



# **Message Transcript**

## **When The Going Gets Tough**

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Finish this sentence with me. When the going gets tough-

The tough get going.

Sometimes, right? I mean, we say when the going gets tough, the tough get going, but that's not always the case. Sometimes when the going gets tough, the tough make bad decisions. Sometimes the tough fold. And the going tends to get tough, no matter who you are, no matter where you are in life, no matter what you're dealing with, if you live long enough, life has a way of unfolding challenges in your life in some specific way. It could be a challenge with your finances. It could be a challenge in your marriage. It could be a challenge with your kids. It could be a challenge being single. It could be a challenge in school. It could be a challenge in your job. All sorts, myriads of challenges that present themselves. Oftentimes when these present themselves, we want to get out of them as quick as we can. But I want to let you know something.

In everything that goes on in our life, good, bad and indifferent, our heavenly father is either allowing those things to happen or he is unfolding them at our feet. If God is really sovereign and is behind everything that he's doing, then every time that we go through a stressful, difficult situation, our father is giving us an opportunity to respond in a way that glorifies him, that gives us the greatest joy and builds our character. Oftentimes we don't know, what am I supposed to do now? This isn't what I signed up for. This isn't the circumstances I thought I was going to be dealt with. Nobody else has gone through this. I don't know what to do. What do I do? Some of you are in that situation right now. Some of you are in that situation in your marriage,

some of you are singles and in that situation. Some of you are going through severe pain and hurt. Some of you are going through hurt with your job. Some of you have financial crisis.

No matter where you are, sometimes it's difficult to know, well, what option do I have? But if you can view it as an opportunity from the Lord, the Lord wants to give you some ways that you can respond, that will not only help you to grow in him but will also bless those around you. If you're not going through any stress in your life, congratulations. That's a good season. Keep breathing. The notes will apply in the future, I promise you, right? Because life has a way of doing that to us and working this out. As we studied through the book of Hebrews, what we've learned is there's this group of people that were Jewish, who had professed Christ to be their Lord and savior. Some had made genuine professions of faith and were born again. Others were just saying, "Jesus is Lord" but were having a hard time continuing on with Jesus and wanting to turn back.

So the author here is writing to them saying that Jesus Christ is the greatest of all time. He's greater than the angels. He's greater than Moses. He's greater than Abraham. He's greater than Joshua. He's greater than any other character that we read about. He's the great high priest, he's of the order of Melchizedek. Then because he's all these things, we looked at scripture that said, "So persevere. Look at all the people that have continued to persevere. Don't turn back, keep going." Why would they need to persevere? Because it's much easier to be religious than it is to be persecuted for being a follower of Jesus Christ. It's still easier to be religious today than to be

persecuted because you go public with your faith in Jesus Christ.

So, many of these people were moving ahead, but they're looking to turn back. Being a Jew and just following dietary customs and religious holidays was so much easier than letting people know, "I'm a born again believer. I believe Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. He's the only way to the father. You need to repent to and trust him." They were experiencing persecution and many in their community had been martyred. So they're looking to turn back. So this author is writing them saying, "Remain steadfast. Jesus is worth it. He's the greatest of all time." Now as we've gone through 12 chapters, we get to the final chapter in this book, chapter 13. Now he's going to give us practical instructions. How do I do that? When it gets difficult for me, how do I do that?

It's more difficult to live out your Christian faith now than at any other time in my lifetime. How do we do that? What opportunities is God going to afford us so that we can live out our faith the way God wants? And if you want to know how to respond during times of stress, if you want to know what God says, how to respond when the going gets tough, he wants to give you five ways to do that this morning. We're going to take a look in Hebrews chapter 13, verses one through nine. So if you turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 13, verses one through nine, I'll read through this together and then we'll unpack it together. I'm using my phone this morning as a light. Jesus is the light, but my phone is also a light because I can't see up here. All right. Hebrews chapter 13, verse one.

Here's what he says. "Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show

hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves are also in the body. Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed to be undefiled, for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Make sure your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have, for he himself has said, 'I will never leave you or desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.' So we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?' Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you, and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who are so occupied were not benefited." Here in these short nine verses, we really hear how we're supposed to respond when the going gets tough, how we're supposed to respond when life gives us difficulties for being a Christian in our life. I want to share all five of those with you this morning. The first is this. When the going gets tough, take the opportunity to love people. When the going gets tough, take the opportunity to love people. That means welcome people and identify with them. When the going gets tough, love people. Notice what he says. "Let love of the brethren continue. Let it remain."

This specific word for love is talking about brotherly love. It's talking about family love. We get the word Philadelphia, we know the city of Philadelphia. It's two Greek

words that are smushed together, right? [Greek 00:06:04] means love. [Greek 00:06:05] is brother. It's the city of brotherly love. We know that. That's what he's talking about here. We as a church family should love each other like we're our own family. Let love continue. Love is the litmus test of how much we really love the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that one time when there was an attorney in Matthew chapter 22 that came to question Jesus? And he said, "What's the greatest commandment?" Jesus said, "Well, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. And the second is like it. You should love your neighbor as yourself." So he begins to ask a question about, "Well, who's my neighbor?" In other words, what's the limit to which I can share my love with people?

And he tells the story of the good Samaritan to let him know there is no limit to your love for people. Love is the litmus test for how much you love Jesus. If you say you love God but hate your brother, the Bible says you're a liar. If you love God, it will translate into your love for people. I know when I was converted at the age of 18, the first thing that changed in my life was a love for people. I'm not talking about love for people in my clique, love for people in my group. I mean love for people that I would've never hung out with before, just because I had a genuine affection because God created them. What the Bible tells us is simply this. We're to do good to all people but especially to those in the household of God. If there's anything that our church or any church should be known for, it's the way that we love one another.

Wasn't that Jesus' teaching in John chapter 13? Jesus said in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give to you that you love one another, even as I have loved you,

that you also love one another." He goes on to say this, "By this, by this love, all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." So what's Jesus saying? If you want the world to be converted, if you want the world to know that Jesus is Lord, what's the way to do it? Christians, love each other. Love people. That's the answer. Here's what's difficult. During difficult times in your life, during times of stress, during times where things get challenging, I don't care if it's a health crisis, a job crisis, whatever, we tend to distance ourselves from people rather than engage with them. The Bible is telling us when you have opportunity, when you go through stress, which is an opportunity, take the time to open your eyes even more and love people.

We tend to think, "Well, I just got to get through the circumstance, get me out of this. Once I'm out of this, it'll be okay." God's developing this because he is doing something in the circumstance, and the way that you love people is what he wants you to do. So he gives really two examples of this in verses two and three. He says, "First, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without even knowing it." He says, "Show hospitality." Hospitality is a warm welcome greeting that you can be part of my life. Hospitality is a requirement for being an elder in the church. Hospitality has not so much, "Come over to my house. You can hang out at my house." That's part of it. But it's, "I welcome you. It doesn't matter who you are. You can be part of my life."

It can be as simple as if you're in middle school, inviting somebody to sit at the lunch table with you. It can be in a locker room where you invite somebody to come over and be a part of what you're doing. It can be in a job where maybe they're just an

intern, but you invite them to your life. It's welcoming strangers, welcoming people that are foreign to you. Could be a neighbor. If we really see ourselves as a conduit of God's grace, that means everywhere we go and everybody we see, we have the opportunity to welcome them or close our eyes and forget that they're even there. During times of stress, we tend to want to close our eyes and escape community.

Or when we go through a hard time, maybe we'll be in a small group in the church and be in community when things are good, but when it gets difficult, we go into problem-solving mode. "I don't need community. I don't need people. I'll work it out myself." Or we can be at the store and we just got to, "I got to get groceries because I got to get home, because I got to cook food, because I got to feed my family, because I got to get them ready for school, because I got to go to bed. I don't have time to notice who really needs my help." He's saying welcome people. Be the type of person that has your eyes open, where you would be welcoming to anybody in need. Because sometimes the way that God wants to meet somebody else's need is through you. This is how we know that we're a community that reflects the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you study the early church, they had many of the same problems that we have today.

But early on, the reason the church was blowing up was not because they had fancy buildings or budgets or great seminaries or all these things. They saw a group of people that was coming together that were made up of all different ranks and files of society. There were rich and poor together. There were different ethnicities coming together. There were all these people coming together and nobody could figure out what it was. But the one thing they saw was the radical love they had for one another,



and it started to transform the culture. By the way, wherever you go, there's not enough love in our culture. Everybody that you meet is wearing a sign around their neck. You can't see it, but it's there saying, "Would somebody please show me some love today?" Nobody said, "I've had too much love today. Give it to somebody else." I don't care where you are. I mean, perhaps we could be at a rental car counter or something like that, in case you're listening.

We're looking for love. But God wants us to be the people that are bringing that love. So show hospitality, be warm, be welcoming, be inviting. Church should be the most welcoming place on the planet, that regardless of skin color, regardless of background, regardless of gender, regardless of who, you're welcome here. Why? Because Jesus Christ reigns and rules here. And not only you're welcome here, but you're welcome into my life. Not a clique. We're a family, we're a family. Then he says this, in verse three, "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourself are also in the body." Now he's talking about Christians here. Many of the Christians, many of their friends were being in prison, and prison was different then than it is now. They weren't given three square meals a day. They weren't watching TV. They weren't going out to the yard for an hour to get exercise.

If somebody didn't come bring them food, if somebody didn't come talk to them, they had nobody to talk about and they had nothing to eat. They had nobody to talk with, they had nothing to eat. So showing mercy to the prisoners was super important.

Those that had been outcast, those had been ill-treated. Why? Because we're part of the body. It means when we see other Christians who are being mistreated in their character, not only do we need to identify with them, we not only need to love them, we need to identify with them. What happens oftentimes when we go through stress and we see somebody making a stand for Christ, here's what we say. "They're doing a really good job. I'm totally for them." But we don't go public with it and say, "I'm totally standing with them. And if I get the same retribution they got, that's totally fine because that's my brother in Christ."

I'm just here to tell you right now around the world, there's more persecution happening to Christians than at any other time in society. One of the reasons that is, is because we have the largest population that we've ever had. Another reason is the culture continues to grow more and more hostile towards Christ. So we can read about people that are being persecuted or mistreated in other parts of the world. We can even read about people that are being mistreated and persecuted in our part of the world and say, "Man, that's too bad. I'll pray for them." Yeah, it's too bad and I'll pray for them, but I'm also going to stand with them and speak out for them because it's wrong what's happening, and that's my brother. That's my sister.

When we have that kind of love that we would go to bat with somebody, that's when true friendships really occur. I love the way the Proverbs say it. In Proverbs chapter 17, verse 17, it says it like this. I'm in Psalms. I need to be in Proverbs. Proverbs 17, verse 17 says it like this. "A friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity." Isn't it true that your closest friends are the ones that are there when

you go through the most difficult times? I mean you have acquaintances, you have friends, you have good people, but when it really hits the fan, when you really go through that difficulty, it's those that are standing with you saying, "I'm going through it with you. I'm going to bear the burden with you."

And think about this. All of the "one anothers" in the New Testament, love one another, pray for one another, carry one another's burdens, admonish one another, you can't do one anothers without another. It's hard to love one another if there's only one, right? Church was never geared to be one. Church is never geared to be me and what I'm getting. It's all been to be about how I love God, so he can use me to show love to other people. Love. It takes time, especially under stressful circumstances. Can you picture a church where some of the church has been martyred this week and other people have been put in prison this week, and you're sitting in church saying, "It was a lot easier just being Jewish, a lot easier just going through the religious routine." It's still easier going through the religious routine. If Christians really stood up and were vocal and lived out the gospel of Jesus Christ, it would make it uncomfortable for you.

Let me just say this, because there are people in our church, I've heard this, people say this, "I'm just praying persecution comes. I know God will use it to purify the church." It's coming. But how about this? The Bible says in II Timothy 3:12, "Anyone who wants to live a godly life will be persecuted." If you want to experience persecution, just live a godly life. That's all. People will persecute you. Go public with your faith in every area of your life and you'll experience some of that. But when times get tough, you can never go wrong by loving people. Welcome them into your life.

Identify with them. I remember Pastor Jim Cymbala who pastors Brooklyn Tabernacle told this story in our church a number of years ago that Brooklyn, New York on the streets, all sorts of things going on, homeless people, drug people, gang people, everybody's coming in and out of his church.

He had finished their third service, and he was just wanting to get home. He was exhausted. And he saw this homeless man. The reason he saw him is he smelled so bad, when he was praying for people at the end of the service and they were all coming up, and he smelled so bad, he could smell him from 20 feet away. This guy was just sitting there waiting for him. After the service, this guy came forward, and Jim said he reached into his pocket to get a few dollar bills to hand to the guy because all he wanted to do was give him the money. The guy said, he pushed his hand down, he's like, "I don't want your money." He goes, "I want the Jesus that you were telling me about." And he felt so much shame come over him.

He heard the Lord say, "I want you to hug this man." And he said the stench was so strong and so bad that it was hurting his eyes even to be in his presence. He kind of started arguing with the Lord like, "Lord, I can't, don't even know if I can do this." The Lord told Jim, he goes, "This is what you smell like to me as a sinner every single day. Hug him." So Jim put out his arms and started hugging this guy. Then they started rocking back and forth and he said, "I tell you," he goes, "the aroma of the spirit came in" and he goes, "I started smelling all these smells I'd never smelled before and it was beautiful" as he trusted the Lord. See, sometimes when we welcome people, we really don't realize that God's growing us in a way to show love in a way that demonstrates,

this is how Jesus loved us.

Jesus didn't die on the cross because you're an awesome person and he wanted to bring you to heaven. Jesus died on the cross because you stink, and he can't be a part of your stink, but he wanted you so badly, he was willing to shed his own blood and give his own life so he could have life with you. That's what it means to love people. If we really understand what Christ has done for us, then when we go through difficult times, we'll keep our eyes open and we'll look for opportunities to love people. Amen? When the going gets tough, take the opportunity to love people. Number two is this. When the going gets tough, take the opportunity to grow character. Take the opportunity to grow character. Now he's going to highlight too, he's going to tell us how to manage your marriage and money continually.

Manage your marriage and your money continually. Two topics that are uncomfortable to talk about in church because they're challenges for us. Notice what he says. He says in verse four, "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled, for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Fornicators are those that are intimate before marriage. Adulterers are those that are intimate with somebody other than their spouse after they're married. All of it's wrong. God designed sexuality. He's not embarrassed by it. He wrote an entire book called the Song of Solomon about it. God designed sexuality to be in the content and container of marriage because it's so powerful and it's so binding, only a marriage can handle it.

So he says, "Marriage is to be honored among all." You say, "Oh, I'm single." Then you need to honor marriage, which means this. Don't go looking for somebody else's wife. It means while you're single, you get one option, celibacy. That's how you honor the Lord. You say, "Well, I want to get married." Then continue to honor the Lord. Being single is not about finding the right person. Being single is about growing and becoming the right person so God will bring you the right person. Amen? He rarely does it on your timetable or in the way that you want. We'll get to the married people in a second. But singles, if you're single in here today, would you stand real quick for us? We want to give God some appreciation for you. If you're a single person, any age, we give God praise for you. All right. Now stay standing, stay standing, stay standing, stay standing. If you're single, stay standing. You can sit down if there's no desire in your life to ever get married. Go ahead and take a seat. My son sat down in the first service.

Okay. So there's a great desire. And sometimes we come to church and we start looking in our heads on a swivel like, "Where's my mate? Where's my mate? Where's my mate?" Let me tell you what God's doing. He wants you to do a couple things before you find your mate. One is, be resolved about your mission and here's your mission. It's to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ and advance his kingdom. That's your mission. Ladies, don't go after a guy that's not settled on that. Guys, don't go after a gal that's not settled on that. Get your mission central to what you do. Then number two, that's your ministry. If your mission is to glorify the Lord and advance the kingdom, how does he specifically want to do that through you?

You need to know that. Is it as a dentist? Is it as an athlete? Is it as a coach? Is it as an attorney? What are you supposed to do? Then you're ready to talk about your mate. Guys, too often you don't know what you want to do. And you're like, "Well, when I find the right girl, she'll tell me what I'll be, and I'll do whatever because she's hot." That's a bad choice. You need to be going the way you need to go, so God can bring you the person that you need. By the way, as a single, he's growing your character right now. So there's certain things he's having you do that seem meaningless and pointless and stupid. So you're praying about your spouse and God's telling you, "Yeah, I need you to study math." Like, "I'm never going to use math."

But here's what God's saying, "Can you be obedient to me in the moment? Can you let me grow your character in the moment? Can I see that you're doing what I want you to do? Because I want to know that you're listening to me even when you're not getting what you want." Mission, ministry, then comes marriage. And what's your marriage? Your marriage is a way to use your ministry to grow your mission. Because if you're just getting married for happiness, that's a bad choice too, because you'll find out very quickly that marriage is not about happiness. It's about growing your holiness and your mission. So as a single, you can take yourself far down the road, not by saying, "God, where's my spouse, where's my spouse?" You can pray that way. But how about pray this way? "God, what do I need to be? Who are you making me into? I want to be the fullness of everything you are so that when you bring my spouse, we'll be on mission for you."

Amen? That's what he wants from you. Singles, we love you here at BRAVE. I

spend a lot of time with singles. We're for you. So let me just pray over you. Father in heaven, for everyone standing that desires a spouse, we just pray that you'd bring them in your perfect timing, and that until that time you would grow their heart and their character in such a way that their mission and their ministry would be aligned, so that they would be walking with you every day of their life. They would walk in purity and being undefiled and not doing what the world says, but remaining chaste until they're married. In Jesus' name. Amen and amen. Singles, you may be seated. We love you.

See, the reason this is so important is that singles, what you're taught on social media and everywhere else is that you got to try different people out and you got to date this person and date that person then date that person. The more experience you have in dating, the harder your marriage is going to be. It just is. And the more physical you are in your dating, the more difficult it is. I mean right now, just know this. There's over eight million couples that are co-habiting in our culture. When I do premarital counseling, about half the people I meet with are already either living together or have slept together. Christians, all right? That is a great way to set up disaster in your marriage before it starts. Half of American high school graduates have lost their virginity before they graduate. You do not need to lose your virginity to keep a guy. You do not need to lose your virginity to keep a gal. You don't.

Let me just tell you on the authority of God's word, it's possible for you to remain a virgin until you're married, and oh yes, there are other virgins out there. They're just not going to tell you. It's true. Because God gives us the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, peace,



patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. It's a fruit of the Spirit. It's part of the fruit of the Spirit. Singles, God wants you to live holy now so that you'll live holy in your marriage. You can't live defiled and unholy now and then expect to have a holy marriage. So you get the opportunity. And singles, I know. I mean, I get it. I know some of you need to be washed by the blood again today, and I got good news for you. Jesus Christ died for whatever sin you've experienced. He'll wash you clean right now and you can start fresh today. Amen? Amen.

But God also wants marriage to be honored by those that are married. Amen? He says it's to be honored by all. Now here's the problem. Singles, I'm doing this for you today because when I was single and I would come to church, I would see husbands and wives with their arms around each other. Maybe they had a couple kids in between them. They would smile. They would talk about the message. And my assumption was every single married couple in church is super happy, and I'm missing out on all the happiness everybody has. And I have to be married in order to be happy. Friends, that's just not the case. I'm going to prove it to you.

Married couples, stand up. Whether you're here with your spouse or without your spouse, go ahead and stand up. Now, married couple, you can be seated if you can say this. Husbands, you can be seated if your wife gets it right every single time and you've never had any challenges with her. Wives, you can be seated if your husband gets it right every time and you've never had any challenges with him. You can go ahead and have a seat. My wife's still standing, unfortunately. This is reality because you got to realize marriage is not about two people coming together and trying to work

it out. Most people go to counseling and try to work it out. Most people go to counseling and try to get the other person to get fixed so that we can work it out.

That's not marriage. Marriage is not about two people working it out. Marriage is about oneness, and you've come together now and you're cemented as one and God only sees you as one. And guess what? You're going to have challenges. Here's why. The way God defined marriage is between a man and a woman. So you got two different genders. So you got problems there because you're going to see the world entirely differently. You come from two different family backgrounds. You come from two different family experiences. And both of you are incredible at sinning. Now you come together and because the bride wears a white gown and there's a husband that wears a tux and there's a pastor in front, supposedly everything's going to be great when you get married.

And maybe on your wedding day or part of the honeymoon, that's true. But then life happens and you have to realize, "Hey, working this out together looks different than it did working it out by myself." How many of you married people know you can win the battle and you can lose the war, right? You can be right and be totally wrong all at the same time, right? So God put marriage together and used intimacy and marriage together as a cement, as a container, as a way of saying, "We're committed to each other till death do we part." And oh, by the way, I'm for counseling. My wife and I have been to counseling. I'm not saying there shouldn't be problems in your marriage. But it shouldn't be for five years and "I got to go to counseling and go." God is a healer. He is a healer of marriage. When you get to a place that you stop trying to

fix your spouse and you ask God to heal you, God can do some great things in your marriage. Amen?

So here's what it means. If you're married, stop looking around for somebody else. You didn't marry the wrong person. If you're married, your spouse is not the one that's holding you back. Quit believing the lie that there's better out there. The enemy will keep you blind to what's good about your spouse and show you some other things that your spouse may not have. And you're like, "Oh, maybe I need to go this way." But doesn't show you all the wonderful things that your spouse is. Marriage is God's design. Marriage is God's design. Here's why marriage is so important. We read about this culture where we're losing youth and nobody's going to church anymore and all this stuff. But if you study boomers and you study millennials of kids that have both parents in the home, there's the same percentage of young people going to church.

But do you know what's happened? Satan from the beginning has tried to destroy the family. He's tried to destroy the family. Don't let him destroy your family. You look each other in the eye and you hold each other's hand and you say, "Come what may, I made vows to you until death do we part. I'm in this." When the world sees that, that's foreign to them. It's not because we're better or we've figured out all the things. It's because we're committed to Christ. Women, how can you submit to your husband in everything? Only because Christ has him. Husbands, how can you love your wife like Christ loved the church and lay down your life for her and preference her and take abuse and beating from her just so, right? That's what Christ did for us. All right?

Fortunately, I married well, so don't take as much of that. But it's important. Because when we get together, here's what God's trying to build. What's he building? He's not building your happiness. He's building his mission through your ministry. If you don't get that, you're going to be miserable. Singles, if you think you're miserable now, marry the wrong person. Marry somebody that's not going your way, and I'll show you what misery feels like. There's some amens in this building. And oh, by the way, if you're going through a hard time in your marriage, God loves you. If you've been through a hard time, you've been through a divorce, I want you to know, God loves you. His grace and his mercies are new every morning. He loves you. He just does. So don't feel shame and don't live in that shame.

But if you are married, fight for oneness, fight for each other. No matter what happens with kids, money, whatever, you fight for each other, and God will use it not only to benefit your character and grow you, but he'll use it to bless other people. Amen? Amen. Can we give God some praise for the married people? Let me do this. Let me pray for all those who just stood. Father in heaven, we pray for the marriages at BRAVE. Lord, we're no different than the rest of the world. We have issues. We have challenges. We have heartache. We have difficulties. Lord, bless the marriages here. Lord, cement them together. Let them preference one another until one of them sees you face to face. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Now this is why this is so important because the Bible makes clear, the fornicator and the adulterer, God will judge. I know that and that intimidates me, but I'm also scared of my wife too, because right? I mean, if something happened there, I know I'd

go home and the door would be locked and there'd be a note on the door saying, "We left and hope you have a good life and I will forgive you, but we don't need to see each other ever again." Why? Because marriage is intended for oneness for each other. So he talks to us about marriage. That's building your character. Marriage is a character builder unlike any other. There's no more intimate relationship you can have when somebody can be with you all the time and know everything about you. You can hide as a single. You can't hide as a married.

Then he talks about money. He says, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have, for he himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor will I ever forsake you.' So we confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?'" So he talks about money. You know money is a character builder too? How you handle your money is spiritual. How you handle your money reveals your character. Now, I understand that we can go through difficulties with money. I understand sometimes we seem like we have a lack of it. But oftentimes what God reveals through how we steward our resources, he stewards our own character.

If you spend more than you make, that's a spiritual problem. If you've always got to covet and have the next best thing, that's a spiritual problem. Money is not the problem. It's the love of money that's the root of all evil, I Timothy six says. It's not how much you have because oh, by the way, if you're sitting in this congregation today, you're some of the wealthiest people on the entire planet because there's some people

that would trade whatever paycheck you have for theirs in a heartbeat. You say, "I'm a high school student. I made \$3,000 this summer." I know families overseas that would take that in a heartbeat and think they have more than a year's salary.

I mean, we have resources. And what tends to happen is two things that we're not. Number one is content. Contentment is a foreign word to this culture. Contentment means, "God, what you've given me, I'm satisfied with. I don't need anything else. If you prosper me with other things, that's fine. But I'm very content with what you gave me." But we're content with our car until we drive into a parking lot and somebody's got that car. Then we're like, "I need to get a new car." Or we're content with our house until we go to somebody's house that's nicer than ours, we're like, "I need a new house." Or we're content with some sort of material blessing that we have until we see that other people have 10 times that much. Then we have to go. You don't need it all. You don't need it all.

I mean, the promise here in the word is that God will take care of you. "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you." What's the context of that? That's your finances. It's God will always meet your needs if you put God first and if you steward the resources the way you want. You say, "Well, how do I know if I'm content?" Here's how you know if you're content, the second word. Are you generous? If you can be generous with what you have, that means you're content. The more generous you are, the more contentment that you have. The more that you're willing to give away, the more that you're willing to say, "My house is mine. I'm opening the doors. My car is mine, if you need to borrow it." I mean, the more you can live like that, the more

content you know that you are. It's whether you have a little or you have a lot, but it's all yours and you got to keep it for yourself, that selfishness is what shows a lack of contentment.

Young people, listen to me. If you focus on money and make that your goal to get where you need to go, you'll miss out on every good thing God has for your life. "Well, I would do what God wants me to do, but I got to make money. Well, I would take that job, but I got to make money." If you'll just go the way that God wants you to go, he says, "I will take care of you." Philippians 4:19 says, "He will meet all of your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ." Like you can't outgive God, you can't be in the will of God and not have him provide for you. All throughout the scriptures we see that. There's a scripture in the Old Testament, Psalm 37, verse 25, where the writer says it this way.

Psalm 37, verse 25, "I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread." God will always provide for your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. If he is first in your life and you seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these things will be added unto you. Amen? So he's saying when it comes to your money, don't hoard it, don't hold onto it. Doesn't matter what you make. Make as much as you want. That's fantastic. But be content with what God gives you and be more and more generous. The reality is the more generous you are, the more God will provide you with resources to be even more generous, because he knows he can entrust you with that. And that's what he wants. But if you're content with God, whatever he calls you to be,

you'll be satisfied on the inside.

All of us are called to the same mission, but each one of us is called uniquely to a ministry that God's fulfilling through us. Be content in what he's called you to. Use your resources to steward what he wants you to do. Don't compare yourself to anybody else. We give an account for our own. Amen? In other words, love people. Don't disengage from community. Grow your character. Don't take shortcuts. When you're squeezed is the time it's easy to take a shortcut. When marriage gets hard, it's the time you start looking around. When singleness gets hard, it's the time you start saying, "Well, I'm not waiting anymore for my spouse. I'm just going to go ahead and be sexually intimate with somebody." Don't do that. Don't cut corners. Follow it all the way through, and God will be faithful to his word.

Let me give you number three. When the going gets tough, take the opportunity to imitate leaders. Imitate good leaders. It means this. Follow the faithful and the fruitful. Follow those who have been faithful in the Lord and follow those that you see abundant fruitfulness in their life, where you see the fruit of the Spirit, where you look at that man or woman and say, "I can tell they're living for the Lord. I know they're not perfect, but they're living for the Lord." Notice what the author says in verse seven. "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you, and consider the result of their conduct. Imitate their faith." Means take special care and notice those in the body of Christ who are walking faithfully with the Lord. Notice those who have taken bold steps of faith, time and time and time again in different areas.



For instance, if we're talking about marriage, find somebody who has taken a bold step in their marriage and placed their marriage first in a season where they could have done otherwise, and seen the fruit of it. If it's parenting, find somebody who's put their kids ahead of the other things around them and ask, "How did you do that?" If it's finances and things are tight and I want to learn how to be generous to the Lord, but don't know how, "How did you do that?" Whatever it is, there are people that are further down the road than you, that you will see that are faithful people. Don't choose skilled people. Don't choose people that are good speakers or really friendly or can play the guitar well or whatever. Choose people whose character is faithful. Ask people how they made a decision of faith. "Wasn't that hard for you to choose that? Wasn't it hard for you to put your money there when it could have gone there?" "Yeah, it was. But that's what God wanted us to do. And here was the result of that."

Find faithful people and imitate them. And then this. If you're getting older, like I am, be a faithful person so that other people can imitate you. Jesus said this, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." But what did Paul say? "Follow me as I follow Christ." In other words, I want to grow on my faith in such a way, and you want to grow on your faith in such a way that you and I could look at people and say, "Watch what I say, watch what I do, act like I act, use your money this way, use relationships this way, build your marriage this way, be a single this way. That's what I do, and that's how it works." And many of us as Christians be like, "Not me. Don't do it that way." We tend to think that we have to have this perfect track record. Mentors, people who are older, I just want you to know, nobody cares that you are perfect. As a matter

of fact, they want to hear about your failures.

When I'm meeting with somebody and learning about money, I don't want to hear how you made perfect decisions with money. Anybody here ever make a stupid decision with money besides me? I mean, we all have, right? We've all done some dumb things. I want to hear about that and how God redeemed that. Anybody make some stupid decisions when they dated? Anybody make some stupid decisions in their marriage? Don't be afraid to be vulnerable. Every time Kim and I are counseling with somebody, we usually get in the car, we're driving home, and we know it was more for us than it was for them because we realize, and I'll say to her, "I need to change that. I got to get better at that. I know I was saying that and you're about ready to kick me under the table because I know that's the right thing to do, and I don't do a good enough job." And she'll say the same thing.

Here's what I'm trying to say. Don't wait until you're perfect to make disciples. Start making them and you'll become imitable. Share what you know. Many of you know far more than a lot of people in the world when it comes to the Bible. Share what you know, and that's how you begin to grow in your faith. Find people you can imitate so that someday, somebody will be an imitator of you. And here's the reality. When you find somebody who is faithful in stressful circumstances, courage is contagious, isn't it? Courage is contagious. When you find someone and you learn that they gave 90% of their income away to the church and lived off 10%, you're like, "Why and how and what and who, and what was that like, and what did you learn from that?"

I mean, it's different, right? When you find somebody who prioritized their marriage when the whole world was falling apart, and at the end of their life, that's what's going on, it's important. And here's why you need to understand this. Because at the end of your life, and I've officiated enough funerals, nobody cares about your accomplishments, even your family, and nobody will even talk about them. The only thing they'll talk about is to the extent that you were imitable. The only thing they'll talk about is the good that you provided in their life, the way that you loved them, the way that you cared for them, the way that you had character, funny stories about you and growing into that, that's all they care about. Nobody cares about what you do. They don't care about your trophies. They don't care about your plaques.

They don't care about any. All they care about is how you treated them and who you were. That's why God's trying to grow your character. He's trying to help you find the right people to imitate, so that one day people will imitate you, amen, to the extent that you're following Christ. So be a good steward of your marriage and your kids and your career and your finances and your dating life and your relationships, your material possessions, be a good steward of your time, your daily disciplines. All those different areas of your life are way God's trying to grow you, so that you can be someone worthy of imitating. When the going gets tough, take the opportunity to imitate leaders. What we tend to do during times when times get tough, instead of talking to somebody that's faithful in the Lord and listening to them, we tend to follow our feelings.

Sometimes when marriage is difficult and we want to find somebody just to tell them, "I just need somebody to tell me I need to get out of this," and we meet with a

Christian, it's like, "I know it's tough. It must really be challenging for you to even be at home. But I want you to know you're married and God wants you to stay married." Are you going to imitate that? Are you going to follow that advice? Or you're going to be like, "Well, that's not how I feel, I'm out"? Find people worthy of imitating that are following the Lord, that are following his word. Amen? Number four is this. When the going gets tough, take the opportunity to prioritize Christ. Prioritize Christ, make Christ and his gospel central to everything. Because the tendency is when the going gets tough, we focus on us. Rather than focusing on a love for God and love for people, we focus on us.

That's why he says this in this hinge verse, this beautiful verse, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Don't you love that verse? Isn't it good to know that the God you serve doesn't change his mind all the time? Isn't it good to know that the God I'm preaching about on Sunday and tell you how much he loves you and how much he's willing to forgive you and how much he cares for you doesn't change? And on Tuesday he's really, really angry and ticked, and on Wednesday he's distant, and on Thursday he's pouting that you didn't do a good job. And you've always got to guess how to ... God's the same. The same God that led Moses through the wilderness is the same God that you serve. The same God that led Joshua into the promised land is the same God that you serve.

The same God that worked through King David to slay Goliath is the same God that you serve. The same God that let the apostles spread the gospel and write the

New Testament, that's the same God that you serve. And all the same things that you read about in the Bible are all the same things that he's doing today. God's still a healer. God's still a Redeemer. There are many people in the church today that say, "God kind of turned the faucet off 2000 years ago. You can read about what he used to be like, and you can read about what he did, but don't expect any of that good stuff for you." That's wrong. He's the same yesterday, today and for how long? Forever and ever. Meaning God is a Redeemer. He's a healer. He's hopeful. He can bring joy to your heart in an instant.

When you read a story in the Bible and you say, "I want that experience," pursue the Lord. Trust the Lord. Hold the Lord to his word. The Lord does great, abundant things. It doesn't mean he does what we want on demand every time that we ask for it. We've talked about this when it's come to healing before. I've watched God heal people of tremendous diseases and cancer. I've watched God take people that love the Lord with cancer all the way to his throne. Right? I've watched people who love the Lord have wonderful life with their children. I've watched people who love the Lord lose a child in a drowning accident. We can't control what God does. But God is the same. He's still a loving, faithful, awesome, incredible God. And if he's unfolding some things in your life that you don't like, it's because he loves you.

He's allowing those to grow your character. He's building you as the leader that he wants you to be. And he wants you to prioritize him. Because here's what happens. When we don't prioritize Christ and we focus on ourself, we end up self-medicating somehow, right? I mean, here's how we do it as Christians. We end up watching

movies or we eat too much food or we spend too much money or we drink. We used to drink a glass of wine at night, now it's two bottles of wine at night and all these different. We self-medicate because this is really hard right now, and I want to be isolated and I want to be alone. I need to get to the mountains. If I just get to the mountains. You can go to the mountains all you want. Ain't going to heal you. What God's calling you to do is "Prioritize me. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added."

And yeah, this season is longer than what you wanted. Yeah, it's hard. And yeah, you wouldn't want to go through it. But prioritize Christ, prioritize his gospel. Christ loved you so much that he died for you. He gave you everything you need for life and godliness. What more do you need? Here's what I'm here to tell you. When people come into church, oftentimes we come in with needs and that's okay because we're needy. That's part of our sin condition. We're needy. But here's the answer to your need. He's Jesus Christ. "I need healing in my marriage." You need more of Jesus in your marriage. "I need healing in these addictions in my life." You need more of Jesus in your life. "I need healing in relationships with my boss." You need more of Jesus in your relationship with your boss. I mean, whatever you need, because what tends to happen is when we don't prioritize Christ, we tend to play the victim card.

"Can you guys believe what's happening to me?" We get Christians around us to feel sorry for us and all these things, when oftentimes God is allowing this horrible circumstance to grow your character. The question we should be asking is, "What's the Lord trying to teach you through this? And how's the Lord trying to grow you through

this? And boy does this stink, and it is awful and it feels gross and wow, but just know he's doing something special through it. And I see you trusting the Lord more and it's building my faith." And isn't it true in your life, when you see people that are going through challenges and they press into the Lord, that it builds your faith? I've watched people go through cancer and end up on the other side and be healthy. And they say something like this, "When I was going through it and I was going through all the chemo, I was going through all the stuff, I was so close to the Lord. I know now I'm healed, but I miss the intimacy that I had with Jesus while I was going through it."

I know that sounds weird. But even though it was awful, that's what they tell me. And what they're saying is this. They believe that God unfolded the circumstance for them to grow and be a blessing to others. And here's what happened. They were a blessing to others. Anytime you press into Jesus and prioritize him no matter what your circumstance, you're always going to be a blessing to the body of Christ. If it's something in your marriage, something in your singleness, something with your kids, something with your money and people see you saying, "I don't know how, but my God does it." And it's awesome. Because when we were talking about money before, "I will never desert you, nor will I forsake you," I mean in the Greek language, there's five double negatives there. We don't use that in English. You would get points taken off on your English paper if you said that. But really what he's saying is, "I will never never never never never leave you. I will never never never never never forsake you. If you prioritize me, I'll take care of everything you need."

I want my life to be a living testimony of that. I've seen him do that in my life. I

want him to see him do it in yours. His mercies are new every morning. Malachi 3:6 says, "I, the Lord, do not change." Prioritize Christ. And then finally he says this. If we're really being the kind of people that God wants us to be, where we're loving people and growing in our character and we're imitating the right leaders and becoming that, and we're prioritizing Christ, then he says this, "Embrace truth." When you're going through a difficult time, embrace truth. Stand on the authority of God's word. Here's why that's so important. Because if you don't embrace truth when you go through a difficult time, you'll embrace the culture. And the culture will always tell you something that feels good, that goes the opposite direction of what God wants.

If you're here today in your marriage and it's challenging, and you want to find somebody that can tell you, you need to get a divorce, you can find people that will tell you, "You should get a divorce." It just won't happen at BRAVE, or it shouldn't happen at BRAVE, right? If you're a person that's dealing with addictions and you're going through these addictions, you can find people that say, "Well, you're always going to be that way. You'll never change." But not here at BRAVE. We'll say our God that's the same yesterday, today and forever can heal you of that if you'll prioritize him. His word promises to heal. That's what he does. It's embracing the word rather than the culture. Because did you know, and this may come as a surprise to you, the culture is not going the way of Jesus Christ right now anywhere in the world.

The culture is trying to redefine gender. The culture is trying to redefine marriage. The culture is trying to redefine family. The culture is trying to redefine what male



leadership looks like. The culture's trying to define what females look like. The culture's trying to redefine everything. If you listen to the culture, then that's just normal. Here's the challenge. When you have little kids that are two, three years old, they're great. They're just, they lack discernment. It's why they need parents. Because you can't just let a two-year-old wander through the house and eat whatever it wants. Because it can't tell the difference between poison or blue Kool-Aid. They both look the same. They need somebody there saying, "Don't touch this. This is okay." The problem in the church, especially a church like ours with a lot of young believers, which is a great thing by the way, and we hope to see more and more and more is that you need to feed on the word of God and grow into maturity, so that you'll preference the word of God above what the culture is saying, which is always opposite of what the Bible says.

I mean the world says, "We don't know how we got here. It was a big cosmic bang." God says, "I created everything in six days when I spoke." It's not that hard if you believe the word. And if you say, "Well, I don't believe all the word," that's a problem too because Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You diligently study the scriptures because you think that in them you have life. Yet these are the very scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." Everything in this book is the DNA of Jesus Christ. You can't say, "Well, I don't know if I believe that." Well, then you don't believe the fullness of Jesus Christ. It's either all true or it's false. You can't have it any other way.

You want to learn how to date. You want to learn how to be the right person. You want to learn how to have your marriage. You want to learn how to be the right

kind of person in your family. You want to learn how to be the right kind of dad, the right kind of mom, right kind of boss, the right kind of employee, the Bible is replete with information about how to do that if you're willing to put yourself under the authority of God's word. So I say this, trust the word, trust the message not the messenger. I've said from this pulpit many times, if there's something I say, even in my best effort to be accurate, if you say, "Nah, the word doesn't say that," believe the word. This word, the grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our Lord stands forever. The question is during the tough times, will we put ourselves under the word? Because during tough times, that's when the culture says, "You can't believe that fake book written by men thousands of years ago. You can't really believe."

I believe all of it, 100%. I'll die for it. It's truth, and we're going to stand on the truth. See, God wants to heal. God wants to do this. God wants to help us become the kind of people that embrace truth and prioritize Christ and become the leaders that are worthy of being imitated and love people and grow character. But he needs to do that in and through us. And the way that it happens is not through a class, where we're sitting around saying, "Okay, now we got to work on this, and we got to work on this, and we got to work on this and work on this. What do I got to do this week?" It's really a surrender. I mean, when I'm in a prayer meeting and we ask about, "Do people want to see revival?" everybody's like, "Of course we want to see revival." And here's what people think, that revival is for the lost out there.

By the way, that's part of it. That's an effect of revival. We should care about the lost. We should be praying for the lost on a regular basis. We should be engaging the

lost. We should be sharing the gospel with the lost always. However, how does revival come? Revival comes when God breathes life into his church. When the people in the church love one another. When marriages are whole and healed, when single people are honoring the Lord, when there's a love across differences in skin color and backgrounds and culture and socioeconomic conditions, and there's just a genuine love, and people are wanting to follow Christ and follow people that are following Christ and prioritizing Christ and embracing all the truth. How does that happen? He has to revive you. Christianity is not a religion of dos and don'ts. It's why he says this in verse nine. He's talking about going back to the traditions and he says this.

He says, "Do not be carried away by varied or strange teachings." That's something different than the word of God. "For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited." One of the challenges early Jews had was they could eat anything. Christ died on the cross for the law. He rose from the dead. They're not under the law. They're in Christ who fulfilled the law. So Peter's like, "I'm not going to eat those kind of foods." And three times in Acts chapter 10, he had to have a vision saying, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." He's like, "Never, Lord." "No, you have to do this." And he did okay, till in Galatia he was enjoying his pork ribs and all that stuff until Paul got there. Then he started, "Ah, I can't do this because I'm a Christian."

Here's what we tend to do. We tend to preference our religious rituals and "Here's what I can do, and here's what I can't do and here's what I should do." Prioritize Jesus. He died on the cross for you and rose from the dead and will send his

Spirit into your life and you can live in the fullness of his grace. Will you let him revive your heart? Some of you here today are not Christians. You're just good religious people. You do good things. People would say you're a nice person. I'd probably say you're a nice person. But you never repented of your sin and trusted Jesus Christ. You don't see yourself how God sees you. Jesus Christ came and died for you because you couldn't get to him. You can't get to him on your own. He died for you. God put eternity in the heart of man. That's why you know there's something more when you die.

That's God. He wants you to know you can have life in his name. If you were to die today, where would you go? You'll go and stand before the Lord. And you'll either have him welcome you into his presence saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant" or he'll send you away saying, "Depart from me, you worker of inequity. I never knew you." Where you at? It's going to happen to you. It's going to happen sooner than you think. God loved you so much, he sent his son to lay down his life for you, so you wouldn't have to do anything other than believe that he is the Christ, the son of the living God. Do you have a relationship with him? God wants you to have that today. In a minute, we're going to sing a song called God of Revival. We sing that song oftentimes thinking about other people.

I want you to sing that song today, think about what does God need to revive in your heart? Do you need a relationship with Christ? Do you want Christ to be the Lord of your life? Married people, listen to me. Some of you need to revive your marriage.

Some of you husbands need to grab your wife's hand and come to the altar and entrust your marriage to God. Some of your wives need to grab your husband's hand and do the same. Some of you single people that have been living for yourself in the world need to come forward and say, "Hey, I'm done living that way. I want to live for Jesus." God wants to do a work in our church. We're in his house today, where healing and redemption happen. Take advantage of the opportunity as we sing to come forward and be part of all that God's doing.

We'd love to pray for you. We'd love to ask God's blessing on your marriage, your singleness, your job, your life. We'd love to lead you to Jesus Christ so you can have a personal relationship with him. Amen? Would you stand with me as we pray? Father, we know who you are. You're the same yesterday, today and forever. We thank you for your son, Jesus Christ, who loves us unconditionally. And Lord, you're doing a work here in this service today. Lord, I just pray for the singles who are here that need a touch of your grace, that need to be reminded of the fact that you have someone for them, to be reminded of the fact that you love them and they're going the right way to come down today. Let us pray for them.

For the married couples here who said, "Enough. We can't fight anymore. We can't do this. We need a touch from God" that you come down today. For those who are here that would say, "I just need Jesus. I don't need anything else. I just need him. I don't know that I really have a relationship with him." Just come. We'll pray for you. Father, do a work, revive our hearts and then use the revived church here at BRAVE and the church in Denver to reach our world with the good news of Jesus Christ. We

give you all the praise and all the glory and all the honor in Jesus' name. And all God's people said, "Amen." Can we give God some praise this morning for who he is?