



Message Transcript

Choosing Suffering Over Sin

Jeff Schwarzentraub

When I was a little boy, my neighbors used to always go out to the Dairy Queen during the summer about every other night. And I always wanted to go. The reason I wanted to go is because they were all my friends. The other reason I wanted to go, they had the coolest Jeep that didn't have a top on it, and all the kids got to ride in the back of the Jeep and go to Dairy Queen. I would ask my parents every single time that they went if I could go, and 100% of the time they told me no. They never, ever, not one time when I was a kid, not once ever let me go.

And I would throw a tantrum, or I would cry, or I would beg, I would persuade. Nothing that I ever did change my parents' opinions. They never, ever let me go. And I did not understand why not, until I got a little bit older. Turned out as I got older, I realized that our neighbor was an alcoholic and drank all the time and then piled his kids in the car and went. And my parents were saying no, not because they didn't love me. My parents saying no because they cared for me. But even more than that, they were dealing with the suffering of the neighbors because our neighbors would make fun of my parents because my parents wouldn't let them go.

So I didn't realize it at the time, but I remember I got a little trophy. There was one day where all the neighbors, the two parents and their three kids, walked over with this present for me. And I opened it up, and it was a trophy that they had made. It had a plaque on it. The name of our street was Bel Air, and it was called the Bel Air Good Guy Award. And they presented me the Bel Air Good Guy Award because I never got to go to Dairy Queen. And really, what it was, was a slap in my parents' face saying that my parents were too conservative to let me go hang out with them. And my

parents suffered all those years because they were doing the right thing.

It's hard sometimes to choose the right thing when you know you're going to suffer, rather than just give in and do something that goes against your conscience. Especially in the Christian life. What's it look like to choose suffering over sin? When you think about that title of a sermon, choosing suffering over sin, be like, I don't like either choice. I really don't want to sin, I'm a Christian, but I don't want to suffer either. What kind of service is this?

It means you get to choose which way you're going to walk with the Lord once you become a Christian. You either get to walk with Jesus because the reality is, once you start walking with Jesus, you are going to face some sort of suffering. In Peter's day, it was severe. In Peter's day, it was persecution or death for following the Lord. In our culture, it may not be that severe yet, but I can promise you if you walk with the Lord to the fullest extent of what the Lord calls you to do, there will be suffering that you endure, and are you willing to choose suffering over your sin? If you are, it's going to require three things. And that's where our text is going to tell us what it's going to require today.

So if you open up your Bibles to I Peter chapter four versus one through 11, I'd like to read the text, and then we'll unpack that together and take a look at the three requirements of choosing suffering over sinning. Here's what he says.

"Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. So as

to live the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already passed is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you, but they will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For the gospel has for this purpose been preached, even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, that they may live in the spirit, according to the will of God.

"The end of all things is near. Therefore, be of sound judgment and of sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God. Whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies, so that in all things, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Amen? And so, as God is writing to us through his servant Peter today, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he's telling us that choosing suffering requires three different elements. And the first is this, that choosing suffering over sin requires armoring up with the attitude of Christ. He says, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh." Therefore. He's summarizing what he's been telling us. Did Christ suffer in the flesh?

Absolutely he did. He suffered physically, but long before he was ever put on the cross and crucified, he was beaten. He was mocked. He had a crown of thorns put on his head. He was punched. He was smacked. All sorts of different things went on. He suffered in the flesh because of one reason and one reason only, he claimed his true identity, that he was indeed God's one and only son.

He suffered. He suffered in the flesh. Christ suffered. Then he died on the cross. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead. He is the way, the truth, and the life. And you can confess him as your Lord and savior and have a relationship with God, or you can reject him and not have a relationship with God. But therefore, he says, since Jesus Christ suffered in the flesh, he says this. "Arm yourself also with the same purpose." Arm yourself also with the same purpose, that's this armoring up. That word arm there is a military term that means to dress yourself up in military attire. It's arming yourself with the same purpose or with the same attitude. It means Jesus willingly chose to be obedient to his father, which he knew was going to cause his suffering.

Think about this. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, what was he praying about? He knew where he was going. He knew what he was going to suffer. And it wasn't just the physical suffering. He was going to suffer the sin of all humanity. And yet what was he doing? He was talking to his father the entire time, telling his dad, "Whatever you want of me, however you want me to do it, in whatever way you want me to do it, that's what I want to do."

Here's what the text is telling us: arm yourself with that same purpose. In other words, is your life entirely God's? The answer is, well, yes, it is. But will you allow God

and Jesus Christ to be the Lord of your life in every single way? Will you arm yourself with the same purpose? In other words, will you tell the Lord, "Lord, all my possessions, every gift, every talent that I have, every relationship, I submit that to your lordship. It's all yours. I'm arming myself with the same humility that Christ has, so that you can take me down any path you want, any way you want, in any relationship that you want, and that I would live for you in that way." That's what it means to arm yourself with the same purpose as Christ.

And here's how the verse ends. He says, "Because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Now some may say, well, he's talking about Jesus there, because he suffered in the flesh and has ceased from sin. The problem with that is Jesus didn't cease from sin. Jesus never sinned. What he's really talking about us doing is armoring ourselves up because he who has suffered in the flesh is ceased from sin. It doesn't mean that when you suffer, that you'll never ever sin again. What it means is when you mature in your faith, where you're willing to suffer for the lordship of Jesus Christ, what you're doing is you are turning your back on sin. You're no longer taking the easy road. You're no longer going with your friends and your acquaintances at school or at work and just saying, "Well, that's just what everybody does. And yeah, I'm a Christian, but I can play along with that a little bit."

No, I'm making a line in the sand that I'm crossing over to live completely for Jesus. And by suffering in that way, you are ceasing from this life of sin that you used to live. The way Paul would describe it would be like this. If you want to write this

verse down in Romans chapter six verses six and seven, he says, "Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin, for he who has died is freed from sin."

In other words, when you understand Jesus Christ is the Lord of your life, and you begin to live that way, and you begin to grow in that way and take steps that way, you will experience some suffering. And when you do, just smile up at the Lord and say, "Lord, I'm starting to get a taste of what you endured, not at the level you did, but I get what it's like." As you're walking that way, what you're doing is you're starting to cease from the sin that you used to be in. That's how we have to arm ourselves up, to live with that same purpose.

And why is that important, especially in American culture? Because we don't want to make a distinction between anybody. We all want to be the same. And even as Christians, we don't want to live for Jesus as it can cost us something. It can cost us friendships. It can cost us a job. It can cost us relationships. It can cost us any number of things. And here's why it says you got to armor up. You got to decide if Jesus Christ is really your Lord, are you going to allow him to be the Lord of every area of your life? If you do, you will find yourself suffering more than you find yourself sinning. That's the point.

And he goes on to say it like this. "So as to live the rest of time in the flesh, no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." Now, what's the rest of time? Do you know what the rest of time is? Yeah, it means it starts today. Because here's how

many of us think when we hear a message like this. "I got this little pet sin. It's not that big of a deal. And it doesn't creep up all the time. It's just there sometimes. And it's not that big of a deal. So at some point in time, I'll probably deal with that. At some point in time, maybe I'll repent of that, or I'll work on it in the meantime."

No, he says so for the rest of time, meaning today you draw your line in the sand, and for the rest time, I'm done with that. I'm repenting of that. I'm confessing that. I'm knowing I have no control over that, and I'm asking God to be gracious to me in that, so that the power of God might be manifested in my life. So I'm no longer going to live for the things of this world and all the appetites and the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

Think about the world's appetites. Many of us want to combine Jesus and America or Jesus and the world system and hope that it all goes really well. And the way that that works is this. We sit down with a piece of paper or a book that we read that's other than the Bible, and we start writing down all our wants, and I want, and I want, and I want, and I want, and I want, and I want, and I want, and this is how I design my life. And this is what I want it to be like. And it's so awesome. And then we pray, "Jesus, give me this. And then if you give me this, I'll keep walking with you."

How many know that God does not work that way? Here's what God says. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and will make your path straight." In other words, I get to lead you down the path I want you to go. I get to take you where I want you to go. I'm

just asking you to be submissive to me every single step of the way. Sometimes I'll show you what's coming. Most of the time, I won't. Will you keep walking after me? So from now on live for me guiding your steps rather than for the things of the world.

He says in verse three, "For the time already passed is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries." Now, notice this. "For the time already passed is sufficient for these things."

Listen to me, because some of you here think this. "I'm still young. I know I'm forgiven. God's going to take me to heaven anyway. This is what people my age do. I'm just going to engage in this for a little while.' Here's what he says. "No, no, no. The time for that is already passed." If you're a Christian, you get baptized. And when you get baptized, you're dead to sin, and you're alive in Christ. And the time is passed for what you used to be. You are a new creation. The old is gone, the new is come, and you're going to live your full identity for or who you are in Jesus Christ. So what the word says about you, you're actually going to believe and allow God to live that, and then through you. Because the time passed was sufficient for you to live in all your sin.

Word of you that grew up in the church that got saved at the age of five and got baptized, here's a word for you, praise God. You didn't miss out on anything. It's not like, "Well, I wish I could beef up my testimony. Then I'd really have..." Your testimony is that God's grace captured you at a young age and you got to walk with him your whole life. How powerful is that? The time passed is sufficient for sin. There's nothing about sin and its allurements that will do anything beneficial for you, your heart, your

soul, or your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It's done.

Here's the question. Are you done with it? See, God wants you to be done with it. And yes, God loves you even if you sin, and God loves you even if you stumble, and he's a gracious, good God. But one of the reasons in our culture that Christians don't live their life to the full with God is because they still have one foot here and one foot here, and they're trying to figure out, "How come my Christian life's not working so well? Maybe I'll give a little more attention here. I'm 80% in with Jesus and 20% in with my friend." No, you got to draw the line in the sand and say, "It's passed."

Now, I don't need to define all these words for you because I think they pretty much make sense. When you talk about sensuality and lusts, that really involves sexual lusts or going after the things of this world. Drunkenness is being controlled by something other than the Holy Spirit. Carousing, drinking parties, which really turns into this: abominable idolatries. Now, what's an abominable idolatry? Idolatry is this. It's giving your ultimate trust and hope to that which isn't ultimate. Drinking, sex, all those things can be idols. You give yourself to those things, which are not ultimate. Only Jesus Christ is worth giving your ultimate life to.

The time is passed for those things. Christian, listen to me. You're not going to win anybody to Christ by hanging out with your non-Christian friends and acting like them. You will not win anybody to Christ, going to the bars and getting drunk with all your friends and then sharing Jesus with them at 12:30 at night, when you're both sitting there drunk, and you're crying because you've been baptized, and they've never

been baptized. You think you're having this awesome moment. It doesn't work.

What works is you drawing a line in the sand and living differently than how they live. And here's what happens. If you do that, verse four will be your life. "In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you." Dissipation means wastefulness or debauchery.

If you start living for Jesus, they're going to be shocked. When you start living for Jesus, those closest to you will be shocked. Listen to me, listen to me. If you're a believer in Christ and you start living to for Christ, there will be people in your family that are shocked, that will malign you. There will be people in your closest circle of friends that will be shocked and malign you. There'll be people at your office place that'll be shocked and malign you. There'll be people in your neighborhood that'll be shocked and malign you.

When that happens, just know, "Man, thank you, God. I guess I really have crossed over. I'm experiencing more of what it looks like to live the Christian life." That's what happens. If you say, "That's never happened to me," then this would be a question you should ask God. "God, is there anything in my life that is not totally submitted to your leadership?" Ask him that question because I find that the Holy Spirit's very good at answering that question in my own life.

If I'm sincerely asking God to show me if there's anything out of a line and if there's any sin pattern in my life that I need to relent or repent from or release to him, he's always good at showing me right away. Are you willing to do that? Because if you

do, you're going to find that these friends that you think are your friends, they ain't your friends. Your friends are those who love you when you're pursuing Jesus with your whole heart. Those are your friends. Which if I could just say, that's the importance of the church because in a church is where you're going to find those people where the word of God is being preached, where people are living on mission for the glory of God, and you have other people surrounding you saying, "Great job. Keep going, keep going, keep going." That's where you're going to find them, in the church. Amen?

Amen.

But notice this, when you start living that way, you're going to give them something to think about. Verse five, "But they will give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead." All the people you hang out with that don't know the Lord, much like you, will give an account to Jesus Christ. Now here's the problem. For anybody that has never confessed Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior and trusted in him for the forgiveness of his or her sins, when they meet Jesus to give an account for their life, they will be cast into hell for all eternity.

So when you say, "I'm just being a cool Christian, I'm hanging out with them because we're really getting to know them. And I'm not one of those Bible beater kind that actually preaches the word. We're just being relational." Here's what you're actually doing. You're encouraging them to go to hell for all eternity because you don't care for them. When you live for Christ, they'll be shocked that you're actually living that way. You'll be a testimony to them because they'll see in your life, you believe you're standing before the Lord someday. And they'll recognize by seeing it in you,

maybe they are too. You have a witness to the Lord when you follow after him.

When you're willing to choose suffering over the little sins that you do, then God shows up in a powerful way. Why? For the gospel has been preached for this purpose. It's for this purpose been preached to who? Even to those who are dead. Now, what's that mean? It means the gospel has been preached. And at the time that Peter's writing this book, there's some that the gospel have been preached to, who believed in Jesus Christ, that are even now, they're dead.

So for this purpose, the gospel's being preached, even now to who are dead. Why? That though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit, according to the will of God. What does it mean? It means that the gospel is so powerful that even if for a moment you endure suffering, which always has an end game. There's a temporary part of suffering. It's always going to end at some point in time. And when it does, guess what? You will live in the fullness of the spirit forever and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever, amen. And even if you suffered 100 years on this world, and you meet Job in heaven, and you're like, "Dude, you didn't suffer at all compared to what I suffered." Even then, you'll recognize that was a light and momentary affliction compared to the eternal weight of glory that I'm experiencing with the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

And so when we're choosing suffering over sin, what we're saying is, I love Jesus and my witness that he wants to live in and through me more than just doing these things and saying, "Well, he'll forgive me anyway. I'm growing as a Christian this way."

The second way that we choose suffering over sin, it requires this. It requires this urgency to pray and to love one another. The urgency to pray and love one another. Notice verse seven. He starts off by saying, "The end of all things is near." That simply means this, that the end of all things is near. The world that we live in and the system that we live in and the homes that you live in and the cars that you drive and the relationships that you have, it's all coming to an end. And it's coming soon. How soon? I don't know. The Bible says he's coming soon. There's a nearness. If Jesus comes back in my lifetime, I will not be surprised whatsoever. Come, Lord Jesus. May he come. I'd love it if he came. If he tarries 500 more years, he can do whatever he wants, but I know this. He's coming soon.

The end of all things is near, which tells me this. There's an urgency in this. It means that for many of us as Christians, when we hear a message like this, it's like, "Yeah, I should probably take a step in that direction. This week, I'm busy. We're moving, or I've got a vacation planned, or we got finals coming up, or graduation just ended. We got to... So maybe next week." No. Today. Now. The need for the gospel is that great, and the need for your soul to be cleansed is that great.

It's near. Therefore, what does he say? "Be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer." It means to be self-controlled and clearheaded for the purpose of prayer. Now here's what you might think. What you might think, I know how I would be writing this. The end is near, the end is near, go tell everybody about Jesus. The end is near. Do you not realize the end is near? Go evangelize. The end is near. Here's what he said. The end is near, so be sober minded, be clearheaded, be self-

controlled, so you can pray.

Prayer is the most powerful offensive weapon that we have as a Christian. I believe, and this is my own personal testimony, that's why I find that discipline harder than about any of the others that we do. Tithing is not a hard discipline for me. Spending time alone in silence, seeking the Lord in prayer becomes a very hard discipline for me. And maybe you've had some of the similar experiences I've had, where you sit down to pray, and as you're sitting down to pray and you open your Bible, you're like, "Okay, I got to call this person. I got to do this. I got to finish this thing. I got to..." And then you pick up your phone and maybe you text somebody, and then you put it down, and you're like, "Oh yeah. Oh, but I forgot this." You ever had that happen?

It's hard to pray because the enemy knows that he wants to distract you because he knows he ain't afraid of your witness. But here's what he's afraid of. He's afraid of Jesus Christ living his life in and through you in a very full way.

Amen.

He knows that if you're praying, he knows that if we're praying, that he has the ability to do things in and through us that are supernatural. So what are we called to do? We're called to pray. What did Jesus spend a lot of his earthly ministry doing? He prayed. He's Jesus. He's Jesus. And yet he felt compelled to pray and be with his dad all the time. After miracles, before selecting disciples, up all night doing... What was he doing? Praying. Why? Because there's spiritual power in prayer. What are we called to

do this for?

Hey, here's where the battle takes place. It takes place in your prayer life. And I'm not asking you by show of hands, because I don't want to embarrass anybody. I'm not trying to, but just ask yourself the question. How long did you pray this morning before you came to church? If I were to ask how many got up two hours early, just to pray for two hours, because you wanted to make sure that when you heard God this morning from his living and active word, that you'd be ready to put it into practice, and you'd want other people to get saved, and you'd want other people to grow in their faith. Two hours.

When Jesus was with this disciples, can you imagine this? Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is being betrayed. He's getting ready to go to the cross. He's got 11 men with him. He invites them to do what? Come pray with me. Just pray with me. Now, knowing what we know now, wouldn't that be an interesting event to be a part of? Jesus is getting ready to go to the cross, and he invites 11 of us and say, "Hey, come pray with me." Would you go pray with Jesus?

What did his disciples do? They fell asleep. Jesus questioned to them. Three times, he comes back. "Could you not even stay awake for an hour?" Jesus' posed question is like, an hour is not a long time to pray. For most of us, three minutes is a long time to pray.

Ouch.

For most of us, it is. And it's a developed discipline. So I'm not telling you, and

you can't do this, don't make a commitment, say starting Monday morning, I'm getting up a half an hour early and I'm going to pray for a half an hour. You will not be able to do that. That would be like waking up tomorrow and me saying I'm going to bench press 400 pounds tomorrow. I'm going to start. I can't do that. Okay. You guys are looking at me like, "Can he do it?" No.

So we're called to be sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. And then he says above all, what are we going to do? Not only to pray, but keep fervent. That means eager or urgent in your love for one another. Because love covers over a multitude of sins. That means be eager to love other people. Be eager to demonstrate love to people that are unlovable. That's what it means. Why? Because love covers over a multitude of sins. Love always covers over a multitude of sins. What's that mean? Well, when Jesus died on the cross, obviously he covered more than a multitude. He covered all our sins. It's not talking about Jesus. It's talking about how we cover sins for each other. The way we cover sins for each other is we don't have to bring everything up. It means we show love rather than reprove every single time we're around somebody.

When you got married, you knew you married a sinner, but after you got married, you knew what the sins were, didn't you? And then you got married, and what's love do? Love covers over a multitude of sins. Because if you spent your entire marriage pointing out all the flaws of your spouse, it will not work. It'll upset your spouse and frustrate you to death. Love covers over a multitude of sins. Love is able to say, "You know what? I don't need to bring this up. And I love you in spite of, and you're awesome, and God can come in and give grace to that." It means we show love to

each other in that radical kind of way. We're called to do that in the church specifically, we're called to do that to people outside, where people see a demonstrable evidence of our love for God by the way in which we treat them.

So we're to pray, we're to love, and then the third one is this. What are we to do? Be hospitable to one another without complaint. Hospitality is really friendliness to strangers. It's a welcoming idea. It can be welcoming them in your home, but more importantly, it's really welcoming them in your life. You could be at the gas pump and show hospitality to someone when you're welcoming them into your life. It means you're living on mission to welcome strangers. It means people can be a part of who you are. You're not untouchable. You're not in your own realm. You're not just living your life. You're hospitable.

It means I want to show you love. I want to get to know you. And if you got time, I got time for you, and you can be part of what's going on here, because there's nothing special about this guy, other than Jesus. There's nothing special about this gal other than Jesus. That's showing hospitality. And the Bible makes clear that sometimes when we show hospitality, in the book of Hebrews, we may have even entertained angels unaware. We're showing hospitality to people in a way that represents, when we're standing before them and with them, if Jesus were in and through me, which he is as a believer, this is exactly what he'd do. This is exactly how he'd spend his time. This is exactly the way in which he would demonstrate love.

So what are we called to do? They don't seem like really earth shattering things, but for us, they're the most important. Prayer, love, and hospitality. Jesus said, "Hey,

this is the command I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you. By this, all men will know that you're my disciples." Did Jesus show hospitality? Everywhere he went. He didn't even have a house. He didn't even have a place to lay his head. And he demonstrated hospitality to everyone he met.

Choosing suffering over sin requires that, that we armor up with the attitude of Christ, that we have an urgency to pray and a love for one another. And then finally, is this. Choosing suffering over sin requires a stewarding of God's investment in you for his glory. A stewarding of God's investment in you for his glory. You're going to see the word stewarding in the text. Steward simply means this, I'm managing that which was given to me. I don't own it. I'm not the owner of it. I'm managing that which was given to me. And he says this. Look at your Bibles. Look at this. You got to see this for yourself. "As each one has received a special gift."

Okay? Who's that? Who's that?

Holy Spirit.

That's me and you. Each one. Means every single person who has trusted in Jesus Christ has received a special gift. Now obviously, at the moment of conversion, we've received the Holy Spirit on the inside, and the Holy Spirit gets to decide how he dispenses gifts to the body of Christ. He dispenses gifts. He gives gifts the way he wants, and you're going to see what the purpose of gifts is. The purpose of gifts is not for comparison. And the purpose of gifts is not for you. The purpose of gifts is not to look around and say, "Why did I get this one? How come I didn't get his? How come I

didn't get hers?" It's not to look around and say, "Thank goodness I got this one, and I didn't get those."

The purpose of gifts is not about comparison. And the purpose of gifts is not about you. God did not gift you for you. God gifted you for him. He gifted you with a special gift for a purpose for him. He's entrusted you with something, which means this. If you're a believer in Christ at the moment you were converted, God's love was around you up until the time you were converted. He's loved you with an unconditional love. When you came into the family of God, he gifted you and gave you a special gift. Everybody in the body of Christ has at least one gift, maybe multiple ones.

And here's the reality. You've all been given this gift, and what's he say? Employ it in serving one another as good stewards... There's that word stewards. Of what? The manifold grace of God. Manifold means many. It means variety. It means God gifts people uniquely.

Yeah, there are certain gifts that everybody has the same. You may have the gift of teacher. Some people have the gift of teacher, teach like this. Some people have the gift of teacher, teach like this. Some people have the gift of teacher, teach... Just because you've been given a gift, there's a myriad of ways that God uses the gift. Some people have the gift of teaching, are upfront like I am. Some people have the gift of teaching, do it one on one. Some people have the gift of teaching, do it in a small group. Some can do it with kids, miraculously.

When I grew up and was four years old, I remember I had a four-year-old

nursery school teacher. Unbelievable. She's in her 80s to this day. She was awesome. And I remember watching her as I got older and was in high school, and she could have 40 four-year-olds just follow her in a single file line, sit on this invisible magic square with their hands folded and their legs crossed as if it was not a big deal.

And then I got asked to lead VBS in the first church I was in for five four-year-olds that I had. And can you take them outside and play kickball? I'm thinking to myself, easy. I'll have them sit on the magic square, and then we'll just play kickball. Magic square, my foot. They opened the door, and the kids ran everywhere, nobody was doing. And I realized what a gift that was that she had. Not everybody has that gift. Does that make sense?

And so God has not only gifted you with spiritual gifts, but he's done it in a unique way that only you can do the gift and bring the gift for the purpose of doing what? What's the purpose of the gift? To serve others. To serve others.

Now you're going to see that the final goal of that gift is bringing glory to God. But what's the purpose of the gift? It's to serve others. God gave you a gift for the purpose of serving other people. It's not self-serving.

Now, why is this important? Because you can read every self-help book. I think I've read most of them. I read them all when I was in college. Now there's new ones, but all these things, how to find the right job and how to find the right this and how to think and grow rich and how to do all this and how to do all this and how to do all this. And then I learn how to use my gifts for who? For me. When I graduated from Dallas

Seminary, I was really trying to ask the Lord, what would you have me do? And how's this thing going to work out? And after I went to this church planning residency, it didn't work out. And I was confused and I was saying, "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

And prior to becoming an evangelist, I was asking, I'll do anything. I'll coach football, I'll go speak in the marketplace. And I had an opportunity to go speak in the marketplace. And they asked me, "How much do you charge?" And I didn't know. I said, "I'll get back to you on that." So I called my mentor. I'm like, "What do I tell them?" He was like, "Well, how long do they want you to speak?" And I said, "I think a half an hour to an hour." And he's like, "Just tell them 1000 bucks." And he goes, "They won't even blink." I'm like, "1000 dollars just for speaking an hour?" He's like, "It's nothing. Trust me. They won't even..." So I called them back, said, "Yeah, I'll do 1000 dollars." And "Do you need a hotel stay?" I'm like, "Yeah." And they paid for all my food. They gave me 1000 dollars. I went and spoke at this thing.

They told me when I got done, they were like, "Man, you're so undercharge yourself. We're going to send you another check for 4,000 dollars because we feel bad for robbing you." So I called my friend, like, "They paid me 5,000 dollars an hour." He's like, "That's nothing." He goes, "If you do this," he goes, "you'll have way more than that." So I was like, I can live off that. So maybe I'll do this.

And I remember praying about it, like, "Lord, I'll do this because I got to meet a lot of non-Christians in the marketplace, and I can share my faith and do all this stuff." But as I continued to pray to the Lord, he made it crystal clear to me. I called you to preach the word. Not just help people grow, but I called you to preach my word. That's

what I got tattooed on my arm. That's what he called me to do.

And so, I remember I went back to this final meeting where I was going to sign a little contract and start doing that stuff in the marketplace. And I met with them. They're like, "Are you ready to go?" And I said, "Yeah, but before I sign, let me just tell you what we're going to do. I'm not doing that. I'm going to go preach the word. I'm going to do evangelism ministry. And I want you to be on my board." And he goes, "Where are you going to get the money?" And I'm like, "We don't have any, but let's go do that." And that's how the meeting shifted. Because in my heart, I knew that deep down in my heart, there's nothing wrong with doing business and professional speaking, but in my heart, I was only doing it for money. And I was just saying, "I can do it that way. And here's what I'll do for you, God. And let me show you how the plan's going to work, and it's going to be awesome."

You ever done that with God? Where you take your gifts and you show them how you can use it and how it's going to work. It's so much better when you just do this. It's not my life. It's yours. You must increase. I must decrease. What do you want to do? I'll do whatever you want. And then God has a way of saying, "Here's what it is. And here's what you can do."

And I tell you this, I don't miss any of that part at all. I love what I get to do. And this is why he says in verse 11, he says, "Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God. Whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies." So here, we don't have an exhaustive list of spiritual

gifts, but he really sums them all up. Here's what he talks about. Whether you're speaking or serving, do it all to the glory of God. Amen?

So if your gifts involve more speaking or you're in a situation one on one where God's working through you to say something to somebody else, either an encouraging word or a difficult word, speak as if you're speaking the very utterances of God. And if you're serving, serve in such a way where the manifest power of God comes through you, where people don't see your service, or you're not serving so you get notice or you get a title or you get a degree or you rise up the ranks of your... You're doing it so that people see Jesus in you. So whether you speak or whether you serve, do it all for him.

And this gives us the final why. "So that in all things, whether you're speaking or serving, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever, amen." Jesus Christ is sitting at the right hand of his father. He is coming back soon. He will be here soon to be glorified from everyone and everything in all creation on the earth. May he be glorified in our life now. Because to him deserves the highest praise.

So here's a question, and this is a really hard question. I'm just going to be honest with you. It's one you're going to have to wrestle with, and you're going to ask God to give you the grace to do this, but here's the question. "Hey God, do you have everything in my entire life? Is my life completely submitted to you? Or Lord, is there any area in my life that's not submitted that you want me to submit to you? Because this day I want to do that for you."

Now, it's a real easy thing to mouth. It's a real hard thing to mean. Because when you start thinking about it, if you're like any other Christian that's ever walked the planet like me, you start realizing, yeah. But if you take me that way, that's not the way I wanted to go. If you take me that way, that's not the path I had planned for my life. That's not what I wanted to do. That's not what I wanted to be when I grew up.

Kim and I were having a conversation, my wife and I, just the other week. And we were talking about where we are in life and what we thought about people like us when we were growing up. And I remember thinking of what conservative pastors were like, okay. And I was like, "Dude, those people are weird." I didn't go to a Bible preaching church, but those people are so conservative. They're so narrow-minded. And then homeschool families, have you ever met some of these parents? Now we homeschool. Now I'm a conservative pastor.

And every single time that I continue to be in the word, I've become everything that I used to make fun of when I was growing up. If 30 years ago, somebody would've told me, "You're going to be a pastor and homeschool your kids," I would've said, "Give me death. Right now. I want nothing to do with that."

Let me tell you, I love what I get to do. And I love what we get to do with our kids. I'm committed to those things because that's how God's led our family. It's what he's leading to us. And that's what I'm telling you. Everything I had planned in my life and everything in my head that was on my imaginary bulletin board that I was going to become, all those things have burned up to the surpassing knowledge of knowing

Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I'm so grateful. And I love him more and more every single day.

Which doesn't mean this. It doesn't mean if you give your life to Christ, you're going to become a pastor. It means if you give your life to Christ, he will take you on a journey that's unimaginable in ways that you might not have gone, and you will be the most fulfilled, and you will have the greatest impact so that when he returns, you will hear these words. "Well done, good and faithful servant. Here's what I entrusted to you. Not only did I give you these gifts, but I gave him uniquely you with your personality and your gifting. I gave you the parents. I gave you the hardships. I gave you the joys. I gave you all that as curriculum for you to steward what I gave you for my glory. Thank you so much for doing it my way through you. I love being creative and doing that."

That's the joy. And when we choose that over a life of sin, there's great joy in our life. Because for many Christians, and I'll end by telling you this, for many Christians, they never get beyond the early stages of their Christian walk, which is nothing more than this. Can I do that and still be a Christian? Can I do that and still be a Christian? Will God still forgive me if I do that? Will God still forgive me if I do that? Let me answer that for you. He'll still forgive you no matter what. It's not a matter of living, is this sin? Is this not sin? It's a matter of am I completely submitted to Jesus and letting him take my life and use my life for his purposes. And yeah, I'll make mistakes along the way. Yeah, I'll stumble and fall. But at least I'm falling forward, and I'm going the way Jesus wants me to go.

And when you choose that path, sin starts falling away. You start ceasing from it. The grievous sins I used to sin, I don't sit around my house and ask myself, "Do I want to go live that way tonight?" Not only is the answer no, I don't even think about it. I don't want that life. I hate it. I despise what I used to be. I love who I'm becoming.

And here's the truth about what we're talking about. It's a journey. Amen? It's a journey. The immediacy is saying, "You have my life." The journey is, as we continue journeying with him day by day, we realize how much more of our life he really wants. Amen. And no matter where you are today, I got great news for you. When you confess your sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive your sins, and he'll cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

Amen.

There's no one here today that God would say, "Nope, you've sinned too much. And you, way, way too much back there. And you sinned a little bit here. Yeah. You're going to need to work that off." No, no. The blood of Jesus Christ covers everything. He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. If you've never trusted in Jesus Christ, you can simply confess him as your personal Lord and Savior right here in this moment. And if you have trusted in Jesus Christ, maybe the prayer for us all will be, "Lord, do you have all of me? And Lord, if there's any way you don't, I'm giving that to you right now." Would you stand with me as we close today?

So Lord, we come before you right now. And Lord, we ask in this moment that you would do a work on both of our campuses, God. If you're here today and say, "I

don't even have a relationship with Jesus Christ. I'm not sure I'm going to heaven,"

here's how you can pray. Jesus, I believe that you're the God of the universe, that you died on the cross for my sins, that you were buried, but that you rose from the dead in victory. And right now in this place, I repent of my sin and I confess you as my Lord and Savior. I want you, Jesus.

And Lord for the rest of us here that are believers, here's what we're praying.

Lord, by the help of your Holy Spirit, Lord, would you just reveal to us if there's any place in our life that you don't have a hold of that you'd like to have this morning?

As you hear his voice this morning, would you just mouth back to him, "Lord, I confess my sin. I repent of that in my life. Please take that from me and lead my life in this area for your glory. Lord, you have all of me, my finances, my career, my direction, my hopes, my dreams. I put them all in your hands. Even my most grievous sin, they are yours. Lord, do a work in and through me." And Lord Jesus, we give you all the praise and glory for who you are in your mighty and matchless name. Amen.

And amen. Can we give God praise this morning?