



Message Transcript **Unleashed**

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Pastor Jeff:

Will you pray with me? Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise for who you are. And Lord, we thank you for yet another year to glorify your gracious and awesome name. May this be a year where we see your presence do things that we've never seen before. May we fall more in love with you and may we be excited about all that you're going to do in and through us by faith. Lord, we gather because we believe that every time that your Word is studied or meditated upon or memorized or faithfully and accurately proclaimed, Lord, that you have a word for us. So our prayer this morning is speak Lord, for we are ready to hear.

And now for all those who have gathered who desire to hear the Lord 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?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

Amen. Here at BRAVE we often say that the hardest step of faith that you'll ever have to take is the next one. And no matter where you are in your journey, faith is taking a step where you have not stepped before. The Bible says in John 3:16 that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him would not perish, but would have eternal life.

The greatest news on the planet is that God loves this world so much and he has such an incredible love for you, that God the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world, that God sent Jesus the second person of the Trinity to become incarnate flesh, who lived a perfect life, who fulfilled the law, who did for you what you couldn't do for yourself. He bridged the gap between you and his Father. He died on a cross. He laid down his life on a tree, taking all of your sin and placing it on him. And when he did and died that death, sin was completely paid for. Then he rose from the dead and validated he was indeed the Son of God and offered life to all those who would repent of their sin and believe on his name. There's no greater news on the planet. And yet when we take a step of faith to turn from our sin and turn to God, it's a great step. And as someone who doesn't believe, who places their faith in Christ, that's a humongous step. What the Bible will call that is new birth. That's just the beginning.

And as we continue our journey with Jesus, we read passages like Ephesians 3:20-21, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to his glorious power at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." And we say, "Yeah, I totally believe that, that God can do more through me than anything I could ask or think. He can do more through our church than anything that I ask or think." And yet there are limits to our faith. There are ways in which we say we believe, but when we experience those things, we have a hard time expressing them or believing that they actually work today.

I'm here to tell you that the God of the Bible, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday,

today and forever. And everything that his word presents is an opportunity for us to trust and take a step of faith closer and closer to him. So if you've wanted to grow in your faith, if you ever want to take a step in your faith further, today God has a word for you.

I always like to start the year off with a special message or passage that's been specifically important to me throughout the previous year, 2022. And today I'm going to do that. I'm going to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark chapter 9. Mark chapter 9. And as you're turning your Bibles there, just for context, here's what's been going on. Jesus commissioned his disciples, given them authority and commanded them to go out and preach the gospel, to heal people, to cast out demons. They've been doing it. As they've done it, he says, "Don't rejoice that the demons submit to your name, but rejoice because your name's written in the lamb's book of life." In other words, "Rejoice that you're saved."

Jesus takes a special journey up to the top of the mountain. He takes with him, Peter, James, and John. And on that mountain, he's transfigured into the fullness of who he is, the Son of God. His clothes are whiter than any launderer could ever whiten them. I mean his full expression in all of his glory. And as Peter, James, and John are there, they're so overwhelmed because they hear the Father's voice speak and they see Moses and Elijah show up and they're on the mountaintop having the most spiritual high they can possibly have. And Peter gets a bad rap because he basically says, "Hey Lord, let's build three tabernacles." In other words, "Let's set up shop here. Let's have

a camp out. This is pretty cool."

By the time they figure out what's going on, Jesus is back into his original state. Moses and Elijah are gone. And guess what they're doing? They're coming down the mountain. They've experienced a spiritual high. They're just like we are when we experience the spiritual high; we want to stay right there. We want to know that God is always present and that every day's a good day and that it's all good. And what does Jesus do? He takes them back down into the valley and that's where they begin to experience life again. And this is where our story picks up in Mark 9:14. I'm going to read through this story. It's also found in Matthew 17 and Luke 9 if you want to read some other context, but this has the most detail of the story that took place. And here's what happens when they get down to the bottom of the mountain where the other nine disciples have been.

It says, "When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and some scribes arguing with them. Immediately when the entire crowd saw him, they were amazed and began running up to greet him. And he asked them, 'What are you discussing with them?' And one of the crowd answered, 'Teacher, I brought you my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it.' And he answered them and said, 'O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to me.' They brought the boy to him. When he saw him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground,

he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth.

"And he asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to kill him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us.' And Jesus said, 'If you can, all things are possible to him who believes.' Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, 'I do believe; help my unbelief.'

"When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, he rebuked the unclean spirit saying to it, 'You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.' After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him and he got up. When he came into the house, his disciples began questioning him privately, 'Why could we not drive it out?' And he said to them, 'This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.'"

And hearing that story, what we're reading about is how Jesus is teaching his disciples where they lack faith and how they can grow faith, where they lack faith and how they can grow faith. And the reason that we need to understand where we lack our faith and how we grow our faith is because the Bible says this in Hebrews 11:1, "Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen." It's what the ancients were commended for. It's by faith that we believe. We walk by faith and not by sight. And here's the truth, and we must have faith because anyone that comes to him... He says without faith, it's impossible to please him, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he is and that he rewards those who

diligently seek him. Without faith, it's impossible to please our God. And God wants to be pleased. And so we need to understand faith.

So today as we look at this story, I want to highlight three ways that we can lack faith and three ways that we can grow our faith. So as we get into the story, let's talk about the first one. We lack faith because sometimes we believe in Jesus traditionally, but not personally. We believe in Jesus traditionally, but not personally. And I notice what happened. When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and some scribes arguing with them. Immediately when the entire crowd saw them, they were amazed and begin running up to greet him. So when Jesus brings Peter, James and John down the mountain, there's a large crowd. There's nine of the disciples that weren't up on the mountain, and there's religious leaders and crowds of people and there's a big commotion and they're being disturbed and they don't know what's going on. Why all the commotion? What's taking place? And that's what they're trying to figure out because Jesus and the three haven't been down there. They're not watching what's going on. And immediately when the crowds saw Jesus, they were amazed. They began rushing over to Jesus.

Let me make a point here. It's interesting if you read through the New Testament, everybody wanted to be around Jesus. Pagans wanted to be around Jesus. Religious people wanted to be around Jesus. People were intrigued by Jesus. When you hear people say today, secular or none, "I don't want anything to do with Jesus," they're not painting a picture of the Jesus of the Bible. Because the Jesus of the Bible was one

who had great compassion for people, great love for people, was healing people, was raising people from the dead, was restoring sight to the blind, was doing all sorts of incredible things so much that everywhere Jesus went, crowds of people were trying to flock to him to get with him. So as this is going on, there's this huge argument taking place and all of a sudden Jesus begins to say, "What's happening here?" And all of a sudden people started seeing, oh, it's Jesus. And they begin to flock around him and he asked them, "What are you discussing with them?"

Now, who are the them? Is he asking his disciples, "What are you discussing with them; the religious leaders in the crowd?" Or is he asking the crowd, "What are you discussing with them; my disciples?" Either way, it doesn't matter. He's trying to figure out what is the point of the story that's going on? Why all this commotion and why all this arguing? And a father speaks up and he says, "I'll tell you what, teacher, I brought my son possessed with a spirit which makes him mute and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth and he grinds his teeth and he stiffens out. I told your disciples to cast it out and they could not do it." He says, "Jesus, let me tell you what's going on. My son's got an issue. Nobody can help my son. I've heard through the grapevine that your disciples have been given authority to take care of issues like this. So I brought my son to your disciples. Let me tell you what's been going on. He foams at the mouth, he stiffens up."

We're going to read later that when this happens, oftentimes he's thrown into water where he is going to drown or thrown into the fire. And when Jesus ask him how long it's been going on, he says, "From childhood." So this has been going on, not for a

day, not for a week, but for an extended period of time, probably years in this boy's life.

Parents listen to me. If you have children, you know how much you love your children. When something's bothering them for a day, it grinds on you. When something's bothering them for a week, it pains you. When it goes on for a month, it's like, "What do I do?" And when it goes on for a year, you feel helpless. This father's helpless. He says, "I'll tell you Jesus what's going on. I'll tell you what all the commotion is. I'm hearing about your ability to heal people like my son through your leaders, and I brought my son to them and they couldn't do anything." That's the problem. That's what we're arguing about. Do you see what happens?

It's much like some people talk about church. "Why would I ever need to go to church? I mean, y'all talk about how Jesus can do all these powerful things. I don't see him do anything powerful in your life. And he's never done anything powerful for me." So what's the rebuke? The rebuke is against Jesus and his followers that the God that is being discussed is not able to do what God says he can do. And God can't empower his people to do what God says his people can do. And oftentimes we believe in Jesus like that. We believe in a traditional Jesus. And by traditional, I mean this. Whatever your tradition was growing up, maybe you grew up with no traditions of Jesus. Maybe your tradition was you went at Christmas and Easter and that was your view of Jesus. Maybe you went every single week. Maybe it's tradition based on your denomination. Maybe you were Baptist or Nazarene or Methodist or Presbyterian. And that's your understanding of Jesus. You know when to stand and you know when to sit

and you know how to sing and you know what to recite and that's what you think. But the God of the Bible is not interested in your traditions. He's interested in relationship.

Knowing Jesus traditionally is different than knowing Jesus personally. Most people outside of the church believe that they're going to heaven because of some tradition. Their tradition might be, "If my good outweighs my bad, I guess I'm going to heaven." Their tradition might be, "If I'm a good person, I'm going to heaven." Their tradition might be, "I go to church once a week, so I'm going to heaven. I'm an American, I'm going to heaven. I try to keep the 10 Commandments. I'm going to heaven." There's some tradition that they have. None of that stuff saves you. What saves you is a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ by turning from your sin and turning to him.

One of the reasons that even for those of us who are Christians have a hard time of seeing God move in our lives in power, is we still believe in him traditionally rather than personally. Because when we start to read the Bible afresh, if we just had this book and the Holy Spirit to teach us, we would probably believe a lot more about Jesus than what we're taught. And here's why. Do you notice what's going on?

There's an argument developing about why this doesn't work. And what I find is that oftentimes people like to argue that Christ has no power when the reality is that they just have no faith. There are groups of people that like to argue that Christ has no power when in reality it's because they have no faith. God is the same, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Everything we read about in the Bible is true of

who Jesus Christ is. He's never changed. And yet oftentimes when we go through a crisis, when we go through a trial, we think that there's some formula or tradition. "If I just do this and then I go to church and I join a small group and I read my Bible and I do... then God's got to act." He doesn't care about your tradition. He cares about your heart. He cares about your relationship. He wants you to know him personally and he wants you to believe in the fullness of what the Scriptures reveal about him and then place your faith and trust in that.

And many of us, even after we come to know Christ, don't see God move in the fullness and his power because we still like to keep him in our traditional box, whatever that box looks like. And some boxes are bigger than others, but we like to keep him safe there. Let me tell you this, God is not in a box. God created the whole universe. There's nothing that can contain our God. He's not even spatial. Like how much space does he take up? Infinite. He's spirit, he's God. He's big.

Isn't it true even in Christian circles sometimes when things aren't going well for us, we like to help other people out and let them know why? "Well, let me just tell you why. I mean, I know you're praying that way, but God really doesn't work that way anymore. I'll pray for you just to endure." There are times where God calls us to endure, and there are times where God calls us to persevere, and there are times where God takes things in a different direction. But oftentimes we don't start with the fact that God can and that he's able and that he's willing. We start on a lower tier and just say, "I know he probably won't. I know he can't. So I'll just either try to get along or just say that God doesn't do that."

And the longer you become traditional and the longer you stay religious, the more you will argue away the power of God. Some Christians are the worst at this. There's whole groups of Christians that have made up a whole theology about how God doesn't move in power anymore. He just doesn't do that. He did that. It all ended with the last apostle when the apostles died. And God doesn't do that anymore. Says who? Not the Bible. You have to do all sorts of biblical origami and gymnastics to get to a place that God is different today than he's been. He's the same yesterday, today and forever. Period. End of story. Don't believe in the God traditionally. Don't believe in what you've been told; believe in what's been revealed through his living and active word.

Now here's what's really interesting. This father's got a massive problem. Luke's going to tell us it's his only son. We don't know how many other children he has, but he's got one boy and he loves his boy. And this has been going on over and over again. This condition in him that takes his son, seizes him, makes him stiffen up, foam at the mouth, throwing him into the fire or throwing him into the water, he's going to be drowned. So his dad's got to be with him all the time because his dad is his protector and his dad is weary, and his dad is tired. His dad's tried everything, and he tells Jesus, "Here's the problem. A spirit has my son." Now this doesn't mean that every physical ailment has a spirit behind it. It doesn't mean if you have a headache, there's a spirit of headache or if you have a sore throat, you have the spirit of sore throat. What it does mean is that oftentimes in the West when we have a physical ailment, the first thing we think about is a doctor or a medication, rather than seeking Jesus first.

In the first century, that's not how they thought. If this is going on, I don't have a doctor to go to. I don't have a medication I can take. I need help greater than that. And I've heard that there's someone that can do something greater than that and I have news for you. There is someone that can do something greater than that. Your first go-to needs to be Jesus. It doesn't mean don't take an aspirin. It doesn't mean don't take... It doesn't mean that. It just means that first and foremost, you should be seeking the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

About four years ago, I had some things show up on my vocal cords that required surgery. It didn't mean that, well, that's not spiritual. If God wants to heal me, he'll heal me. I prayed about it and I felt like God led me to one of the best doctors in the country and he healed my throat through surgery. There's nothing wrong with that. It just means where does your heart go first? Does your heart go to Jesus or does it go to medication? Does it go to Jesus or does it go to another person? This father's desperate and he brings him to Jesus and he said, "I'll tell you what, I've heard about good stuff your disciples can do, but let me tell you something about disciples. They're weak and they're worthless. Let me tell you something about you. I don't think you can do anything either." That's what he's saying.

Now think about the Jesus that you know. Think about how you picture Jesus.

See a father bring his son, the father's desperate. He's like, "Here's what's going on with my boy. He's got this physical ailment and he's spiritually bound. I can't do anything. That's what's going on. And I took him to your disciples and they couldn't do anything." What would you expect Jesus to say next? "Oh man, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. That's got to be really hard for you right now." Isn't that what you would expect Jesus to say? That's not what he says. Notice how he responds to the father and to all those in earshot. "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" That doesn't sound like Jesus, does it? Does that sound caring and compassionate?

If you went to the doctor and you told him about your ailment and they're like, "Oh, how long do I got to put up with you? How long do I need to stay with you?" I mean, you probably wouldn't go back and visit that doctor again. That's Jesus's comment, what's he saying. He's saying this, "How long will you not believe in my authority?" He's told his disciples to go out and heal people. His disciples have gone out and preached the gospel. People have gotten saved. They've gone out and healed people and they've gotten well. They've gone out and cast out demons and evil spirits have gone. And he's saying, "How long am I going to be with you until you believe that you have authority to do what I told you you can do?" Christian, how long are you going to believe that God can work through you in any way that the Bible says that he can work through you? "How long am I going to deal with this?"

And then to the whole nation, "How long am I going to have to be with you? How long do I have to put up with your unbelief? Do you not believe that I am God? I

created the whole world out of nothing. I put it all together. I created all the constellations. I created all the suns. I created all the galaxies. I created you. I created oxygen. I created your very life. I've given you very life. I've done everything for you. Here I am standing in front of you and you're having a debate over if I'm able to heal a boy. How long is it going to be until you know that I'm the eternal Son of God?" That's what he's saying. Then he says, "Bring the boy to me." So he makes this point. His point is this, "You're faithless because you're arguing over traditions rather than believing in my authority and power."

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go make disciples."

"I'm delegating authority to you to be able to do everything that I did when I was on the earth. How long do I have to put up with you not believing that you can do that?" That's what he's saying. And sometimes we lack faith because we believe in Jesus traditionally but not personally. In other words, we have limits to what we're really going to say that Jesus could do in and through me. "I believe him to a point, but I don't know that I could trust him further because that feels a little bit weird or that feels like it'd be too great a step of faith." Or, "Can God really come through in something like that?" Here's my answer to you. Oh yes he can. The more difficult the challenge, the more God says, "It's not hard for me. I can do all things." That's what he says. So sometimes we lack faith because we believe in Jesus traditionally rather than personally.

Second is this. We have a tendency to believe in Jesus piously but not practically,

piously but not practically. Piously means this. I put on heirs that I'm spiritual than I'm religious. I tell people about my devotional life. I tell people about my church attendance. I tell people about my Bible study or my... I'm able to tell people what I do to look and appear religious, but when it comes to practical matters, I really have a hard time believing it for me. In other words, if you tell me you have a problem, I can tell you this, "My God will heal that. My God will provide for that. My God can change that situation. My God can help you." But when it's me, I have a hard time believing he can do it in my life. That's what I mean. We believe the theology, we believe it piously, like I know God can. I would be offended if you said he couldn't.

How many believe that God still heals? You'd be mad if I said he didn't. But when it comes to you and you get sick, you're like, "I don't know he's going to heal me." If I said, how many believe that God can provide? I know he can provide except when I'm a little short on cash, I don't know if he'll provide for me. I know that God can fix a marriage or I know God can sustain me being a single. I totally know that, but I don't know that he'll do it for me. It's when you believe God piously and you have all these words to back what you say, but when it comes to you personally and practically you have a hard time believing it.

Notice what happens. They brought the boy to Jesus. Verse 20. When he saw him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. So when the evil spirit sees Jesus, he takes control of the boy. It's going to have one last time. He's going to make it really

bad. By the way, it's always darkest before the dawn, just so you know. Satan knows his time is short. That's why the world's spinning out of control because we're approaching the end quickly. That's why we see more demonic attack and more evil in the world than we've seen before. Why? Because Satan knows his end is quick. He knows his end is near and it's always darkest before the dawn.

So when the evil spirit sees Jesus, takes control of the boy, throws him unto the ground, he's foaming at the mouth, he's stiffening up. What would you expect Jesus to do? I mean, I'd expect Jesus to snap his fingers or say be well or do something, and that's not what he does. Well this boy is flailing on the ground and going through all these convulsions. He looks at his dad and he asks his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" Who cares? I mean, it's obvious we got a problem here and here's how we think. "Fix my problem and fix it now. Don't you see how big of a problem... Fix it." And Jesus is like, "Well, how long's this been going on?" And he says, "From childhood." In other words, he knows, but he's getting the father to say, "This has been a long-term pain for me. This didn't start yesterday or last week or last month or last... This has been going on. I'm exhausted."

Isn't it interesting if you read through the Bible how many times Jesus asks a blind person, "What do you want me to do?" "I want to see." Or a sick person, "What do you want me to do?" "I want to be made well." Why does he ask? Because the person needs to want what Jesus wants. If you're counseling somebody and you want what God wants for them more than they want it, it will not work. Sometimes you're counseling people, you want their marriage to work out more than they do. It won't

work. Sometimes when you're helping people, you want them to remain steadfast in the Lord more than they do. It won't work. Sometimes when you're counseling people to believe a truth about God and you believe it more than they do, it won't work. At some point you have to receive what the Lord has for you. So he is asking the guy how long this has been going on, because he wants the father to know, "Hey, I want you to articulate this has been going on for a long time and I want you to articulate, you haven't been able to fix this problem."

Think about this. Think about all the things going on in your life and January 1 is a good time. We always start making those New Year's resolutions that don't work. So you can save yourself some time. Because usually what we do for New Year's resolutions is this. Here's all the things that haven't worked this last year or the year before or the year before, but this year it's going to be different. Why? What's going to be any different by February 15th? Answer is nothing other than you felt good on January writing something down. Because if you couldn't fix it before, you can't fix it Now. That's what Jesus is trying to get this man to see. "It's been going on since childhood. You love your boy, you can't fix him, you can't take him anywhere else. Bring him to me."

He says how long it's been happening since he's been a child, verse 22. "It has often thrown him both into the fire and the water to destroy him." Notice what he says next, "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." He doesn't say take pity on my son. He doesn't say help us, have compassion for me too. It's been just as hard for me as it's been for my boy. Why? Because when you see loved ones hurt, it's

sometimes harder for you to watch loved ones hurt than it is for the loved one that's getting hurt. I mean, if you've lived long enough...

I mean, Mrs. Job gets a bad rap in the Bible because when Job's going through all of his nightmare of losing his kids and losing his house and losing his job and losing his friends, and now he's got boils all over his body and he is just laying there. What does Mrs. Job say? "Why don't you just curse God and die?" And we're like, "Oh, that is so untheological." Really it's not, because you know what she's saying? "It is so hard for me to watch you suffer. And if you were dead, at least I wouldn't have to watch this anymore. It'd be easier." It's harder sometimes to watch somebody else suffer. So what does he ask for? He doesn't ask, "Heal my son." He said, "Have compassion on us. It's hurting all of us. This is a family issue. This is something that's big. It's huge." And notice what he says, "If you can." Now we read that and we're like, "Oh, nonbeliever. If he can. Of course, he can. He's Jesus." What do you say in your life, "if you can"?

See, we have limits to what we think God can do in our own life when it comes to practical, tangible problems. And we forget that all of our tangible, physical problems have spiritual roots to them. I've pastored this church for 10 years. I've seen this over and over and over and over and over again. Genuine, born again, Christ-loving, Christ-exalting, God-honoring people that love the Lord until something hits them that they can't fix. And then they start looking for solutions outside of Jesus, all the time. You watch somebody in our church and they believe Jesus and he's the one that instituted marriage. He's the one that has a plan. He's got all the answers. But when marriage

problems hit, first thing they say is, "I got to go get a counselor."

Now I'm not against counseling. I think it's good. I've been to a counselor. I think there's things that counselors can help point out, especially good, solid Christian biblical counselors. They can point you back to the word and in six to eight weeks you can kind of get your feet under you and move. But let me tell you something else. If you go into a counselor for a year or two years or three years and nothing's changing, but you're spending \$175 a pop, it's not a good use of your money.

I mean, I've told people that I know really well before when they're going through a season like that, I'm like, "How much is it costing you?" "Oh, like \$175 a week." I say, "Well, why don't you just send me that money because I'll use it and it'll be better for my family because it's not doing you any good." I'm not against counseling, hear me, but first and foremost, you've got to come to Jesus and recognize that he has some spiritual answers for what you need before you go to somebody that may not even believe in the Jesus of the Bible. Does that make sense? And this is what he's teaching this man. And so he's saying, "Well, if you can."

And Jesus has an interesting answer. He says, "If you can." "Seriously, that's your question, if you can. You're asking me if I can. Like seriously? I'm the God of the... I created you for heavens sakes and you're asking me if I can heal your son? I created your son, I created you. I created everything out of nothing. Seriously, if you can? Is your faith that bad?"

Here's what he says, "All things are possible to him who believes." Now do you

believe that? I mean, if I were to say we're going to take that out of the Bible, most Christians would be like, "We're can't take that out of the Bible. All things are possible for him who believes." But do you believe it practically, like all things? See, we have a tendency to put up limits to what God can... God's spiritual. He can save our soul from an eternal hell. He can rescue us, he can redeem us, he can deposit his Holy Spirit in us. He can take us to heaven for all eternity. But I don't know if he can help me pay my house bill. That's kind of beyond his pay grade. I don't know if he can help me find a spouse. I don't know if he can help change my boss's attitude.

The Bible says, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the Lord's hands. He can turn it wherever he will." God can do all things. So Jesus says if you can, he goes, "I can do all things." I mean in Matthew's section, this is where he says, "If you have a faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Uproot yourself and go throw yourself in the sea,' and it'll be done." But you don't see these things because your faith is so small. You don't believe what God can do. If you don't believe he can do it, he's not going to do it. If you believe my marriage is always going to be horrible, it's never going to be better. You are so right. If you believe God's never going to provide for me. He doesn't care for me. I'm always going to be broke. You are right. I'm always going to be single. God's never going to provide for me. You're right.

See, faith is believing what we cannot see. We walk by faith and not by sight. He's trying to teach this father, "What are you talking about? I can do all things. The problem is not me. The problem is your lack of faith." And we have limits to what we believe God can do specifically in our own lives personally. Even if we believe it for

others, sometimes when it hits us, I'm like, "I'm not sure it's going to... Man, I wish I was praying this for somebody else's family. I wish I was praying this for his situation. I wish I was praying that for her because I believe God would do it for them. But for me, this is really, really tough."

You don't need to believe God just piously; believe him practically. He's down to the finest detail in your life and everything that the enemy would lie to you and say, "Well, that's not a big deal." It's a big deal because it's a big deal for you. And God cares about all the little details of your life. He cares about your heart. He cares about what you think. He cares about your feelings. He cares about your resources. He cares about you. He cares about providing. He is the God of all comfort. He loves you. His mercies are new every single morning. And sometimes we lack faith because we're too pious and not practical enough.

And then finally is this, sometimes we believe Jesus historically, but we don't believe him presently. So he knows why the father cries out. Jesus says, "I can do all things to him who believes." And immediately the boy's father cried out. I mean there's no time for him to even respond. He's like, "I do believe. Help my unbelief." It's a great prayer, isn't it? "I totally believe that you can. There's no doubt. Historically I've seen you move." We read about the parting of the Red Sea and we say, "Our God did that." We're like, "Yeah, he did that." We see him call fire down when Elijah calls him. I totally believe he did that. We see Daniel in the lions den where God kept the mouths of the lions closed. And we say, "Do you believe that?" Oh, I totally believe that. We believe Jonah got swallowed by a whale and spit out three days later. I totally believe that. We

believe Jesus came as the eternal Son of God who died on the cross and rose. I totally believe that.

But when it comes to something in our lives, we're like, "I believe it but, I mean how am I going to believe because I've never seen you do this before?" It's a great prayer. It's an authentic prayer. It's a good prayer to pray. Because sometimes we're phony when we hear a preacher preach and we're like, "Okay, he can heal this and he can do that. He can deliver this and praise the Lord." Sometimes it's more authentic to say, "I know you can. Help me believe that you can where I'm currently not believing that you can." And that's where the Lord comes and shows up. That's an authentic prayer, by the way. Everywhere I've seen growth in my life are the times where I've prayed like that. "God, I know you can, but I'm having a hard time believing that you can. So I need you to change my heart and show me that you can. I need to see it played out in my life this way. I don't know that I can change. I've tried to change. I can't change. Can you change me? Lord, I believe you can, but I don't know how you're going to do it." That's what it looks like.

And it's okay to say, "I believe, but I'm having a hard time in the practical day today seeing it. I believe it historically, but I'm not believing it presently." God wants you to believe in presently. And so when Jesus saw the crowd that was rapidly gathering, he rebuked the unclean spirit saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." Notice this. He called the demon by name. He called the evil spirit by name, "You deaf and dumb spirit." Why? Because physically the kid was unable to hear and he was unable to speak. Dumb

didn't mean stupid.

The Bible says, "The fool in his heart says there is no God." There's a lot of smart, smart, intelligent people that are fools. When you see the word dumb here, it doesn't mean that they're stupid. It just means they're not able to live out what is normal. The normal pattern for someone that's born is they'd be able to hear and they'd be able to speak. This kid can't hear, he can't speak. How it translates to us may be not that you have a dumb and mute spirit physically, but many of us have a dumb and mute spirit spiritually where we don't hear the Lord and we can't act on what the Lord wants us to do.

And so we're looking around at all these solutions in the world, but we're not listening to God and we're not able to play out what God wants. Whether we're single, whether we're married, whether we're a parent, whether we're a child, whether we're in school, whether we're in a job, we see what the word says, but it's hard for us to understand what to do and we don't know how to work it out. That's the deaf and dumb spirit. And what does Jesus do? He commands it to come out, and immediately the spirit comes out. And what does he command the spirit to say? "Don't ever go into that boy again." Why? Because when Jesus heals, he heals completely. Ain't that good news? It's not just a partial healing; he's done. This boy's never going to struggle with this again.

And it's interesting because what happens is it's such a powerful situation that verse 26 tells us that after crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came

out, that's the evil spirit. And the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said he's dead. I mean, this was such a powerful physical thing that as the boy's convulsing doing all this stuff, he's on the ground, he looks like he's dead. And what happens? Jesus took him by the hand and raised him and he got up. It's a picture of salvation, ain't it? Jesus takes that which is dead and makes it alive again. Remember the daughter that was healed, she looked like she was dead and, "Ah, she's not dead, just sleeping. Let's get her up." That's what Jesus does. He takes that which is dead and makes it alive.

When we come to the end of ourselves and we know we can't fix it and we can't do it, and this is dead if I'm still in control, God's like, "I got it now. You take your hands off, I'll put my hands on. I got this." That's what faith looks like. And sometimes we lack faith because we think about faith in the way of, "What's the tradition of faith I need to believe? What does Pastor Jeff say? What's BRAVE Church belief? How do I act pious around other Christians? And historically, how do I know the word?" Versus, "How do I personally believe the word of God? How do I practically apply it? And how do I presently believe that God's in my situation and can help me?"

See, this is what happens here. I mean it's really interesting because we read the story about David and Goliath. We love the story of David and Goliath because you have this shepherd boy that comes to the battle lines wondering why this big tall enemy is taunting all the armies of Israel like "What's the problem? I'll take him. Who are you?" He's like, "Hey listen, when I was a shepherd," he goes, "the lion came, I killed the lion. The bear came, I killed the bear. I've been trained for a moment just like this.

My bigger question to you is, what is this uncircumcised non-covenant Philistine doing, making God's nation bow in submission? This is wrong. He has no bounds here. I'll take care of him." So Saul gives him his armor and it doesn't fit. "I don't need this. All I need is five smooth stones."

So he goes out to the battle line and Goliath, the 10-foot giant starts taunting him. He is like, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" What does David say? "I'm not coming at you with a javelin or spear sticks. I'm coming at you in the name of the Lord Almighty. Today you will die and I will cut off your head because my God's that powerful." And we love that story because David's killed Goliath. The God you serve is the same God that killed Goliath. The God you serve is the same God that indwells you through his Holy Spirit. The God you serve is the same God that can deal with all the challenges you're dealing with. You just have to believe it personally. You have to believe it presently. And you need to believe it practically that he cares about the little situations in your life that the enemy lies to you and says, "He doesn't care about that." He does.

So then here's the question. If that's what causes me to lack faith, then what can I do to build my faith? I'm so glad you ask because that's what we're getting. And this would be true on January 1st, 2023. It'd be true 10 years from now if we're still here. I mean this is how you grow your faith. Notice what happens next. Verse 28 says, "When he came into the house, his disciples began questioning him privately." So the crowd's left, disciples are now with Jesus. This is not the only time they've asked him questions privately, but now they're asking him a private question. And here's the

question: "Why could we not drive it out? Why?"

In other words they're saying, "You commissioned us to go drive out demons. We've done that. You commissioned us to heal people. We've done that. You've commissioned us to preach the gospel. We've seen people respond to you. What is it this time? We did all the stuff you told us to do and it didn't work." You ever been there in your Christian life? "I'm doing what God's telling me to do. It's just not working right now." That's what they're saying. "Why couldn't we do it? We saw you do it, but why couldn't we? Because you told us that we could do all that you do because you commissioned us with that level of authority." And he said to them this kind cannot come out by anything but what? Prayer. Prayer. The earliest, most reliable versions have prayer. Majority of others say prayer and fasting. We'll talk about both.

The first way you grow your faith is this, prayer. Prayer. Prayer is intentionally seeking God and desiring to hear and obey his voice. That's what prayer is. Prayer is when I'm going to get to know who the Lord is. That's prayer. Prayer is not just reciting a creed. Prayer is not just saying, "Dear Lord, bless me." It's not just going through religious motion. It's when you encounter the living God personally by communicating with him. That's what it means to pray. That's why the first Tuesday of every month, both here in Westminster and online, the most important meeting of the month. Why? Because we gather together to seek the face of God. There's no more important ministry you have than prayer. If you study the Bible, you will see how important prayer is. When people pray, how God moves. When people don't pray, the lack of faith and what happens as a result of it.

I mean, all the way back in the book of Joshua, they prayed, they sought the Lord, it was great, they're taking over. But when the Gibeonites came, it says, but they forgot to inquire of the Lord. "Ah, we got this one." And they made a bad covenant with the Gibeonites. When we pull off the throttle of prayer, we set ourselves up for failure. Prayer is the most important minister you can have. It's seeking the face of God. Prayer changes everything. Prayer changes your heart. God may not change your circumstance, but he may change your heart in the middle of your circumstance so that you can endure. Prayer is what God works through.

If you study the life of Jesus, here's what you would see. You would see a man who prayed. Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and went to solitary places, where he prayed. It was his routine to get up early in the morning and pray. What was his routine before he performed miracles? To pray. What was his routine after miracles? Up to go on a mountainside and pray. What was his routine before he walked on the water? To pray. What was he doing in the Garden of Gethsemane the night where he knew he was going to be betrayed and handed over? He was praying. What was he doing when he was on the cross and dying for the sins of the world? Oh, he was praying. What was he doing when he was 12 years old and his parents were looking for him? He said, "Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?" He was praying. What'd he get so upset for in the temple when people made it a den of thieves or a marketplace for themselves instead of a what? A house of prayer. What did God want his people to do? Pray.

He wants you to know that you have access to God through the person of Jesus Christ. You don't need to come through a pastor or a saint or a person that died and went before you, an ancestor. You come directly to the Father through Jesus and there is no other way. But here's the question, rhetorical. Ready? If Jesus took away prayer in your life, would it make any difference? If you couldn't pray anymore in 2023, would it make any difference? There have been seasons in my life, especially as a young Christian, I would be like, "I don't know if it would make much of a difference at all." Now I would say, "You take away my prayer life, I'm going to be desperate. I need the Lord. I need to spend time with him."

And if you study history, like we can sing songs about revival and pray for revival, we want revival. Anytime you've seen the Lord move mightily, either in the early church in the Book of Acts or any other time in history, there's always been a move of prayer that precedes that every single time. And what do you see in our churches in North America as a general rule? What's left the church? Prayer. Do you know we started praying in services about five years ago publicly because I felt so strongly that if I can't lead our people in prayer, what am I doing as a pastor? And we were a church of about a thousand people at the time. Do you realize when we started praying publicly, about 250 people left our church and I was getting letters from people, "I just don't feel comfortable praying out loud anymore. I can't go to your church."

And I remember thinking, it's painful to watch people leave, but what's more painful is what kind of church am I leading if I can't teach people how to seek the face of God? So we're going to pray even more. I mean, prayer is foundation to everything

our church will ever be. There's three times a year we pray as a staff from nine to noon, the busiest weeks of the year. Right before Easter, right before fall launch, and right before Christmas. So guess what we were doing all last week before our Christmas Eve services? We were praying. You know what we're asking the Lord to do? Fill the place up. You know what we're asking the Lord to do? Save people. So for those of you who were here at Christmas that saw this place have standing room only, and we saw hundreds of people accept Christ across both campuses, why was that? Prayer. Prayer. You want to grow in your faith, learn to pray.

You say, "Well, where do I start?" I studied the life of Jesus. Go to Matthew chapter 6 and recite the Lord's prayer. Learn how to pray about his holiness. Learn how to pray to let his kingdom come. But here's what else I'd say. Get around somebody that knows how to pray. Prayer is more caught than taught. You say, "Where do I find somebody like that?" Come on first Tuesday here in Westminster. You will find people that know how to pray. They'll pray with you. "But I don't like praying out loud." Well, you will if you come. There's something about the relationship that you're going to grow in as you pray and desire to hear God and obey his voice.

It's so important because when you go through a hard time, it's important that you hear the Lord. Because sometimes when you pray and you're hearing the Lord, you're like, "Lord, why are you doing this?" And he'll say, "It's going to be for a while. Get comfortable." Well, that's good to know, isn't it? Or, "Hey, I got this, but I'm going to have to work it out my way." Or this is for their good or anything like that. When I

know what the Lord is doing or what he's up to, because I'm close enough to him, then I can endure differently. And prayer doesn't mean that God does what I want when I want him to do it, but he sometimes responds in the ways that I would like. Does that mean every single person we pray for to be healed is healed? Does that mean every person we pray for to be delivered is delivered? Does that mean every person we pray for to be saved is saved? No.

I pray for people to be saved. They've gotten saved and people that haven't gotten saved. I've prayed for people... I've told you this. Last summer I was praying for two women in our church. Both had cancer, prayed for both of them to be completely healed. One went to the doctor a week later and said the doctor couldn't find any cancer. The other one went to glory a month later. Why? Because God's in control. But when we pray, God changes our hearts. God changes us and we sometimes do not have because why? We do not ask. "Lord, I don't want to bother you." Or, "This is too insignificant. I know you don't deal with stuff like this. Or hey, better yet, "This was my fault. The reason I'm in this situation, I'm the one that did it, so I'll try to fix it."

The beauty of the gospel is all of us have fallen short of the glory of God. All of us have blown it. Even if you have done it after you're a Christian, there's grace and mercy and forgiveness. Let him take your broken mess now. He's good at it. Amen. You want to grow in your faith, grow in your prayer.

Here's how you know that prayer works. I'll just give you this little tidbit. If you haven't been a prayer, don't try to pray for 30 minutes tomorrow. You won't be able to. You just won't. Maybe you set a goal to pray for three minutes. And even if you're

scoffing me, "Three minutes. Everybody can do that." Just try it. Try it. Write down on a calendar today, what time tomorrow you're going to set aside three minutes just to spend time with the Lord. Just three minutes. And you watch what happens during the time that you wrote out that you were going to spend that three minutes with the Lord. You watch how many phone calls you get, how many distractions you get, how many interruptions you get, because the enemy doesn't want you to pray. The enemy's not afraid of you, but he's very afraid of the Jesus, all powerful one in you. And when you pray, you awaken the Jesus in you.

I mean, it's kind of like in Marvel, it's like the Hulk. I mean he's not all that much until he gets awakened. But when he gets awakened, he's a terror. How do you awaken? You awaken by prayer. Devil's not afraid of you. He's afraid of the God in you. He's afraid of the Jesus in you. So start by praying.

Second is this. You want to grow this year, add fasting to it. Add fasting to it. Fasting is setting aside that which is essential, primarily food, to pursue the Lord. Setting aside food to pursue the Lord. Notice what he said. Why couldn't we drive it out? "This kind only comes out by prayer." This kind only comes out by prayer and... Well, what is this kind? Whatever you're dealing with that you prayed about, whatever you're dealing with that's still there, whatever you're dealing with that you've gone to the Lord, it just is not budging. This kind only comes out by prayer and fasting. That's the kind. So when you go into a fast, you're praying for those things which have not budged in your normal Christian walk.

Now, let me tell you what fasting is not. Fasting is not starving yourself and hope that God rewards it. "Oh, we're doing a 21-day fast. I'm going to starve myself for 21 days and trust that the Lord's going to show up." If you don't pray, there's nothing to fast about. For some of you, you may not even want to start by doing a fast. And if you've never fasted before, I'd encourage you pick no more than one meal a week that you're going to intentionally set aside so that you can spend that time praying. Because here's what will happen. You'll think, "Well, I didn't eat breakfast today, so God's got to bless me." No, you're just going to be hungry.

And why food? Because food is essential. The only people I would say to here, that I would say don't do food, is if you have some sort of physical ailment where you need to eat and your doctor says you need to eat. Or number two, if you struggle with biblical identity and you've had an eating disorder like anorexia or bulimia or something like that, where you set aside food and it's going to trigger something in you because now it's all a physical thing, it's not spirit. Then don't choose food; pick something else.

If you're under the age of 18, here would be a good place to start. Screens. Just set those aside for five hours a day. Set those aside for three days in a row. You don't need them to live. You think you do, but you don't. And it's not just setting them aside, it's setting them aside that all the time that you would spend on your phone, now you're going to spend with Jesus. "I don't know how much time I did." You can look on your phone, it'll tell you how much time you spent on your phone. Say, "Okay, instead of doing that, I'm going to do this." That's what fasting looks like. Fasting is a choice. It's not commanded in the Bible. When we do a 21-day fast, nobody's coming around and

asking you, "What did you do? How long did you fast? There's no reward for who does the most or anything. It's assumed that you're going to fast and it's between you and the Lord.

Some of you may fast one meal in 21 days just to set aside time to pray to the Lord. Good for you. Take that step of faith. Others of you may be able to go longer or go the whole distance if you've done it before. Good for you. But don't start... If you've never fasted before, don't say, "Okay, I'm going for it. 2023, I'm going to get..." You won't make it all day. I mean it's a spiritual discipline. As we do this, I'm going to have podcasts that come out daily. If we have your email address, they'll show up in your inbox. They'll be about three to five minutes to help encourage you as we do this as a church. But I believe that prayer and fasting come together, are putting gas on a fire. When you get a praying church that's saying, "Lord, you do whatever you want. And Lord, you change me however you want. And Lord, I'm setting aside that which is intentional so that you will do it. Lord, grow us, grow me, change me, move in my life." We believe that you're going to do this.

Now, I didn't know much about fasting 20 years ago. I'd heard about it, but I thought it was for a special few that were out there that were a little bit weird or crazy. But I went through a desperate time about 20-some years ago where I was sensing after I graduated from seminary, does the Lord want me to continue in ministry or coach or go back in the business world? And nothing was coming together. You ever had a season where nothing's coming together? That was my season. And I remember

I watched a video from Pastor Jim Cymbala from Brooklyn Tabernacle. It's probably still on YouTube and all fuzzy because it's probably 25 years old, talking about prayer and fasting. And it was so moving to me. I'm like, "I'm going to try this. Lord, I know I pray, but I've never fasted before and I need to know what you want to do with my life."

I was scheduled to preach back in my hometown. At the time I was in the Czech Republic. And I started fasting while I was in the Czech Republic, every day asking the Lord, "Hey Lord, if you're in it for me to be a preacher, I've just got to know that that's what you want from me. I'll do whatever you want, but I need to know that when I get done preaching this next message that I see you tangibly at work in my message." I just begin to pray that and I fasted for a couple weeks on and off just asking the Lord. And he gave me a message. It was a very simple gospel presentation at my home church, which was about four or 5,000 people.

I was walking in on Saturday night to give the message and I heard the voice in my head that I'm very familiar with being the enemy like, "You're going to preach this message. Everybody knows this message. They're never going to invite you back. This is so simple. Everybody in the church knows this message." I remember I fought the voice by saying, "Well, that's cool. It'll be the last time I ever preach and that's good, that's answer." And I told them I was going to preach the gospel. And they said, "Hey, we have some yes packets. We have 35 yes packets out in the lobby. So when people come to Christ, just tell them to go out to the lobby and pick up a yes packet." I said, "Okay." So I preached, didn't feel any different to me than any other time I'd ever

preached. Preached the gospel, asked anybody that wanted to receive Christ to stand. And on Saturday night, about 250 people stood and received Christ. Amen.

So I walk off the platform, a guy comes running around the backstage, he's like, "You got to go back out there. We only have 35 yes packets. We're way short." So I went back out and told them what they did and how to get involved in the church, et cetera. Then I preached the next day and over 500 people came to know Christ. I preached the same way I'd always preached. So about 750 converts in one day. I'm not the smartest person in the world, but I said, "God, you're in this." Fasting works. It works on those stubborn areas that can't come out by just going through the motions and just praying and just doing it. It's adding gas. Lord, I'm setting this, this has got to go. I'm desperate here. You've got to help me. And it's us saying by our actions, "I'm willing to set aside that which is essential for me to pursue you more intentionally for this period of time."

So again, when it comes to this BRAVE Church, nobody's going to come around and, "How are you fasting? What are you doing?" And it's okay, by the way, if you tell somebody, especially if you're married, I mean, you can talk about this. When the Bible says, "Don't let anybody know you're fasting," it's talking about not showing off. So like when people are like, "What's going on with you?" "Well, I'm fasting." That's what it's referring to. It's not referring to telling somebody, "No, I can't get lunch with you. I'm going to be fasting during this period." That's okay. It's just don't be braggadocios about it. You do what the Lord asked you to do. And oh by the way, if you set out to do something and you fail, I got great news for you. Our Lord's mercies are new every

morning. Just pick up right where you left off. It's okay. All right.

So we're going to pray. We're going to fast. That's how you grow your faith. Let me give you a third way you grow your faith. It's vision, it's vision. Vision is believing your future is blessed. Vision is believing that your future is better than your present or your past. That's what vision is. So when I'm praying for something, I'm believing it by faith even though I don't see it. So you think about all the different areas in your life. If you're single, you think about your dating life. If you're married, you think about your married life. If you work, you think about your work life. You're going to school, you think about your school life. If you have friendship life, I mean just the different categories of your life. If in that category you say, "I know it's bad and it's only going to get worse," that's not faith. Faith is, "This is where I'm at. Good, bad or indifferent. But because my god's with me, it's going to get even better." That's vision.

Vision is believing that God can, even though you don't see it. And vision is contagious, isn't it? Vision is that, "Well, I want to be part of that. I want to see that grow. I want to see my marriage heal. I want to get married. I want to have kids. I want to..." Well that just sounds like prosperity gospel to me. Not really. I mean our God's a prospering God. He wants good things. The Bible says, "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." You're not getting any spiritual points by saying, "My life's horrible and I'm a worm and I can't wait to die." That's just not an attractive evangelistic presentation. And I'm not talking about, I'm blessed because look what I'm doing. God loves you all so much. He's the best parent in the world. He doesn't want to give you stuff to prosper you in a way to choke you or make it hard for

you. But he does want to bless you in a way that you know that he loves you in an incredible measure. Vision's important.

I mean, I think about as a church where we've been and over the last 12 years, God's really expanded our tent pegs. And I believe now is the time really for us to come together. For those of you who are here on Christmas Eve, I mean you saw what God's doing. He's growing his church. He's building this church. Over the last couple years of chaos, he's really clarified to us, hey, what's your specific mission as BRAVE? And what's he calling you to do? And how is that at the tip of the spirit, not only for the culture, but for the church? And what does that look like? And how's he calling all of us together to do that? So one thing we're going to begin starting next month in the year of 2023, we're going back to membership. We want you to know what our church is about. We want you to know, hey, this is what we're partnering in together because we need all of us to get this done.

And even if you've been here for 12 years, I'm encouraging you to go through our membership class for a couple reasons. One, it's only 90 minutes. And two, it will clarify for you all the things that God has brought together with clarity. We just shared these with our staff about three weeks ago, and it was so fun for me to preach after 12 years in some areas of ambiguity to bring complete clarity to this is who we are and this is who we're not. And this is what God specifically entrusted to us. And we want you to know what that is and we want you to be a part of that. We're going to teach you about the BRAVE way. How do we align all of our people with the mission God

wants us to do? If we're really going to be about the gospel and ensuring the gospel, how do we put all of our people on mission?

We're so excited about how we're going to form groups going forward right around the Easter time as we launch them, that we're going to rename them. You'll hear me talk about it in March. We're going to have a whole vision series. We're going to teach you how to study the word. We're going to teach you how to study it with people. We're going to teach you how to be accountable. We're going to teach you how to share your faith. We're going to teach you how to engage with people that don't know. We're going to teach you how to pray for spiritual conversations so that you can do that. So that here at BRAVE, everybody all week long is always on mission for the good news of Jesus Christ. And when I teach you on that, I'm going to come out of my skin because I've been waiting 12 years for this to happen. I mean, it's exciting.

Now, it doesn't mean that everybody here's going to be like, "I'm totally in." You don't have to be. But I'm going to tell you what BRAVE Church is going to be about and all that we're going to staff for and all that we're going to do and why we're going to do it. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

And then he's doing some incredible things. God's given us great vision and resources. I mean, I constantly hear from people after a service, "Pastor Jeff, I can't

believe it's my first time here. I've been here for a month. I can't believe that there's a church that actually opens up the Bible and unapologetically preaches it. Can't believe there's a church that worships the way you do. Can't believe that there's a place that really devotes itself to prayer and believes in the fullness of the Holy Spirit." There's just not a lot of churches out there like that. And we know this. That's why we want to expand and plant more campuses. That's why we're starting an academy. That's why we're trying to start schools because we want to disciple not just Denver, but the nations. And we want to teach you how to be a part of that.

So for the first time in our history, this April, we're going to start a capital campaign. Capital campaign will be a three-year capital campaign. Capital campaign is, "How can I align my heart with everything BRAVE is doing?" Because where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. So for those of you who're like, "I'm going to skip March. I'm not coming to March," you want to be here in March. Because when you're here in March and you hear what God's doing and how you're going to be blessed to be a part of what God's doing, it'll be clear to you that God is doing something so special through BRAVE Church, so unique through BRAVE Church, that if God calls you to be a part of that, it's going to echo throughout all eternity with all the lives that God touches. And we get to be a part of that. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

We want to be a church that when people live 30, 40, 50 miles from here, they can still be part of Brave Church. We want to be a church that if somebody lives in Florida instead of watching online, they're on a campus, or in California, they're on a campus. We have a vision for all of that. We believe God wants to do that.

And I would also say this, the time is short. God's calling us to prepare the way. He sent John the Baptist the first time before his first arrival. He has his church getting him ready for the second arrival. We're part of that. We're the tip of the spear for that. I'm expecting Jesus to come. And if he doesn't come in my lifetime, I want to make such an impact with you for the kingdom of God on this planet, that it's still echoing an eternity long after we leave. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

And that's what he's doing here. And so I just encourage you. Say this year I want to grow in my faith, grow in your prayer life, add fasting to it, and then believe that the God you serve can do what? All things. He can do all things. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Our God's able to do it. You think about, well, this kind. What for you is this kind? What for you is that weight and that burden like, "I don't even think he can move this. I don't even know if this can..." What is this? That's what God can do. Why don't you devote starting next Sunday through the 28th, that time of prayer to that thing. Why not invite some other people to pray for you about that kind?

Why not fast about that kind?

Let's trust the Lord to go over, above and beyond anything that we could ask or think, according to his glorious power that is at work within us. Amen. Let him be our vision. Let's look to him to see things the way that he sees things. That's what God wants to do. Would you guys stand?

Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise. Lord, may 2023 be a year filled with faith, coupled by prayer and fasting and vision. Lord, may you unleash for us a way to walk in freedom in Christ. Lord, even today as some of our pastors and elders come forward, Lord, maybe there's just some here today that just need to pray and say, "Lord, I'm entrusting this year to you. I'm trusting this weight to you. Lord, move in my life in this way." And Lord, could we see supernatural things happen to every individual here that's standing, to people in our church? And can we tell of your glories and your splendors, both here in Denver and all around the world? God, we look to you and you alone. You are our King, you are our Lord, you are our Savior. We give you all the praise, all the glory and honor in Jesus' name, amen and amen. Can we give God praise today?