

If you have your Bibles, why don't you go ahead and grab them. We're going to be in Mark 7. That's where we're going to start. If you're an overachiever, you can flip over to Romans 5 and save that spot too, because we'll eventually get there. Just rehashing a bit of last week... We started our fall series last week. *Recovering Redemption* is the title. We said the word *gospel* means good news.

For news to be good, it has to invade bad spaces. There has to be some sort of tension, some sort of fear, some existing reality for news to show up and be good. Last week, all we did was the bad news. If you missed last week, you can kind of let out some air, except uh oh...you're here, and I'm going to rehash. What we said last week is that there are a select few of us who by vocation are aware the world is broken, but for the rest of us, there are two things that happen. There is an occasional lifting of the fog.

Occasionally, someone will get sick. Someone will die. Someone will shoot up a school or a theater or something like that, and we're like, "Dang it, man. The world is a mess." By in large, what you and I are plagued with is the desire for fullness of life that always seems to kind of be in front of us and never quite being able to be enjoyed in the moment. We're constantly moving toward the future in the promise that the future holds for us a greater satisfaction than we're experiencing now.

The problem with that is we have been chasing that carrot, some of you for a long, long, long time with no real lasting satisfaction. Can you have a moment of it? Maybe. Can you dwell there? Not long. You're going to get bored easily with your new stuff. We said really we try to fix this problem of fullness of life by running to one of four buckets. We want to run to the well of self. The default position of everyone when they feel unsatisfied is, "Let me better myself. Let me fix myself. A better version of me will be the solution to my dissatisfaction."

We set out trying to create a better version of us, a more attractive version of us, a wealthier version of us, a version of us with a sweeter car, a version of us with a better house. We are going to better ourselves. We begin to pursue that, which is why the bestselling books ever are not classics but rather self-help books. It's a sad day when some of the classics are being replaced with books like *6-Minute Abs*. That's something on our culture we're going to have to own eventually. That's embarrassing.

Ultimately, we set out to solve, "Let me create a better version of myself," but we painted clearly last week that this is simply impossible. All right? If you feel a lack of satisfaction right now, which by the way is a gift

from God (we'll talk more about that in a second), a better version of you will never satisfy that. In fact, you will be just as disappointed in that sexier version of you as you are right now.

Ten years from now, you with your ripped up abs and dollar bills falling out of your pockets, that guy will disappoint you also. Ladies, if your hair is curly now instead of straight or straight now instead of curly, right? That thing. It's a mystery. You get whatever you're after, whatever you want. Ladies, you're climbing the corporate ladder. You get that. You'll still be just as frustrated with you 10 years from now as you are today, because *you* are not the answer to the satisfaction question.

If it's not you, then we shift away from us at times. Sometimes we try both of these together, and that's when things get toxic. We'll try to find satisfaction in others. Our culture loves this one. It preys on you, sucks money out of you, and squeezes the life out of you that you're going to find something (thank you, Jerry Maguire) that "completes" you. You're not.

We begin to put expectation on our friends, expectation on our spouse (God help us), expectation on our children that they would live in such a way as to erase that unsatisfactory feeling out of our hearts, out of us. The problem is that is an impossible weight to bear for anyone. The way I have said it for coming on 11 years is women make really terrible gods. They're nice, but they're bad gods.

Ladies, men... Hello? I mean, how long did it take you to train your man just to put the seat down? Right? You're thinking that dude is going to rescue you? He can't aim. You have, "This guy is going to solve this." He's not. He can't. The expectation that he would will do nothing but bring conflict into your relationship. For those of you trying to live vicariously through your children, you have to put that to death before you crush that little soul. Stop it. Enjoy them. What a gift from God kids are! But don't live vicariously through them. What kind of pressure is that? It's crazy. May God squash that in our day and age.

We go to the well of others, and the well of others doesn't work, so we try to fix us. That doesn't work, so we have expectations that other people would help us fix us, and then that doesn't work. Then we run to the world. The world is a tricky one (I said this last week), because what people will run to in order to try to satisfy their longing are things God created as good to be enjoyed but not made a god. I used three. I knew two of them were going to get me emails, and sure enough, they did. Here were the three I used.

Food is a gift from God, is it not? Food is a good gift from God. God created food. It was God who came up with flavors and the new flavors that would occur as you put things together. That's God's work. Food is a gift from God. Wine (emails) is a gift from God. Your problem is not with me; your problem is with the Bible. Sex (emails) is a good gift from God. It was designed by God, given as a gift from God, given to man for both procreation and pleasure. That's God stuff.

Here's what I want you to hear me say. All three of those can be enjoyed by believers and unbelievers alike. Correct? Can we agree that people who want nothing to do with Jesus Christ can love a fillet, drink a Cab, and enjoy sex, right? Okay. Now, here is what I will tell you with all my heart. They, as unbelievers, will never be able to enjoy those things like believers should. Why? For the believer, the pleasure in those things doesn't terminate on those things but rather rolls up into praise of the God who gave us those things.

For the unbeliever, he eats his fillet. He drinks his Cab, not out of a box, and then he makes love to his wife. He enjoyed all of that. For the believer, they eat that steak, and they're like, "Man, God is amazing!" and it rolls past the steak. He drinks the Cab responsibly, and it rolls past the Cab. He enjoys his wife. She enjoys her husband, and it rolls past to the Giver of those gifts. It doesn't terminate on the gift. It rolls past them.

The unbeliever can't do that. An unbeliever will never cut into that fillet and go, "Man, God is good!" They're not. They're just going to be, "Hey, I love steak. I can pay for it. Awesome." Right? The believer enjoys the gifts of God in a different way than an unbeliever, because we're acknowledging where it came from. The pleasure rolls past the experience and into the giver. It doesn't terminate on the experience itself. Worship is wrung out of the heart of a believer at a meal.

This is why the Bible would say, **"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."** This is that enjoyment of God through the gifts of common grace that are available to all but experienced in greater joy by those who are believers. That's yet another one of those beautiful gifts God gives his people.

Unfortunately, these good gifts can be used in perverted ways that wreak havoc in the lives of people, so they run to the world to try to satisfy that dissatisfaction. They get lonely and run to food. Listen. In a spot, in a pinch, in a dark moment, Blue Bell works magic on your soul. It really will. You get in a pinch, a spot, then food, drink, relationships, sex, all of that works for a moment.

People run to them outside of the boundaries God has created for the fullness of enjoyment of those things, and we run to those things like they are our gods. "I'll find satisfaction here. I'll find fullness here." Despite the fact that it has betrayed us over and over and over again and has done nothing to bring lasting satisfaction but only regret, we continue to run back to it over and over and over again like morons, don't we?

"That pornography did nothing to really satisfy me." That's not going to stop you from logging on the next night after the house goes quiet, but God is there. He sees. Don't be dumb. It's not like God didn't see that. "That's my god. That's where I'm going to find satisfaction. That's where I'm going to find release. That's where I'm going. I'm going to food, going to wine." There are others; I'm just using these three as big examples. There are dozens of things men and women will make idols, good gifts given by God that are abused by the recipients of the gifts.

The fourth one (I put all our junk, if you're a skeptic; I threw us out there too) is religion. People run to religion. They run to, "Let me earn the favor of God. Let me tip the scales in my favor. Let me be a good man so God will bless me. Let me be a good woman so I might put God in my debt." Religion is outside in. "Let me behave well enough so God will have to give me what I want, so God will owe me." That's religion. Those are the four wells people run to. None of them work.

As we said last week, all of that was a result of the fall, was a result of sin entering the world and fracturing the cosmos. I need to do a little bit more work there because of what I don't want you to do now is go, "Man, Adam. I can't believe it. You really made a mess of this thing." You can't blame-shift over to Adam, although it's through his line that sin reigns and rules in the world.

I mean, you hear that very wildly popular Bible verse that says, **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** That verse makes you not a victim of Adam's rebellion but a participant in his rebellion. Are you tracking with me? You are not just a victim of Adam's rebellion; you have gladly joined him in his rebellion against God, so that every time you go, "I'll fix it myself," your declaration is, "I don't need you, God. I'm a better god than you. I'm smarter than you. My way is better than yours."

That's madness. You would never say that out loud, but when you go, "I don't need you, Lord. I can better it myself," that's what you're saying. Whenever you run to others to try to find the satisfaction that only God can bring, your accusation, your rebellion against God is, "I don't want you; I want your stuff. I want it my way; I don't want it your way."

When you run to the world, you snatch a good, right gift out of his hand. You abuse that gift, break it, and then make accusations against him that he's not good because of the gift. That's rebellion. Think your kid does that on Christmas morning. Is somebody catching a whipping and going back to bed before we open any more presents? Maybe not. Maybe you're just like, "I deserve that." Maybe you're that kind of parent.

I'm just saying. If your kid snatches his gift, opens it up, crushes it on the ground, and then screams at you for giving them a broken present, that's a problem. That's what you do when you run to the world.

Religion... Are you serious? "I want to take your name, God, and I want to do the very thing you came to

rescue me from under the banner of your name." That's rebellion. Everyone in this room is guilty, and I'm in this room. Every one of us is guilty, so we're not just victims of sin; we are active participants in it.

See, I told you you weren't going to get off by not being here last week. Now, with that said, I want us this week to really get to the bottom of this issue, really get to the heart of it. To do that, I want to look at Mark 7. As I promised, this week is primarily about the good news, not the bad news. I just always need us to feel the bad so when the good invades, we can love the goodness of the news. I'm going to pick up Mark 7 in verse 14.

"And he called the people to him again and said to them, 'Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.' And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. And he said to them, 'Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?'"

If you're reading a red letter version, I'm thankful for these next black letters. **"Thus he declared all foods clean."** Let's praise God for some bacon. **"And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."**

What you have happening in this text is you already have some common grace present in the people who are listening to Jesus teach, because they are aware they are unclean. I want to continually try to lay this before you. If you *feel* that, that's not necessarily a bad thing. If you feel you have fallen short of the glory of God, if you know you are in need of some help, if you have some depression, if you're struggling with addiction, if you have some loneliness or some despair, that might just be the High Surgeon of heaven beginning to do a type of surgery that will ultimately set you free.

Oh, God, that we would be a culture that understands there is promise in the pain! Pain for us is something that has to be solved. We see no real value in it. Anybody who has ever tried to train their body knows there is an aspect of pain involved to getting stronger, to growing more healthy. Things have to be torn down in order to be built up. The same is true about how God shapes his people. He's talking to people who understand they are unclean.

Some of you do not understand you are unclean, and some of you have such a hypersensitivity to it that me even mentioning the word *unclean* has you wishing you weren't here, but we'll deal with that more in a few

minutes, brothers and sisters. In this text, when people realize they're unclean, they tend to go one of two ways with it. Here is the first way.

The first way is religion. "I feel unclean, so let me do number four." Number four is nothing but number one with a choir robe on, right? It's us fixing ourselves under the banner of God's name while at no point really leaning into God for our help and salvation. It's, "I'm going to fix me so I can make God not destroy me." That's number four and number one combined. It's toxic. We go into religion.

The people Jesus is teaching right now have dietary laws and cleanliness laws. There are certain foods they cannot eat, and there are certain ways they must wash before they eat. There are cleanliness laws and dietary laws. They literally believed that you could eat something or not wash a particular way before you ate something or went into the temple or synagogue that would then make you unclean, so something outside of you could somehow make your soul dirty.

Jesus is going, "No, no, no, no, no. Don't you see? Don't you see that's not how it works? Whatever goes inside of you, you process and get rid of." How about that science right in the text? "No, no, no. What is unclean is already inside of you." You have to hear this, because I think people get this backwards. That activity you participate in that you feel ashamed of is not what has made you unclean. You are unclean, so you did that activity. Are you tracking with me?

You don't do sinful acts to make yourself a sinner. You are a sinner, so you do sinful acts. That's huge. Here is why moral tinkering is never going to work. Here is why, "I'm going to make myself a better person," is never going to work. What we just read in this text is really the heart of the problem. It's the problem of the heart. You're the problem. Your heart is the problem. It's not outside of you; it's in you, which is why you can't solve it.

What we do in evangelicalism is we fixate on this issue. "I have a lust problem. I have an anger problem. I have a laziness problem. I need this fixed." We're not watching the rear flank, so while we're trying to put out this fire, this fire starts up. That's why we never get real traction in regard to growing. Ultimately, our heart is not being transformed. We're trying to modify behavior, and behavior modification isn't going to work. Whatever reigns and rules in your heart will always overflow out of your heart into your actions and attitudes.

Here is what I have learned over the years. When I have come across men who really struggle with laziness or lack initiative, it has been my experience (this isn't universal 100 percent of the time) that a lot of times, really the root cause there is fear. It's not even really laziness; it's fear. They're afraid that if they really put

themselves out there, really pushed all their chips in, really gave it their all that they would fall short and fail. They just couldn't live with that, so they do nothing. Somehow they can live with that.

If we just address laziness, but we don't get to the bottom of them not trusting God, we have problems. I have found that lust almost always has much more to do with control and anger than it does lust. See, for whatever reason, wanting to control, having some wounds, you will take a human being with a soul, with emotions, with a mind and a heart, and we will dehumanize them and use and abuse them for our own pleasure. That is pornography.

For men and women, it is the dehumanization of another human being for our enjoyment with no consideration of their heart, their soul, their mind, any type of damage occurred in them. They are simply there to be used by us. Lust isn't the problem; anger and control are the problems. If we don't get to that root, putting Covenant Eyes on your computer; although, I think might be a wise thing for most, maybe a wise thing for all...

This is free. I don't even have time for this. Parents, don't give your kids unrestricted access to the Internet. It's like letting them play with your pistol. Since we're in Texas, I know everybody can relate to that one. "I can't, because I have it right here." I'm trying to help you here. In the end, so much of what we deal with in regards to 20 and 30-year-olds started when they were 12 and 13-year-olds with moms and dads who just didn't care what was going on in their shut bedroom.

Ultimately, if you don't get to the bottom of really this lack of forgiveness, this anger, you don't get down into those roots, then it's just going to spring back up. They're going to get stuck in this crazy cycle of falling back into old patterns, or there are just going to be new spots that flare up because all they did was mow over the weeds. Religion is the way a lot of people go, and it's not going to work. It's not going to work, because whatever reigns and rules in your heart will overflow into actions and attitudes.

For some people, religion is not going to be their bag. When they feel unclean, unsatisfied, they're not going religion; they're going blame. Their kind of fundamental lens by which they see life is, "I am not responsible for my attitudes and actions. I'm not, because other people are ultimately responsible for my joy. Other people in the circumstances of my life are not controlled by me. They're controlled by others; therefore, I am never responsible for how I behave, how I act out, and the attitudes by which I act out."

Jesus is just deconstructing that thought like a champ here, like he is Deity or something. He literally in this text is going to outline things nobody can make you do but you. Let's look at it. It's going to be awful. By *awful* I mean awesome. This is verse 21. **"For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil**

thoughts..." Let's just stop. We can't do this with all of them, but evil thoughts. No one can make you think evil thoughts, no one.

I know you might be going, "That's not true. You don't know my cousin. See, if you knew my cousin, if you knew my friend Dave, you wouldn't be saying that, because Dave... That brother makes me think evil thoughts." No. There are all sorts of ways you can... Listen. I want to lay this down. We're in a fallen world. People can betray you. People can hurt you. Would anyone in this room who is not a year old not raise their hand and go, "Man, I've been betrayed. I've been hurt. People have done things to me that bother me." Let's lay that down. It's absolutely true.

For some of you, that abuse has been serious. That neglect has been serious. That betrayal has been gut-wrenching. Look at me. No one controls what you think but you...no one. No one controls what you think but you, and you can arrest thoughts. You can go, "Nope, that's not true. That's not right. I'm not dwelling on that." You decide what you dwell on. You decide the fantasies in your mind. You decide wishing something bad would happen to that person.

You decide whether or not you're going to pray for them and forgive them or whether or not you're not going to let go, because that hate keeps you warm. You decide. That's on you. No one can make you think evil thoughts. You choose to. We don't like this. We like to play the blame game. I think the clearest place you see this... Oftentimes, I've heard people say this. "I'm not a liar. I just lie every once in a while." "So you're a liar who doesn't lie? I'm just rewording it and giving it back to you so you can help me, because I'm so confused right now." Right?

No one would call themselves a liar. No one in here would say, "Yeah, I'm a liar," but we lie. Right? This is this bucket. This is this game. It's madness. No one causes evil thoughts in your mind but you. You let them go. You run with them. God help us. Some of us enjoy them. We enjoy evil thoughts. Sexual immorality. Nobody can make you walk in sexual immorality but you. No one can make you. You choose to enter in. You choose to log on. You choose to stare over at that woman, at that man. You choose that fantasy in your head. You choose it. No one makes you walk in sexual immorality. You do.

It's your heart that is the issue. "Well, if my spouse would just... If I could just..." No, no, no. You. It's on you. Just for free, in an over-sexualized culture, let me just say this. Sex is a beautiful gift from God; it is not the apex of the marital relationship. That's why we even see in Ecclesiastes that there will be a day if you get old enough that the desire fails. Some of you are like, "Uh-uh." Uh-huh. All right? There will be a moment where desire fails.

I'm not saying it's not important; I'm just saying it's not the apex. Men especially, if you will love well, lead well and be patient. It's not a code to unlock some fantasy in your head, but if you would love your wife's soul, that aspect of your relationship will probably get better. I'm not saying there can't be some damage in your wife's heart that might require you to be patient for a long, long, long time, but ultimately, no one makes you walk in sexual immorality.

Listen to me. You gladly walk into it yourself. You *gladly* walk into it yourself. Do you feel shame on the back end? Probably. Does that stop you from walking right back in again? Usually not. I won't do anymore, but do you get kind of the rhythm here? "...**envy, slander...**" That's you. People can't make you do that. Whether religion or blame, what we do when we feel unclean is one and four and two and three. "I'm going to run to myself. I'm going to run to others. I'm going to run to the world. I'm going to run to religion, because I feel unclean, so let me fix that." Jesus clearly says here that at best, you'll just smear the mess.

I ended last week by just saying this. Am I saying we're just all damned, that there is nothing we'll be able to do about fullness of life? Last week I said, "Yeah, that's pretty much what I'm saying, unless..." This week is the *unless*, so let me start my sermon 27 minutes in. Let's flip over to Romans 5. How do we change our hearts then?

If the heart is the problem, if really the real issue in your life and mine isn't our marriage, isn't our addiction, isn't our struggle, isn't our loneliness, isn't our depression, isn't our lust, if the real issue in your life and mine is actually our hearts, then how do we have our hearts transformed? Let's look at Romans 5, starting in verse 6.

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." I just want to stop for a second. I'm sorry we have way too much to do. "At the right time, while we were weak..." I love that verse, man. I love that verse. All over the map here, aren't we? In fact, some of us have no memory except following the Lord and loving him. If that's your story, if you grew up in church and God rescued you early...

Let me tell you why some of you get on my nerves. You don't like your story. You want a different story. I've heard some of you say this. Please hear me. Don't desire another story. "What grace has been lavished upon you." I've heard some of you hear the testimonies in the water about guys who have struggled with heroin or people who got an STD. You're really saying this. "Oh, I wish I could have an STD and have the baggage of wrestling with heroin." No, you don't. Stop it.

You're a good young man, a good young woman who God saved early. I'm pleading with the Lord that that's the testimony of all three of my children. "I never knew anything other than loving him and pursuing him. I never knew anything in my house except that we loved him, that my dad had cool friends, manly

men and womanly women who came into our home and loved Jesus and were cool and fun to be around and rejoiced in the good gifts of God." I want that to be their story. I'm praying God would.

Please stop that. You have a great story. Some of us were weak, and at the right time, he came and grabbed us, not in second grade Sunday school. He came and grabbed us in our 20s, in our 30s, in our 40s, a few of you in your 60s. He showed up. The common theme for when he showed up is when we were weak. One of the things I've heard the world say, and I just want to agree with... They're trying to slam us, but it's true.

"Christianity is a crutch." I'm like, "Absolutely, because my legs are broken. My legs are busted. I need that crutch." "It's for the weak-minded." "Yes. I have a weak mind. Give me a right mind." "Weak people need it." "Absolutely, weak people need it. Brother, you just don't know you're weak." Ultimately, is Christianity a crutch? Yes. Are we crippled? Absolutely. **"...while we were weak, at the right time..."**

In fact, as we've prayed for you this week as a staff, we're praying God would open up your eyes to your weakness, and you would finally lean on the crutch instead of hobbling around on your busted femur. Right? **"...while we were weak..."** God loves the weak. He oftentimes saves and uses the weak to shame the strong. See, God loves weakness. In our culture, we hate it. That's a huge problem. Do you understand? It's a huge problem for us to despise weakness like we do.

We don't want to be seen as weak. No, brother, be seen as weak. God's power flows most vividly and most powerfully through the weak vessels. Let's keep going here, or I'm going to get in trouble for going too long. **"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."**

Listen to verse 10. **"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."** Let's chat for a second, because there are all sorts of beautiful building blocks in this text. By the death of Jesus Christ, we have been justified. We have been made right.

In our active rebellion against God, while we were enemies, Christ died for us. That's huge. If you struggle with being able to run hard after the Lord because you feel unworthy, the apostle Paul here is saying, "Hey, listen. When you are at your worst, weak as you were and the enemy of God, at that moment, God intervened, and he rescued you." Is it hard for you to believe God delights in you today as you stumble

toward maturity, as you wrestle with your addiction when all is said and done that God died for you while you were an enemy of his?

Then he goes on to say, "Won't we then be saved much more by his life?" God hasn't saved you to leave you in that spot in which he saved you, but rather to mature you and sanctify you. We're going to talk a whole sermon on sanctification and then use examples of sanctification in the weeks to come. For now, just know God hadn't saved you. It's why we say here it's okay not to be okay, it's just not okay to stay there, because God doesn't leave his people in the mess. He begins to lead them out of it.

We are justified by God Almighty. We are saved by his grace alone. We are given new hearts by the God of the universe. We are given new desires in that new heart. We have new desires. We begin to not like *this* and want more of *this*. We begin to participate in *this* and have our hearts broken, all the while desiring more of *this*. Immediately upon justification, upon being made right by God, we are given by God new appetites, new desires, new longings God himself will satisfy.

Paul wants to continually remind us; therefore, God in the Scriptures wants to continually remind us. It becomes imperative for us to know this. While you were enemies, Christ died for you. While you were an enemy, Christ died for you. When you were weak, at the right time, God saved you. That means God has a plan for the kid who has no story other than, "I grew up in church. I have always loved Jesus." God has a plan for you. He's going to use you in a specific way.

He has a plan for those of you in your weakness. That was drugs and alcohol and all sorts of other deviances in that moment and at your weakness, when God saves you. God, by his life, by his resurrected life, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is going to transform your life, and he's going to use you in magnificent ways. This is the gospel. The gospel, the good news, is that while you were an enemy of God, Christ died for you.

When you were at your weakest, at the appointed time, God rescued you. This is the gospel. This is good news invading dark spaces. Are you in rebellion? Absolutely. God's response to your rebellion is to rescue you out of that rebellion, to snatch you out of your rebellion against him. Here is where it gets even more beautiful. It begins to straighten out those crooked wells.

Here's what happens when we finally believe that God justifies me, adopts me, calls me his own, forgives my sin, imputes to me the righteousness of Jesus Christ, absorbs all of my sin on the cross. Immediately I know I'm not looking inside of me to solve the problems with me, because I am the problem. What I'm doing now is habitually laying my life before the Lord and asking for his help to believe the gospel all the more, to trust him and live out the implications of the gospel in my life.

I'm not going, "I'm going to get better for you Lord." I know I can't. On my best day, I will fall woefully short of God's expectation of me. God has intervened on my behalf. It straightens that out. It also creates humility and really cuts the legs out from under Christian swagger and arrogance. It shouldn't exist. You didn't do anything. You got saved by God. You didn't pull yourself out of the muck and the mire. That's not what Psalm 40 said.

You were pulled out of the muck and mire. You were stuck. He unstuck you. You were dirty. He cleaned you. You didn't clean you. We don't have any stories of pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. That's not what happened to anybody in here. We were rescued and saved by grace alone through faith alone. God gets the glory alone. When you get that, listen. You don't go into you; you go into the Lord. When your marriage, when your children, when others reveal there is still idolatry in your heart, you repent to the Lord, and you find that satisfaction in him.

It straightens out the paths of others. It frees me up to not need to be validated by you or my wife or my kids. That's an unbelievable gift. The gospel frees me up from you needing to clap and say, "Good job, Matt." Listen. You're dying. You're perishing just like me. Whether or not you like me or don't like me has no eternal significance whatsoever. It just doesn't. That's why I can stand up here and preach without a lot of fear. "Oh no. What if you don't come back? What if they don't like me? What if they don't tithe?"

It's God's church. I'm just trying to be faithful. I have to stand in front of him. I'm far more afraid of him than I am of you, far more terrified of him than I am of you, far more concerned about his approval than yours. Only the gospel can do that. The gospel can free me up to love my wife without expecting any reciprocity, to serve her without making demands that she serve me in return. Why? Because God has validated me.

It frees me up to not live vicariously through my kids. God has already told me I have value. The gospel says I am an adopted son of the most high God. That starts to straighten out the path of others. Is that path completely straight? Not on either one of those yet. Maybe not until glory, but we're better. We're better today than we were 20 years ago. In regards to worldliness, I am now able to enjoy common grace without spiraling off into depravity.

I'm able to eat a meal and not become a glutton and be grateful for the meal. I'm able to drink a nice glass of wine. My preference is Silver Oak or Opus One, if you're looking at Christmas. I can enjoy that without it leading to drunkenness. On and on I could build this out. I do want to do an asterisk here. Some of you, even with the gospel in view, it will never be safe or right for you to drink ever. Do you hear me? If you have

a past of serious addiction, it might just be that you and I, brother or sister, we get to drink it up with new wine in glory, but for now, it wouldn't be wise. It would be foolish.

The common grace of wine is not for everyone. In fact, there are some of you who should never touch it. If you have a history of alcoholism in your family, I just wouldn't touch it. Do you have freedom? Sure. Can you use freedom foolishly? Absolutely. Some of you shouldn't touch it. I just want an asterisk. If you didn't write that one down, write that one down also. I'm able to enjoy common grace and have it roll up into worship. He's straightening that out.

In regard to religion, man. I just am completely set free from the slavery of religion. None of those paths are completely straight, but they're getting more and more straight. On this religion one, let me just kind of start to land the plane with this. On this religion one, I want you to think about it this way. God has given us the image and the picture of his relationship with us in the covenant of marriage.

Here is what I want to lay before you. When I start to talk about religion, I don't mean there is not a great deal of discipline in our pursuit of greater intimacy with God. That's not what I'm saying. I'm not saying that if you're disciplined... You set your alarm, and you get up. You dig in the Word, and you study it. You write, and you memorize Scripture, and you share the gospel with others. I'm not saying that's legalistic religion. That's not true.

I've been married to my wife Lauren for 14 years now. I've been with her for 16. I am married to her. She loves me. I still study that woman, and I study her because she keeps changing on me. I can't believe I didn't get a "Glory," or something from another man in here. I feel like I've got it, and then *bam!* That's not true anymore. I'll study again. I don't know how you're wired, men. I try to actively date my wife. I try to think of how to creatively engage her heart. I want to encourage her gifts and abilities.

For me, those are acts of discipline. That's, "When am I going to do that?" If I don't figure out on my calendar when I'm going to do that, men, the busyness of life will just sweep away a legitimate desire of my heart to love my wife well. I literally will three weeks out from a creative date have on my calendar, "Creative date with Lauren." *Bam!* Google, "Creative dates." "Ah. No, no, no. Yeah!" I'm doing that. It's a great deal of discipline that I study and run with my wife, and none of it is to get her to marry me. All of it is to build greater intimacy and connection with her.

None of it ever feels like work. I'm just pursuing her, pursuing greater intimacy, understanding her heart more fully, understanding what she loves. I love to watch her feel loved. So it is with the Lord. We don't study the Bible. We don't attack sin. We don't do those things to *get* him to love us. We do those things because he *does* love us, and we are in pursuit of growing in greater intimacy with the Savior of our souls.

That's the motivation behind putting sin to death. That's the motivation behind growing in the knowledge of who God is found first and foremost through the Word of God. That's the motivation for doing life with other Christians in such a way that we're stirred and encouraged on in our faith. That's the reason... On and on I could go here. The gospel is the remedy to the problem of the heart, the only remedy. Nothing else will ever solve it. That's why Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it to the full." Let's pray.

Father, thank you for our time together today. I pray even now, Holy Spirit, that those who have been trying to create a better version of themselves would finally just collapse into your arms. It's not a better version of them that you love and will rescue, but it's them right now. Thank you for Romans 5. It says, "**...while we were weak, at the right time...**" I pray it would be the right time for many.

I pray for those who have put expectations on their spouses, on their friends, on their children to somehow fulfill them. God, I pray you would give them eyes to see the bankruptcy of that, and there might be repentance. Father, some of us are really stuck in our flesh. God, we continue to run to lust, to food, to drink. We continue to run to things that will not satisfy us instead of running to you. Forgive us, Father, for worshipping at ridiculous altars.

God, for many of us, religion is our drug of choice, We ask, God, that you would forgive us of trying to tilt the scales in our favor, but rather, God, you would enable us by your Holy Spirit to just rest in your arms today, just trust you've done what you've said you've done, to really push all our chips in and say, "I'm betting everything on God accomplishing what he said he accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ." Help us now, Father. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.