



A GOSPEL FRAMEWORK FOR APPROACHING EVERYDAY LIFE (cont.) **Living Every Day to Love Your Neighbor as Yourself**

Remember the work of the Father and the Son ...

Round three is going to be a lightning round. All right, here we go. Living every day to love your neighbor as yourself. So how does being in Christ not just affect our lives but intersect with other lives? Remember the work of the Father and the Son. Remember how Jesus in His everyday life worked with the Father in the world. Listen to this passage from John 5:

"My Father is working until now, and I am working." This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will."

So you think about that passage. It's clear. Jesus knew that God the Father was working around Him. "My Father is always working." He also knew that apart from the Father He could do nothing. Verse 19, *"I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord."* Nothing. Jesus couldn't do anything of His own accord. So, Jesus looked and listened to know where and how the Father was working. *"The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he see the Father doing."* Verse 20 says the Father shows Jesus all that He's doing.

So Jesus looked and listened to see and hear, to know where and how the Father was working. Jesus was in constant tune with the Father. His everyday life was a constant response to what He observed the Father doing around Him. Which leads to the fourth truth, that Jesus joined the Father wherever and however He was working. End of verse 19, *"Whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise."* It says in John 12:50, "I say whatever the Father tells me to say." John 15:10, "I do whatever the Father tells me to do."

The fifth truth is Jesus knew the Father involved Him in His work because the Father loved Him. *"For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing."* Then all that leads to the sixth truth: Jesus knew that the Father's everyday work in Him had eternal ramifications. He goes on in the rest of John 5 to talk about eternal life and judgment. So John 5 is describing the unique relationship between the Son and the Father when the Son was on earth. This is a picture of the Trinity and these two Persons of the Trinity, obviously the Holy Spirit being the third Person.

Consider the work of the Spirit in your life ...

But what we see between the Son and the Father, the Bible tells us has huge implications for how we understand how we walk with God through His Spirit. So, consider the work of the Spirit in your life. Now, this might sound like a stretch to some people. But when you realize that Jesus goes on in the rest of John to connect this whole picture in John 5 to promises He's going to give to His disciples, it starts to come together.

So in chapter five, verse 20, Jesus said, *"The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel."* There's one other place in the book of John where Jesus uses that same language, and it's here in John 14:10-12. He says:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

Jesus said, "I did the work of the Father on earth, but you, my disciples, you're going to do even greater works than I did." What a statement! How can Jesus make that statement? Well, listen to His reasoning, "because I'm going to the Father." Now, why is that important? Because when the Son goes to the Father, the Son will send the Spirit into the Christian's life. John 14:15. *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."*

Same thing in verse 26. *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you,"* John 15:26, *"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."* Again, twice in John 16 and then one last time in John 17. So the relationship between God the Father and God the Son that we see in John 5 is intended to be reflected and realized and experienced in our relationship with God the Father and God the Son through God the Spirit.

Jesus desires for us to work with Him and the Father through the Spirit in the same way that He worked. Not even just the same way He worked, but in greater ways than He worked. So think about it. Can you believe this? God the Father involves you by His Spirit in you in His work in the world just as He involved Jesus in His work in the world. So this is where I want to encourage you. On a daily basis—particularly when you think about it, not just your life but other people's lives around you—to be aware. Be aware. God is already at work in the lives of people around you. Our Father is always working. Be aware of this.

And then be available, because God desires to include you in that work in their life. Be alert. Look and listen for evidence of God at work. Be sensitive to how God is working in your family members' lives or your friends' lives, your co-workers' lives, your neighbors' lives and in lives of random people that you coincidentally meet throughout the day. Maybe it's not as random as you think. Maybe God has this thing rigged and He's bringing you in contact with different people on a daily basis for a purpose.

So then be active. Sacrifice your agenda each day to join God wherever and however He's working. And as you see God working in people's lives, join in what He's doing. As you do, remember that God has involved you in His work—not because He needs you, but because

He loves you. In all this be assured that God's work in and through your life will bear fruit that will last forever.

Think about it. You wake up in the morning. God desires to do things in and through your life that day that could have bearing on all of eternity. That changes everything about how we approach the day. Because Christ died for you and because Christ now lives in you, you are working together with God through His Spirit in what He's doing in other people's lives.

So then, how does this change a husband's daily approach to his wife? Wife's daily approach to her husband? Parents' daily approach to their children? Singles' daily approach to others? How does this reality affect Christians' daily approach to other Christians, as well as a Christian's daily approach to non-Christians? So in Christ we're dying to ourselves every day, and we're living in Him to love our neighbors—the people around us—as ourselves, with the cross transforming every single one of our everyday relationships.

A husband's daily approach to his wife ...

Reflect Christ through daily sacrifice for your wife.

So we're going to go quick here. Let's start with a husband's daily approach to his wife. So how does the cross of Christ change the way a husband loves his wife every day? Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. So this is a cross-centered way to look at your wife in the morning. You roll over, you look at her, you've been called and commanded to reflect Christ through daily sacrifice for your wife. To die to yourself, lay aside your interests, to love your wife, to love your wife daily.

Love your wife daily.

Let each one of you love his wife as himself. Love your wife daily. Love her selflessly, like Christ has loved you and Christ loves her. It's a self-sacrificing love, which means it's not based on what you can get from it. That's how the world loves. The world says you love your wife because of all her positive characteristics. You love your wife because she deserves it. That's a fickle love, because as soon as some characteristic in your wife is no longer as appealing as it once was, then that kind of love disappears, fades away. Husbands, you love—not because of who she is, but because of who Christ is. Do we really want Christ to love us based on what we bring to the table? No. So don't for a second love your wife like that, Scripture says.

The world says to be macho, defend yourself, assert yourself, bring attention to yourself, live for yourself. The Bible says give up yourself for your wife. Love her selflessly. Provide for her. Take responsibility for your wife and family's physical provision. Protect her. I put a variety of verses here that give this imagery of men protecting their families and in some cases leading out in battle. That's the picture, not just in a physical, but a holistic sense. We live in a spiritual war. We're involved in a spiritual war. So fight the battle, husband, on all fronts—physically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually—to protect your wife.

Love her selflessly. Love her effectively. Christ's love is effective. He loves her in a way that she's presented in splendor, Ephesians 5 says, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, "*that she might be holy and without blemish.*" So Christ's love molds and makes His bride beautiful, and He takes responsibility for making His bride that way.

So husbands are responsible for leading their marriages to be holy, and for leading their wives to be lovely. So see this, brothers. Under Christ, we are responsible for our wives

growing in Christ. And if they're not growing in holiness, growing in loveliness, then that responsibility comes back to us.

Now I'm not saying if a wife maybe commits adultery, falls into some sin, that she's not guilty before God for that sin. No question she is. But husbands, we're responsible. Imagine a navy ship. In the middle of the night, a young sailor rebelliously runs the ship into the ground. The captain of the ship meanwhile was sleeping on his watch. So is the sailor guilty? Of course. But was the captain responsible? Without question. Husbands, we are responsible for loving and leading our wives in a way that they grow in holiness and loveliness. And if there's a problem in wives' lives, problems in our marriages, we're responsible for laying down our life to lovingly address those problems. Don't fall asleep on the watch God's entrusted to you.

Love her selflessly. Love her effectively. Love her carefully, like your own body. Paul almost appeals to male selfishness issues here. He says, "Men, you know how much you care about yourself. Care for her like that." Nourish her. Cherish her. Don't be harsh with your wife. Never be harsh with your wife. Be warm with your wife. In the spirit of 1 Peter 3, love her completely in every way. First Corinthians 13 says to love her as yourself. Love her completely.

Husbands, as Christ serves you each day, out-serve your wife each day.

Husbands, as Christ serves you each day, out-serve your wife each day. This is the cross compelling us to love our wives like this on a daily basis.

A wife's daily approach to her husband ...

Revere Christ through daily submission to your husband.

How about a wife's daily approach to her husband? Ephesians 5:22: "*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*" So, the call in your lives, wives, is to revere Christ through daily submission to your husband. It's a word that's used throughout the New Testament. Ephesians 5, Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1, Titus 2:4—they all say submit to your husband.

And this word submit literally means to yield to another in love. This is such a beautiful word when you understand it in the New Testament. Wives, revere Christ through submission to your husband.

Respect your husband daily.

Respect your husband daily. Let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Honor him. Build him up.

Help your husband daily.

Help your husband daily. Help your husband daily. That's the picture we have at the beginning of the Bible, Genesis 2:18. Later in the Bible, Ephesians 5, Proverbs 31. A wife's clear priority on helping her husband so that together they might glorify God.

It's so powerfully portrayed in the language of Proverbs 31. Listen to verse 11. "*The heart of her husband trusts in her.*" Did you hear that? Help your husband daily, that he might trust you with his heart. This is remarkable language. Outside of this verse and one other verse

in the book of Judges, everywhere else in the Bible Scripture condemns trust in anyone, anything but God Himself. Don't trust in this; don't trust in that. But in Proverbs 31:11, we have a picture of a husband who trusts his wife with his heart. That's valuable. Now it makes sense. A woman who can be trusted like this in her husband's heart is indeed far more precious than jewels.

Help your husband that he might trust you with his heart and he might trust you with his household. The whole picture of Proverbs 31 is a woman who oversees the house well, that he might trust you with his heart, his household, and he might trust you with his good. "*He will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.*"

Wives, as Christ serves you each day, observe your husband's leadership each day. So wives, as Christ serves you each day, observe your husband's leadership each day. In other words, notice, honor, affirm, respect your husband in a way that reflects the church's love for Christ.

I know that some wives for example may be married to non-Christian husbands, so I put 1 Peter 3 here. "*Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct.*" I pray that God will give you grace, by the power and the presence of Christ in you, to show Christ to your husband in ways that—as you respect and honor him—that might one day lead him to the Christ.

A parent's daily approach to children ...

Two primary commands ...

A parent's daily approach to children. So how does the cross compel us to love our kids? Two primary commands in Ephesians 6 there, based on the pattern in Deuteronomy 6. You work from the back of that passage to the front. Number one, daily instruct your children so they know the Word. So bring them up, the Bible says, in the instruction of the Lord.

And we do this by teaching our children the Word. Genesis 18, Deuteronomy 6, Ephesians 6 are clear. We must have a verbal commitment to God's Word in our homes, to talk about the Word all the time. More than we talk about football or baseball or math or make-up, talk about the Word. God has designed a parent's relationship with their children in such a way that the parent would be the primary instructor in the Word for that child.

We must have a verbal commitment to the Word in our house. We must have a visible commitment to the Word in our homes. Make God's Word so visible in your home that it's as natural as life and breath for your family, that it dominates conversations, and this is similar to every facet of your home. So how do we do this? Well, we teach the Scriptures. We're intentional to teach the Scriptures, Psalm 78. We teach them who God is. Tell the next generation who God is. We tell the stories of what God has done. We warn against sinfulness in their lives, and we exalt the Savior in our homes.

Here's some help in doing this. So a simple guide for family worship. Just as you set aside a time to go to a place to be before God on your own, set aside a time and have a place where you gather together with your family. It could be in the morning, it could be in the evening, but at some point, go somewhere where you read the Word together. So read the Word together. Include your children. Involve them in reading the Word. Explain difficult concepts on their level. Discuss the Word together. Examine the Word together, much like

you do in your personal time with the Lord. Ask these questions. Maybe you can just share with your family what you've been learning in your time with the Lord.

So read and discuss the Word together. And then pray together. This is just like we talked about earlier. Praising God. Confessing sins to God. Asking God for things. Yielding to God. And then maybe sing together. Sing acapella or play a song or a CD on your phone or whatever if you want. Memorize together. Commit God's Word to memory together. Consider how you can do all of these things, not just on your own, but as a family.

Here are a few suggestions for family worship. If the father's not a Christian, mother, take initiative in a non-offensive, non-threatening way. So you want to respect your husband's leadership. At the same time, you want to provide leadership for this yourself, if it's possible. If the mother's not a Christian, father, take initiative with compassion and sensitivity. In a single-parent home, trust God's grace to supply your need. This is obviously a heavy burden to bear alongside other duties that you're bearing alone. But pray that God will supply great grace and He will more than make up for any natural deficiency you may perceive.

And then incorporating children. So keep it simple. We're not talking about an exhaustive exegetical study followed by a season of prayer and a series of hymns. Like, keep it simple. Make it enjoyable. Many times our family worship is just this way. We're singing a song, and then somehow, I don't know how, but all of a sudden the kids are just on top of me, jumping on me, and wrestling in the middle of the room. So I'm not sure how we got from deep conversation about the cross as we're preparing for Holy Week to wrestling. But it happens. And it's good. Make it enjoyable. So involve your kids throughout, and shepherd their hearts; shepherd their hearts.

This is what we've been called to do, Mom and Dad, to shepherd the hearts of our children. We need this to be a priority in our home. Just think about the inevitable benefits of family worship. It brings glory to God. It's a reminder for everybody in the house that God is worthy of our time, our attention, our affection.

Family worship produces joy in the home—the joy it just gives to individuals—in time alone with Him He brings to families. There's reward for your family waiting to be had. And family worship affects change in the world. As families pray, study, sing together, they join from their homes in what God's doing among the nations, all affecting each other's lives for generations to come.

Listen to the words of Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley in addition to other children. She just captured the priority of a mom who shepherds her children's hearts toward Christ. She said,

I am content to fill just a little space if God be glorified No one can, without renouncing the world, in the most literal sense, observe my method [talking about motherhood]; and there are few, if any, that would entirely devote above twenty years of the prime of life in hopes to save the souls of their children, which they think may be saved without so much ado; for that was my principal intention, however unskillfully and unsuccessfully managed.

In other words, this is worth it. And when we do this, what we hope, what we pray, what we long for is that our children will know God in their minds, and that they'll trust God in their hearts. This is what we're praying for. This is what we're working for. This is what we're longing for. More than we want them to be successful at sports, more than we want them to

have good grades—not that these things aren’t valuable and don’t have a proper place—but we want them to know God. We want them to trust God in their heart, and that they will obey God in their lives. So this is what we want. More than the things that this world says will make them successful, we want these things. And it’s worth it to work for this. Daily instruct your children so they know the Word.

And then to daily train your children so they obey the Word. Ephesians 6 says, *“Bring them up in the discipline of the Lord.”* Proverbs 22:6 says, *“Train up a child in the way he should go.”* To discipline is to train. The picture’s clear. Children—sinful children—don’t just pop out obeying their parents and following Christ. This is what I love about the cross and parenting. Titus 2:12 uses the same word “train” to talk about how the gospel trains us to live godly lives. So the gospel does this. The gospel corrects, chastens, and disciplines us so we can experience God’s design for us.

And the Bible saying here to parents, “Train them, work with them, discipline them.” This is a mandate from God to discipline your children so they will grow in the Lord and the Word will come alive in them. Now, this reality is sure. You cannot train them to do what you do not know how to do. Our children will not be what they cannot see. So let’s say to our children the words of 1 Corinthians 11:1. *“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”* *“What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you,”* Philippians 4:9.

One primary caution ...

In all this, one primary caution that Ephesians 6 gives us. Fathers, parents, do not provoke your children to anger. So daily discipline your children with love that leads them toward God, not with anger that leads them away from God. There is a temptation that I experience all the time to discipline my children with anger, frustration, that will lead them away from God instead of love that will lead them toward God.

So we’ve got to guard against extremes here. One extreme: Not to discipline our children, to think that loving our children means avoiding discipline. This is the kind of parent who switches Ephesians 6:1 around and says, “Parents, obey your children, so this will keep them happy and bring peace to your home.” But Scripture says if you don’t discipline your children, you don’t love your children. So discipline your children with love. Proverbs makes that clear.

But don’t go to the other extreme in your discipline such that you would in any way provoke the prevailing spirit of anger in your children. That doesn’t mean if your child is angry with you then you’ve done something wrong. Nobody enjoys discipline when they’re going through it. When they get on the other side and they see why, then they see love in your discipline. So make sure they see the importance of discipline in their lives. So we’ve got to be intentional here to train them in the way they should go.

One particular encouragement ...

One particular encouragement, and I wanted to put this here because this reality is being undercut in so much of Western culture today, particularly when we think about the everyday life of a mom. So we live in a day where the idea of a woman making a home or working at home is seen as servile, second-class, even in some ways a waste of somebody’s life. And I just want to pause and point out what I pray will not just be biblically obvious to us, but practically obvious to us. Is there any career more important?

And I’m going to use the word career here, because a career’s a job that requires training, preparation, commitment, dedication on a daily basis, bringing together varied skills energy

and time to accomplish a task. Overseeing and making a home, helping a husband and raising children qualifies as this more than anything else I can think of. It's part of the point of Proverbs 31. You read this proverb, and it seems like this woman never sleeps. That's the point. Overseeing a home literally is a seven-day-a-week, 24-hour job, and I can't think of a career that's more important than overseeing a home, supporting a husband, rearing and nurturing children, all to the glory of God. And I just want to point out: A mom who fears the Lord, honors her husband and nurtures her children on a daily basis is worthy of deep praise. Deep praise.

Now, one caveat here. In affirming a wife and mother's role in the home according to God's design, I don't want to imply that it's wrong and it's sinful in every circumstance for a wife or mom to work outside the home. Scripture doesn't teach that. But I would say that Scripture does exhort wives and mothers, even if they work outside the home, to make sure not to neglect the oversight of the home, so not to neglect helping husbands, prioritizing care for your children.

The picture in the Proverbs passage exalts the ways this mom nurtures her children. She loves them. She loves them, providing clothes for them, food for them, protection for them. She lays down her life for them. All these details she takes care of from sun-up to sun-down. She takes seemingly mundane tasks and accomplishes them when nobody else is looking, when no one else is there to laud her for it. Don't miss it. Verse 28 in Proverbs 31 says her children rise up and call her blessed. She lives to make them her legacy. All the long days of hard work, loving discipline, unselfish giving are so that her children are able to stand, blessed to bless.

Dorothy Patterson wrote an excellent article on this. I just want to read what she said. She said:

Few women realize what great service they are doing for mankind and for the kingdom of Christ when they provide a shelter for the family and good mothering—the foundation on which all else is built. A mother builds something far more magnificent than any cathedral—the dwelling place for an immortal soul (both her child's fleshly tabernacle and his earthly abode). No professional pursuit so uniquely combines the most menial tasks with the most meaningful opportunities. It is hard to locate an aging mother who believes she made a mistake of pouring her life into her children, and it would certainly be more difficult to find a child to testify that his mother loved him and poured herself into his life to his detriment and demise. Homemaking—being a full-time wife and mother—is not a destructive drought of usefulness but an overflowing oasis of opportunity; it is not a dreary call to contain one's talents and skills but a brilliant catalyst to channel creativity and energies into meaningful work; it is not a rope for binding one's productivity in the marketplace, but reins for guiding one's posterity in the home; it is not oppressive restraint of intellectual prowess for the community, but a release of wise instruction to your own household; it is not the bitter assignment of inferiority to your person, but the bright assurance of the ingenuity of God's plan for complementarity of the sexes, especially as worked out in God's plan for marriage; it is neither limitation of gifts available nor stinginess in distributing the benefits of those gifts, but rather the multiplication of a mother's legacy to the generations to come and the generous bestowal of all God meant a mother to give to those He entrusted to her care.

Well said. So, wives and moms, tonight as we think about the cross and everyday life, be affirmed. Be honored in the Word of God for the self-denying, cross-centered way you lay your lives down in your homes to the glory of God.

A child's daily approach to parents ...

Two primary commands ...

That then leads to a child's daily approach to parents. So two primary commands in Ephesians 6. I only put verse one there, but I should have put verse two. But number one, daily honor your parents with your attitude. So honor your father and your mother. Ephesians 6:2 says respect, esteem and love, honor your parents. God takes this seriously. You look in the Old Testament. God says, *"Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death."* *"Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death."* *"Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God."*

This is pretty important to God. Ephesians 6 says to every child tonight—every student, every teenager—are you respecting your parents? Are you honoring them? Are you valuing them by the way you respond to them? You say, "Well, how do I know if I'm honoring my parents?" Well, first look at your attitude, then your actions. Honor your parents with your attitude and daily obey your parents with your actions. Children, obey your parents, for this is right.

The word, "obey," here—it's a compound word. It literally means to hear in such a way that you obey, in such a way that you do. In other words, you obey your parents first by hearing what they say, listening to them, listening to their advice, their instruction, their commands. *"Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck."* (Proverbs 1:8-9) And then do what they say. *"Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord."* (Colossians 3:20) So do what they say, without challenge, without excuse, without delay. This is pleasing to God.

One primary caution ...

And not to do this is offensive to God. And this is the caution to children in Ephesians 6. One primary caution for children: To dishonor or disobey your parents is to rebel against God. Ephesians 6 says it's right to obey your parents. The only exception to this is that you may have a non-Christian parent who tells you to do something that's clearly against God's will in His Word. Obviously, you don't follow a parent into rebellion against God. But with that one exception aside, God says, "If you disobey mom or dad, you are rebelling against me."

In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 21, disobedience to one's parents is put on the same level as treason and idol worship. You look at the end of Romans 1, and you see disobedience to parents in a laundry list of horrible sins. So here's the deal. If you're a 16-year-old and you decide you're going to go against what your mom or dad has said, then you have not just set yourself up against them. You have set yourself up against God.

Do not be the kind of student that talks about how much you love God and you want to grow in God and do great things for God, and then go home and disobey your parents. Your spiritual life is not expressed primarily in what happens in the youth group. Your spiritual life is expressed primarily in what happens in your home. The cross compels you to daily honor and obey your parents.

A single's daily approach to others ...

Remember how singleness portrays the gospel.

And then let's look at a single's daily approach to others. Remember how singleness portrays the gospel. So marriage portrays Christ's sacrificial love for the church and the church's submissive obedience to Christ. But singleness portrays the Christian's ultimate identity in Christ. So think about it. The world says you need a husband or a wife to complete you. Singleness reminds us that's not true, because in Christ we're complete regardless of marital status. All these Scriptures I put here below. The Lord is a husband to His people, more satisfying, more eternal than any husband or wife could ever be.

So there are truths about the supremacy of Christ that are clearly portrayed in singleness. Singleness says to the world, "Christ is my satisfaction. In Him I have everything I need," in a way that marriage, though good, doesn't portray in the same way. So remember the words of Amy Carmichael in her singleness. She said, "There is joy, joy found in nowhere else, when we can look up into Christ's face when He says to us, 'Am I not enough for thee, Mine own?' with a true, 'Yes, Lord, thou art enough.'"

Singleness portrays the Christian's ultimate identity in Christ, and then singleness portrays the Christian's eternal identification with the church. Remember that marriage is a temporary institution. It's what it stands for that lasts forever—Matthew 22. So married people will be married in this life, then for billions and billions of years we're going to be single. And singleness uniquely portrays the Christian's eternal identification with the church.

Take daily advantage of the times you're in.

Which then leads to exhortations in Scripture for those who are single in Christ. One, to take advantage of the times you're in. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, "*In view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife.*" So the clear message here is don't squander your singleness. We're not sure exactly what Paul means by present distress here. Most believe it revolves around both persecution and perversion. Persecution was rampant in the first century. It was costly to be a follower of Christ. Perversion and great sexual immorality was rampant in Corinth.

Maximize daily opportunities in the mission you're on.

So Paul says, in view of these things, maximize these days. Maximize daily opportunities in the mission you're on. Paul's echoing here what Jesus taught in Matthew 19 concerning eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom. So he's talking about singleness for the sake of mission, singleness for the spread of the gospel here and around the world. Remember the words of Rhena Taylor, a single missionary to Kenya, who said, "Being single has meant that I am free to take risks that I might not take were I a mother of a family dependent on me. Being single has given me freedom to move around the world without having to pack up a household first. And this freedom has brought to me moments that I would not trade for anything else this side of eternity."

Trevor Douglas made similar statements. Don't forget, the Apostle Paul and scores of great men and women after him have been single for the advancement of God's kingdom. Could it be, single brother or sister in Christ, that your greatest impact for God's kingdom will come not in spite of your singleness but precisely because of your singleness? Maximize daily opportunities in the mission you're on.

Daily guard against competing affections.

At the same time there's caution. Daily guard against competing affections. Paul says, "*I want you to be free from anxieties.*" So guard against affections. "*The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.*" (1 Corinthians 7:32) So Paul's not just downing marriage here because of all married men and married women have to do, but he's saying to singles—unmarried men and women—that there's no distraction on your affections. You're even less tied to the world than a married man or woman.

So take advantage of this. But be careful in this. Be careful that you're not distracted even as a single. Guard against unholy sexual desires all day long, which we've already talked about in 1 Corinthians 6. The world is desperately in need of single followers of Christ who will counter the cultural lie that sexual expression is okay, even necessary, for ultimate fulfillment in life. The ultimate example of this is Christ, who never once sinned sexually and He is the epitome of full human life.

So guard against unholy sexual desires all day long, and guard against unholy selfish desires all day long. So the command in Mark 12, Matthew 22, to love our neighbors as ourselves is a battle for all of us. But listen to these words from John Stott, himself a single brother. "Apart from sexual temptation, the greatest danger which I think we face [as singles] is self-centeredness. We may live alone and have total freedom to plan our own schedule, with nobody else to modify it or even give us advice. If we are not careful, we may find the whole world revolving around ourselves."

And we live in a world, whether single or married, that says we need to boost self-image, self-confidence, self-this, self-that—we've got a whole vocabulary that talk about our preoccupation with ourselves. Biblical singleness is about dying to yourself daily, that God might gain great esteem, glory, in your life. Listen to John Piper:

Today singleness is cherished by many because it brings maximum freedom for self-realization. You pull your own strings. No one cramps your style. But Paul cherished his singleness because it put him utterly at the disposal of the Lord Jesus The contemporary mood promotes singleness (but not chastity) because it frees from slavery. Paul promotes singleness (and chastity) because it frees for slavery—namely slavery to Christ.

Daily give Christ undivided devotion.

So guard against unholy sexual desires and unhelpful, unholy selfish desires. And then daily give Christ undivided devotion. "*I say this for your own benefit...to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.*" (1 Corinthians 7:35) Stott said, "Single people experience the great joy of being able to devote themselves, with concentration and without distraction, to the work of the Lord." So single brothers in Christ, or sisters in Christ, give yourselves every day to a single desire—to use God's good gift for God's great glory among all nations.

A Christian's daily approach to other Christians ...

Now, backing away from family relationships now, think through, okay, two categories. Our approach to other followers of Christ every day and our approach to those who are not

followers of Christ every day. How do we approach Christians and non-Christians on a daily basis? So, we're going to fly. Ready?

One: We care for one another. As you receive mercy from God, reflect mercy toward one another. So this is the cross of Christ compelling us to do all these things. We've received this kind of love, so we reflect this kind of love. Our community with one another is intended to be a reflection of His character. So, we love one another, John 13:34-35, *"Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."* Host one another. *"Show hospitality to one another without grumbling,"* First Peter 4:9. Greet one another, 1 Corinthians 16:20. We don't have to necessarily do it with a holy kiss, but greet one another.

Receive one another, Romans 15:7. Honor one another. Literally, prefer one another in honor. So outdo other people, other followers of Christ, in bestowing honor, Romans 12:10. Serve one another. Instruct one another. Wait for one another. Forgive one another. Colossians 3:13, *"Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."* Do not hold grudges against a brother or sister in Christ. It undercuts the gospel completely.

Submit to one another. Spur on one another. Promote peace with one another. *"Be at peace among yourselves,"* 1 Thessalonians 5:13. Bear one another's burdens. Encourage one another. Comfort one another. Second Corinthians 1, five verses, comfort mentioned ten different times. Comfort one another. Pray for and confess to one another. Esteem one another. Edify one another. Teach one another. The Word's not just for you. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom."* (Colossians 3:16) Teach one another.

"Be kind to one another," Ephesians 4:32. Serve alongside one another with all the gifts that God's given you in the body of Christ. Remember this: Serve alongside one another. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12—we're members of a family where everybody counts. Everybody counts. So don't sit on the sidelines in the body of Christ. Nobody's inferior. We guard against self-depreciation, "Well, I'm not really needed in the church."

Nobody's superior. We guard against self-exaltation, "I don't need others in the church." There's no need for us to compare ourselves to others and conclude that we have little to offer. And then no need to copy somebody else in an attempt to be somebody we're not. God has saved every single follower of Christ. He's filled you with His Spirit. He's given you unique gifts to build up others in Christ. We're members of a family where everybody counts and members of a family where everybody contributes, where we all use our gifts to the glory of our God. We serve alongside one another.

We give to one another. Great passages there on giving in the New Testament that emphasize continually prioritizing care for the poor. We continually prioritize care for the poor among us, to help brothers and sisters among us in need. Intentionally maximize your resources, not in excessive luxuries for yourself but in extravagant love for others. First Timothy 6, be generous with what we've been given. So our resources, our salary is not just for us. They're for others, other followers of Christ, followers of Christ in need.

We restore one another when we see each other wandering into sin. Galatians 6, *"If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness."* We follow Jesus' instruction on a continual basis. We're continually doing this, starting with step one—private correction. If a brother or sister is caught in sin, we go to that brother or sister. We don't wait. We go to them, humbly, lovingly. Address that. If they refuse to turn from that sin, that leads to step two—small group clarification, where we

bring one or two others along. Address sin in this brother or sister in Christ, calling them back to Christ.

If that doesn't work, we move to step three—church admonition. *"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector..."* (Matthew 18:17) Then step four—church excommunication. In other words, there comes a point where you treat someone else like they're no longer a brother in Christ as a member of the body of Christ because of unrepentant sin. So there's a process here that Jesus has given us that we play out on a continual basis as Christians in each other's lives, where we're calling each other away from sin.

And the goal in all of this—the goal of all church discipline—is spiritual restoration. *"My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."* (James 5:19-20) This is a good work we do in each other's lives. I need brothers and sisters in my life on a daily, weekly, basis who love me enough to call me away from sin whenever they see me wandering into it. The most unloving thing Christians around me could do is see me wandering into sin, not repenting of sin, and sit back and do nothing about it.

This is obviously not an easy process, so we've got to make sure in this process to be humble, to be biblical. *"Avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless."* (Titus 3:9) So this is not just pet peeves. We need to ask questions. Is there sin that is dishonoring God? Is there sin that is damaging the gospel, like we see in 1 and 2 Timothy? Is there sin that's hurting the unity of the church, Romans 16:17-18? Or is there sin that's hurting the witness of the church, Philipians 2:14-15?

If so, then by God's grace address it. So be biblical. Be humble. Be pure in the process. Make sure to examine your own life, examine your motives at every point. Are you going to this brother or sister out of love, for their good, to serve them? Not yourself. Be pure. Be prayerful. Realize that if a brother or sister's caught in sin, only Christ can bring them out of that. You can't ultimately make this happen no matter what you say, how hard you try. So I love 2 Timothy 2 here, we instruct a brother in sin, in the hope that *"God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth."*

Be prayerful. Be quiet, meaning be quiet when it comes to gossip. Don't gossip about it. Zealously guard the character of Christ in our brothers and sisters. Be quiet and be quick. Not that we should rush this process, but Scripture says we don't let sin grow, Matthew 5. *"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

The reality is, the longer sin continues—the longer a brother or sister is continuing in unrepentant sin—the more challenging restoration is going to be. So be patient, obviously, in overlooking minor offenses, but when sin is dishonoring to God, damaging to the gospel, hurting the unity, witness of the church, be quick to address it. And ultimately be Christ-like, trusting in Christ's authority, depending on Christ's presence, honoring the cross of Christ all to the glory of Christ—Matthew 18.

So we want to live our lives on a daily basis to love other Christians as we love ourselves. And these are some of the ways Scripture says we do that in the normal routines of

everyday life. Now, it's not that every single day we say, "Okay, how can I do all these 'one anothers'?" But this is the posture on a daily basis that we approach other followers of Christ with. As Christ has loved us, we love them.

A Christian's daily approach to non-Christians ...

And then that love spills over into a Christian's daily approach to non-Christians. So, why has God left us here on earth? Christians, why has God not just saved us and immediately has taken us to be with Him as a church in heaven? Why has He not taken us out of this world of sin and suffering? He has left us here for a purpose: To enjoy His grace and exalt His glory.

And we do this, not only in knowing the gospel, but in proclaiming the gospel. There are people around us every single day who are on a road that leads straight to hell. And if nothing changes, then they'll spend all eternity in everlasting damnation. And God has put us in their lives for purpose. And the dangerous thing is, if we're not careful, we will just completely miss this purpose.

You and I are tempted on a daily basis to sit back in our supposedly Christian lives to enjoy God, to pray to God, read God's Word, worship God in church, talk about God with other Christians. Yet, so often we rarely talk about God and the gospel with people who are not Christians. We live in a Christian bubble; we're quieter about Christ around our non-Christian neighbors, employees, friends. We don't have an urgency oftentimes to tell them how they can be saved from their sin.

So I'm guessing that many of us, if not most of us—just to be honest, probably the large majority of us—are not waking up in the morning thinking, "Who can I share the gospel with today?" We're not thinking that way. And we're not living all day long trying, working hard, to lead other people to Jesus. Like, that's an afterthought to us, or that's for the pastor, or other people. It's just not for me. The reality is—I say this with as much compassion as is in me—if I were to ask followers of Jesus in this room tonight or all the places that we're gathered, to stand up if you led somebody to Jesus in the last year to stand up where you are, I think the overwhelming majority of us would probably stay seated.

And the reality is, for many followers of Jesus, the last two years, or three, or four or five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty years, have not led somebody else to Jesus or maybe led one or two people to Jesus. And please hear me. I am not looking to heap guilt, condemnation upon you, make you feel bad if you've not led somebody to Christ or if you're not actively leading people to Christ, or not to make you feel prideful if you are. But I am saying these things to help us realize that if we're not careful, our salvation can suddenly and inadvertently turn into self-consumption, where we're receiving grace from God in our lives, but we're keeping it to ourselves.

And if we're not careful, Christians, we're going to get to the end of our lives, and we're going to look back and realize we missed the whole point. God has given us this command: Make disciples of all nations. It's intended to infuse our everyday lives. So are we going to get to the end of our lives, stand before God and say, "I didn't do the one commission you gave me to do on earth. I didn't make a disciple, or I made a disciple here or there."

So I want to call all 60,000 of us tonight out of a casual commitment to the commission of Christ, and to call us in Christ to say, "This is Christ's invitation, for us to be a part of what

He's doing in the world for the spread of His glory, so that more and more and more people can enjoy His grace and exalt His glory. So that more and more and more people can know this precious truth that we hold tightly in our hearts on this Good Friday evening. And so that more and more and more people can miss hell and make heaven by the blood of Christ."

So, I want to call us—based on Colossians 4, 1 Corinthians 9—to this kind of picture. So how do we approach non-Christians? We daily relinquish our rights for the sake of the gospel. We relinquish our rights. So the example in 1 Corinthians 9 is Paul. Seven different times in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul talks about how he had a right to financial support from the church at Corinth. He surrendered that right, though, for the sake of the gospel in Corinth. Paul believed that taking financial support from Corinth would hinder the spread of the gospel in Corinth, so he set aside that right that he had.

So in this, hear the exhortation to you and me. You and I have rights every day—where we live, in the world around us. I just put in your notes some tangible examples. There are obviously tons more. But think about it. In this country you've got a right in this world to life, friends, marriage, family, safety, security, health and happiness. You have a right to eat, drink, watch, wear, read, study, listen to, say whatever you want. You've got a right to organize your schedules, spend your time, choose your career, make your money, use your money, take your vacation, plan your retirement. You have a right to do what you want to do, go where you want to go, live how you want to live.

Most of us in this gathering tonight are Americans. Maybe more than any people in the world we're familiar with our rights. We cling to our rights. So this truth is huge for us. Because, followers of Jesus, the cross compels you and me to surrender our rights every day for the sake of the gospel where we live and in the world around us. To surrender our rights, to say on a daily basis, "I have a right to do all kinds of things today with my time, my money, my family, my life, but I'm going to surrender them today to say, 'How can I best spread the gospel with my time, my money, my family, my life?'"

This is what we do. As followers of Jesus, we put it all on the table. We use language around here at the Church at Brook Hills all the time about a "blank check," no strings attached. You put a blank check on the table of your life on a daily basis. You say, "Lord, what do you want me to? Where do you want me to go? How do you want to use me to make the gospel known today? And I'll do it." This is what it means to be a follower of Christ. This sounds kind of extreme, but this is basic discipleship—to lay down your life, to say, "My life is yours to make this gospel known."

So, it's what the cross compels us to do. We relinquish our rights for the sake of the gospel, and we daily rearrange our schedules for the spread of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 9:19, Paul moves from language about rights to language about freedom. He says, "*Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all,*" and the word there for 'servant' is literally slave. He says, "I've made myself a slave to all." Why? Follow it here. Here's the purpose. "*I made myself a slave to all, that I might win more of them.*" What does that mean, win them?

He goes on to say, "*To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law...that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law...that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak.*" And then he says—here's what I mean by this "win" language, verse 22. "*I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.*"

Paul just said, "It may sound like old-fashioned religious language to some, but this is biblical reality." Paul knows there are all kinds of people around him—Jews, non-Jews, people of different ethnicities, people of different backgrounds, different situations. What unites them all is they need to be saved from their sins. Paul knows all kinds of people are on a road that leads to an eternity apart from God, and so he says, "I do whatever it takes. I flex my lifestyle. I make adjustments. I rearrange my life in order that they might be saved. I'm a slave to this purpose," Paul says.

See, followers of Jesus in this gathering tonight, see how Jesus frees you to be a slave. That sounds backward to us, but it's true. Followers of Jesus, we are slaves of God. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:16, *"If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"* Then he says this, *"If I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship."*

Do you realize what Paul just said? He said, "I'm not preaching the gospel because I chose to do this. This is God's will for me to do. It's necessity. It's incumbent upon me. Woe, condemnation on me if I don't do what I've been commissioned to do by God. I'm His slave." Which is exactly what Paul calls himself throughout the New Testament—a slave of God. Followers of Jesus, this is what we are. To use language from 1 Corinthians 6 earlier, you're not your own. We've been bought with a price. We belong to God. We belong to Him. We're slaves of Him.

Which means—so, in your notes there—when it comes to Christ's commission to spread the gospel, we're obligated to obey. We don't have a choice. Necessity is laid upon us. Woe to us if we don't share the gospel. Woe to us. This is the same language Paul uses back in Romans. He says, *"I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome."* He says, "I'm obligated." Because Christ owns Paul, Paul owes Christ to the world. Because Christ owns you, you owe Christ the world. We're under divine obligation to spread the gospel.

Now, I want to be careful in using that language. I mean, it's scriptural language, but it can start to sound as though, "Okay, we have to do what we don't really want to do." But that's not the way Paul is using obligation here. Paul is not reluctantly saying, "Well, I'm a slave. I don't want to be a slave. But I am. Even though I don't want to do what God has told me to do, I have to do it." That's the farthest thing from what Paul is saying. Paul is saying for him, may it include us, God's gracious conversion of us creates a gospel compulsion in us on a daily basis. Paul's driven to spread the gospel to others, overwhelmed by the grace of God in him.

You and I have been saved by immeasurable, incomprehensible, inconceivable mercy, and that mercy now compels us to spread the gospel in our lives. We're stewards of it. We've been given something great, been given something eternally great. There's nothing greater than the gospel of God, so we don't keep it to ourselves. We're free—we're free—by the gospel to be slaves of God, which then leads to the next part: we are slaves of others. "I've made myself a slave to all so that I might win them to Christ."

So this is how you view people around you in the world on a daily basis. The people you work with, the people you live next to, the people in your community, your city, people in North America, people groups among the nations—do you see yourself as their slave, where you're willing, where I'm willing, where we're willing to rearrange our lives, that they might

be won to Christ? This means we wisely contextualize the truth of the gospel for others' lives. We endure anything but put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. That's what it means to contextualize: We remove obstacles to the gospel so that people around us can understand the gospel as clearly as possible.

And we continually communicate threads of the gospel in our lives. Now, here's what I mean by that. This is language we use around here at The Church at Brook Hills a lot, and it comes from the time I spent in the Middle East with a group of people. So this is a country in the Middle East where it's illegal to convert to Christianity from Islam, and it's illegal to share the gospel with a Muslim. But I was around some brothers and sisters who were sharing the gospel all day long in this country in beautiful ways. You say, "Well, how is that possible? I thought it was illegal."

What the way they described it—I saw it in action—is they've got a business where they're working with Muslims in this country. And in the context of this business, they said, "Our goal is every day to weave threads of the gospel into the lives, into our conversations with Muslims who we work with. And so every day we want to be intentional about weaving threads of the gospel, talking about the gospel in different ways. And our hope is, our prayer is, what we are constantly praying is that as we weave these different threads of the gospel, that one day God's going to open their eyes to this tapestry of grace that's been woven in front of them, and we'll draw them to Christ."

And they're seeing it happen. They talk about different gospel truths, just in unassuming ways, all day long, just in the flow of everyday life, and then something will happen in this man's life, and he'll come to them and say, "Hey, I heard you say this. Can you tell me more about that?" And they're seeing Muslims come to Christ. And when they have the opportunity they kind of give the whole picture, and here's how all the gospel comes together, and Muslims are coming to Christ.

It's causing problems for them, because the more people come to Christ, the more persecution rises. It's what we were talking about earlier. But I came back thinking, why can I not do the same thing every day? Why can't the cross of Christ be compelling us every day, the gospel just saturating our speech? There are opportunities we have to weave threads of the gospel into our conversations with people who don't know Christ on a daily basis, and do the same thing. So what I've put in your notes there: Five threads of the gospel. They are the Character of God, the Sinfulness of Man, the Sufficiency of Christ, the Necessity of Faith, and the Urgency of Eternity.

The Character of God ...

We're going to hit these really quickly, and then go to break. There's so much here we could dive in to, but I want to give you just some practical ways to think about, okay, we've been given this commission, so how can we do this on a daily basis?

Knowing this gospel thread ...

So think character of God. God is a holy, just and gracious Creator of all things. God is holy. We've already talked about this. God is perfectly unique, completely separate, absolutely pure. God is just. He justifies the innocent, condemns the guilty—Proverbs 17:50. And God is gracious. God shows the guilty free and unmerited favor.

Weaving this gospel thread into everyday conversations ...

So then, how can we weave that gospel truth into everyday conversations? I mean, think about it. Conversations you've got at work, at lunch, around friends, family, neighbors, ball field—wherever you go, look around, how can you talk about the character of God? Talking about God as Creator. Acknowledge the glory of God in creation every chance you have. So Romans 1 makes it clear that God is revealing Himself at every moment in creation to people around us. So instead of saying, "Look at that sunset. Isn't it majestic?", say something like, "Look at the glory of God in that sunset. He's majestic." Don't talk about creation like you're an atheist.

And similarly, acknowledge the presence of God in specific facets of your life. The question, "What's going on in your life?" takes on radically new meaning when you're intentionally weaving the gospel into the fabric of your conversations. Again, don't talk like an atheist, like God is nowhere to be found in your life. Talk about God as present in your life. "What's going on in your life?" "Well, God is working in my life in this way. God is blessing me in this way. God is leading me in this direction. God is guiding me to make decisions. God is teaching me this truth. God is showing me this realization."

As you say this, you're triggering to people, "Hey, this guy actually believes that there's a God who is at work in their life and actually doing good things in their life." So we have this dangerous tendency, don't we, to compartmentalize our faith? We put God over here on Sunday morning in that box, and that's when we talk about Him, and we rarely mention Him otherwise. Ah, He's our life here. I mean, some people say, "I just can't share the gospel. I need to go to some training in order to share the gospel."

Let me ask you to pause for a second. How many of you are grandparents? How many of you who are grandparents talk about your grandkids? I'm just going to tell you—you all talk about your grandkids, say, all the time. How many of you received training on how to talk about grandkids? What's on your heart and your mind comes out of your mouth. What's on your heart and your mind comes out of your mouth. Put God on your heart and your mind—it's God on your heart and your mind. So if you're communing with God, you're walking with God, He's on your heart and your mind—you start talking about Him.

Talking about the holiness of God. Speaking about God with reverential awe. Speaking about yourself with genuine humility. Drawing attention to attributes that distinguish God from people in this world. There's a whole series we walked through at The Church at Brook Hills, if you want to dive into this more in depth. There's so much I'd love to go into here, but it's 11:00. Draw attention to ways in which God reigns above the gods of this world.

Talk about the justice of God. Express confidence in God before others when things go wrong. Express remorse before God and others when you do something wrong. Even amidst all this social justice talk today, as you work for justice in the world, speak about the Judge of the world. As you observe people in suffering in the world, speak with hope about the world to come.

Which then leads to talking about the grace of God. Constantly point out evidences of God's grace in and around you. Constantly credit God as the Source of everything good in and around you. So when something good happens, thank God. Chesterton said, "The loneliest moment for an atheist is when he's filled with gratitude and has no one to thank." Express gratitude to God. Continually acknowledge your need for God's grace. Unceasingly express your gratitude for God's grace. Do people around you—that you work with, live around—do they know how grateful you are for God's saving grace in Christ? Do they know that

because you said that, you spoke that, over and over and over again? So speak about the character of God all day long.

The Sinfulness of Man ...

Knowing this gospel thread ...

Second thread: The sinfulness of man. We're each created by God, but we're all corrupted by sin. As people, we've rebelled against God, we've turned away from God to ourselves. What we thought would lead to freedom in our sin has led each of us in a slavery to sin. As a result, we're separated from God, which leads to guilt, shame, fear in our lives. We're dead without God. What we thought would lead to life -- turning away from God -- has led each of us to death—eventual physical death and eternal spiritual death. We're completely unable to save ourselves.

Weaving this gospel thread into everyday conversations ...

So, how do we weave that gospel thread in everyday conversations? Do we just go up to people and say, "Hey, you need God to save you from your sin and yourself"? Well, reality is, most people don't think they need to be saved from anything, and at that moment, the only thing they may want to be saved from is you. So, how can we more wisely weave this gospel thread into our conversations? How about just start with speaking respectfully to and about all people as individuals created in the image of God? So that's a good place to start. Just everybody around us—even the people that get on our nerves the most—they're created in the image of God.

Look intentionally for opportunities to encourage others by the grace of God. Share confidently in view of the regenerating power of God. The God who has the power to create has the power to recreate, which means, to just pause here—you can go to the hardest heart in your office, the man or woman who wants nothing whatsoever to do with God, you can go to the darkest unreached people group on the planet whose mindset and culture is completely set against Christianity in every way—you can speak this gospel and with the power of the Spirit of God He will bring people from death to life. He will do it. I mean, do you believe this?

So talking about our rebellion—acknowledge the reality of sin in and around you. Acknowledge the root of sin in and around you. Don't talk about sin on a surface level. Go to the root of the heart. Speak honestly about our propensity to sin. Talk about sin in all of its forms. Talk about sin in light of its force.

Talk about our separation. Speak humbly about the seriousness of sin. Don't joke about sin in your life or others' lives. Don't joke about temptation. Then let the effects of sin inform the way you talk about salvation. When talking about guilt, talk about forgiveness. When you're talking about shame, talk about honor in Christ. In conversation about fear, talk about freedom in Christ from those fears.

And then, whenever the topic of death comes up in the room, how do we speak? Well, respond to death in non-Christians with appropriate honor. So somebody dies without Christ, what do you say? Well, you honor that person with biblical honesty, meaning we have to guard against this dangerous temptation that comes out—particularly I'm speaking here from Alabama, this religious South—when it comes to death, a totally pagan non-Christian will die, and all of a sudden, everybody in the church is talking like they're going to heaven. And biblically, it's not true. People who die in their sin, who have not trusted

Jesus as their Savior and followed Him as Lord—they die eternal spiritual death. So with biblical honesty.

Now, obviously nobody ultimately knows the state of a person's heart, so speak with humility, knowing that something may have happened. Maybe that person even trusted in Christ, even in their last minute. So, at the same time knowing that if they didn't, they died apart from God. So speak with heart-breaking anguish over the death of a sinner separated from God, but with life-giving resolve to spend our life to spread the gospel to others like them before they die.

And then respond to the death of Christians with profound sorrow, abiding joy, sincere worship and unshakeable hope. Oh, there's so much here. Constantly point to our dependence on God and constantly point to our desperation for God.

The Sufficiency of Christ ...

Knowing this gospel thread ...

Now let's look at the third thread: The sufficiency of Christ. This is the reality that Jesus alone is able to remove our sin and restore us to God. He lived a life we couldn't live. He's died a death we deserve to die. He's conquered the enemy we cannot conquer.

Weaving this gospel thread into everyday conversations ...

So, intentionally weave in this gospel thread. Intentionally talk about Jesus. Outside of Sunday, Christians talk so tragically little about Jesus. They hardly ever mention His name. I mean, we go out on a limb every once in a while to talk about God. But once you mention Jesus at work, things just got really awkward.

But speak about Jesus. Look for opportunities to highlight His example for us. Look for opportunities to acknowledge His work in us. Look for opportunities to point out His identification with us. Are people around you hurting? Jesus hurt. Are people around you broken? Jesus was broken. Do people around you feel rejected? Jesus was rejected. Do people around you feel alone? Jesus was alone. Then talk about Jesus' death. Never stop emphasizing the gravity of sin. Never stop talking about your gratitude for Christ.

And then talking about Jesus' resurrection, speak about difficulties with hope. Speak about difficulties with hope, and speak about death with joy. You talk about cancer with joy, you talk about pain with joy, you talk about risking your life to go to the nations with joy, and people start wondering what's going on. I'm not talking about a flippant happiness. I'm talking an abiding sense of joy because you know Christ is risen and that means death is gain.

I put here talking with Pluralist Paul. So people who have a pluralist idea that all roads kind of lead to the same place. Highlight the all-important distinctions between taste, tradition and truth. So we live in a culture where religious beliefs are just personal tastes, whatever works best for you. And so you're born, you may choose this path, you may choose this path—they're all kind of the same. Well, talk about how it really comes down to an issue of truth. So all religions are not fundamentally the same and just superficially different.

There are core truth claims that separate Islam from Christianity for example. Islam said that Jesus didn't die on the cross. Christianity says that Jesus did die on the cross and rise from the grave. I'm not even saying which one's true or which one's false in a conversation at that point. I'm just saying they can't both be true at the same time. Either He did die or

He didn't die. And people say, "Well, you can't really know what's true. There's no absolute truth." And you just say, "Does that include the statement you just made? Because you're denying your own statement: There is no truth." So, anyway, there are other things we could talk about there. Like, ten of you got that.

Talking with Open-Minded Olivia, explain the pursuing love of God in the perceived narrowness of the gospel. People say, "Well, why would God only make one way?" When once we realize the whole story of the gospel and have an opportunity to talk about that, we realize the question is not why is there only one way—the question is, why is there any way at all? This is God's love for us that He's made a way.

And then talking with Nominal Nancy—nominal Christians—so people who are Christians in name only. Point out how privatized faith in a resurrected Christ is practically impossible. It is impossible to believe in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as the only way to be restored to God—to believe that and then for that to have no effect in your life.

The Necessity of Faith ...

Knowing this gospel thread ...

All that leads to the necessity of faith, how we can be restored to God only through faith in Jesus. We turn from our sin and ourselves and we trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Weaving this gospel thread into everyday conversations ...

So this is why I want to encourage you to take advantage of every opportunity you have to tell your story of how you turned and trusted in Christ, repented and believed. So keep it simple. This is not an exhausting, circuitous trip down spiritual memory lane with a half a dozen plot lines, sixteen main characters, complete with all the aisles you've walked in church and all the angels who have appeared to you in your bedroom.

Just keep it simple. Keep it focused on the greatness of God and the threads of the gospel, weaving them in. Keep it understandable. So I would not recommend talking about how you've been justified by the Holy Ghost when He regenerated your heart, revealing your depravity before His divinity, restoring your connectivity with the sovereign King of Christianity because of Christ's propitiation for your sin. Like, that's just not going to make sense. So be humble and prayerful. Be passionate. Be yourself.

Talking about restoration. In conversations about guilt, talk about forgiveness in Christ. In conversations about shame, talk about honor in Christ. In conversations about fear, talk about freedom in Christ. Talking about turning—point to the mercy of Christ when people around you see their sin. God is bringing people to the end of themselves. Don't tell them to believe in themselves. Tell them to go to Christ. Point to the presence of Christ when people around you come to the end of themselves. And then talk about trusting. Encourage people around you to see the Lordship of Christ, to see the Lordship of Christ. And urge people around you to receive the love of Christ.

Then I put in here, particularly when talking with your children about faith, maximize interaction. So when you're talking with children about the gospel, ask open-ended questions, not yes and no questions. I remember I was sitting near the front in a worship service, and a guest preacher said, "All right, now we're going to have invitation time at the end of the service." And he said, "Some of you may need to come to Christ." And then he said, "But some of you need to just go to other people in the church and just thank them for who they are, just to encourage them."

And so the pastor was standing down near the front, and I was a little kid—I don't remember how old I was, ten or eleven—and I saw the pastor was standing there all by himself. And I was thinking, "Oh, I mean, somebody's got to thank him for what he's doing." And so I get out from my seat and I come up to him, and I look up -- and he's an older brother -- and I said, "Pastor, thank you for all you do." And I could tell—the music was loud or whatever—he didn't really understand me. And he said, "Say that again." So I said, "Well, thank you for all you do." And he said, "So, you want to rededicate your life?" I was like, "Yes, sir."

And so he sits me down in the front row, I start filling out a card, and I mean, my parents come down, they stand with me at the front, and they're in tears, everybody is going, "Oh!" I mean, "Look at the wayward ten-year-old who's back!" And I was just trying to thank him. So clarity of communication is what we're after with kids. Utilize illustration with kids. Use repetition. Constantly emphasize the threads of the gospel all day long with your kids, and continually encourage a posture of turning and trusting.

You know, it may not be discernible exactly the moment when a child comes to faith in Christ. A 40-year-old who's been a drug addict and comes to faith in Christ—there's going to be a pretty radical turning there that might not look exactly the same with an eight-year-old who's not a drug addict at that point. And that's okay. I want my kids to have a really boring testimony, where they can hardly remember a time when they weren't turning and trusting, when they weren't repenting and believing. So just constantly encourage that kind of posture.

And then what about talking with cultural Christians about faith? I just encourage you to ask thought-provoking questions that kind of get below the surface. Avoid or at least clearly define over-familiar terms. So, "Do you believe in Jesus?" Ah, everybody in Birmingham—well, 90% of the people in Birmingham—believe in Jesus. Big deal. Most every intoxicated person I've ever met on the street believes in Jesus. What does it mean to believe? Ask thought provoking questions.

Invite them to study the Bible with you. So you walk through the Bible where you begin to uncover what biblical Christianity is, and people hopefully begin to see where their hearts are in Christ. Expose them to good gospel-saturated community and resources. Boldly and graciously call them to turn and trust. Call people out of nominal Christianity. Intentionally and humbly weave the gospel threads.

The Urgency of Eternity ...

Knowing this gospel thread ...

All that leading to the urgency of eternity. Our eternal destiny hinges on our response to Jesus. Hell is a dreadful reality to those who turn from Jesus, a place of continual rebellion, final separation and eternal duration. Heaven is a glorious reality for those who trust in Jesus, a place of full reconciliation, complete resurrection, and ultimate reunion. So we're asking people, "Will you turn away from Jesus or will you trust in Jesus?"

Weaving this gospel thread into everyday conversations ...

So weave in this gospel thread. Minimize your conversation about temporal things and maximize your conversation about eternal things. Talk about what matters. Talk about hell. Speak about God's character with humble confidence. Speak about God's judgment with healthy fear. Don't speak lightly about hell. "We had a hell of a time." "You played a hell of

a game." "That was a hell of a song." We have no idea the gravity of what we're talking about. Speak about God's wrath with honest compassion.

Talk about heaven. Talk like this world is not your hope. Live like this world is not your home. We undercut the gospel when we're storing up all our treasures on earth. We're living for another home. Talk about your anticipation of being with God. Talk about your realization that dying is gain.

And when it comes down to it, we're not just sharing the gospel for information. We're sharing the gospel, calling people to make a decision here. So CALL-ing people to turn and trust.

Clarify the gospel. So you share the gospel with somebody. You're able to bring all these threads together and ask things like, "Do you have any questions about that? Do you understand that?" If they have questions, you dive in. If they don't, okay then, ask. Ask a person if they have any questions. Clarify the gospel, make sure the gospel's out there, ask a person if they have any questions, have they ever turned from their sin and themselves. "Have you ever turned from your sin and yourself and trusted in Jesus as Savior and Lord?" Ask if they would like to do that.

Now, maybe they'll say no. That's okay. They know the gospel; they've heard it from you. They know they can come back to you with any questions. If they say yes, well, L—let the Holy Spirit work. So this is all the acrostic C.A.L.L. The first L, let the Holy Spirit work. Only the Spirit of God can draw someone to Christ. So let the Holy Spirit work. Don't feel like you've got to manipulate a situation. And then in that situation, if they say, "Yes, I'd like to trust in Christ," well then invite them to call out to God to save them.

This is where I would say that I don't think it's necessary to say, "Okay, say these words." If God has opened their eyes to the gospel and they understand who God is, who they are, what Christ has done, what it means to turn and trust, then it's not about getting the words right at that point. This is a heart condition. Invite them to call out to God to save them. Or be willing to let them be alone with God, if that's best. Maybe they need to spend some time alone with God, wrestling over these things. But we're still calling people to trust in Christ. And then L—lead them as a new follower of Christ. We don't want to manufacture decisions. We want to make disciples.

We daily run this race for the glory of our God.

All that going back to 1 Corinthians 9, we daily run this race for the glory of our God. First Corinthians 9 ends with Paul using an illustration about runners running to receive the prize. And so this is a race for me. There are daily requirements in this race: sacrificial self-denial, stringent self-discipline, and single-minded devotion. He says in Acts 20:24, "*I do not account my life of any value.*" But one thing—one thing—"I want to finish the task and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me, the task of testifying to the gospel of His grace. This is what I'm after. This is what I'm focused on."

And the ultimate rewards to this race are others experiencing the eternal joy of salvation and us fulfilling the earthly purpose of our salvation. We will fulfill the earthly purpose of our salvation. Here's the deal. I'll make this really quick. Get the picture. I'm in high school. I'm on the baseball team. We're horrible. I'm horrible at baseball. We're playing another team that's horrible. We get to the end of the season, and it's a close game all the way through. We get to the last inning where it's all tied up. We hold them from scoring in the top of the last inning. We're coming into the bottom of the last inning, which means we've got a chance to win.

Our coach meets us out in front of the dugout. He does this when there's something really important. He says, "All right, guys. We've got a chance to win this game, and we need to do it right here. Because if we don't, we're going to go into extra innings and what's going to happen?" We say, "We're going to lose." He said, "Yes, that's right. We're going to lose. That's what we normally do." So he said, "Here's the plan. David, you're up first this inning. We need you to get to first. Once you get to first we're going to steal you over to second. Once you get to second, all we need is one hit and you're around third, come home, and we'll win the game."

I'm thinking, yeah right. One, we don't win games. And two, it's dependent on me getting to first base, which doesn't happen. So, all the other guys believed this can happen. So they're like, "C'mon Dave. C'mon." So I'm putting the helmet on, I'm grabbing a bat, and I'm just walking up to the plate, just praying, "All right, I know, God, you love people on that team too, but this would be really good if you could give me a hit right here."

And so I walk up there and stand up to bat. By the grace of Almighty God, I draw a walk. So apparently it was too much for the God of the universe to allow me to get a hit, so He made sure that ball didn't come near me. So I draw a walk. So I go to first base. I get there. I see the third base coach give me the steal sign. I'm thinking, I like the walking thing better and now I've got to run. I take the lead off first base, pitcher winds and throws, I turn and I start running. Start hauling towards second base. I get about five feet away, I start this beautiful head-first slide. What do you think? Safe or out?

Well, safe. Who said out? I mean, c'mon. I've got wheels, man. And the story would be horrible if it ended at this point. Like, just go with me, all right? So I get to second. The next guy up to bat strikes out. Big loser. Didn't walk like I did. So, now if you know anything about baseball, if it's going to happen it needs to happen right here. This is the moment where it needs to happen, because if they get a second out and they don't have to worry about me, they can kind of relax. If it's going to happen it needs to happen right here.

So I'm taking my lead off second, guy up to bat, pitcher winds, throws, he hits it in between the third base and the shortstop. And so I turn and I watch the ball go in front of me into left field. And I start running toward third. And I look up and see the third base coach, and you'll never guess what he's doing. He is waving his arm, like all the way down the third base line, like faster than I ever could. "Why don't you do this, Coach?" And so I think, okay, touch third base. And I look up. And 90 feet in front of me is a guy who's a lot bigger than I am, and he's wearing all kinds of equipment, and he is out, mask off, and he's standing over home plate.

And so I decided, this is my moment. And so I start running as hard as I can, and it's like a movie. All the guys are out of the dugout, jumping up, yelling. All the fans are going nuts. There are only like two people there, but they're going nuts. All our parents wouldn't even come watch us play. We were horrible. We were horrible. So I'm running. I get five feet away and I start this head-first slide, and I'm not going to ask you what you think happened. I get in, I brush my hand across the plate as the catcher catches the ball and puts it down on my shoulder. We both look up in the dust, and the umpire, yes, "Safe! Safe!"

The guys come running out of the dugout. They jump on top of me. It was like we won the World Series. We won a game. A game. It was the only glorious moment in my entire sports career, which was right there. And it's so much fun to relive it.

So, let me ask you this question. Let me ask you a question. What would you think of me as a baseball player if, when I was rounding third base, I thought, "I'm kind of hungry right now; I could use a hotdog"? And I'd just go running over and get a hotdog at the concession stand. What would you think of me as a baseball player if I was rounding third base and I look up at the coach, see him passionately going down the line, and I think, "I've just not spent a lot of time with the coach recently." And I just stopped and put my arm around him, like, "Coach, how are you? How's your wife and your kids?"

Or what would you think of me—I'm rounding third base, and as a high school boy, I look up and I look over in the stands, and it just so happens an attractive girl has come to watch us play. And I think, "She looks better than he does." And so I go running over to her and just start a conversation. "Yeah, nice walk, huh?" So, what would you think of me if I did something like that? You'd think, "Ah, it's no wonder you don't win. You missed the whole point. Like, when the game came down to this moment, you got distracted and you missed the whole point."

So this is where followers of Christ, all of us who are in Christ, Christ in us, with Christ, He's with us—I want to call 60,000 of us tonight not to miss the point. We're in a world where people are on a road that leads to hell. We've got the gospel. Run the race. None of us has been saved to be sidelined in this race. None of us has been filled with the Spirit of God to be a spectator in this race. God has put us in the places in the world He's put us for a reason, for the spread of the gospel.

And so I want to call you. I want to call you on a daily basis to wake up and say, "How can I make this gospel known? How can I rearrange my life and run this race, spreading the gospel for the glory of God?" So, that's where I want to leave this one. And let me do this. As we go to break, can you just picture one person in your mind who doesn't know Christ? I hadn't planned on doing this, but can you picture one person in your mind who you know doesn't know Christ?

I want to pray for you, for courage to share the gospel with them this week? I mean, you've got a perfect opportunity even Sunday—Easter Sunday. This is the one Sunday where people actually expect us to invite them to church. I wonder why we don't if we don't. So, maybe this Sunday, would you pray for courage to share that? Would 60,000 of us filled with the Holy Spirit of God just go out with one person on our heart and share the gospel with them this week?

God, I pray for that. I pray for that. God, I'm praying for myself. I have a couple people right now in my mind. I pray for courage to share the gospel with them. I pray for the people in minds all across this room, and pray that over the next week that you would send out 60,000 of us, filled with your Holy Spirit, to run this race. And we pray for the salvation of friends this week. We pray for the salvation of family members, for the salvation of co-workers, neighbors. God, we pray you would draw people to Christ through us this week, and you would enable us by your grace.

Give us courage, God. Give us courage we pray to experience the purpose for which you've left us on the planet. Help us not to miss the point, we pray. Help us not, we pray. My life, our lives—help us not to get to the end and miss the point when we look back. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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