



## **The Gospel For The Dirty, Guilty, Ashamed, Afraid Or Alone Following Jesus, Part 4**

If you have a Bible—and I hope you or somebody around you does that you can look on with—let me invite you to open with me to Mark 1. It's good to be together around God's Word.

I want to remind us, before we dive in, that we are planning to come together from all of our various locations this Friday night. I want to invite our church family leading up to that night to fast together on Friday, to the extent it's possible physically for you to do so. I want to call us as a church to fast and pray together for two particular reasons. One, for unity around the gospel in our church. For those of you who are visiting or exploring Christianity, the gospel means the good news about Who Jesus is and how much He loves us. So let's fast and pray together for unity around the gospel—the Great Commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30).

That leads us then into the second reason to fast and pray. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). When we gather together next Sunday, we're going to have an Acts 13 Sunday, which means—in the context of worshipping, fasting and praying—with more than three billion people in the world who still don't have access to the gospel, who are unreached by the gospel, we're going to pray, "God, who are You calling from among us to go to them?"

I want to ask every single follower of Jesus to pray, over this next week, asking, "God, are You calling me, are You calling us, to go someplace where the gospel has not yet gone?" We believe that with three billion unreached people in the world and thousands of people in this church, surely God is calling some of us to take the gospel to them. He could call any one of us. It doesn't matter how young or old you are. It doesn't matter what your station is in life.

So let's all just pray, "God, are You calling me to go?" Let's fast and pray Friday, in light of Jesus' words in Matthew 9:37-38: "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*" We want God to send out more people to take the gospel to those who haven't heard. It would make no sense to pray for that and not be willing to follow His leadership if He leads us to do that. Now don't miss next Sunday because you're afraid He might call you to go. I'm seeing the thought bubbles—"Ah, I think we have something next Sunday."

Following Jesus is not just for super-Christians. Every Christian goes wherever Jesus leads us to go, without conditions; otherwise we're not actually following Jesus. We're just playing games on Sunday. We don't ever need to be afraid to follow the One Who has made us, Who loves us and knows better than we do what is best for our lives. I would encourage you to not be afraid of where God will lead, but where you will lead you. Be afraid of taking your life into your own hands. That's what you need to be afraid of. So let's fast and pray together on Friday, come together that night at 7:00 and worship on Sunday with everyone united around the gospel, with love for God above all, and see how He leads us to carry out the Great Commission.

All that leads to today and some questions I want to ask you, giving you an opportunity to answer. We've done something similar to this before. If you have a phone or tablet, I invite you to pull it out, just try not to get distracted as you do. I don't mean for you to go to other apps; just this one app. Go to [menti.com](https://www.menti.com), put in the code 81708133, or you can just click on the QR code on this screen. This is totally anonymous. You won't put your name or any personal information in here that will identify you. You're not signing up for anything. I want to invite everybody, to the extent you're willing, to participate. These questions are for young and old alike. They apply whether you've been in the church for years, decades, or this is your first time ever in church.

By the way, if this is your first time ever in church or watching church online, we are so glad you're here. We don't believe it's an accident that you are here. So join us in this; these are questions for everyone. The other caveat I would give is there are some pretty heavy questions we're going to walk through, even though this is totally anonymous. If any question feels a little too raw to even enter an answer, that's totally fine. Obviously, feel free to turn off the phone at any point and maybe just ponder these questions internally.

All right, here we go. There are 12 questions total, split up into six pairs.

### **Question #1 – Do you ever feel unclean or dirty because of something or some things you have done?**

There are five choices here: all the time, most of the time, sometimes, rarely or never. Put in your answer and we'll move on to the next question.

### **Question #2 – Do you ever feel unclean or dirty because of something or some things that someone else has done to you?**

Again, you have the same five options. I feel unclean or dirty all the time because of something someone else has done to me most of the time, sometimes, rarely or never.

**Question #3 – Do you ever struggle with guilt over something or things you’ve done, even when you know you’ve been forgiven?**

Do you ever have this low-level nagging sense of guilt that you can’t seem to shake? Is it an all-the-time struggle for you, most of the time, sometimes, rarely or never?

**Question #4 – Do you ever struggle with guilt over something or things that someone else has done to you?**

Do you struggle with guilt over wrong that someone else has done to you?

**Question #5 – Do you ever struggle with shame over something or things you have done?**

I’ll just let you insert your own understanding of guilt or shame in this question? Do you ever feel shame over something you’ve done?

**Question #6 – Do you ever struggle with shame over something someone else has done to you?**

How often do you struggle with feelings of shame?

We’re halfway through.

**Question #7 – Do you ever feel afraid of what others might think about you if they knew things you had done?**

How often do you feel afraid in this way?

**Question #8 – Do you ever feel afraid of what others might think about you if they knew something that someone else has done to you?**

**Question #9 – Do you ever feel alone because of something you’ve done?**

This is the last pair like this. There may be many reasons why any of us might feel alone. To what extent has something you have done contributed to feeling alone?

**Question #10 – Do you ever feel alone because of something someone else has done to you?**

Similarly, how often does something that has happened to you make you feel alone?

These final two questions are a bit more specific. I would say in a sense they are more raw, so just stay with us. This is totally anonymous and obviously you don't have to answer these questions. Feel free to put down the phone if you want.

**Question #11 – What have you done that has led to feeling unclean, guilty, ashamed, afraid or alone?**

To the extent that you're willing to share, in just a few words, what have you done that has led to feeling unclean, guilty, ashamed, afraid or alone?

**Question #12 – What has someone done to you that has led to feeling unclean, guilty, ashamed, afraid or alone?**

Then, answer this in just a few words. As you write out answers to these questions—particularly these last two, I encourage you that this is what worship is about. I think we sometimes have the idea—I've even heard it said from stages in a church setting like this—"We're coming in here, so put all the things that are going on in your life outside, just come inside and worship God." But that's not worship. Worship is bringing all the things in our lives and laying them before God. The previous is artificial; this is authentic. We should not put on a face before God or each other, but be honest before God and each other about realities in our lives.

If you're still writing, that's totally fine. I want to take a moment to pray for you and for us in light of the Word we're about to hear in the next few minutes that speaks to all of these things we just thought about.

O God, even as we answer these questions, writing all the different thoughts that are going through our minds, we lay all of this before You. As we have done things, or others have done things to us, with all the emotions, feelings and thoughts that accompany them, we ask that by Your Spirit and through Your Word, that You would speak to each of our minds and hearts in the next few minutes in a supernatural way. Help us to see and feel how the gospel is good news for the guilty, the ashamed, the afraid, the alone and the unclean. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The title for this message today is "The Gospel for the Dirty, Guilty, Ashamed, Afraid or Alone." Or maybe better put, "The Gospel for All of Us." One of the things I love about the Bible is that it doesn't shy away from reality in our lives in this fallen world. One of the things I love about Jesus is how He meets us like no one else can at the raw realities of our lives in a fallen world. I want to show this to you, starting in Mark 1:29.

Picture what we're about to read as 24 hours in the life of Jesus. We're going to walk through a day, starting in the middle of one day and going about 24 hours, making some observations along the way and asking, "What makes Jesus unlike anyone else?" We'll start right after He's finished teaching in the

synagogue, with spiritual authority like no one else. We looked at this last week. What a great line Mike's sermon ended with last week: "Abundant life is only found under the authority of Jesus Christ." Hold on to that. "Abundant life is only found under the authority of Jesus." After we see Jesus teaching with authority in Mark 1:21-28, now Mark 1:29 says:

*<sup>29</sup> And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. <sup>31</sup> And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

Now, let's make some observations as we go through a day with Jesus.

### **Observation #1 – Jesus has authority over disease and sickness.**

This is just a simple observation. Simon's wife's mom has a fever. Jesus goes to her with no Tylenol, Advil or Aleve in His hand. He takes her hand, lifts her up, and by the time she's standing, her fever is gone—just like that. Now, that may seem minor to some, but first you can't do that. And second, the next verses make clear that it wasn't just a fever that was under Jesus' authority. Verse 32 says:

*<sup>32</sup> That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered together at the door. <sup>34</sup> And he healed many who were sick with various diseases.*

Let's stop there. "...all who were sick..." "...many who were sick with various diseases." Jesus had authority to say to sickness and disease, "Leave" and they did. I would submit this is really good news for all of us in a world of sickness and disease.

As I was studying this passage this week, I got a call that my mom in Metro Atlanta had been taken by ambulance to the emergency room for some sudden heart issues. It was a really tender call to get. The call was actually on my dad's birthday. He died unexpectedly years ago of a heart attack; that was a call I'll never forget. So my mom was admitted to the hospital and they started asking people to pray. Long story short, after procedures and tests the last couple days, by the hand of the One Who has authority over heart issues, my mom went home last night. She's watching from home this morning. I love you so much, Mom.

This is why we pray for each other in a world of sickness and disease, knowing we're speaking to the One Who has authority over sickness and disease. We're going to pray like this over each other as a church family Friday night. Let me mention that if you cannot make it to our prayer gathering Friday night because of your sickness or disease, we want to pray for you. Go to [mcleanbible.org/prayer](http://mcleanbible.org/prayer) and share with us how we can pray specifically for you to the One Who has authority over all disease and sickness, according to verse 34:

*<sup>34</sup> And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

## **Observation #2 – Jesus has authority over demons.**

Jesus speaks and demons flee. Jesus even has authority over when they speak. We walked through this last week and we'll see this again in Mark, so we're not going to spend a ton of time here today. But after a full day of teaching, healing diseases and casting out demons, Jesus goes to sleep. Then verse 35 says:

*<sup>35</sup> And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, <sup>37</sup> and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." <sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out." <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

## **Observation #3 – Jesus prioritizes time alone with God over every other thing in His day.**

Two more quick observations about Jesus that I'll make here that are instructive for us. Jesus rises early in the morning, while it's still dark, finds a desolate place and spends time alone with God the Father. Can I just ask, is this your priority over every other thing in your day? Maybe another way to ask that question, for those of you who are followers of Jesus, is Jesus' priority your priority? Or do you have different priorities than the One you are following? And why is that?

Now, I know we are busy people. Who of us in this gathering is not busy with all sorts of things to do in our day? I would submit Jesus was pretty busy too. Let's face it. None of us have lines of people waiting outside our door every morning to be healed of all their diseases and cast out all their demons. Yet Jesus knew that the most important time in His day was time alone with the Father. And if that's true for Him, how much more so for us?

I submit to you—amidst all the important, valuable and necessary things you do during the day—time along with God is more important, more valuable and more necessary than them all. I want to encourage you—kids, students, teenagers—make it a pattern in your life now to get up early. Even if it's just five minutes earlier than normal at the start, be alone with God, read His Word, pray to Him, then grow in maturity over time.

And adults, let's show them what it looks like to prioritize time alone with God. Let's show them that time with God is better than the busyness of our schedules. Why would we not? What could be more important in our day than meeting with the One Who gives us breath, Who causes our heart to beat, Who loves us more than anyone else, Who reigns over the entire universe with all authority, Who has invited you to meet with Him? What more important thing do you have than this? What more valuable thing do

you have to do in your schedule than this? Jesus prioritizes time alone with God over every other thing in His day.

#### **Observation #4 – Jesus prioritizes proclamation of the gospel among people in more places over meeting physical needs right around Him.**

There's a lot here and we'll actually talk about this more next week, Lord willing. But notice what Jesus says when His disciples were asking, "Why are You out here alone in this desolate place? There are people to be healed. You've got work to do." Jesus says, "*Let us go on to the next towns...*" Why? "*...[T]hat I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.*"

"This is why I've come," Jesus says, "to proclaim the gospel." We saw this in Mark 1:14-15. He proclaimed the gospel to more and more people in more and more places, eventually desiring for all people in all places to hear the gospel. It was not just for some people in one place to be healed of diseases and delivered from demons. "That's not My mission," Jesus says.

I want you to hold on to this observation for next week, because that's why we're doing next week as we are—because the mission of Jesus is to proclaim the gospel to more and more people in more and more places.

If Jesus' priority is our priority, then we will work together as a church to see the gospel proclaimed among three billion people who have never heard the good news of Jesus. I also want us to see today how this observation—Jesus' mission, His reason for coming—speaks directly to the questions I asked earlier in that survey. Watch with me what happens as Jesus leaves this time alone with the Father to go to a new place. Let's pick up in verse 40:

*<sup>40</sup> And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean."<sup>41</sup> Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean."<sup>42</sup> And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.<sup>43</sup> And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once,<sup>44</sup> and said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them."<sup>45</sup> But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.*

Ah, there's a lot to observe here, with significant implications for the questions we answered about our lives. So let's follow this. A leper came to Jesus. That's a general term in the Bible used to describe a variety of skin diseases, the most extreme form of which attacks a person's nervous system to the point that infections set in, tissues degenerate and limbs fall off as the body literally withers. Leprosy was more than just a disease that needed to be healed. Do you notice how the word "healed" is not used at all in this story? The leper doesn't ask to be healed. The Bible doesn't say that he was healed. Instead, the leper says, "*If you will, you can make me clean.*" That word is repeated in four verses in a row: clean, clean. Why?

Because to be a leper was to be unclean, dirty. Leprosy was more than just a physical condition; leprosy was a dreadful contagion.

Leviticus 13 and 14 in the Old Testament describe that if you had leprosy, you lived in shame and lived alone. You had to stay a wide distance away from anyone else. If, for some reason, someone got near you, you were required to yell out, “Unclean! Unclean!” So they would be startled and would go the other way. You were seen as repugnant and repulsive, a danger to others, to the point where they were afraid to be near you—and before long, you were afraid to be near them.

Obviously we’ve experienced isolation in new ways over the last 18 months. Many of us have been quarantined for various weeks. The effects of all this on people’s mental, emotional and physical health are yet to be fully seen.

We can only imagine, then, the physical, social, mental, emotional and even spiritual struggles of a leper. Which is why leprosy in the book of Isaiah became a symbol of sin itself. Lepers were looked upon as “the living dead.” If you had leprosy, you could not touch or even be close to your family, friends or anyone, ever. You couldn’t work with others, have fun with others, worship at the temple with others. You were alone, afraid, ashamed, dirty and unclean; there was absolutely nothing you could do to change any of that.

So this leper comes to Jesus—and that, in and of itself, is shocking, right? If you have leprosy, you don’t come up to anybody. You stay away from everybody. But not this man. Not on this day. Just imagine the scene as this man walks through the crowds, likely yelling, “Unclean! Unclean!” People around him start parting like the Red Sea, running away from him, pulling their kids away, shouting for everybody else to do the same. He comes up to Jesus, falls on his knees and implores Him, saying, “*If you will...*” Not, “If you are able...” This leprous man knows Jesus is able. The question is: is He willing to make him clean? The crowd pauses in stunned silence, waiting to see what Jesus, the Teacher, will do. The Bible says Jesus was moved with pity.

Now, it’s interesting, because if you have the New International Version, another English translation of the Bible, this verse says, “Jesus was indignant.” Now that sounds like two different emotions, right? Moved with pity or moved with anger? Which is it—pity or anger? This is one of those very rare places in the Bible that do not in any way affect a major teaching of the Bible, but do reflect minor discrepancies between the oldest biblical manuscripts we have. One manuscript says Jesus was moved with pity; another says He was moved with anger. Regardless of which it is here, we know both emotions are realities in Jesus.

They actually go together, don’t they? Think about it. When you love someone and see them hurting or suffering, your heart aches for them. At the exact same time, you hate whatever it is in this fallen world that has led to this hurt and pain. Jesus personifies this kind of love. But here’s the difference between Jesus and us. When we’re in situations like that, it’s because we so often feel helpless. We see this

person we love hurting—a child, a parent, a friend, a spouse. We want to change it. We want to take it away, but we can't. The difference is Jesus is able and willing to do something about that.

Look at what Jesus does. Instead of turning from this man like everybody else, Jesus turns to him. He doesn't just speak, like we see in other miracle stories. Jesus could have said a word and this man would have instantly become clean. But Jesus doesn't speak. Instead, moved with pity, He stretched out His hand. Jewish law said, "Do not touch lepers." To touch a leper would be to become unclean yourself. To touch a leper would be to join that leper in his uncleanness and shame. But Jesus "*stretched out His hand and touched him.*"

Imagine the crowds gasping in horror at the Teacher Who has now defiled Himself. Jesus says, "*I will; be clean. 'and immediately the leprosy left him...*" What did that look like? Picture it. The shriveled, stained skin suddenly made clean. Shame instantly removed. The man looks around and realizes for the first time in a long, long, long time that he doesn't have to yell at anybody to get away from him. For the first time in a long, long time he's not alone. He's not afraid. He sees that friend. He sees that spouse. He sees that child. He's able to hug them.

Jesus changed everything. Who else can do this? Who else can remove dirt, shame, fear and loneliness in a moment? No one else can do this. There is no one like Jesus.

Then Jesus tells this man to go to the priest in the temple, according to God's law in the old covenant, in order to be officially declared what he actually is: clean. Jesus tells him not to speak about this to all kinds of people. We'll see this multiple times in the book of Mark, as we're reminded of what we've already talked about. As awesome as this miracle was in this man's life, it wasn't the primary purpose for Jesus coming. The primary purpose for Jesus coming was the proclamation of good news for more people in more places. And not just more people in more places in first century Palestine, but stretching all the way through time to 21<sup>st</sup> century men, women, students and children in Metro Washington, DC. This story now starts to come to our lives, and we begin to realize this is why Jesus came. You are why Jesus came.

Let's pull up the results from that survey we looked at earlier:

- Do you ever feel unclean or dirty because of something you've done? The overwhelming majority of us feel this way, including some of us saying "all the time." Just think. Where you're sitting, one out of the 20 people around you feel this all the time.
- What about feeling unclean or dirty because of something someone else has done to us? For close to 40% of us, this is a feeling we're familiar with sometimes or even more often than that.
- Do you ever struggle with guilt over something you've done? That's 85% of us who say this is common enough to be described as a struggle in my life sometimes. Or even struggling with guilt over something that someone else has done to us, even though we didn't do the wrong.
- What about shame over something you've done? Again, over three-quarters of us are familiar with that on a somewhat regular basis in our lives. Similarly, shame over things that have been done to us.

- What about fear of what others might think of us if they knew about things we have done? Almost three-quarters of us say that's true in my life, with the underlying thought of, "I don't want people to actually know me." Or fear of what others might think if they knew something someone else has done to me.
- Do you ever feel alone because of something you've done? A little over half of us do sometimes or more often. Or we're alone because of something that someone else has done to us, so we just feel like nobody else understands or maybe that nobody else is with us in the middle of that.

Those questions open our eyes to some realities, but listen to these last two questions that dive a little deeper.

- "In just a few words, what have you done that has led to feeling unclean, guilty, ashamed, afraid or alone?" The words you have used include "lied, lust, anger, gossip, divorce, sexual sin, cheating, abortion, adultery and impure thoughts."
- "What has someone else done to you that has led to feeling unclean, guilty, ashamed, afraid or alone?" Your answers include things like, "Abuse, anger, rejection, assault, abandonment, betrayal and gossip."

Can I just summarize this by saying that we are a hurting, broken people in a fallen world? Can we just stop putting on a face like everything is perfect, right and good in our lives, in our families, in our past, in our present? We all feel these things in some measure in this world. I would submit if you don't feel any of these things, you may be in the most dangerous position of all, because you have done things, we have all done things, for which we are guilty before God and others. Denial may be your drug of choice for covering up some of these things, but God makes clear in His Word that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

We are fallen people, fallen families in a fallen world. The first step toward healing, wholeness, health and hope in our lives is realizing this. "Unclean! Unclean!" is not just a cry on a leper's lips. It's a reality in every single one of our lives. So where is the one who is able and willing to make us clean? The good news of the Bible is there is One Who is able and willing to make us clean. This is why He came. Jesus, God in the flesh, has come to this fallen world. The One with all authority over all disease, with all authority over all demons, has come to proclaim good news to all people in all nations, no matter who you are or what you have done.

To all who are unclean, because of things you have done or things that have been done to you, Jesus says, "I am willing, I am able, I have come to make you clean." To all who are guilty, Jesus says, "I have come to declare you innocent." To all who are ashamed, Jesus says, "I have come to bestow upon you honor." To the afraid and alone, Jesus says, "I have come to cast out your fears of this world; I will never, ever, ever forsake you in this world." Jesus has come to say, "I love you."

Just feel this where you are sitting. “I love you and I hate the sin and evil that brings about the suffering with which you are familiar.”

Now what’s the problem? All of us are sinners. So how can Jesus, Who is perfectly just and true, declare any of us innocent when all of us are guilty of sin? How can Jesus give any of us honor when all of us deserve judgment for sin? How can any of us have eternal life with God when all of us, in our sin, warrant eternal separation from God?

The answer is what makes Jesus unique, unlike any other. It’s why this story of Jesus and a leper is actually pointing us to a much greater story about Jesus and your life, right where you are sitting right now. For this leper who was humble and bold enough to come to Jesus, Jesus stretched out His hand and took the leper’s uncleanness upon Himself, in order to make that man clean. In a much, much greater way, He stretched out His hands on a cross and took all the sin and uncleanness of those who trust in Him upon Himself and paid the whole price. This is the ultimate reason for which Jesus came. He died so that all who are humble and bold enough to believe in and trust in Him and His love will be made completely clean. This is the gospel.

Let me illustrate this for you. We have talked about things we have done and things others have done to us, things we have done that leave us feeling unclean, guilty, ashamed, afraid and alone. It may look different in each of our lives, but the stain of sin marks all of our lives. Then there are things that have been done to us, or things we’ve experienced when it comes to suffering in this world—disease, sickness, struggles. We live in a world that offers all kinds of avenues to try to get rid of this guilt, shame and fear. “This relationship surely will do it. Just work hard. Give yourself to that person.” But it’s still there. Maybe it’s work. Just work really, really hard. Get really busy. Be really successful. Or maybe it’s drinking. Maybe it’s this habit. Maybe it’s this outlet. Maybe it’s if I just do enough religious things. We try as hard as we can but it’s still there. Why? Because we’re looking to a fallen world to do what a fallen world cannot do. There’s no one—no matter how great the relationship is—who can take away your uncleanness and make you clean in this world. This is where this world leaves us.

But the good news of the Bible is that the pure and holy One, God Himself in the flesh, has come to us, lived a perfect life among us, then willingly chose to suffer on a cross for us, to shed His blood as the price for our sin, so that by trust in Him—no matter what you have done, no matter how afraid you might be for others to know about that—the God Who knows about that has taken all of it upon Himself, defiled Himself, became sin for us, in order that we might become the righteousness of God, free from sin.

You may be thinking, “I’ve still got suffering in this world. I still struggle with sickness and disease. I’m so thankful your mom’s doing good, but I prayed for healing for my disease, but it’s still there.” Or, “I’ve experienced this. This person did this to me and I can’t get it out of my mind or my heart.” Whatever it might be, there are realities of suffering in this world.

But this is the great news, even beyond what Jesus has done to pay the price for our sin. When Jesus went to the cross on our behalf, He not only paid the price for our sin, Jesus severed the root of suffering itself. He suffered on our behalf. He died on a cross. He experienced death in our place, and in so doing, He was saying to all who believe and to all who trust in Him, whatever you experience in this world, whatever suffering you experience—sickness, disease or anything else that anybody else has done to you—those things will not define you, those things will not have the last word.

He has died on a cross, He has risen from the grave and He is coming back one day. On that day, He is going to take away all your sorrow and suffering; He's going to wipe every tear from your eyes and you will be made whole again forever. Who can do this for you? No one else but Jesus can heal your deepest hurts, can take that which is unclean and make you clean, can take that which is guilty and make you innocent, can take that which is ashamed and bring you honor, that can remove fear and reconcile you into relationship with your Creator, where you will not be alone for all of eternity. If only you will be bold and humble enough to come to Him as the One Who can do these things in your life.

So toward that end, I want to invite you to bow your heads with me. I want us to go before Him right now with all the different things in our lives. I want to ask first and foremost, have you placed your faith in Jesus? Have you placed your faith in the One Who has died on the cross for sins and risen from the grave? Are you a follower of Jesus? If your answer is not a resounding yes in your heart, today is the day. Right now, God is speaking to your heart. I invite you just to say to Him, "Make me clean, God." Confess before God right now in your heart, "I have sinned against You. I am guilty before You of sin. But I believe today that Jesus loves me, has died on a cross for my sin and has risen from the grave. Today I trust in Him."

For all who say, "Yes, I trust in Jesus," God says, "You are not guilty anymore." You say, "What do I have to do?" By grace through faith in Jesus, trust in Him and be declared righteous, a child of God, brought into His family forever.

Then for all who are a part of His family, for all who are followers of Jesus, I'm not presuming in any way that there's not a battle in your mind and heart, sometimes on a daily basis, sometimes throughout the day, to believe these things. This is why we've come together as the church because none of us can do this alone. We're intended to help one another, walk with one another through these things in life, applying gospel balm to each other's hearts and minds, day after day as we share life with each other, week after week as we come together.

God, I pray for all kinds of people, all across this room and other locations, online, who are listening right now, who are walking through all kinds of things. I pray that they would know that they are not alone, that they would know that You are with them, that they would know Your promises in our Bible reading as a church today. I pray they will know that they can do all things through Christ Who strengthens them (Philippians 4:13). I pray for the strength of Christ over those who feel weak. Help us not to be

anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, present our requests to You, that the peace that comes from you and transcends all understanding might guard our hearts and minds (Philippians 4:6-7).

God, I pray this over Your church today. I pray this over every single person listening right now. May Your peace guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. May they know that they are secure in Christ, that they are not defined by what they have done or what has been done to them. God, would You bring continual healing to our hurts? Would You grant continual strength in our weakness and struggle, as we look forward together to the day when we will see Your face, Jesus? As we look forward to when You will wipe away every tear from our eyes, when sin will be no more, when sorrow and suffering will be no more, when death will be no more?

Come quickly, Lord Jesus, we pray. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on You, the One and only, until that day. In Jesus' name we pray all these things. And all God's people said, "Amen."

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All Scriptures are quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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