

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

AN IMAGE TO BEAR 2023 | RE-IMAGED

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It's really good to be with you today. I want to welcome everybody across all of our locations and those of you joining us online. Happy New Year.

If you have a Bible go ahead and find Genesis, chapter 1 as we get ready to kick off a new series for a new year.

I don't know how you find yourself coming in to 2024. What I mean by that is I don't know if you are feeling somewhat optimistic and hopeful about the 12 months ahead of us or maybe you're a little bit cautious about what may be around the corner.

I would say regardless of either one of those perspectives—both of those are probably legitimate—I've had enough experience with what happens throughout history to know that just in the next 12 months or so there are probably some things to be hopeful for, there are some things to be a little cautious about. I wish we could predict what 2024 has in store for us but there is no way of fully knowing that.

We certainly do our best though to try and figure that out. It seems like the first couple of days after New Years I'll read as many different articles, listen to as many pod casts as I can, that will forecast where we are headed. I don't know if any of you do that.

I listened to a pod cast this last week and the whole thing was 2024 trends, trends that are coming toward us in this next year. They looked at half a dozen or so of them.

But out of all of them maybe the most memorable was—this was just their opinion—they said that they really feel like the years 2015 to 2023 were what we might call the age of anxiety. Would you agree with that? I think I probably agree with that. It kind of seems like, especially over the last several years I could probably preach on that subject monthly and I don't think anybody would object because it's so pervasive in our world, our society. So they were kind of saying (this is some good news) that they really felt like 2023 was the ending of that age.

Now, it's not that anxiety is going to go away. But they were just saying the age of anxiety bracketed around 2015 to 2023. In 2024, we're entering into a new age. And I thought, "Oh, this is good. What could it be? The age of good times? The age of wondrous joy?" That's what I was kind of hoping for. But no. They actually said they really feel like the next step of progression in 2024 and through the next set of years is the age of anger. Oh, goody.



Your response was exactly mine. I was like, “Oh, great. Here we go.” This is just their perspective. They talked about a number of things. We’re already seeing evidence of it. And that’s actually a natural progression to go from anxiety to anger. They did have a silver lining in it but you’ll have to listen to the podcast.

I’m hearing all of this and you know, we don’t know, we don’t know. We don’t know what the future is going to hold in the year ahead. I think that I can speak pretty confidently, though, to the fact that the next 12 months are going to be filled with good times and bad. Would you agree? Mountain tops and valleys; setbacks and breakthroughs; a fair amount blessing and a fair amount of pain. So, I don’t know how much good it does us to try to anticipate the future as much as it does to become a person and a people who are ready for whatever may come.

The prophet Habakkuk talks about this in chapter 3, verse 19. I love this verse. It says:

“The Sovereign LORD,”

And that word sovereign just simply means that God does know. God is in control. He’s the only One who does. And He is never caught off guard. That’s a good way to put it. God never watches the news and thinks to Himself, “Oh, Myself. I did not think that was ever going to happen.” He’s not panicking over things. He’s like, “Yep, that’s about the way that I ordained it to happen. Watch Me work.” That’s what that word sovereign means.

“The Sovereign LORD is my...”

Say the word out loud with me, the other two services were miserable at this. So you guys just say the word out loud: strength. There you go. You guys did the best job at that.

“The Sovereign LORD is my strength!”

Not my circumstances. Not my ability to predict the future. Not my bank account. Not the way my relationships are going.

“The Sovereign LORD is my strength!

Then he says something kind of strange:

“He makes my feet like the feet of a deer,”

I can’t remember the last time I prayed that prayer, “God, could You just make my feet like the feet of a deer?” But I’ll explain what he means by that in just a minute. It’s actually pretty brilliant. He says:

“He enables me to tread upon the heights.” (NIV)

So that desire... That He makes feet like the feet of a deer is kind of like this, it's this mountain animal, maybe like a mountain goat that has skinny legs but strong ones. You just kind of look at that ground. That looks pretty intimidating, but they are able to scale the heights because of the strength of their feet.

And I don't know about you but most of the time when I pray and, by the way, I'm kind of ashamed to admit this out loud, but it seems like my prayer life ramps up when life gets really hard. Anybody with me in that? Yeah, you don't want to admit that. That's true. And when times are good, I forget to talk to God. When times are bad, that's when I talk to Him.

Most of the time, though, here's what I end up praying, "God, could You please flatten the ground under my feet?" And maybe what He wants to do is He wants to strengthen your feet for unstable ground. That's a different kind of a prayer.

"God could please remove me from these painful circumstances?" You know, beam me up Scottie, Star Trek, style. "Just get me out of here." And God is like, "No, actually, I'd like to keep you in it. I'm sovereign. I'm in control. And I'm going to keep you in that to develop some things within you, some character that couldn't be developed any other way."

See, most of the time I want God to change my circumstances. And it's not that He won't. It's not that He can't. I'm not telling you not to pray for that, but I think He's more interested in the development of our character.

So, regardless of what 2024 throws at you or us, I think one of the things that we can do is we can be ready. And the way to be ready is to understand who you are, your identity, and from that, "Why am I here?"

I don't know if any of you remember seeing the movie Chariots of Fire from a long time ago with Eric Liddell who was training for the 1924 Olympics. And his sister, Jenny, thought that was a waste of time. She really thought the purpose of his life was to be a missionary. And Eric turns to her and he says this infamous line, "Jenny, God made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure."

And there it is right there. So, when we're talking about God's will, God's plan, God's purpose for our lives, generally and specifically, that's what I'm talking about. And this is the question. I don't know when the last time you thought about this was, because life is coming at all of us so fast, so many decisions. We're trying to make ends meet. Trying to survive. Just trying to keep everything on the rails. But when is the last time that you stopped and you were like, "When is it that I feel the pleasure of God?"

What I mean is when was the last time you were like, "Man, I was made to do this? I feel like I'm right in the center of His will." And how do you even begin to figure that out? That's what this series is about as we jump into a new year.



Part of the prompting for this series came, actually, last Easter. Last Easter I surveyed the whole church and I said, "Hey, is there any sermon topic, is there any message series that could help you in your spiritual growth, wherever you are, to take your next step." And the number one answer by far from all of you was: How do I discover God's will and purpose for my life? And that is such a great topic.

I think Mark Twain said it this way. He said:

"The two most important days of your life are the day you were born and the day you figured out why."

All of us are trying to figure this out. And it doesn't really matter what stage of life we are in. I think the question is just as pertinent for all of us. And I think that we feel like, "If I knew what it was that God specifically wanted me to do then it would help me answer some of the questions that we all face."

Maybe you're in a season of your life right now, high school seniors, you're trying to figure out, "Where should I go to college? Should I go to college? What major should I declare?"

Maybe you're in a season of your life right now, in mid-life, where you are like, "Should I switch careers?" or, "Should I start this relationship or end that relationship?" "What pursuits should I go after?"

Maybe you're in a season of life where maybe you're kind of wrestling or grappling with some regrets. Maybe you're wondering if you let some things go that maybe you should have addressed a long time ago.

It really doesn't matter what stage of life we're all in. I think all of us are filled with all kinds of questions and we're wanting to know, "God, what is Your will for my life?" And we sort of treat it like...

I just want to go ahead and establish your expectations for this message. I'm not going to tell you what God's will is for your life. I'm going to give you something kind of general that I think you can go off of.

I think, often times that's what we want. We want God to send us an email, "My will for your life is ."

"Thanks for clarifying. Now I'm going to go do that."

Or maybe we treat it this way. It's kind of like trying to crack the code on a safe. A couple of turns to the right, meet this person, a couple of turns to the left, take that job, couple of turns to the right, meet this financial goal. Click. Open up the safe. That's God's will and purpose for my life. I don't really think it works that way. I wish it would. But I don't think that is how God's will for our lives works.

You know this. I think we have to start here at Jeremiah 29:11. This is read at almost every high school graduation. A graduate receives this verse in some fashion. It says, "God desires for you to have a hope and a future."

And I just want you to know that that God is not trying to withhold His will for your life. God's not trying to... It's not like this cat and mouse game, this guessing game where you've got to figure it out. God wants you to have a hope and He wants you to have a future.

It's just that I think that much of the time what we want is... Mostly when we ask that question we're looking at external circumstances when God is looking internally at our character. And I sometimes wonder this. If God were to suddenly thrust you into His will for your life, that thing that gives Him pleasure and you fulfillment, that thing that you were put uniquely on this planet to do, for most of us our character wouldn't be ready for it.

Our character has to be developed to handle our gifting and the opportunities that are in front of us. And that just simply takes time. Unfortunately it takes some pain and it takes some waiting regardless of how old you might be.

CIRCUMSTANCES > CHARACTER

CIRCUMSTANCES < CHARACTER

You can't control circumstances; you can cultivate character

See, you can't control circumstances. I think most of us know that. But what we can do, regardless of the circumstances that we are in is that we can cultivate character.

When you look at the Scriptures you just see that every person that God uses in a significant way, circumstances were just outside of their control. All of them walked through a season of pain. And yet, in the midst of that, they could cultivate their character. And then you just begin to get this sense that that's really what God is after all along.

So, the greatest barrier between you and the future that you want is inside of you, not outside of you. The only person who can take you out of the will of God is you. Not anyone or anything else. Not any set of circumstances. God will sustain you through the valleys as well as on the mountaintops.

So, when discovering God's will and purpose for our life where do we even begin? I hope you are jotting down a few notes. Not for my sake but for yours just to spend a little bit of time kind of chewing on this, marinating on it through the week. Here's the first thing to write down. It is so elementary, but if you are going to discover God's will for your life, you've got to start with God. Not you. Not like, "Hey, God. What is it that You want me to do?" You've got to start with Him. In other words: Creator.

Ephesians 1: 11-12 puts it this way. I love how the message paraphrases it. It says:

“It’s in Christ that we find out who we are,” that is like so specific, “and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.”

Colossians 1 says it this way:

“We look at this Son and see God’s original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything ... got started in him and finds its purpose in him.”
Colossians 1:16 (The Message)

So, here’s another way of saying what we just read. You were made by God and for God. And until you really fully understand that, you will never fully know or grab on to God’s will and purpose for your life. It won’t make any sense.

Now, just from my pastoral observations, most of the time when people come to me and say, “How do I discover God’s will for my life?” I will always ask this follow-up question, “Well, which one?” “You mean there is more than one?” “Yeah, there is more than one.”

And most of the time when we’re asking for God’s will and purpose for our life, we overlook something that is really important. It would be simply this.

GENERAL Will: Ten Commandments and Greatest Commandment

There is what we might call God’s general will for our lives. And if I could sum that up it would be like the Ten Commandments and the Great Commandment. So the Ten Commandments, in the New Testament... Actually there are way more than 10 laws, by the way, there are a whole bunch of them, but that’s like God’s top 10.

And the top 10 is not how to make your way into heaven, the top 10 is basically—here’s how I like to think about them—if every single person all across the world could live by the Ten Commandments we would eliminate pain and hurt. We would just eliminate them. So, God’s top 10 is for the fulfilment of creation not the hindering of joy. None of us can do it, but that is God’s general will for us. That’s His desire and plan.

The Great Commandment is... What Jesus summed up all of the law in is this: Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself. So, that’s God’s general will for our lives. Most of the time we kind of overlook that one.

SPECIFIC Will: The unique thing God intended for you to contribute to the world and His Kingdom coming

What we want, and we jump to this next one, is God’s specific will. And if I could give that a definition it’s that God’s specific will is the unique thing that He intended for you

to contribute to the world and His kingdom coming. There is only one you. It's like finger prints. Everybody is uniquely designed and made by God. There might be some people similar to you or their gifting overlaps with yours, but there is only one you.

And God has ordained for you to be alive, to come out of your family of origin, however healthy or unhealthy that was, and has placed you in this time period, in 2024. And I just want you to think about that thought for a minute. Out of all of the people in the history of the world, God chose you to be in this time and space. It's a mind-blowing thought. You look at the problems in this world and God is like, "Yeah, you're going to a part of the solution. I've ordained you to live in this unique time and place."

That's what most of us are after. It's a really noble thing. I think God has hard-wired it into us. We want to know, "What is the unique thing that God has called me to do? That thing that when I do it I feel the pleasure of God. I'm running in that lane."

Now, many times we want to know the specific will without first aligning ourselves to His general will. Here's a stronger way to say it. I cannot expect to get clarity on the specific thing that God has ordained for me to do if I'm ignoring, dishonoring, or disregarding God's general will for my life.

If you want to figure out how something works and why it works the way it does, you've got to go back to the creator. And the creator will tell you how it's supposed to work.

I don't know how many of you got a gift at Christmas this year, maybe some sort of an electronic gadget, and you opened it up and you were like, "Uh, what is it? I don't really know what this thing is supposed to do." And then you read the owner's manual and you figure it out and you're like, "Oh, this is the intent of the creation."

And the same is true for you. You'll never know what it is that you were made for and why you're here and the purpose of your life if you don't start with your Creator.

I just want to go back to Genesis, chapter 1, verse 26. Let me just read these passages. It's sort of like the owner's manual. It's the origins of creation. And then I'm going to make some observations from it. Look at verse 26. It says:

"Then God said, 'Let us'" who is He talking to? Well, the Trinity. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. At the origin of time they are all together, and they say, "Here's what we want to do."

"Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground." Genesis 1:26 (NLT)

And then in verse 27, notice all of the action words in this passage. You might even underline these in your Bible:

“So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”

Both genders reflect the glory and the image of God. Verse 28:

“Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.’”

Just notice all of the action words there: created, blessed, fruitful and multiply, fill, govern, and reign.

Here’s just an observation. This is a little bit of a sneak peek as to where we are going next weekend. God has given us meaningful work to do. Work preceded sin. I always thought that work was the result of sin, but work preceded sin. It’s not that sin created work, it’s that sin made work much more difficult. It cursed the work.

In heaven... When Jesus returns, there will be work in heaven. Some of you are like, “Really?” Yeah, really. But it’s going to be work without all of the pain, without all of the hardships—that difficult boss, that challenging co-worker, all the fallenness of what makes work difficult. We’ll talk about that next weekend.

Part of God’s purpose for us is meaningful work. And it says in verse 29:

“Then God said, ‘Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.’ And that is what happened.”

Now look at verse 31:

“Then God looked over all he had made,” including you and me, “and he saw that it was very good!”

I love that verse. God is stepping back looking at it and going, “Man, look at what we did. This is amazing.” And from that passage we see several key insights. This is all foundational stuff. This is like a framework for us. Ultimately, I want you to discover God’s unique calling and purpose for your life, but you’ve got to start with this framework.

I just want to give you a number of observations. These all come out of the text. None of these are my opinion or my idea. These are all just observations from the text. So if you’re jotting down some notes, here they are. Number one:

You were made intentionally

God made you on purpose. There are no accidental human beings. You might have been a surprise to your mom and dad. You were not a surprise to God. He ordained your life in

the future which is why we say that all life has inherent worth and value. You were made intentionally. Second thing:

You were made in God's image

That's just a wild thought to me. Those of you who have biological kids... Have you ever looked at one of your kids and were like, "Oh, man. I can see her momma in her." Or, "Man, she's a daddy's girl. I can just see the resemblances."

I've got four kids and at times it just kind of takes my breath away. I'll just kind of turn and look at them and see either their mom in them or see bits of me in them, poor kids. Pray for them. I look at them and I'm like, "Oh, man. They've got the image of their biological parents upon them."

And in the same way it says that you were made in the image of your Heavenly Father. It is imprinted upon us. And that fact alone should change the way we treat, talk, and tweet people. That fact, right there... Here's this wild thought. You will never lock eyes with somebody who is not made in the image of his/her Heavenly Father, regardless of whether he acknowledges Him or honor Him with his life or not.

James chapter 3 verses 8 and 9 says this:

"...no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God." (NLT)

Everybody has been made in His image. Here's the next thing:

You were made for a specific purpose

God really does have a plan and a purpose for your life. Now, you may not know what it is yet. There are a number of things that can sort of side track or even derail us from what that plan is. But, part of the process of discovering God's plan and purpose for your life...

You can do the setbacks and the breakthroughs, which is actually called growth. God often does not reveal His will and purpose for our life all at once. He reveals it as a part of a process of growth so that your character can handle it when you do step into it.

You were made with God's blessing

While everything you do and say may not have His approval and joy, you, though, as a person have His approval and joy. And many of us are carrying around a sense of shame, guilt, or inadequacy because of some past failure or short-coming or addiction or maybe through the abuse of someone else upon our lives—maybe it's just a sense of inadequacy, maybe you've got this imposter syndrome, your self-critic is raging and yet

God sees you and He loves you and you have His blessing. He wants to mend and heal that wound. Here's the next thing:

You were made to give yourself away

You know, part of understanding God's specific will for your life is that you've got to quit navel gazing. You've got to quit just looking at yourself. Looking at, "How am I going to get ahead." Because part of understanding God's will and purpose for your life is to literally give yourself away.

This is why meat and vegetables are good for you and Sour Patch Kids are not, because that cow and that plant with the living organism gave its life so that you could have life. Part of our fulfillment is giving ourselves away and serving other people. And in the process of that you end up finding out why you are here. The last thing I'll just say is:

You were made with God's approval!

Some of you need to hear that because it's been a long time since you have. And maybe you've forgotten that or you no longer feel worthy of His approval.

I don't know how many of you are like me but for the longest time I felt this way. I didn't have the courage to say it out loud, but I would just kind of keep it to myself, "You know what? I know that God loves me. I know that God forgives me, but I don't really think that He likes me because I just keep failing and I keep making Him promises that I can't fulfill. He's got to be exhausted with me."

You've got God's approval. He finds glory in you. He loves you. And that's a wild thought because there isn't anybody who knows you better than God. The Bible says that God knows the number of hairs on your head, God knows every thought that you've thought—that's a scary thought. God knows everything you've done secretly, the secrets that you are keeping. He knows all of that and you still have His approval. He loves you.

That's not true for most people we are in relationship with. I don't know if you know the person sitting next to you right now, but chances are if the person sitting next to you knew every single thing about you, they'd probably get up and move a seat over. Just guessing. But God actually knows you better than your spouse, your best friend, and yet He loves you and wants to be in relationship with you.

Those are amazing observations that can literally transform your life. And here's the list behind me. Just look at all of that. You were made with all of that in mind.

Now, here's the question. If all of that is true, why is life so hard? If all of that is true, then why do I...? I just don't know what I'm supposed to do next. Why is there so much pain in the world?

The simple, but complicated answer to that is because this was God's intention but when we chose to rebel and bring sin into the world, this is what happened. It fractured the image of God within all of us. And that right there explains so much.

When I look at that screen I still see the words behind it [the fracture] but they are certainly distorted. It's not fun to look at. There is that little twitchy light thing and that's going to get annoying after a while, by the way. You're just going to look at that and you look at the world right now and you just take a look at yourself. I can look at myself and I can see some good and some bad. I can see some noble things in my life and I can see some things that I'm ashamed of. Chances are you can too.

We can look out at the world in which we live right now and we can see evidence of heaven. The sunset on a beach at dusk. And we can see evidence of hell. Road rage at high noon. We can see kindness in people and we can see abuse in people. So much of what God often times gets blamed for when we look at everything that is so broken in the world is really just a result of sin.

We are living, right now, in the era when Jesus has come and He has come to create a way for us to be reconciled with God. But His kingdom isn't fully restored. We're in the in between. So we can see both. We can see the beauty and the pain in the midst of all of that.

This explains so much of why we toil and why we struggle. Paul actually says it so well in Romans. He says:

"I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it."

Any of you relate to that? Paul must have made some New Year's resolutions. I don't know. He goes:

"Instead, I do what I hate." Romans 7:15 (NLT)

That sounds irrational. That sounds human. He says in verse 21:

"I have discovered this principle," he actually calls it a principle "of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong."

In other words, if you try to white knuckle morality, you just empower the sin or the urge within you. You cannot do it on your own. In verse 22 he goes:

"I love God's law," That's another word for God's Word, the Bible; I love it "with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me." I have a sinful, fallen, broken nature. "Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?" Romans 7:21-24 (NLT)

And God gave us an answer in the person of Jesus. He'll set you free. Jesus came 2,000 years ago to deal with the fracturing of our identity because He knew that we could never fix that. And so He came to fix it. He came to pay the debt that we could not pay. He came to live the life we couldn't live. He came to die the death that we deserved to die to reconcile us back to God, here's the beautiful thing, to re-image us back to God's original intention for us. So we are... Here's what salvation is. It's a miracle. It is the re-imagining of that broken nature within all of us.

Now, on this side of eternity it's not yet fully fulfilled. But here's what happens. When you become a Christian something supernatural happens. The Holy Spirit enters into you and you begin to get re-imaged into the person, likeness, and character of Jesus Christ and you begin to stand out because now you are a resident of His kingdom coming. And God is coming to restore what has been broken.

So, every time somebody becomes a Christian, that's a little glimpse of what God's going to do to creation as a whole. And I want to be a part of it. I want to be a part of it here and I want to be a part of it then.

You cannot understand God's specific, unique calling for your life until you get that right, as a baseline. So, this isn't about living your best life or being successful. This is about understanding that you step into God's specific calling for you regardless of what you do for a living when you begin to reconcile with God and are re-imaged into the person and likeness of Jesus.

Some of you may be pushing back on me right now, going, "I don't know, Aaron. Man, sounds great but I know lots of non-Christians who seem to be living their best lives: lots of influencers on social media, lots of people super successful it seems like they've got a really happy marriage. They seem to be doing quite well financially. They don't acknowledge God. They are not following God. How do you explain that?"

And I would just simply say, number one, not everything on social media is true. Just remember that. And we often times have a tendency to compare others' outsides with our insides. Anybody can wear a mask.

Let's just say that they are quite successful. They are living life quite well. It's part of the reason that Jesus said that it's very difficult for the wealthy to enter into the kingdom of God, like a camel through the eye of a needle. That kind of thing. Because they really don't recognize their need. And there is a real difference between temporary happiness and eternal glory. There is a difference between momentary success and eternal victory.

You know being a Christian doesn't mean you are perfect. Being a Christian just simply means that you've been redeemed by God. We've still got junk to work on. That's why we're all hypocrites. We've still got stuff to work on. There are still issues and challenges and trauma in that. So, amen. Preaching to somebody.



I've read this quote before but I love the clarity in it. Actor Jim Carrey said this. He goes: "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see it's not the answer."

And I would just simply say that for those who are not following Jesus and they seem to be so successful that they are the recipients of what I might call God's general grace. Everybody in the world right now is a recipient of that regardless of whether they believe in God or not or if they are living a totally different life style, whatever it may be.

And you say, "Well, what do you mean by that, Aaron?" Well, just as long as you are breathing, as long as you have a roof over your head, as long as you've got another meal, you are the recipient of God's general grace. You are not a self-sustaining person. You don't tell your heart to beat. It just beats. You don't tell your body to breathe, it just breathes—God's general grace upon your life. Even those who are far from God still have some showers of blessing in the sense of God's general grace.

But all of us need God's saving grace. That's a different thing. That requires an understanding of the deficit of our needs. That requires an understanding, "I need a Savior and I'm not Him." That's an understanding that I need somebody to reconcile me back to my Heavenly Father. Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 8 through 10 says this:

"God saved you by his grace when you believed."

You want to know what the Bible is about? That one sentence right there pretty much sums it up. We have a tendency to make this thing so complicated. It's not rocket science. God saved you. How? Not by you being good. Not by your working really hard. Not by managing your image, which is what all of us have a tendency to fall into. He saved you by His grace. But when? When you believed. Believed what? That He's God and I am not. Jesus reconciles me to Him. The Holy Spirit comes into my heart. I've got to turn from my sin and begin to follow after Him. I've given God my whole heart:

"And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God."

You don't pay for gifts. You just simply receive them.

"Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew" fractured image made new "in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NLT)

That is this whole series in a single statement. You are God's masterpiece. Something dramatically went wrong. A rock went through the mirror. Now He wants to make you new in Christ so that you can figure out the good things that He has planned for you to do a long, long time ago.



You've got to begin with that. And today that can happen in an instant right where you are seated. You can be reconciled with God. It's going to feel weird. Because you're like, "Oh, man. I'm the same person I was just a second ago. I've still got some of those same struggles, those same set backs that I've got to deal with."

Yep. What happens is that you have a right standing with God and from that standing of certainty and security you can begin to grow. And you will spend the rest of your life growing into the image and likeness of Jesus.

So, my task as a pastor is both complicated and very simple. It's simple in the sense that there are really only two things I'm trying to prompt you to do. I'm trying to give those of you who don't see your need for a Savior to see it and receive Him and for the rest of you to step into the process of sanctification and growth.

And what I mean by that is not that you would grow in head knowledge. Some of you are in 15 Bible studies and you listen to tons of pod casts and all kinds of worship music and your head is full but your heart is still empty. It's not about knowledge. It's about transformation.

This is why some people have seminary degrees and are jerks. The knowledge didn't go from their head to their heart. And some people are all heart and no head. So it's this idea of understanding that God wants to change you. He wants to grow you.

It usually happens periodically. I'll get an email or somebody will message me and say, "You know I'm really disappointed in you." And I'm like, "Thank you. Appreciate that." He'll say, "You know I just really wasn't expecting this when I came to the church. I just thought, 'Everyday language, you dress like normal, and I hear you teach,' and I honestly I'm disappointed. I thought you'd be a more progressive pastor than that."

Well, I am. I'm trying to help you progress more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus. That's what I'm trying to help you do. That's what we want. And the word for that is sanctification.

Now, here's the deal. You get that right in your life where you have a standing with God and you're beginning to grow in your relationship with God, now watch how the question of what it is that God specifically wants you to with your life begins to unfold in front of you, almost effortlessly.

I'll never forget about 25 years ago as a young man I was sitting in a half-day workshop with an author by the name of Dallas Willard. Some of you might recognize that name. He's since passed away. He was a professor at UCLA. He wrote a number of books. He deeply marked me, especially in my early journey as a Christ follower. I remember being in his workshop.

This was the content he was talking about. He was talking about knowing God's will for your life. And I'll never forget something that he said because when he said it, I about

fell out of my chair and I had to chew on it for a little bit because I'd never heard anybody say anything like it and I was trying to figure it out. He said this. He goes, "Listen. If your heart is fully surrendered to Jesus Christ, if you have fully given everything you are to Him, then God's will for your life is whatever you want."

And at first I didn't really understand what that meant because that sounded so flippant. But think about the logic of that. If your heart is fully surrendered to God then you will do what pleases Him. And God actually gives you great freedom in that.

There have been moments in my life, big, massive, crossroad decisions, you know? Should I propose to Lindsay or not? Should I take this job or not? Should we move to this state or that? And I kind of thought, "Well, God's got one plan laid out for me and if I make a wrong decision then I've kind of ruined the rest of my life. That's kind of what I thought.

I remember specifically contemplating coming here in this role and I really wrestled with it. And I remember in the quietness of the morning being like, "God, I don't want to mess this up. What is your will for my life? What do You want me to do? Do You want me to go to Traders Point? Do you want me to stay where I am?"

And I just had the quietness of the Holy Spirit in that moment where He said, "Aaron, either way you're still in My will. If your heart is fully Mine, I'll bless either path." Guys, there is a tremendous amount of freedom if your heart is fully surrendered to Him. He'll bless either path that you take.

I want to end with this statement right here. And it is simply this: You were created in the image of God but you must be disciplined into the character of God. And that's what we desire and want for you.

Listen. We're not just trying to grow bigger as a church. We're not trying to draw bigger and bigger crowds. Now, unapologetically, we're casting the net wide and deep because we know that there are a lot of people who need hope; a lot of people who need Jesus. This world is broken and dark. So, we're trying to reach as many people as possible.

But that is not what motivates us—to grow bigger crowds. We want to help you get introduced to Jesus and then to dig deep roots as a disciple, which means being formed into the character of God so that your feet are steady for whatever may come. So, we're trying to do both of those things at the exact same time.

The deep part, much of that is upon you. We're trying to create some pathways, but you've got to take them. You have to be fully invested in them. And one of those is something called Rooted. I know a number of you have gone through it.

For those of you who haven't yet, the next session starts January 16th. We still have 150 spots available. I'd love for you to sign up for Rooted. What a way to kick off a brand-



new year. You can follow the link and jump in on that. It's just a 10 week course with a small group that is designed to do exactly what it is called—to root you in the faith.

And together, as a church family, let's step into to whatever it is that God's has for us in 2024. Something tells me it's going to be a rodeo. Something tells me there are going to be some challenges and some ups and downs. But as a church we can have steady feet for whatever may come to glorify our Heavenly Father and to be representatives of His kingdom coming to this world.

Let's pray together.

Father, we just want to consecrate this year in front of You. We know that it's probably going to be a wild one. And yet we know that You are sovereign and in control. And we want to be people whose hearts are fully devoted to You. So, God, would You please give us clarity and courage and obedience to trust You no matter how tumultuous the waters might get.

We know that You have made a way and one day You're going to restore all things. Scripture tells us that You are actually bottling up every tear that we shed on this side of eternity so that one day You can reconcile those tears. So we choose to trust You. We choose to know that even in the midst of the challenges You're developing a character that is ready for whatever calling You've ordained us to step into.

So we lift up our voices; we raise our eyes to You. We trust You in the midst of these uncertain days because You are worthy of it all. We ask this in Jesus' name and everybody said: Amen.

