



# Message **Transcript**

## The Problem with Self-Centeredness

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Pastor Jeff:

Our Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise for who you are. And we thank you Lord that we get to come together and worship your name, we get to seek your face and prayer and be dependent upon you, and that we get to hear directly from you and your word. Lord, we as a people believe that every time that your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed, that you speak. And so our prayer this morning is speak Lord, for we are ready to hear. And so now for all those who have gathered, who desire to hear Jesus speak directly to you, who will believe what He says and who will by faith put into practice what He shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word amen? Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

There is nothing greater than coming into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is there. I mean, when you have left your sin and turned from your sin and turned to Christ, you are a new creation. The old is gone and the new has come. The challenge to that is that the moment that you become a believer and you've been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved son, that your sin nature still hangs with you. Wouldn't it be great to know that all of your selfish desires magically disappear at the moment that you trust Jesus and all you would know how to do is live obedient to Him? The reality is that a battle takes place at the moment that you come to Christ in

that who God calls you and who you are positionally, you need to actually begin to work out what Christ is working in.

That's why in this series title, Walk Your Talk, we've been going through the Book of James to talk about, okay, since I am now a believer in Christ, how do I live that out in such a way that my behavior aligns with what I say that I actually believe? And we've been talking about how to do that. We talked about how do you deal with trials as a believer? How do you deal with temptations as a believer? How do you receive the Word of God as a believer? How do you not preference and show favoritism to people as a believer? How does your faith align with your deeds as a believer? How do you speak as a believer? What does it look like for you to do all the things that God wants you to do as a believer?

And the reason for that, and what's central to that is that self-centeredness still resides in the heart of a believer if it's not taken care of. And many of us hear about self-centeredness like, "Well, I know I've got some of that, but not as bad as somebody else. And really, what's the big deal anyway? How does that hurt my walk with Christ? I mean, it's really my business anyway. What I do is about me and who are you to tell me about me?"

But I want to talk to you this morning about the problem with self-centeredness and I want to highlight three problems with self-centeredness so that you as a believer in Christ can grow into the fullness of what Jesus wants you to be. The reason that you're here this morning, whether you realize it or not, is so you can hear God. And for those of you that know God through relationship with Jesus Christ, it's how do I

experience the fullness of everything Jesus Christ wants me to be? And I want to show you three hindrances that are keeping you from being the fullness of what God wants you to become.

So I want to encourage you this morning, open up your Bibles to James Chapter Four. We're going to start in verse 11 and go through the end of the chapter today highlighting 3 reasons that self-centeredness is crippling. Here's the word of the Lord this morning. He says, "Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?"

Come now you who say, today or tomorrow, we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit. Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that. But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it to him, it is sin."

And here, the Lord highlights for us and spells out for us the problem with self-centeredness. And I'm going to highlight three of the areas that God wants us to be aware of and what self-centeredness leads to and why that can be so crippling to us

as a believer and why that hinders us from becoming everything that God wants us to be. And the first way is this. Self-centeredness leads to the criticism of others rather than the preferencing of them. Self-centeredness leads to the criticism of others rather than the preferencing of them. Hear what He says. He says, "Do not speak against one another, brethren." That means don't slander other people. And who's he talking to? Believers. Hey, brothers and sisters, watch your tongue. Brothers and sisters, don't slander another. Brothers and sisters, don't speak evil of another person. Why?

"He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you're not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There's only one lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?" Now what about the law? I mean, God gave us the 10 Commandments. The first four are really vertical about how to honor God. And the next six, starting with honoring your father and mother, really how to honor each other. And as a matter of fact, Jesus in his earthly ministry was asked this question, "What is the greatest commandment?"

And in Matthew Chapter 22, verses 37 and following, He says, "Well, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." And the second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On this hang all the law and the prophets." Jesus said if you want to sum up everything that I'm about, it's about the fact that you honor God. And if you're really honoring God, it's going to translate into the way that you preference other people. It's going to translate into genuine love for other people. So here's what God is telling us. He's saying if that's really true, then

when you slander another, when you talk bad about another, when you gossip about another, when you speak evil of another, what you're doing is you're breaking the law. You're saying that I'm supposed to love God and honor Him, and I'm supposed to treat other people well, but I'm breaking that law and when you break the law, you're really setting yourself above the law.

God's the one that gives the law. "Here's what I care about," God says. "I care about your love for me and I care about the way you love others. That's what I care about." When you slander another, you're breaking the law because you're saying, "You know what? I'll decide what I'm going to say about other people. I'll set the standard for what they need to be. I'll let other people know what they need to look like." And Jesus says, "When you do that, when you speak against a brother, you judge them, you judge them." It means watch your tongue. It's really interesting because when Jesus was on the earth, the Jesus that we say that we love, the Jesus that I'm preaching about said this in John Chapter 13, this won't be new to you. As a matter of fact, it'll be a refresher course, but think about how it translates in your life.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this, all men will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another." What's His point? Love one another. How? In the same way that He loved us. How much did Jesus love us? That while we were still sinners, He laid down his life for us. While we were still sinners, He preferred us. While we were still sinners, He spoke well of us. He said, "If you want the world to know who I am, then love other people like that." Love other people

radically. That's what He said. And it's not the only place in the New Testament, we read about it. We could read about it all over the place.

Another place you can read about it is in Paul's letter to the Philippians. In Philippians Chapter Two, when it's talking about the humility of Christ, he says this. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind, regard one another as more important than yourselves." Now, I've traveled the world and I've heard a lot of people tell me, "Pastor, this is my life verse. This is my life verse." Nobody's ever told me this is their life verse. Consider others more important than yourself. That's my life verse. That's what they would say.

"Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also the entrance of others." In other words, here's what He was saying. He was saying, "If you say you love God, if you really love the Jesus of the Bible, that will translate into how you genuinely love all the people in your sphere of influence. The ones that you know well, and the ones that you're just acquainted with, and the ones that you bump into, how you love other people is a visible demonstration of your love for God." Why? Why is that so important? I'll give you three reasons why it's important.

Number one, it's indicative of the faith that you say that you have. It shows you what's important. If you say you love God but you hate your brother, you're a liar. You don't love the God of the Bible if you don't love other people. I mean first and foremost, when you love other people, you're saying, I love the God of the Bible.

Secondly, loving other people is essential for your growth in Christ. Do you know

why? Because loving other people's not easy.

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

All these people, "I know other people." You're not easy to love. I'm not easy to love. It's hard because loving somebody requires spending time with them. It means forgiving them. It means being patient with them. Why do you think there's so many one anothers in the New Testament? Because we need to be reminded over and over, if we really believe in the Jesus of the Bible, then how we treat other people is essential to demonstrating our faith. It's essential to growing in Christ. Many times we'll say, "Well, I just want to grow in Christ. I'm just going to read my Bible." If you just read your Bible and don't apply it, you can't grow to the fullness of what God wants you to be. You have to read it and apply it. That's why there's so many one anothers. So that no matter what circumstance you're in, there's some way to apply one another to that person that's right next to you.

But they're so difficult. They're so hard. Well then God gives you Galatians 6:2. "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." They're a real pain in my side. So I'm going to come alongside of them and I'm going to help them carry that burden. I'm going to forgive them. I'm going to love them. I'm going to exhort them. I'm going to help them because I want to see them become the fullness of who Jesus says they are. If you say you love God, loving others is indicative of the faith that you say



you have. It'll grow you in your faith.

And third, it's essential and paramount to your witness. To your witness. Why? Because the Bible says that, "The God of this age is blind to the minds of unbelievers." They can't see the knowledge of the truth. They can't see Jesus. They don't know Jesus. They don't believe the Bible's true. They reject it outright. The only revelation that they truly have is creation when they see it in the world and their conscience that they know something's wrong. And guess what? Your witness. What they see in you. If what they see in you is your slander towards other believers, it is virtually impossible to lead somebody to Christ. Because as you're sharing with them the hope of Jesus and how he can change your heart, but you spent the rest of your time complaining, gossiping, whining, grumbling and all those things, why would they ever want the God that you say that you serve?

But if they see in you a radical love for people and they see you speak highly of people and they see you preference other people, and then you share the God, "How do you do that? Because that person to me looks unlovable. Here's how I do that, because Christ is in me and He loves them, and that's why I'm showing love. And that's why you need Jesus too because He can change your heart." That's why if you're living your life in such a way with criticism of others, you're missing out on the fullness of Jesus. The Bible has tons to say about this.

In Proverbs 20:19 it says, "That a gossip betrays a confidence. So avoid a man who talks too much." What's a gossip? A gossip is somebody that talks about somebody behind their back when they're not there. Do not hang out with people like

that. You know why? Because guess who they're talking about when you're not there. I mean, my ears are very attuned to people when they start talking. They're talking about, "There is a church I used to go to, my pastor." I don't have ear. I am listening, but I'm not listening. You know what I'm saying? Because I don't care. What I know is you're a gossip. And so I'm very strategic about what I'm going to say back to you. Avoid a person like that. Don't engage with a person like that.

And more importantly, don't be a person like that. Guard your tongue. Speak highly of others. Why don't people speak highly of others? Why do we slander other people? Because here's what we believe in. Here's what self-centeredness does. We believe in self-exaltation, so I want to look higher than them, so I want to put them down. When you put other people down, it doesn't make you look higher. It brings you down beneath them. The verse we just read last week right before this says, "Humble yourselves. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of the Lord and he will exalt you in due time."

The opposite of that is self-exaltation. And self-exaltation is I'm going to put you down so that I look good. He said, don't do that. When you do that, here's what you're saying. I know I'm going to put myself ahead of God. God said to love them, but I'm not going to love them. I'm going to hold them to a higher standard than I hold myself and I'm going to talk down to them. And when you do, you are crippled in becoming the fullness of who God wants you to be. You don't really have the faith that the Bible says you have. You're not practicing it. You're really not growing in Christ, and your witness is tarnished in every way.

We have a lot of people that will say things like this when they come to church. They'll say stuff like, "I don't get drunk. I don't sleep around. I don't gamble. I attend church. I spend time with my family" as if that's like a high watermark or something like that. But then they'll slay people with their tongue. They'll butcher them behind their back. They'll gossip like crazy. One of the greatest sins in the church is gossip. Just so you know. It's so demeaning and degrading and hurtful. You would never say some of the things that you say if the person that you were saying them about was standing right next to you, or more importantly, if you knew Jesus was sitting there watching you.

But we forget that He's watching and we don't care about them. And all we care about is ourself and the self-centeredness we have and the self-exaltation. So we put them down so that what? We feel good for a moment, but it hinders our growth in Christ. That's why the New Testament in Ephesians says it like this. In Ephesians Chapter 4:29 says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edifying according to the need of the moment so it will give grace to those who hear." Only speak words that are building to others, and people that are listening. Speak in such a way when people are around you, you're edifying their soul, speak in such a way they're getting built up and they're hearing you build up others. That's what it means to be a believer in Christ. Because self-centeredness is crippling because it leads to the criticism of others rather than preferencing them.

And let me just tell you about our world because you know this already. There's

nothing wrong with disagreeing with somebody. There's nothing wrong with holding a plumb line of truth and they don't hold a plumb line of truth. And we can disagree on that. But I'm talking about all the ad hominem attacks that are personal. If you watch the news, it's no longer really about the policy. It's about the person. It's about criticizing a person. It's about speaking bad about a person. Be careful when you do that because God created that person. You can talk about their behavior. You can talk about what they believe. You can talk about how they act. You can talk about what needs to change. As a matter of fact, God even gives government responsibility to punish those who are evil. God gives the church responsibility to exhort those who aren't living for God to do that. God gives us a plumb line of truth to speak into other believers' life and to judge their bad behavior.

But not attack them personally, not come down on them and speak ill of them and want bad for them. That's not what Christians do. Why? Because Christ died for them and Christ loves them, the God that you say that you serve. So it's okay to hold a plumb line of truth and it's okay to disagree with people, but to do it with attacked and to do it with love and to do it with respect and to do it with the hope that they would align with Christ. Not to put people down. Because when you speak towards a person or a political leader or a churchman or a church woman or whatever, and you're talking bad about the pastor and bad about the church and bad about this politician, when you're talking individually, here's what you're doing. You're breaking God's law, you're breaking His command. You're exalting yourself. God's not pleased with it, and you don't receive any benefit from it, so don't do it. That's the problem of self-

centeredness. It leaks out of your mouth in the form of self-exaltation.

Second problem is this. The problem with self-centeredness is that it leads to the controlling of your future rather than trusting in God. Self-centeredness leads to the controlling of your future rather than trusting in God. Notice what he says in verse 13. "Come now, let's listen up here, you who say, today or tomorrow, we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit. Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." He says, "Be careful because when you live with self-centeredness, you try to control your future." It means you have hopes and you have dreams and you have desires, and you're going to white-knuckle the steering wheel of your own life to make sure that you can get the most satisfaction out of what you want.

And for some, it's "I want this and I'll do whatever it takes to get that." And for others, "I'll hold on and I'll just do whatever it takes just to stay right where I'm at." And both ways you're controlling the future. "Hey, we're going to go to this city, we're going to do this. We're going to do that. We're going to carry on business. We're going to make a profit. Here's what's going to happen." How many of you 10 years ago knew you were going to be sitting here right now listening to this message? I mean, we don't know what a day is going to bring forth. You don't even know the day you're going to die, although God knows the very second you're going to breathe your last breath. Nothing's a surprise to God. But everything's a surprise to us. And the way we mask it with self-centeredness is we really think we're in control. We really think we're not only

in control of our lives, but we think we can control the people around you.

Let me just save you some time and energy. You can't control anybody. Did you know that? You can leverage people for a while. You can manipulate people for a while. Maybe you can motivate people. You can't control anybody. And when you stop trying to control other people and stop trying to control yourself and you start trusting God and that He's got your best interest, then life becomes an adventure. It becomes an adventure.

But when you're white-knuckling the steering wheel of your life and you're trying to control the future, what you're saying is, "I'm not trusting God because there's certain things I can get done that He can't get done or He doesn't want to get done or He can't get done as well as me. So I'm going to sit on the throne of my life and I'm going to get going where I need to go. And thank goodness I'm saved and thank goodness I believe Jesus is Lord. And thank goodness when I die, I'm going to Heaven, but God just stay away. I got a future to claim. I get to date who I want to date. I get to marry who I want to marry. I get my marriage to look like what I want my marriage to look like. I get to make the money I want to make. I get to choose my career. I, I, I, I. I'm in control." And whether you say it or not, really your motto in life is if it's going to be, it's up to me.

Now, let me just be clear. God created me as a visionary. I like seeing forward to the future. God created me as a goal setter. I think it's okay to set goals. But there's a difference between white-knuckling those things and holding them with an open hand. "Hey Lord, this is where I'm taking a step towards what you're leading me

to. But Lord, if you change your mind, you're going to take me a different direction, that's totally fine with me as long as I'm right in the center of your will, right doing what you want me to do." That's good goal setting.

"Lord, this is the direction it seems that you're leading me. Lord, this is the direction it seems that you're leading our church, Lord. This is the direction we're going. But Lord, if you change your mind or if we've heard something wrong, we'll change according to what you want, not what we want. Oh Lord, oh by the way, I'm doing this in such a way that if I die on the way to doing this, I'm okay because I'm only doing this for you anyway as long as you give me breath." That's different than controlling the future. Controlling the future is this has got to happen in this way and this time. And some of us are such control freaks about everything down to the second of our life that we miss trusting in God for the moment. You don't know what's going to happen. You have no clue what's going to take place. You don't even know when you're going to die.

I mean, the bigger our church gets, the more I can say this with authority. The likelihood of all of you being alive next year at this time is slim and none. Now I know what you're thinking. I wonder who it is. It could be you. Because every funeral I've officiated, nobody's told me, "I knew it was going to be me on this day." You don't know. I don't know. Is today my last day on Earth? Could be. You're only given a one-day contract with life. There's no guarantee of tomorrow. So you make the most of today. But when you control your future, you miss out on trusting God for his best. Let

me give you a couple of things God wants you to know.

God created you. God designed you. God placed you in this time and season. God knows everything about you. There's a reason God put you on the Earth in this time, and He's the only one that can fulfill everything that he puts you on the earth to do. If you're the one controlling and manipulating everything, you can't live out the fullness of what God wants, which means your life is going to look different than anybody else's life. And oh, by the way, your kid's life is going to look different than yours. Parents, listen to me, listen to me, listen to me. Because some of you are like, "Well, my kid can make their decisions once they finish high school and once they go to college and once they get their master's degree and once they do the job that I've created for them, then they're on their own."

What if they're not going to finish high school your way? What if they're going to serve the Lord in this way? What if they're going to go to trade school instead of college? What if they're going to take a mission trip for two years as a gap year to tell the world about Jesus? And that's not your plan, but that's God's plan for your child. Will you let God do that? And oh, by the way, before I get off on a tangent, sending them to a four-year public institution may not be the best choice of your time or money.

Now, I'm not against formal education. I was formally educated until I was 46 years old. So I'm all about educating yourself. I'm just saying God's plans may look different than your design for your life. See, we like to design our life and then ask God to bless what we've designed rather than saying, "God, you designed my life. How can I live in your providence and blessing for what you've designed? You hold the steering



wheel, you white-knuckle that thing. I'm going to sit over here in the passenger seat or in the back. I'm just going to enjoy the ride." And it's hard to live that way, but I'm telling you, if you live that way, it takes all the pressure off because God becomes the provider, and God becomes the designer, and God's the one that's bringing favor, and God's the one that's bringing blessing, and God's the one that's giving, and God's the one that's taking away. It doesn't mean your life will be perfect. In this life, you will have tribulation, there will be trials, there will be temptations.

But if God is in control, you can experience a joy and freedom in Christ no matter what's going on. Unlike if you're white-knuckling the steering wheel. "How [inaudible 00:24:10] that happening? Why is this not happening? Life's so hard." Yeah, because you're in control and you're not good at running the world and you're not good at running your life or the life of anybody else. God is. So let him be in control, relinquish the control so that Christ can be the one who leads. Psalm 139 tells us that God ordained all of our days before one of them came to be. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount tells us not to be anxious about our life. And then he concludes that section by saying, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." I mean, Jesus wants to bless your life. He does.

And I'm telling you, for a long time I did not understand this. I didn't understand it. I mean to go all in with Jesus. Have you ever felt the fear of going all in with Jesus? Well, if he's really in control, and I'm not, that's scary. What if I go all in with Jesus as a wife and I'm going to submit to my husband as to Christ, and he doesn't love me back like Christ loved the church? That's scary. What if I as a husband love my wife, like

Christ loved the church, but she doesn't submit to me as unto Christ? That's scary.

What if I go all in with Christ in my finances and I begin to tithe and give over and above my tithe to God? What if I run out of money? I mean, that's scary. What if I forgive this person who hurt me and I have nothing else to hold onto anymore?

Because look at all that they did to me. And if I forgive them, I'm basically putting them into God's hands and I can't hold onto that bitterness and resentment anymore. That's scary.

Do you understand what I'm saying? No matter what step you need to take to trust God being in control, it's always a scary thing. What if I tell God, "Okay, you made me. You get to choose my career" and He changes the career path I'm on, or He changes my geography for where I'm living, or He changes the direction of my life. It's scary. But here's the truth, there's great joy in it because if God's the one that designed you, He knows right where you fit. He knows right what's going to give you the greatest joy he knows right what's going to give you the greatest satisfaction.

I remember for me, when I was in my early 20s when I graduated, the only reason I went to college was I wanted to get a job and be rich. I mean, that was it. I just wanted to make a lot of money. That was it. That's all I cared about. So when I graduated, I had goals. I wanted to be a millionaire by the time I was 27, I wanted to retire at 40. Those are my goals. And I worked with my supervisor and we set goals and I went after them. I was the most miserable person on the planet. Do you know why? Because those weren't God's goals for my life. And I would make God bribes

like "God, if you give me this and I'll give you that," and all that kind of silly stuff.

And I remember I went to a conference, I got invited to a Fellowship of Christian Athletes Conference, and it was a bunch of old people. They were like my age now, like 40s and 50s. And I remember listening to these guys and here's how they talked. They seemingly didn't have a whole lot by the world standards in terms of income, but they were talking like this. "I wish I had another 40 years to do what I'm doing. There's not enough time to tell enough people about Christ, and I love what I get to do, and I love my wife and I love the relationships I have. And here's who I'm discipling and here's what I'm doing." And I remember watching these people and I'm like, here I am 24 years old, I'm wanting to retire in 16 years. I'm miserable. They're old. They wish they had more time and they're totally satisfied with everything in their life.

So you know what I did? I went home and quit my job the next day, and I didn't know what God was going to have, but I said, "God, whatever you have for me, I will follow you every day for the rest of my life." And God began to open up doors in ministry and I began to take steps forward. Now, if God would've told me at the time, "You're going to pastor a church," I would've said, "No." Can I just tell you this? I love what I get to do. I love this job and I hold it with an open hand.

When Kim and I moved out here a number of years ago, I remember thinking when we moved to Denver, I'm probably going there for the rest of my life. That's how I felt. But even to this day, I still feel that way, but I still hold it with an open hand because I say, "Lord, if there's somewhere else I can be that can serve you in a greater purpose or greater capacity, or you think you can use me differently, I'll follow

you because I've followed you all the way along and I'm not leaving you now." And there's great freedom in that. There's freedom in provision. There's freedom in gifting. There's so many people in the church that are all worried, "I don't know if God's really going to use my gifts. I'm scared. I don't know if he's going to provide. I'm scared. I don't know if he's going to take care of me. I'm scared."

It's because you're not all in with God. You're trying to control your future. You're trying to design your life and then invite God in to bless what you want. And here's the truth. If you let God just lead, he'll bless you beyond measure. I mean, I was thinking about it this week. I was talking to Kim about just some of the blessings that have come out of just following God, that God's just done things for me that really have nothing to do with ministry, that have been things that I've just enjoyed as kind of a little favor, touch, blessing along the way. It's almost embarrassing how good He's been to me. The Devil lies to you. And here's what he'll tell you. "You go all in with Jesus, you're going to miss out on all the fun in the world." No, if you go all in with Jesus, you'll have the most blessed life you could ever have on this side and in the life to come. That's the facts.

And controlling your life, it only makes you miserable and everybody else around you miserable because they've got to fit into what you've designed for you and you can't even control who you are. And if self-exaltation leads to criticism, then what leads to controlling is this idea of self-reliance. Self-reliance. Now, I'm all about personal responsibility. I think we need to be more personally responsible. That's great. Self-reliance is I don't need it, I don't need God, I don't need anybody else, I'll get it done. If

you were born in America, it's part of your DNA, whether you know it or not. Self-reliance. I don't need anybody else. And if you watch any infomercial on TV, the ultimate win is when you don't need anybody else. The ultimate win is, "I don't need anybody else. I have all the money I need. I have all the relationships I get to choose whatever." That's death. That's death.

Life is I'm completely dependent upon Jesus and I'm grateful for every relationship He's brought because that's giving me life and vitality. Self-reliance is I don't need God and I don't need you. But don't you wish you could be like me? My answer is no, I don't want to be as miserable as you ever. And what is it? "Prophet a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul." Or what can you give in exchange for your soul? You seemingly to the world have everything but in your soul, you know that you're totally empty. Why would anybody want what you have?

But to the man or the woman or to the boy or the girl that says, "I'm not in control, God is. Hey, mom and dad, I'm just going to let God choose my future. Hey wife. Hey husband. I'm going to let God control my future. Hey boss, I'm going to let God control my future. Hey employees, I'm letting God lead this company." I mean, when you start living like that, there's such freedom that comes off your shoulders. You don't have to have all the answers. You don't have to know how it's going to work out. I remember people when I quit my job, they're like, "Well, where are you going to get paid?"

"I don't know."

"Where are you going to go?"

"Not sure yet."

"What would you ..."

"I don't know. It's because I'm trusting Jesus and He'll provide at the right time."

And you know what He always has in every season since then. And here's the beauty of it. He'll do the same for you. If you go all in with Jesus, He will not leave you alone. He will never leave you. He won't forsake you. You're not going to come up short. He will give you everything you need to fulfill everything He put you on the earth to do. Isn't that good news? I mean, the problem with self-centeredness is we miss out on God because we spend all our time criticizing others and we can't preference them or celebrate them or honor them because we're too concerned with our own self-exaltation.

And the second problem is we start controlling our future rather than trusting God. And we promote our self-reliance and, "Look at how strong I am and Christianity's a crutch for the weak. I don't need that religion stuff. I'm self-reliant." No, you're on your way to Hell and you're miserable and there's a better way. That's what you would say. Notice what He says here in verse 15, right after He finishes, He says, "You're a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." You're a puff of smoke, poof, your steam coming off a pot, poof, and you're gone. That's how long you're going to live. And all the people you look at like, "Oh, they're so important." Who were the important people 100 years ago that everybody was looking to? Well, they're

dead now and they don't have a whole lot of influence.

You're going to be dead too unless Jesus comes back in your lifetime. So live for Him. Trust Him, celebrate others. You don't know what's going to happen. Instead, here's what you ought to say in your life. "If the Lord wills, we will live, and also do this and that. But as it is, you boast in your arrogance and all such boasting is evil." Here's what you should say. If the Lord wills this, here's what I'm planning to do. Hey, if the Lord wills it, we're going to start the middle school and high school BRAVE Academy. And guess what we're going to do if He doesn't? We won't. I'm pretty comfortable with that. If the Lord wills that our church grows, it'll grow. If the Lord wills that it doesn't, it won't. Isn't that freeing?

But if we start saying, "This is the Lord, this is what He's going to ... I know God." I'm not the infinite God, and you're not the infinite God and you don't know what a day's going to bring forth. You just don't know. I don't know. But what we can say is if the Lord wills. I learned this back in 2018 in a very profound way. I remember I was preaching on one Sunday and I told our congregation, "Next Sunday, I'll be back preaching on one Corinthians 10" or something like this. But that didn't happen because on Monday I went to the doctor and I learned I needed to get throat surgery. And the doctor said, "You can't speak for another three months." Well, I didn't know that. What I should have said, "If the Lord wills, I'll be back next Sunday and I'll be preaching on First Corinthians 10."

Now, it doesn't mean that you have to go around in every single conversation say, "You know what? I'll meet you at five o'clock if the Lord wills. I am going to school

tomorrow if the Lord wills. I'll be back [inaudible 00:34:16]." You don't have to say it. You need to have the attitude of it. And we don't need to be everybody else's Holy Spirit. So when they say, "I'll meet you at six at your house for dinner."

"If the Lord wills brother." I mean you don't need to be that. It is not giving us a way to speak to others. It's telling us what our attitude needs to be and our attitude needs to be, I don't know what's going to happen. This seems to be the direction that the Lord's leading. I'm looking forward to this. But if things get shifted, I'm not bothered. God can alter anything and it will be unalterable to me because I trust Him and that's part of His plan for my life.

And just think about our lives, just how much we control everything. When a plane's going to take off, if it gets delayed a little bit, just how frustrated we get. Or am I the only one that happens to? Or you're in a store and the line's too long. I mean every little thing that happens, if God's behind it, then he's doing something to build us. And if we can look behind, well, why this or why that? Or this isn't what I planned. And if you're my age or older for sure, but even some of you younger, there's several things in your life that have already happened where you would say, "I would've never picked this. I would've never chosen this direction. I would've never chosen these circumstances. This is not the way I wanted it to happen."

But if you allow God to control your future, you're saying not what I would've chosen, but God's still in control and there's things He's growing in me. This is part of my faith journey and this is part of my witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. And while I



may not enjoy everything that's going to happen, I'm going to rejoice in the God that's sovereign over it right now.

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

And that's the difference between trusting God or trying to control your future. BRAVE Church, set goals, be visionary, go after things, but hold it with an open hand like this. God, this is where I'm sensing that you're leading and I'm passionate about this and I'm moving in a direction. I have personal responsibility, but you can change whatever you want and I'll listen to you. That's why you got to keep your ears attuned to the Lord. Some of us, we come to Christ and we turn them off. "I got it. I heard Jesus. Now he's going to listen to me. I'm praying about me. I'm praying about my fear."

"No, no. Turn your ears on. Lord, what now? What next? What now? What next? Am I doing okay? Am I doing it right? Search me, Lord. I want to do it your way." That's what it looks like to stay in tune with the Lord. Self-centeredness leads to the criticism of others rather than preferencing them, it leads to the controlling of our future rather than trusting God. And finally, self-centeredness leads to complacency and obedience rather than practicing righteousness. It leads to the complacency and obedience rather than practicing righteousness. Listen to this verse, powerful verse, James 4:17. "Therefore, to the one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it

to him, it is sin." To the one that knows the good he ought to do and does not do it, you're sinning. Ladies, if you know the good you ought to do and you don't do it, you're sinning. Young people, if you know the good you're supposed to do and you're not doing it, you're sinning.

Now, there's two different types of sin that the Bible talks about. Sins of commission and sins of omission. Sins of commission are the sins we commit. And we talk a lot about sins of commission in the church. We tell people what not to do. Like don't drink, don't smoke, don't chew, don't date the girls who do, I mean don't, don't, don't, don't, don't. You're committing sins, stop. But oftentimes we don't talk about what's just as great of a sin, which is omission, which is when the Lord's showing you what you should do and you feel prompted to do it, but you don't do anything with it. That's sin too. That's why when I pray before my message, and this is how I pray before I preach, and this is how I pray during the week, that you would hear the Lord, you'd believe what he says, and then you do what? You would put into practice what He shows you.

So I could be preaching on three elements of self-centeredness, but the Lord could be speaking to you today about forgiving a person that He's been prompting you to forgive for a long, long time. And you refuse to do that. You're sinning. He could be talking to you about how you should be more generous with your resources and you're not. You're sinning. He could show you how you need to treat your bride with more sensitivity and you're not, and you're sinning. He could show you how you need to treat your husband with more respect. And you're not, and you're sinning. And we think

falsely that just because we feel prompted, "Oh, if I get around to it, maybe someday I will," that God's okay with that. No, you're sinning in the moment when God shows you, here's what I want you to do and you don't do it. And some of you are not growing in your relationship with Christ and you're failing in your witness and you're not living out the fullness of what God requires. Because He's been prompting you on these little things that you refuse to do.

All the while we're sitting around, "Well, if He calls me to Africa, I'm in. But don't ask me to just be generous and kind to my neighbor. Don't ask me to invite them over for dinner. Don't ask me to walk across the street and ask if there's anything I can do to ... Don't ask me that. But you want me to go to Africa? As long as God gives me four grand, I'm there." And we miss out on everything because I've found over the years, it's those little incremental baby steps that are seemingly painful or insignificant that are what's growing my faith in Christ. And all those little baby steps add up to one big faith journey, don't they?

And the challenge we have is that if we're living a self-centered lifestyle, what we end up doing is we live in complacency to obedience. "Yeah, God spoke to me about that. I'll get around to it. God's been telling me I shouldn't be dating that person. I'll get around to it. God's telling me I shouldn't be sleeping around. I'll get around to it. Hey, God's telling me I should get married. I'll get around to it. God's telling me I should be more generous with my money. I'll get around to it. God's telling me I should talk to my boss about this. I'll get around to it. God's telling me I should implement this as a boss to my employee. I'll get around to it. God's telling me I should spend more time with my

spouse. I'll get around to it." Anytime we're saying I could, I should have, I would've, we're sinning. And that sin is keeping us, keeping me, keeping you from the fullness of everything that Jesus requires. If you know what God's calling you to do and you do not do it, you sin.

Now, we've already talked about the sin of self-exaltation and the sin of self-reliance. This is the sin of self-satisfaction. I know what pleases me the best. I don't need God. I can please myself. But here's what you miss out on. What you don't realize is the way that you were created, you're created with a hole in your heart that can only be satiated by God. And when you bring God the greatest glory, He'll bring you the greatest satisfaction. When you're worshiping Him the greatest, when you're being obedient to His Word the most, when you're living out the mandates He requires, when the promptings of the Holy Spirit show you what to do and what not to do, and you start doing it or stop doing it because you want to be aligned with Jesus, that's where the greatest satisfaction comes in your soul. Because then you know on this side of Heaven, I'm honoring the Lord and I'm serving others.

And not only is there benefit in this life, but there's great reward in Heaven because when I get to Heaven, whether I'm a one talent person, a two talent person, a five talent person, I can look the Lord in the eye and say, "With everything you gave me, I did everything I could to the best of my ability, and I came up short sometimes, but I tried to give you all my best so that you could live your life through me. And I was satisfied in that life. And I've been yearning for the one to come." That's what it looks like. And so few people get to the place where they're willing to go all in. People get

close and they're like, "It's kind of scary. It's so scary." Why is it scary? Let me tell you about our God. He's so good. He's so good. Now, we say in church things like this and repeat them back. Say it with me. God is good.

Congregation:

All the time.

Pastor Jeff:

And all the time.

Congregation:

God is good.

Pastor Jeff:

We say it, but we don't believe it. "Yeah, He's good all the time. All the time. God is good. That's a good thing to say in church. But on Monday when I'm at my job, he doesn't feel that good." Maybe it's because you're not in the job you need to be in, or maybe because you're not serving in the job the way Christ wants you to serve in that job. Or maybe you're not living at school the way Christ wants you to live. And we're wondering why you can hear a preacher get up and talk about the truth of God's Word, but you're not experiencing it. Perhaps it's because that sin of self-centeredness has crippled you from experiencing the fullness of God. And God's calling you to go all in with him. God wants you to go all in with him because anyone who knows the good he ought to do and does not do it sins.

And this era of passivity and cowardice, we find it creep into the church and we're like, "Yeah, I don't know if I want to do that. I don't know if I want to go all in with God. If I go all in with God, that means I'm rejecting this world." Yes, that's what it means. And if you do, there's great joy. There's great honor for the Lord. There's great love for others. And you become the person who is practicing the righteous requirements that God requires. Even as the Holy Spirit works for the Apostle Paul in Romans Chapter One, and in the last chapter of Romans, he says this, in Romans 1:5, he says that, "He has received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles for his name."

And in Romans 16, the very last chapter of Romans, he writes this. He goes, "According to the commandment of the eternal God, He has made known to all the nations leading to the obedience of faith." If you say you have faith, it's going to translate into obedience. And obedience is not, "I don't do bad stuff anymore." Obedience is God's growing me out of my bad habits because I want to honor the Lord and holiness, but it's not just the sins I used to commit. I don't sin as much. It's the sins of omission, the ones I never used to do that I'm doing more of. I never used to read my Bible. I never used to pray. I never used to share my faith. I never used to stick up for a person when they were being gossiped about. I never forgave a person when they wronged me. Now I do.

So I'm growing out of my sins of omission and I'm decreasing my sins of commission. And both are equally important in our growth in Christ. Both are equally important to the faith that we say that we have. And both are equally important and

paramount to our witness. There's no greater joy than following Christ, no greater joy than following Christ. And I'll tell you this, no matter where you are with Christ, there's a whole nother level. There's a whole nother level. If you come to church, you're like, "Yeah, I used to go to church, but I got that. I nailed it. I mean, I've read through the Bible and I'm witnessing in my neighborhood and I've got all of that." If you're satisfied with where you are with Christ, you don't know Christ. There's always another level. There's always another depth to his mercy and his grace and his love.

Psalm 23:6 says, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I'll dwell in the House of the Lord forever. His goodness will chase me down and overtake me." I mean, how do I do these things? Because if you're thinking self-centeredness, okay, I probably slander people too much. I'm going to try to stop. I probably control my life too much. I'm going to try to stop. I probably am not obedient enough. I'm going to try to be better. You can't. It's only Christ in you, the hope of glory that can change you. He's the one that can make a difference. So I'm going to stop depending on myself, and I'm going to be reliant upon Him. I'm not going to be self-reliant. I'm going to be Christ reliant. I'm not going to be self-exalting. I'm going to be Christ exalting. I'm not going to be self-satisfied. I'm going to be Christ satisfying. And by doing those things, Christ lives in and through me.

And by the way, wherever you are, there's a greater level. Say, "Well, how do I get there?" Well, it can be kind of scary. It can be kind of scary. I remember as a young kid, like third or fourth grade at the swimming pool, learning to go off the high dive. Now, I could go off the low dive, no problem. But going off the high dive, it's kind

of high. And I remember looking up at it and thinking, I can't do it. All my friends were swimmers and divers. I was not. I could float sometimes. And so I would look at this thing. I'm like, I'm not doing it.

But as my friends did it, I'm like, I got to do this. I got to do this. And you know what it's like if you've ever gone off a high dive for the first time as a kid. You start climbing up those stairs and it looks high from the ground, but it looks even higher when you're up it and you start looking over, like what in the world did I commit to? This is scary. And you can climb back down the ladder. You can tell the person behind you that's telling you, "Hurry up."

"No, I'm coming back down." Or you can just keep going. And then when you keep going, there's these guardrails, and then it's not as scary, but you can feel the wind and it's a little bit different. But then you walk past the guardrails and now you're just on a plank. And when you look down at the water, you're like, holy cow. That's way further down than I thought it was when I was standing on the ground.

But if you keep baby stepping, you'll end up committing. And once you commit, there's no going back. And you start falling and you start feeling, oh my goodness, what's happening? And once you hit that water and go in, you get this joy of coming up out of the water, like that was awesome. I want to do that again. That's what it's like to go all in with Jesus. And no matter what level you're at, every time you take a higher level, it feels the same way. It's not as if you get a faith gene in the higher steps of faith you go, it just becomes easier and easier. It gets scarier and scarier, but it's the



same principles that apply. That's why the most difficult step of faith you'll ever take in your life is the next one. It's the next one. You don't need to look around what other people are doing.

What's God calling you to do? What's God been prompting your heart to do? What's He asking you to put into practice today? Because if you do that, there's great joy. And just things that cripple you, imagine if you lived a life of preferencing others, trusting God and practicing righteousness. There's great glory for God. There's great joy for you, and there's great preparation in this life and for you in the life to come. That's what Jesus is telling us today. Everything the world promotes is self-centeredness. Every commercial, every ad, every product is all about how to make your life better for you and for everybody around you to wish they had what you had. And everything in the Bible is about how to honor God, how to serve others, and how to practice righteousness so that you are the one who knows in your soul, I wish everybody had what I have.

And that's what promotes gospel sharing, that's what promotes obedience is God's goodness coming into your life. And here's the good news, folks. Listen, listen, listen. No matter where you are, God still loves you. He's not done with you yet. If you're here visiting, never been in church before, I'm not even talking about religion. I'm talking about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I'm talking about the fact that God so loved the world, He sent his son Jesus to the cross to die on a cross in your place because you're on your way to die. Jesus died in your place for all your sin, was buried and rose from the dead and offered life to anybody who had turned from

their sinful way and turned to Christ. And if you turn to Christ He'll come live inside your life, and for those of you who have Christ on the inside, then here's Jesus' promise.

Keep taking baby steps with me. Go all in with me. The satisfaction that you're going to find in this world is only found in me. Reject all the other voices and go all in with me. And if you do, there's great joy. There's great benefit, and there's great glory to our Father in Heaven. Amen. Amen.

Would you stand with me? Our Father in heaven, we give you glory on our praise. We thank you for your word, and Lord, you've been speaking to all of us about our next step of faith. Help us to take it right now. If you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus as your own personal Lord and Savior, here's how you can pray. Jesus, I didn't even know who you were till today, but I want you to take over my life. I don't even know all there is to know, but I do believe that I'm a sinner and that you died on the cross for my sin and rose from the dead, and I want to turn from my sinful lifestyle, and I want you to be the Lord of my life. Come save me, Jesus.

Father, for all those who are praying that prayer, invade and invest your Holy Spirit in their lives. And Lord, for those of us who know you, Lord, as you prompted us today, help us to be obedient, not because we have to, and not because you're looking at us and saying you're wrong, but because, Lord, we want to live a life that reflects the God we say we love. And remind us this morning of your goodness that's running, running, running, running after us because of your great love with which you have for us. God, we give you all the glory, all the honor, and all the praise for all you're doing as we sing to you this morning in Jesus' name, amen and amen. Can we

give God praise for who He is.