his Spirit living with you and

actually guarding your heart from doing some of those stupid things that are causing you so much pain, hurt, and destruction.

Some of you are saying, “Well man, Aaron, everything that you’ve said actually lines right up. That’s me. However, I didn’t come prepared to do this today. I don’t have a change of clothes. This was the last thing on my mind when I came today.”

We’ve got you covered. We’ve got a place for you to change. We’ve got dry clothes for you to change into. We’ve got a T-shirt. You’re not going to go home wet.

Some of you are like, “Well man, I’d really like for my family and friends to be here to see this. They’re not here right now, so maybe I need to do it another time.” Totally get that. Just don’t use that as an excuse.

How about this? We have high-definition cameras at all of our campuses that are going to get a close-up of your baptism. We’ll even put it in slow motion and set it to inspirational music. You can give it to your family and friends and they will have a better experience than if they were here live.

I have heard all these objections before. You ain’t gonna win.

No, listen. In all seriousness, I don’t want you to feel pressured by me to do this. I do want you... If you feel prompted, then by all means you need to do this. And if you relate to David’s words when he said: Man, I just feel this anguish. I feel God’s hand heavy upon me; that’s called conviction. And when you actually take action upon that conviction, what happens is your heart becomes softer and more pliable and more open to God. Every time you tune the Spirit of God out, your heart grows harder. Man, don’t reject this.

I want to give you an opportunity to make one of the best decisions of your life. Maybe today, like you woke up today, you almost didn’t come to church today, and yet today might become your spiritual birthday. Today might become the day that you became a brand-new person, not because of anything that you do, but because of what Jesus has done for you.

And God wants to equip you for the fight. He doesn’t want to set you up for failure. God wants to say: Listen man, you walk by faith and you guard your heart and you be a man or a woman of integrity, and when you slip and when you fall (and you will) just own it and come back and be received by my grace. And every time you do that you become transformed by his grace.

I’m going to pray and then I’m going to turn it over to each one of our campus pastors to provide some instruction. We’re going to have a party today, people! We’re going to celebrate some people going all in.

Let’s pray.

Father, we come to you right now, and I thank you so much for your grace. I couldn't live without it.

God, allow us today to be men and women and children who will be resolved to guard our heart and fight for our heart. Sin is not our friend. It's not something that we should normalize. It's something that we should fight against for our good and your glory and for the good of others.

God, I pray today that there might be some who are wrestling right now. They're in their seat. They're squirming. Their palms are sweaty. They're actually a little bit angry with me. They're cursing me under their breath because they don't like this feeling of conviction. But, God, I pray that they know that they are among friends and that we want to cheer them on and come around them as they just simply choose today to no longer cover up but give it up to a God who created them and loves them.

We ask this right now in Jesus' name. Amen.