



## **The Secret to the Christian Life**

### ***The Story of Scripture – Part 30***

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open to Galatians 2. It's good to be together around God's Word. Just to recap, two short weeks ago we were studying Acts 1 and 2 where the first Christian sermon was preached and the first church was started. Three thousand people in one day were baptized as followers of Jesus.

In light of that picture, believing that the same Holy Spirit Who did that 2,000 years ago is the same Holy Spirit Who is working today, we joined together in prayer. We started asking God to save thousands of souls here this year in our city, through other churches and through this church. We said, "Let's fast this Friday and pray. Let's meet together late that night. Let's invite friends and family and co-workers. Let's start asking God to lead people at all of our campuses to repent and be baptized as followers of Jesus."

We got things ready and last Sunday across all of our campuses, 336 people were baptized as followers of Jesus! I say that's a good start, but that's just it. I don't want to just see God's Spirit move in power one week, then just move on to business as usual after that. I want to pray and invite people who don't know Jesus to come. I want to see God move in power every week. Don't you? Don't you want to see more and more people saved? I can't get Acts 5:14 out of my mind—multitudes, more than ever, celebrating new life in Jesus!

I'm wearing this t-shirt again today, because I'm going to invite more people today to put on this t-shirt and be baptized as a follower of Jesus. We had people being baptized after our first gathering this morning. We're not going to have the big one-two-three call in the same way we did last week, but I know there are people in this room right now who either are not followers of Jesus or are followers of Jesus who have not yet been baptized since becoming a follower of Jesus.

I don't believe it's an accident that you are here right now and I want to give you an opportunity to experience and celebrate new life in Jesus. We have shirts, shorts, towels, everything you need. Just like 336 people did last week, I'm going to invite more to do that today and we plan to do the same thing next week. I want to call us to pray every day and every week that God would add to our number people

who are entering into relationship with Him through Jesus. Let's ask for that and expect that. Let's live for that as a church. Invite people next week to experience that.

As a church, we make disciples. We share the gospel. We baptize people in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We teach people to obey everything Jesus has commanded us, which leads us to another way I want to encourage us. Jesus has not just told us to baptize people, but to teach people to obey Him and follow Him together. Really, that's the hard work. It's easy to baptize people one day. It's a whole other thing to help people day by day, week by week, year after year, to follow Jesus amidst good times and amidst hard times.

I want to encourage every single person who calls this church your home church to be involved in this work. I want to encourage every follower of Jesus in this church to get involved in a group or lead a group where you're helping others and being helped by others to follow Jesus.

I heard a story last week about our kids' ministry—Kids Quest—which is bursting at the seams. We almost had to turn away parents and kids because we didn't have enough people to teach kids. Praise God families and children are bursting out at Kids Quest, but we need more followers of Jesus—men and women—teaching kids how to follow Jesus. Our students with The Rock and Access Ministry—they are growing as well.

By God's grace, all of our campuses are growing and expanding in different ways, which means I want to encourage everybody to get in on this. Let's leave spectator Christianity behind. Let's make disciples. Singles, young adults, senior adults—let's invest in the next generation. And parents. One of the things I've noticed ever since I came here a couple years ago is that the pattern seems to be parents drop their kids off at Kids Quest or The Rock, then come to worship. Then they pick up their kids and leave. I want to encourage us to break that pattern for so many reasons. One, because it's good for your kids to be right next to you in worship. I know this has been uncommon.

I remember one Sunday when I had just started preaching here that Heather and our kids were turned away at the door. Somebody told them kids didn't need to come in here, so they went in another door. I want to encourage us to make it common for kids and teenagers to be in worship. Parents, just think about how important it is for your children to see and hear you lifting your voice to God, your hands to God, praising God for Who He is. That is one of the most important things your kids need to see in you. It's a tragedy that so many children don't come to worship with their parents. They never see their parents singing songs of joyful worship to God. They never see Mom or Dad with their face in their hands or tears in their eyes, overwhelmed by the Word, the grace, the greatness of God in worship. Don't we want our kids to see that?

My mom's here today. I think about my dad who sang so embarrassingly loud in worship. I remember as a kid thinking, "Simmer down, Dad." But today I praise God for a dad who loved and

worshipped God with all his heart and who didn't care what anybody thought about it. I thank God I got to see that. Just think about the cumulative effect, between the ages of four and 17. That's 650 worship services spent with Mom or Dad in authentic, passionate communion with God. You cannot measure that.

Now, some people will say, "Okay, but so much of the service—especially the sermon—will be over their heads." To that I say, "Sure. For many kids, of course it will, but it's supposed to be over their heads. They're beginners." When they come out of the womb, our language is also over their heads. But we don't say, "Let's just put them with other children so they say ball and up the rest of their lives." No! We immerse them our language—most of which they don't understand—with the hope that they will begin to understand it, use it and thrive with it.

Let's be careful not to underestimate what our children understand and not underestimate the teachable moments that can happen. What a golden opportunity to dialog with our kids after a worship service, to explain things to them in a way that's huge for their growth and their relationship with God. What more valuable conversations could we be having? It just doesn't seem right that as parents we would take our children in their most formative years and quarantine them to be with other children to shape their understanding of God.

Now, that's not to say children and teen ministries are not helpful. They are. So bring your children to worship with you, then let them learn on age-appropriate levels with other children or teens in Kids Quest or The Rock. You might say, "But what am I going to do during that time?" The answer is make disciples. Get involved in what God's doing. Invest your life in some other kids, especially those who may not have a parent who is a follower of Jesus, or with special needs families. There are so many ways to help across our church. The church is indeed not a building to see or a place to sit. The church is a movement to join, to be a part of, making disciples of the nations starting right here. So let's do it together.

We're talking about making disciples and multiplying churches. Last week, as 336 people were being baptized here, do you know what was happening right down the street from this campus in West Fall Church/Annandale? Close to 500 people were gathering in a new church that just started out of here—CityLight Church. And seven people came to Christ there! That's in addition to another church that we started on Main Avenue two Sundays ago, with 150 people, that baptized three new followers of Christ that day. It's happening! God is doing this. Which is a whole other thing we need to acknowledge.

I've got to get to the text at some point, but I just don't think it's a coincidence that earlier this year we started having late-night, all-night prayer gatherings and now we're seeing hundreds of people being baptized. God is doing this. We are not just playing a religious game here. We are asking God to move and He is answering. Now I want to ask Him to move all the more.

Even today after we spend time in the Word, I want to free up some extra time for us just to pray. I mean really pray. Not just to come together, sing some songs, listen to a sermon, sing a little more and then go home. No, we have come together to meet with God. So if you're a follower of Jesus, I want you to walk away today saying, "We just met with God and we are not the same." If you're not a follower of Jesus right now, I want to introduce you to God so you can know Him and experience Him. When you come here, I don't want you to see a picture of people going through religious motions. That's not what this is about. There are better ways to spend Sunday mornings than just going through perfunctory religious exercises. We have gathered together to meet with God. First Corinthians 14 talks about when people who are not believers in Christ come into a worship gathering, they say, "Surely God is among you." I pray that would be the conclusion of people gathering here. Toward that end, let's listen to God's Word.

I want us to look at one verse today—Galatians 2:20. In this one verse, I want to show you what I am calling the secret to the Christian life. I say it's a secret, not because I've come up with something new that nobody's ever heard. The truth we're about to look at is all over the Bible. In many ways it is the core of Christianity. But I believe many Christians, many true followers of Jesus, have missed this or are missing this on a daily basis. I want to show it to you, then I want to do two things.

First, I want to call many people today to start a Christian life, to put your faith in Christ, and for some to be baptized if you've never been baptized as a follower of Christ. Then, I want to lead us to pray based on this verse. So let's read it together. This one verse summarizes, maybe more than any other verse in the entire Bible, the confession of any and every Christian. Galatians 2:20: *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Here's the deal. Every true follower of Christ believes that Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins. But many Christians practically stop there. They believe they will go to heaven, because they've been forgiven of their sin. But the problem is they're not really sure how to live the Christian life in between.

As a result, many Christians live frustrated, empty or even defeated Christian lives. I'm going to list some descriptions of what I mean by the frustrated, empty or defeated Christian life. See if any of these things sound familiar to you.

1. You know you're supposed to want to go to church, but sometimes getting here on Sundays seems a lot more like a chore.
2. You know you're supposed to read the Bible, but you don't really feel like you understand it. The truth is, you struggle to make time for it.
3. You know you're supposed to pray, but your mind wanders a lot and, truth be told, it starts to feel like a pretty empty religious exercise when you do it.

4. You know you're supposed to give, and you may even feel a little guilty you're not giving enough, but you're not really compelled to give.
5. You know you're supposed to have victory over sin, but you still find yourself struggling with the same thing over and over and over again.
6. You know you're not supposed to be worried or anxious about anything, but in actuality you worry a lot. You're anxious or even afraid about a number of things.
7. You know you're supposed to share the gospel, but, well, you just don't—in part, because you really don't want to be that guy or woman who's kind of crazy about religion. Or you're just nervous that you're going to say something that doesn't make sense and they won't understand.
8. You know God loves you, but you have this nagging sense that God wants more from you. You know you're saved by God's grace, but you constantly feel like there are some areas where you just need to work harder and do better. Maybe you're just tired and Christianity feels like more work.

Do you resonate with any of these descriptions? I have a feeling that many, if not most of us, resonate with one or more—maybe all of these. If that's the case for you I want you to hear this secret today—this truth that is crystal clear in Galatians 2:20 and throughout the Bible that so many Christians are missing out on.

### **Jesus died for you so He might live in you.**

The secret—or maybe I should put it this way—the reason why so many Christians live frustrated, empty, even defeated Christian lives is because so few of us have grasped the mammoth reality that Jesus died for you so He might live in you. You might have an entirely new life now, not just in eternity—which we talked about last week with the rope illustration. But we're talking about now on earth, a new life now, today, tomorrow.

God has been opening my eyes in a fresh way to this truth over the last few weeks. Two weeks ago when we were studying Acts 1 together and the coming of the Holy Spirit, I shared a couple of quotes from Hudson Taylor and Ian Thomas. After that I have had all kinds of people ask me for those quotes. Hudson Taylor was a missionary to China whose biography is entitled Hudson's Taylor's Spiritual Secret. He writes about the moment when he realized he was missing this secret. He was trying to live the Christian life without realizing that Christ was in him. Likewise Ian Thomas, who lived in England, was going out every night into the slums of London to do ministry. He wrote what I think describes so many Christians—even myself:

I had been reduced to a state of complete exhaustion spiritually, so I felt there was no point in going on. One night at midnight I got down on my knees before God and I just wept in sheer despair. I said, "O God, I know that I am saved. I love Jesus Christ. I am

perfectly convinced that I am converted. With all my heart I have wanted to serve You. Yet I have tried to my uttermost, but I feel I'm a helpless failure.

That night, things happened. I can honestly say that I had never once heard from the lips of me the message that came to me then. But God that night simply focused on me the Bible message of Christ who is my life. The Lord seemed to make plain to me that night, through my tears of bitterness, "You see, for seven years, with utmost sincerity, you have been trying to live for Me, on My behalf, the life that I have been waiting for seven years to live through you." I got up the next morning to an entirely different Christian life.

That's what I'm hoping and praying that hundreds if not thousands of you today might wake up to tomorrow—a fresh understanding or maybe a first-time understanding that Jesus died for you so that He might live in you. I pray that you might say in a fresh way, "I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live; Christ lives in me."

### **The Christian life is a totally exchanged life.**

Think about what this means. Galatians 2:20 says, "*I have been crucified with Christ...*" Listen to the language there: I died, yet I live. There's a total exchange that's happened there. There's an "old me" that has died and now there's a "new me" that lives. So what's the "old me"? If you're not a follower of Christ right now, let me invite you to listen closely to this summary of what the Bible teaches. If you are a follower of Christ, be reminded in this summary of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

The Bible teaches that we have all been created by God, but we have all turned from God, from His ways to our own ways. We know this. It looks different in every single one of our lives, but we have all chosen our ways over God's ways. The Bible calls this sin and our sin separates us from God. If we die in this state of separation from God, we will spend eternity separated from Him.

But God has made a way for you and me to be brought back into relationship with Him. God sent Jesus to live the life we could not live—a life with no sin—so that He could then pay the price for our sin. That's what Jesus was doing on the cross. He was taking the penalty upon Himself that you and I deserve for our sin. Jesus died for our sin, then three days later He rose from the dead so that anyone anywhere—including you today, right now—can be forgiven all your sin and brought back into relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

You can experience new, eternal life in restored relationship with God—that's what this verse is talking about. A Christian is someone who believes that Jesus died on the cross for them. A Christian believes the greatest news in the world: God loves me. He gave Himself for me on the cross. And the old me which wanted my ways over God's ways has been crucified, then in exchange, I've not gotten a refurbished, improved version of me; I have received something altogether different. I now have Jesus' life in me.

This is so significant. Jesus did not die to make you better. Jesus died to make you new—totally new. The old me is gone; the new me is here. The new me is Christ in me. For those who are followers of Christ, who have been crucified with Christ, just think about what this means. You have given Jesus your sin; Jesus has in exchange given you His righteousness. Just let this soak in. Christian, you now have the very righteousness of Jesus living in you!

You have given Jesus your slavery to sin, then in exchange, Jesus has given you His freedom over sin. Galatians 5:1: *“For freedom Christ has set us free...”* Galatians 4:7: Christian, *“You are no longer a slave to sin...”* You are now a son or daughter of God. You have given Jesus your defeat against sin and Jesus has given you His victory over sin. In Romans 7:24-25, Paul—who also wrote writing Galatians 2—says, *“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* Christian, don’t believe it. Do not believe that you cannot overcome that sin. Christ is in you. Absolutely you can overcome that sin.

Christian, stop beating yourself up over your sin. You have given Jesus your judgment for sin. He has taken it from you. In exchange, Jesus has given you His salvation from sin. Romans 8:1: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Christ is in you and has taken all your judgment upon Himself, so there is no more price to be paid, no more work to be done. You can rest in His love. It is finished. You don’t have to worry about a thing. You don’t even have to worry about death, because you have given Jesus your death and Jesus has given you His life.

This is why people were being baptized last week and earlier today, and why I pray people will be baptized as a result of this Word that we’re looking at in this gathering right now. They will step into the water to celebrate the reality that Jesus is their life. As they go down in the water, it’s a picture of our dying with Him. Just as Jesus died, we die to the old us. Then the way baptism works is we don’t keep you underwater for very long. Why not? Well, for multiple reasons, but the main reason is because Jesus didn’t stay dead for very long. Three days later He rose to new life, the picture that we have new life. It’s a totally exchanged life. Jesus is our life.

### **The Christian life is a supernaturally empowered life.**

With this exchange comes supernatural power. Just think about the wonder of these words: Christ lives in me. Who? Christ. Jesus. God in the flesh. The One Who spoke and the world came into being. He said, “World” and world happened. Light. Dark. Plants. All He had to do was say a word. And He is the One living in you. It will knock you out of your seat if you think about it. Just let this soak in.

Christian, Jesus—God in the flesh—is in you and you are in Him. This is how the Bible talks about the Christian life over and over again. I can take you so many places right now to show you that Jesus is in you, you are in Him and this changes everything.

When I was about to get engaged to Heather, I'd been saving up for a ring. I'm prone to lose things and I did not want to lose this. So my plan was that I would get the ring in the morning and that night I would ask Heather to marry me. All I had to do was not lose it during the day. I had one errand I needed to run to a music store in the mall to pick up a CD that I was going to use that night in the whole proposal scene. That's a whole other story.

I just knew this was the day some dude was going to come up to me, mug me in the mall and take whatever I had with me. I was pretty paranoid, so I got the biggest, heaviest jacket I could find. It was not a cold day outside, but I got a big heavy jacket. It had a little pocket right here that I could zip and unzip. So I unzipped the pocket, put the ring in there, zipped the pocket back up and put the heavy jacket on. I had my hand on the ring at all times. I just walked into the mall with my head down, no eye contact, just focused. Get in there, get the CD, get out.

I go into the music store, look for a certain CD and I can't find the CD. I go over to this woman who works there and I say, "Excuse me, Miss. Can you help me find a CD?" She said, "Sure!" I start walking with her and she asked, "What do you want this CD for?" I said, "I'm getting engaged tonight." She said, "Oh, really? Do you have the ring with you?" Do you ever think, "Is it all right to lie...sometimes?" I thought, "I don't think it is—but definitely not now." So I admitted, "Yeah, I've got the ring." She said, "Well, can I see it?"

I'm sweating with that heavy jacket on. So I turned to everybody else in the store. We're over in the corner. I unzipped the pocket, pulled out the ring to show it to her. "Here it is." She looks over and says, "That's beautiful!" She then raises her head and says to all of her co-workers, "Hey, guys, this guy's getting married. Come look at this ring that he's about to propose with!"

At this point I'm thinking, "Why don't I just throw it? Who wants it? Don't even come attack me for it. I will just give it to you." Everybody comes over. They're talking. They're looking at the ring. I'm thinking, "Please just give me the CD." I finally got the CD, put the ring back in the pocket and went running out of the mall. Everything changed—the way I talked, the way I thought, the way I walked. Every bit of me changed when I realized I had treasure in me.

Far, far greater than a ring that's going to fade and in the end not going to matter—you have Christ in you. That changes the way you think. It changes the way you walk, the way you love, the way you interact with family or friends. It changes the way you interact at work. It changes every facet of your life—when you're alone, when you're with others. Everything's different when you realize Christ is in you. It changes everything.

When you know Jesus is in you, then you realize that the Christian life is not about what you do for Jesus, but what Jesus does in you. That is so significant. My six-year-old would say, "Dad, this is humassive." This is so different from the way we are prone to think. Most Christians think, "I just look at

all Jesus has done for me, so the least I can do for Him is this or that.” Do you hear that language? “Look at all Jesus has done for me.” Has done—past tense, what Jesus has done in the past for me. So now, in the present, what can I do for Him?

That is a totally wrong way to think. The reason it’s wrong is because Jesus has not stopped doing for you. Jesus is still doing for you. Every moment of every day, Jesus is living in you and His power is working in you. We are not living in debt to Jesus. Don’t use that language. “The least I can do for Jesus is this or that.” Or, “I just want to pay Jesus back for all He’s done for me.” Listen, Jesus is not a businessman looking to do a business deal with you. There is no way you could ever pay Him back—and that’s the point. It’s beautiful!

Jesus has not asked us to pay Him back. He has saved us by His grace, not in exchange for our best works. He saves us by His grace, then He comes to live within us, which means we are not living in debt to Jesus; we are living indwelt by Jesus. That’s a very different way to live. The Bible teaches that Jesus is in you and you are in Him. Jesus is with you and you are with Him. Throughout the New Testament Jesus promises, “I will be with you and you will be with Me.” This means that Jesus died for meaningful relationship with you, not monotonous religious motion from you.

Do you hear the language here in Galatians? Jesus is the One Who lives in you, loves you and gave Himself for you. Jesus has not saved you for a life of monotonous religious motion in His name. Don’t do it. That’s not Christianity, but so many are settling for a life like it is. It’s not. Jesus has saved you so that you might live in loving relationship with Him. The Christian life is the overflow of the love of Christ for you and the life of Christ in you. In this relationship, Jesus works with you to accomplish His will in you—and in the world.

There’s so much we could talk about here, but during my time away recently I was so struck by the phrase, “Working with Jesus.” We read it in our Bible reading in Mark 16:20: *“And they [the disciples] went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them.”* That so stuck out to me. After Jesus had ascended into heaven, it says Jesus was working with them. They were co-laborers. Second Corinthians 6:1 says we work together with Him. That has totally transformed my perspective this past month. Jesus is working with me—with me. With you. In every facet of my life, all day long, I just want to work with Him. I want Jesus to lead me, guide me and direct me every single moment of every single day. Right now while I’m preaching, or when I’m talking to people afterwards, I just want to work with Jesus. This is the Christian life.

### **The Christian life is a wonderfully restful life.**

The Christian life is also full of rest. Paul’s whole point in the context of Galatians 2 is to emphasize that we’re not working to earn status or favor with God. Instead, we’re resting in Jesus, in His

life in us and all that means. That's why Hudson Taylor said, "The sweetest part of realizing this truth is the rest which full identification with Christ brings." Taylor wrote, "I am no longer anxious about anything, because I know Christ is in me and He will give me everything I need for everything I face." If Christ is in me, why should I be anxious?

This is exactly what Paul means when he says, "...*the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God...*" Think about what that means. The life of faith believes Jesus to be everything you need for every moment you live. The Christian life is not just putting your faith in Jesus days or months or years ago, then moving on and doing your best. The Christian life is putting your faith in Jesus today, tomorrow, the next day and the next, believing Him to be for you all that you need.

When you feel weak, believe in that moment that His strength in you is sufficient. When you feel lonely, believe in that moment that His love for you is enough. When you are tempted to return to see, believe in that moment that His way is better. When you are prone to despair, believe in that moment that His hope is greater. The secret to the Christian life is drawing on the immeasurable riches of Christ in you for every need you have. When you realize this, you realize the aim of the Christian life is not striving after more faith or better faith or greater faith. No, we don't strive after faith. We look to, we lean on, we trust in and we rest in the faithful One Who is in us.

### **The Christian life is a completely secure life.**

Because He Who is in us is faithful, in the end the Christian life is a completely secure life. Jesus does not come and go with and in those who are His. Jesus in you now is Jesus in you forever. All who have been crucified with Christ, who now live in Christ and Christ in them, are secure forever. And not just in the future—you are secure now in Christ. We've talked about how fear, worry and anxiety are some of the most prominent struggles across both women and men, adults and children—not just in our society, but in our churches.

I want to give you an illustration based on Tupperware. I want you to picture this first Tupperware container as you. Now, based on what we just saw in what we just read, who is in you? Jesus. Christ is in you. So let's take this smaller Tupperware container and let's write on it: Christ. So Christ is in you and we'll put a top on it. Now we're beginning to get a picture of your life. But we just discussed that not only is Christ in you, but as you see in Galatians 4 and so many other places in the Bible, you are also in Christ. We'll call this next, larger Tupperware container Christ, put you in it, then put a top on it. Now we're getting a clearer picture of who you are. You have Christ in you and you are in Christ, But then let me show you one other verse. Colossians 3:3 is very similar to Galatians 2:20. It says, "*For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ...*" Anybody know what it says next? "...*in God.*" We've got one

more container—let’s bring out the big tub—for God. Let’s put Christ in you, you in Christ and Christ in God.

Now we’ve got a little more complete picture of your life. I want you to think about what comes at you in this world. I want you to think about the adversary who wants to come at you in this world. In order for the adversary to get to you, let’s just think about this for a moment. He first will encounter God the Father, which he does not have a good track record with. Then let’s assume for a second he makes it past God the Father. Then He has to deal with Jesus Christ Himself. Last time that happened, he walked away shamed and defeated. Yes, he thought he won for a couple days, but then he figured out that he was defeated. He had his head crushed by the Snake Crusher, so sin, death and Satan were defeated.

The adversary needs to deal with Christ—round one. If he’s able to get past Christ, he gets to you. But Who is still in you? Round two is Jesus Christ Himself inside you. So I’m thinking that you’re pretty secure. In fact, I would take it a step further, just to think practically. No matter what level of cancer, or what diagnosis comes your way, no matter what people in this world may do or try to do to you, no matter what happens in your job, no matter what happens in your circumstances, no matter what this world throws at you, I want you to see a picture and be reminded that you are in Christ and Christ is in you. In God, you are absolutely secure. When you are in Jesus, nothing can stand against you—nothing. Not even death itself.

We just heard from God’s Word, so with that I invite you to bow your heads with me. Bow your heads and close your eyes, because I want you to put aside any and all distractions. I want to bring each of you before God, asking right now, right where you’re sitting before God, is Christ in you? I’m not asking if you’ve called yourself a Christian or if you go to church. Is Christ in you? I’m not asking if you believe in Jesus. As we read this last week, even the demons believe in Jesus. The question is is Jesus your life? Have you trusted in Jesus as your life?

If your heart does not resound with a “yes” to that, then I want to give you an opportunity right now to say, “Jesus, be my life.” If that’s you and you want to say that in your heart to God, let me invite you to pray this in your heart before God, “Dear God, I know that I have sinned against You, that I have chosen my ways over Your ways. I know that I’m separated from You by my sin, but I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sins. I believe He gave Himself for me. Today, I am trusting Him for new life. God, please make me a new person. Please forgive me of all my sin. Please fill me with Your life. Today and forever, I want Jesus to be my life.”

If you just prayed that to God, I invite you to do something. With every head bowed and eyes closed, I want you to lift your hand up before God—just between you and God—as a picture of you saying today, “Jesus is now my life.” If you prayed that, just lift your hand. Praise God.

O God, You see hearts and hands. I praise You for people who are experiencing new life now in Jesus. I pray that You would give them courage, even today, to celebrate new life in You through baptism.

As you put your hands down, in just a moment I'm going to pray, then after I say amen, I will share with you how you can be baptized today. This invitation is also for others who already had life in Jesus when you came here today, but you have not been baptized. We're going to lead every follower of Jesus to respond to what we've just heard from His Word.

God, we have gathered together to meet with You, to hear from You and to respond to You—not just to go through religious motions. Please don't let us do that. We want to meet with You. We want to exalt You, to hear from You, and now we want to respond to You. Help us, I pray, to have the courage to do whatever You call us to do right now, whether that's to be baptized or seek other assistance. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Here's what we're going to do in the next few minutes. Just follow with me here, because we're going to do something different from what we normally do. Normally during this time I invite followers of Jesus to make their way to tables here at the front, in the middle and at the back to get the elements for communion. During one song, people go pretty quickly to those tables and get the elements for the Lord's Supper. Today I want us to take our time. We have time during a couple songs before we take the Lord's Supper together. I want to give us time to really respond to God for the next few minutes in this room. Then when we stand, I'm going to ask the leaders in our church, men and women, to come stand beside and around these communion tables.

If you have never been baptized as a follower of Jesus, realize that baptism is not something we do to earn new life in Jesus. It's the celebration of new life in Jesus. If you have trusted in Jesus as your life today, or maybe you began trusting Jesus as your life earlier but you've never been baptized as a follower of Jesus, or maybe you were even baptized as a baby but you've never of your own volition taken this step to publicly say, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." I invite you during these next few minutes to come to one of these men or women and just say, "I want to be baptized." Just like many did in the earlier gathering, they'll talk with you.

If you're ready, you can do that today. We have everything you need—shirts, shorts, towels, everything. At the same time, for those who are followers of Jesus and have been baptized, I've also asked these leaders to be available to you, to be able to pray with you in light of what we've just heard from God's Word. Some of you, as Christians, are weighed down by sin right now. Others of you are walking through struggles in different ways.

I want you to have an opportunity to have somebody pray over you, to pray the grace and power of Christ in you. So if you are struggling with a particular sin, or if you're walking through struggles with

life, health, marriage, family, work—whatever it is—I want to give you an opportunity to have somebody pray for you, for the grace, strength, peace and hope of Christ in you.

So during these next couple of songs, I want to invite you during this time to go to one of the leaders at one of the tables. Share as much as you feel comfortable sharing, then they will pray over you. Others of you may need to spend time right where you're standing, praying in light of what we've just walked through in God's Word. Obviously you can also join in singing these songs in your heart in response to God.

Then finally, sometime during the next two songs—preferably after you've had some time to pray either alone or with one of these leaders—if you are a follower of Christ I invite you to come to one of these tables. We have plenty of time. There's no rush. Then after the music, we'll take the Lord's Supper together. It may be a little chaotic with people moving in different directions and responding in different ways, but that's the point. I want each of us to have space to respond to God. I want these leaders to be available if you're ready to be baptized or if you'd like somebody to pray for you.

Let me pray one more time.

O God, by Your Holy Spirit, please lead this time of response. God, I pray now that You would give courage for people to publicly profess Christ through baptism. Please give humility for people to say, "I need somebody to pray for me." Please lead us as we pray, sing and respond to Your Holy Spirit right now as we meet with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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