

## Threads

The Character of God

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### **THE CHARACTER OF GOD** **Isaiah 43:15; Proverbs 17:15; Titus 2:11**

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, please turn with me to Isaiah 43. Feel free to use the Table of Contents in the Bible to find the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, and then we're going to be in Chapter 43. And let me invite you also to pull out the Worship Guide that you received when you came in, which has notes that will guide our time together this morning. And let me invite you to pull out this threads guide, too, this little booklet that hopefully you picked up as you came in. If you didn't pick up one of these up, it would be helpful for you to have one. Our ushers are going to be walking up and down the aisles, and if you missed one when you were coming in, just raise your hand, and they will get one to you. I mentioned last week that we'll actually be referencing this every week, so let me really encourage you to bring this back with you next week, and the next week, and the next week. Maybe just keep it in your Bible so that you remember it, because we're going to be referencing it literally every week in this series.

Just as a reminder, if you were here last week, or if you were not here last week, to kind of catch up you to speed -- last week, we started an eight-week series together that we're calling "Threads." And we're specifically encouraging one another to share the gospel with people around us. If you open up this booklet, you'll see on the right panel, "Weaving Gospel Threads". And we finished our time together last week actually writing down the names of people in our sphere of influence who we have opportunities to share the gospel with -- people that we are praying will come to know Christ. Even during this next two months, the list is made up of people that we are working to see come to Christ. So if you weren't here last week and you are a follower of Christ, let me encourage you to take this booklet and write down the names of people who are in your sphere of influence who don't know the gospel. And start praying specifically for them by name, and for opportunities to weave threads of the gospel into your conversations with them, which is what we're going to talk about today.

Now I mentioned last week that this might seem a little weird to some, particularly if you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus. You may be thinking, "I'm really uncomfortable. Does this mean my name is now on someone's target list?" And if that's you, I mentioned this last week: Let me just encourage you to think about it this way. If this Bible is true, and if God loves you so much that He sent His Son to die on a cross for you, to save you from your sins, to save you from eternal death in hell, to experience everlasting life in heaven. If that's true, then wouldn't you want someone to love you enough to share that with you? Think about it: If the Bible is true, then it'd be the height of hate for a Christian you know not to share that with you.

I want to show you this. This is a quick video clip from Penn Gillette, a famous magician in Vegas and other places, known as an outspoken atheist, and crude in a lot of ways (this will likely be the only Penn Gillette video I ever show in a sermon), but he was recounting a story of a guy who kindly, gently, generously gave him a Bible after a show, and he was commenting on how much he respected the guy for doing this. And I want you to listen to

what he said. This an avowed atheist talking about proselytizing, trying to lead other people to convert, in this case, to Christianity. And proselytize is spelled wrong in this video, but we didn't make it, so we're stuck with it. But just watch this with me.

Interesting, huh? An atheist saying, "How much do you have to hate somebody not to share the gospel with them?" So Christian, follower of Jesus, let's love people enough to share the good news of the gospel with them. If we're going to be intentional about anything, let's be intentional about this, because eternity's at stake. Let's not just talk about sharing the gospel during this series; let's do it. Let's join in what God is doing all around us – this is what we talked about last week – God loves people...and God is moving in the hearts of people all around us to draw them to Himself.

You know I taught on that last week on looking and listening for evidence of where God is at work in people around us and then joining Him in what He's doing. And then, in the middle of this week, I had a friend in the city who's not a follower of Christ come up to me out of the blue and say, "David, I've got some questions about religion. Would you be willing to sit down and talk about those questions with me?" And I told him, "No, man, I don't have time for that." Just kidding. I said, "Absolutely, man," and we're setting a time to get together.

But I walked away from that conversation thinking, "What I'm preaching on really works!" Now I'm not saying it's always that easy or that obvious, but God is working around us, and He's put people in every one of our paths – where we work and where we live and where we shop and where we eat and where we play ball or work out or whatever it is – God is drawing people to Himself. God wants to save people from their sins. He loves them. And He loves us enough to involve us in His work in their lives.

So here's what I want to do. This week, we actually set up an email account for you to share stories of how God is at work during this series. These are stories of opportunities you have to share the gospel with other people and what happens in those opportunities. Maybe they go great and someone that you are praying for comes to Christ. Or maybe they don't go so great, but you learn something in the process. So if you have a story – any story – from this past week or this next week or any week during this series, then I want to encourage you to email us. You can be as general or specific as you want to be. And as you do this, then throughout this series I'll share some of those stories so we can encourage one another. And I won't use your name or even the name of the person you shared with so that this can be totally anonymous, but this is a way that hopefully we can spur one another on. We're praying that people we know will come to Christ over the next couple of months. And we're working for them to come to know Christ. So let's share what that looks like.

## **Ultimate Questions ...**

All right, now let me invite you to look at the front of that booklet that I referenced, along with your notes, where you'll see five of what I'm calling here, "Ultimate Questions". These are five questions that people around us, that people in the world, are asking. Five ultimate questions that shape our view of the world. One: Who is God? Does God exist? And if He does, what is He like? Who is God, and then second, who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? Do I have inherent worth or value, or am I simply the product of evolutionary processes, here one day and gone tomorrow in some kind of circle of life?

All religions in the world have different answers to these fundamental questions about who God is and who we are, which leads to the third ultimate question here: How is Jesus

unique? You've got all kinds of religions in the world – all kinds of religious teachers – aren't they all fundamentally saying the same thing? Is one superior to the others? Or is this just a cafeteria line where you can just pick whichever one works best for you? Are we followers of Jesus just because we were born into this section of the world where there are churches everywhere, and we'd believe something different if we were born in India where there's Hindu temples everywhere, or in the Middle East where there's mosques everywhere? Is there anything that is really unique about Jesus that sets Him apart as true and other religious teachers as false, or is He just another good teacher on the landscape of human history?

And if He is unique, then what does it mean to follow Jesus? After all, there's a lot of people who claim to be Christians, but their lives look just like the rest of the world. This is why I wrote this book, *Follow Me*, that came out this last week. I am convinced, and I am burdened by the reality that scores of people here and around the world culturally identify themselves as Christians who biblically are not followers of Christ; these are masses of people who claim to be Christians who are not followers of Jesus.

Some say, "Is that possible?" Absolutely it is; according to Jesus, it's probable. In Matthew 7, Jesus says, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* He says, *"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles, and I will tell them, 'I never knew you; away from me, you evildoers.'"* Oh, those verses haunt me as a pastor. To think that there are many – many people, Jesus says – who are sitting in church on Sunday (maybe here this morning) who will be shocked to stand before Jesus one day and hear Him say, "I never knew you." So what does it mean to know Jesus? What does it really mean to follow Jesus? That's a huge question.

And then a final ultimate question: Why is this important? Why does this matter? Is religion that important? Is Christianity that important? Why even talk about these things? And these are real questions; real questions in our own minds and hearts and lives, and real questions in other peoples' minds and hearts and lives.

## **Gospel Threads ...**

And the Bible, specifically the gospel, addresses each of these questions. All five of these questions have five distinct points, in what we're calling, "Gospel Threads". The gospel speaks about the Character of God, who He is and what He is like. Who is God? And then the gospel answers the "Who am I?" question with the Sinfulness of Man. The gospel addresses who we are by describing how we have been created in God's image, but we have been corrupted by our sin. This creates a major problem for all of us and for the world. Clearly, any reasonable person can look around in the world and see that things are not the way they're supposed to be. Something is wrong, and the gospel says that what is wrong is the sinfulness of man.

And then, springing from that, the gospel points us to the Sufficiency of Christ. The gospel says that when we understand who God is and who we are, and we correctly diagnose what is wrong in the world, then we see that indeed, Jesus is unique. And He alone is sufficient to meet our deepest need. How, then, is that need met? And the gospel answers that question with the Necessity of Faith. The gospel tells us that sinful men and women can be restored to God only through faith in Christ. And the gospel tells us what kind of faith that is. It's

more than mere intellectual assent or casual association; it's a turning from ourselves and our sin and a trusting in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

This all leads to the Urgency of Eternity. And the gospel tells us that every single person's eternal destiny hinges on whether or not they respond in faith to what Christ has done to restore sinful men and women to God. Eternity is at stake with how people respond to this gospel, which is why we share it. This is why we put aside fear of awkwardness or fear of rejection or fear of whatever to speak this gospel to people who don't know it. And my goal in this series is to help us think through how we can share this gospel every single day. And that's the purpose behind this imagery of threads.

So I've told the story before of a particular trip overseas that transformed my perspective on sharing the gospel. I was in a country where conversion to Christianity is illegal. It is illegal to share the gospel with a Muslim in this Middle Eastern nation, and it is illegal for a Muslim to become a Christian. And as a result, you might expect the gospel to be silenced in this country, but that is not the case. I met and served alongside a small group of Christians who are making disciples and multiplying churches in this country. They were not flashy. They were as plain as you can get. And they're not even missionaries in the sense that you and I often think of traditional missionaries. Instead, they're businessmen and businesswomen running a successful business in this Middle Eastern nation, and they employ Muslim men and women. And along the way, they share the gospel every single day with the people they work with.

Now you might think, "I thought it was illegal for them to share the gospel, so how can they do that?" And here's the way they do it and the way they describe it. They said to me, "David, our goal every day is to weave threads of the gospel into the fabric of every interaction we have with Muslims. In every conversation, in every business dealing, at every meal, in every meeting, we look for opportunities to speak about who God is, how God loves, what God's doing in the world, and ultimately what God's done for us in Christ."

Now not every conversation involves a full-on, hour-long gospel explanation. Instead, they simply try to saturate every one of their interactions with various strands of the gospel, like weaving various colored threads into a quilt. And they said, "Our prayer is that in time, God will open the eyes of Muslim men and women around us to behold the tapestry of the gospel that has been woven before them, and they will come to Christ."

And as I watched this "gospel weaving" in action, I was amazed at how natural (or should I say supernatural) "gospel sharing" could be. In casual interactions, whether at workplaces or in homes, I listened to these brothers and sisters share stories about God's Son, share truths from God's Word. I sat in a shop where Mark, one of the brothers in this country, was talking with a Muslim shop owner and sharing about how Jesus was working in his life and family that week. Another time, while we were waiting to eat dinner with a Muslim family in their home, I listened to Kim, one of the sisters in this country, just share about the selfless love God has for us, and how that love has been demonstrated to us in Jesus.

One night really late, I found myself with Robert, another brother in this country, talking with a group of men about the deity of Christ. This doctrine is for many Muslims the major obstacle to coming to Christ. Most Muslims consider it blasphemous and offensive that God would become a man. And I've got to admit that I was a little nervous as we sat in this upstairs room at two o'clock in the morning, surrounded by Muslim men I'd just met, in a country where it's illegal to share the gospel, and we're discussing what is the most contentious, provocative, and even insulting truth of the gospel.

But these Muslim were open to listening because of the way that people like Mark, Kim, and Robert were living their lives. They had earned the right to be heard with the way they worked together in this business. They were honest in their work, and they honored the people they worked with. They cared for each other and for the people around them in poignant ways. When their employees went through hard times, these brothers and sisters would show them God's love. When coworkers were sick or in need, these brothers and sisters would ask if they could pray for them. And most of the time, the coworkers gladly said yes, and they would pray for them in Jesus' name.

The gospel – the good news of who God is and who we are and what God has done in Christ and what it means to follow Him and why that is important had been woven into the fabric of every interaction Mark, Kim, and Robert had with these Muslims. And as a result, people were coming to faith in Christ. Muslims would secretly pull Mark and Kim and Robert aside to ask more questions about who Jesus is and how Jesus saves. And one by one, God was drawing coworkers, and their families, and their acquaintances to Himself.

Now it wasn't easy, by any means. The reality was, the more people came to Christ, the more at risk they all found themselves. But the gospel couldn't be stopped in the lives of brothers and sisters who were weaving it into the fabric of their lives and conversations everyday.

And so that is my prayer for you. And that is my prayer for us. That each of us individually and all of us collectively as a church would be a gospel-sharing people on a daily basis. We know who God is, we know what man's ultimate problem is, we know who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, we know how someone can be saved, and we know why this is important. Every Christian knows these things. So then, let's weave these things, these truths, these threads into the fabric of our everyday conversations, and let's pray that God will open the eyes of people around us to see the tapestry of his glory and grace that has been woven in front of them. I hope that in this imagery, and in this series, we will see how accessible sharing the gospel is for all of us all day long.

## **The Character of God** ***Knowing this Gospel Thread ...***

So what we're going to do over the next five weeks is hit on each one of these threads: The character of God, the sinfulness of man, the sufficiency of Christ, the necessity of faith, and the urgency of eternity. So we're starting today with the character of God. And what we'll do every week is spend time thinking about knowing this gospel thread. And then we'll spend time practically thinking through ways to weave this gospel thread into the fabric of our everyday conversations.

And the purpose of this booklet is to be a resource for you – to remind you of each of these threads, and my encouragement for you is to memorize them. Memorize these five core gospel truths that are on the inside flap, and then memorize the Bible verses that go with them, so that they are a part of the fabric of who you are. Memorize them personally, and as a family. Our kids have already started on Isaiah 43:15, the first verse we're looking at this morning. I want this gospel to be woven into the fabric of their vocabulary and woven into the fabric of my vocabulary, and our vocabulary as a church and in our lives in this world.

### **God is the holy, just, and gracious Creator of all things.**

So, with the time we've got left, let's think about this first thread: The character of God. It can be summed up in this truth: God is the holy, just, and gracious Creator of all things. God is the starting point of the gospel, and if we are not clear on who God is, then we will (and other people will) never understand the gospel.

Now obviously we live in a world that has a warped understanding of God. So we really can't assume anything at this point. I've had conversations with people about the gospel or Christianity or even religion in general, and people will say, "Well, I don't believe in God." Whenever someone says that, the first thing I always ask them is, "Well, what kind of God do you not believe in?" And many times, they'll say something like, "Well, I don't believe in some god who's up in the sky looking down on us waiting for us to do something wrong so He can pounce on us." And I'll say, "Well I don't believe in that god either; let me tell you about the God I do believe in."

So here's the question: "What are you going to say at that point?" Who is the God that you believe in? Amidst all the unfathomable characteristics of God, how do you begin to describe Him to someone? And this is a sentence that I believe sums up the essentials that we (and others) need to understand about God in order to understand the gospel.

### **God is holy.**

There are three main attributes of God's character that I think are important to focus on. One, God is holy. Let's read Isaiah 43:15. God says, *"I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King."* That's an easy one to memorize: *"I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King."*

Now what does it mean for God to be holy? It means that God is perfectly unique, completely separate, and absolutely pure. He is unlike us; He is incomparable and unique. He is separate from us. In other words, He is of another kind. Yes, we are made in His image, and so we are a reflection of Him in one sense, but He is different from us. And He is absolutely pure. There is nothing wrong in God. Everything God is and everything God does is right. This is what it means for Him to be holy.

### **God is just.**

Now turn over to Proverbs 17:15 for this next one. We're going to talk more about why each of these are particularly important and how they relate to each other in these gospel threads as we go along, but let's just get them out there on the table. First, God is holy. And then second, God is just. Let's read Proverbs 17:15: *"He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD."*

This verse is so key in understanding the gospel, and here's why. This verse makes clear that God is a good judge. And as a good judge, God justifies the innocent and condemns the guilty. As a good judge, God justifies the innocent and condemns the guilty. And as a good judge, God is outraged by injustice; injustice is an abomination to Him. He detests and hates injustice. And so He detests those who say to the guilty (the wicked), "You are innocent; you are good," or those who say to the innocent, "You are guilty" – those who say to the good, "You are wicked." That is an abomination to God because God is a good Judge; He is a just judge. He, like any good judge, says to the guilty, "You are guilty." And He says to the innocent, "You are innocent." He is a perfect Judge, a just Judge.

Now like I mentioned, we're going to unpack these even more when we get to other threads, but I need to jump ahead just a bit here at this point because next week we're going to talk about how we have all sinned against God, how we are all guilty before God.

So follow this: God Himself says that if you justify the guilty (if you say the guilty are innocent), then you are an abomination to the Lord. That's not good. And it begs the question, "How then can God justify the guilty? For as soon as He does, He is an abomination to Himself." How can God look at guilty sinners and say, "Innocent," and still be just? This is the ultimate question of the entire Bible.

Put it in contemporary terms, if there was a judge in a courtroom today who knowingly said to guilty criminals, "You are innocent," then we would have that judge off the bench in a heartbeat. Why? Because he's not just; he's not right. Do you see this: God's forgiveness of sinners is a threat to His character. If God just overlooks sin, then His justice and holiness are completely compromised, and He is no longer God. John Stott said, "Forgiveness [of sins] is for God the profoundest of problems."

### **God is gracious.**

Now we'll see as we progress in these gospel threads how this problem is solved, but we've to see, to feel the tension here. God is holy, and God is just, and that then leads us to the third attribute of God that we need to communicate clearly in the gospel: God is gracious. One more place to turn here, to the end of the New Testament: Titus 2:11. So we've got two verses so far: God is holy – Isaiah 43:15 – "*I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.*" Not a long verse; I really wanted to keep these simple and clear.

So God is holy and God is just. Proverbs 17:15, "*He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.*" This is a verse that shows us that God is a good judge who justifies the innocent and condemns the guilty. That then leads to this third verse, and this third attribute of God: God is gracious. Titus 2:11 says, "*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people...*"

Now what does "grace" mean? This is one of those words like "holy" that can seem ambiguous to us, but this word is so important. This one word is what I would say separates Christianity from every other religion in the world. The story is told of C.S. Lewis walking into a meeting where religious scholars from around the world were debating whether or not there was anything truly unique about Christianity, and they turned to C.S. Lewis and asked him, "What do you think?" And C.S. Lewis responded, "That's easy. The answer is grace."

Here's what it means for God to be gracious: It means that God shows the guilty free and unmerited favor. He not only spares the guilty what they do deserve; He gives the guilty that which they could never deserve. And why this is so important is because religions all around the world are built on doing certain things, taking certain steps, observing certain rules and regulations in order to get to God, in order to earn the favor of God, in order to appease gods. And the message of the gospel is that God does not require anything in order for you to earn His favor. He shows free and unmerited favor those who could never earn it. "*The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.*"

## ***Weaving this Gospel Thread ...***

Oh, this is good news. So how, then, can we weave this gospel thread into the fabric of our everyday conversations? And this is where I want you to think practically about opportunities you will have today with your family, at lunch, around friends, with your neighbors, tomorrow when you go to work, and tomorrow night, when you're hanging out at the ball field, or wherever else you go, and whoever you are around today, tomorrow, this week. Remember Mark, Kim, and Robert in the Middle East? They were looking intentionally

for opportunities to weave the gospel into the fabric of every conversation they have. So how can we weave the character of God into all of our conversations?

### **Talking about God as Creator ...**

And I've put a list here of just some ways this could look, but I'm sure there's tons more. Think about it. How can we talk about God as Creator? Think about practical ways to let this thread of the gospel infuse your conversations with your kids and your colleagues and your friends and your neighbors. Acknowledge the glory of God in creation every chance you have. This is the beauty. Connect this with what we were talking about last week. God is at work, revealing Himself to people all around us in creation. The Bible says in Romans 1, *"Since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."* In other words, God is right now and at every moment at work in creation revealing His character to people. So join with what He is doing, and point people to His revelation in creation. Instead of saying, "Look at that sunset; it is majestic," say, "Look at the glory of God in that sunset; He is 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 a radically new meaning when you are 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 like God is present in your life. If someone asks, "What's going on in your life," say, "Well, God is working in my life in this way..." Think about it: This simple phrase – pointing to the work of God – all of the sudden signals to an unbeliever that this person actually believes in God. And not just in God, but in a personal God.

Maybe even a good God who is blessing me in this way... You're now drawing the attention in your life to God. There's something biblical about talking like this. How about when you're making a tough life decision and you're talking about your options, it's a the perfect opportunity to say, "God is leading me in this direction..." Or, "God is guiding me to make this decision..." Or instead of, "I'm learning this or that," say, "God is teaching me this truth or that truth." Or "God is showing me this realization..." Nothing is by chance, Christian. Right? Nothing is coincidence. The sovereignty of God is on display in every facet of our lives, so let this gospel truth – God as Creator – infuse our daily conversations.

You know, sometimes people say, "I just can't share the gospel with other people because I haven't been trained to do that." And that's just not true. How many grandparents have gotten training on how to talk about their grandkids? No training necessary, right? What's on your heart and what's on your mind comes out of your mouth. So let the reality of God's presence transform your conversations. We have this dangerous tendency to compartmentalize Christianity. We put God over here in a Sunday morning box, and that's when we talk about Him, but we rarely mention Him otherwise. Ladies and gentlemen, He is our life. What's on our heart and what's on our mind comes out of our mouth. Acknowledge the presence of God in specific facets of your life.

### **Talking about the holiness of God ...**

Oh, I hope you are seeing, how natural this can be. Second, talking about the holiness of God, you say, "Well, how do I talk about God's holiness in everyday conversation? Holy is not a word that a lot of people use." Well, think about it in these ways: One, Speak about God with reverential awe. Speak about God with reverence, with awe. Speak about God with a clear sense that you are talking about the Creator of the universe who is perfectly unique, completely separate, and absolutely pure.



And at the same time, speak about yourself with genuine humility. Let your awareness of God's holiness create a genuine sense of humility in your tone of voice and in the things you say. May it be clear in your speech that you are small, and God is big. Prideful speech always undercuts the gospel.

Speak about God with reverential awe and speak about yourself with genuine humility. Draw attention to attributes that distinguish God from people in this world. I was in a conversation the other day about the challenges of parenting toddlers and teenagers, when and how to discipline and some of the frustrations that sometimes arise, and I just said, "What it must be like for God the Father on high, whose children are always wandering from Him, and how He lovingly, perfectly disciplines us all, and yet how His heart must be grieved by continual sin." It was just an opportunity to point out how God is different from us. He is a perfect Father who loves perfectly and always disciplines rightly. He is separate from us, different than us.

Draw attention to attributes that distinguish God from people in this world, and draw attention to ways in which God reigns above the gods of this world. All kinds of gods are being worshiped in this world. In some cultures, there are idols made of gold and wood and silver. In our culture there are idols/gods of money and materialism and sex and sports and success, fame, appearance and notoriety. So in a world full of idols, draw attention to the supreme glory and satisfaction that are found in God, more than all the best things of this world put together. Let the holiness of God infuse your daily conversation.

### **Talking about the justice of God ...**

Then, how do we talk about the justice of God? Well, think about it. Look for opportunities to express confidence in God before others even when things go wrong. When something goes wrong in our lives or in the world around us, when injustice occurs, confess confidence in the justice of God. He is just, and His justice will reign in the end. There is a confidence here that cannot be expressed by the atheist.

Express confidence in God before others when things go wrong, and express remorse before God and others when you do something wrong. Again, we undercut the gospel when we respond to our own wrongdoing with pride or with all-out denial. When we realize we have a God who is our Judge and we can hide nothing from Him, it changes the way we react at home or at work when we do something wrong. Before others, acknowledge your guilt and your need for forgiveness from a just God. Don't live and don't speak like your sin won't be found out.

The third one is really important in light of an almost trendy focus on issues of social justice in our culture today, a focus that is good when we're talking about combating poverty and fighting against sex trafficking or alleviating hunger. These are all issues of injustice that we as God's people need to address, but we must not address any of these things apart from the gospel. So as you work for justice in the world, speak about the Judge of the world. This is so key, and we've talked about the example before: We don't want to only give clean water to starving people while they are on their way to hell. We want to give clean water around the world while we tell them about the God who is the defender of the weak and the Savior of their souls.

Oh, I think about how you as a church have responded to needs of children in our city and the ways you have stepped up to care for foster children and foster families, and in many cases to adopt. And I'll never forget the first informational meeting we had here in this room, and hundreds of you came pouring into that meeting to say, "We want to do something." And I remember standing in the back of the room with a DHR worker, and she

had tears in her eyes, and she asked me, "Pastor, what made you decide to do this, to care for these children?" And I looked back at her and said, "I didn't decide to do this. God decided that hurting children were important and valuable in His eyes, and He cares for the fatherless." And it opened up a window for me to begin sharing the whole gospel with her. As we work for justice in the world, we speak about the Judge of the world.

And as you observe evil and suffering in the world, speak with hope about the world to come. The gospel reminds us that history is moving to a goal. And specifically, the justice of God reminds us that God and good will eventually triumph. Evil and injustice will one day be disposed of authoritatively, decisively, and finally. That's good news; so speak it.

### **Talking about the grace of God ...**

This then leads to talking about the grace of God. Oh, we have opportunities all day long to talk about God's grace. Constantly point out evidences of God's grace in and around you. Evidences of God's grace abound, among both Christians and non-Christians. God gives grace to all men everywhere in many ways. Our every breath at this moment is evidence of God's grace. This is why we pray before we eat, because we acknowledge that the food in front of us is evidence of God's grace. So look around you at all times and point out evidences of God's grace.

And related to that, consistently credit God as the source of everything good in and around you. When something good happens, thank God. G.K. Chesterton said, "The loneliest moment for an atheist is when he is filled with gratitude and has no one to thank." Express gratitude to God for good around you, for good in you. When someone compliments you, point them to the goodness of God.

Now we need to be careful in these things not to go overboard. Remember the story about the preacher who was told after a sermon by a church member, "That was a good sermon," and he responded, "It was all God." The church member looked back at him and quickly said, "Well, it wasn't that good." The reality is, anything that is good in you, and anything that is good in me comes from God. So point to His goodness. When things go well for you at work, verbally acknowledge the goodness of God to people around you. When things go well for you at home, in this or that area of life, verbally speak about the goodness of God to your family and your friends and your neighbors.

And along the way, continually acknowledge your need for God's grace. Speak about your need for God's grace in every breath you breathe and every decision you make and every facet of your life. May it be clear to those around us that you are dependent on God's grace.

And then, unceasingly express your gratitude for God's grace as He gives it. Speak as grateful people, most of all grateful for the salvation He has given you. Do people around you know how grateful you are for God's saving grace to you in Christ because you've spoken about it over and over and over again?

So here's the challenge: This week, speak about the character of God all day long. In all your conversations – with Christians and non-Christians, with family and with friends, with your spouse or your children, at home and at work, in the store and at the ball fields, in the coffee shop and at the restaurant – speak about the character of God. Do this particularly with people we are praying for in our sphere of influence who don't know Christ. How can we be intentional, just like Mark, Kim, and Robert are doing today in the Middle East? Let's weave threads of the gospel (and specifically this thread of the gospel) into the fabric of our conversations with people this week.

In fact, that's what I want us to do here before we celebrate communion. I want to ask these guys to come up and just play in the background, and the choir's going to join me up here as well. In just a minute, we're going to sing about this holy, just, and gracious Creator, but before we do that, we're going to have just a couple of moments where we pray specifically for people in our lives who don't know Christ. And let's pray that God would use us this week specifically to point them to the holy, just, and gracious Creator of all things. And let's pray that this one thread of the gospel would lead into conversations about other threads of the gospel, where we have an opportunity to share not just about who God is, but who we are, what Christ has done, and how we can be restored to God through Christ forever.

So we're going to pray in a moment. And let me say to those of you who may not be followers of Christ that we invite you to trust in God's grace toward you for the first time today. So with that, let me invite you to bow your heads with me and pray, non-Christians, to trust in God's grace toward you in Christ, and Christians, to pray for specific people in our lives to come to know the holy, just, and gracious Creator of all things, and for God to use us this week to lead them to know Him.

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