

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Don't Lose Heart

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Series: Where Glory Dwells
2 Corinthians 4:1-6

**BIG IDEA – WE DO NOT LOSE HEART, BECAUSE GOD WORKS IN
PEOPLE'S HEARTS**

We love kids here at Two Cities Church. Christians love kids because Jesus loved kids. There's this story in the Gospels where the kids are trying to get to Jesus, which tells us, by the way, that Jesus was the kind of guy kids wanted to be around. The disciples were like, "Stop! Stop! Stop! He's too important for you," and Jesus was like, "Stop that. Do not hinder the children from coming to me, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

I want to talk to you for a minute about our Kids ministry. You just met some of the kids from our Kids ministry. Guys, it's the third-largest ministry in our church. I guess you could say there's whatever we're doing in *here*, this worship gathering, and then there are our Community Groups, but right after that it's our Kids ministry. We have over 500 kids each week.

Here's what you may not know or may never have thought: it's also the largest group of non-Christians in our church every week. Now, I know in here right now there are some of you here who don't believe, but I'm saying in the Kids ministry, we are shaping the souls of the next generation.

I do this about once a year, but let me encourage you. If you're not serving, but you've been through our Weekender, or maybe you're serving but want to serve at a next level or on the front lines, consider serving in Kids. Kids ministry, I believe, is the greatest place of spiritual impact, and also the greatest place for people to serve. That's where we have the greatest need.

Doesn't it always work that way? Where's the greatest place of impact? How about the Middle East? How about missions over the world? Where can we get nobody to serve and go? Where there's the greatest need but also the potential for greatest spiritual impact.

By the way, I don't say this enough. You can look around right now. If you see someone wearing a blue shirt that says "TCC Kids," just go and thank that person. When you show up to pick up your kids, say, "Thank you," give a hug, and if you can afford it, give a few gift cards as well. "Thank you so much. That was an incredible hour that I got to be with my church family."

One of the things we're doing for our Kids ministry is parent commissioning. June 8, we are doing parent commissioning. This is one of the ways that we, as a church... Look. I say this all the time. Parents, we cannot replace you, but we want to resource you. One of the ways we resource you is we create moments, milestones, and markers for you and your family.

There are many of those. Right? Hopefully your kid comes to faith in Christ and gets baptized, and maybe a short-term mission trip. We celebrate when they go out into the workforce, and all that, but the first milestone is parent commissioning. We only do this once a year, so if you don't make this one, you'll be waiting a whole other year.

If you've had a kid or adopted a kid, or whatever, in the last year, we'd encourage you to come to this. By the way, it's a great time to invite somebody who's far from God and close to you if you're doing your parent commissioning, if you're dedicating your child, or whatever, because it's a great opportunity to invite friends and family who otherwise wouldn't come.

Finally, guys, this Friday night... I want to just talk to the men. This Friday night, we have Jon Tyson here. (By the way, *Jon* Tyson, not *Mike* Tyson. That's a different talk.) Jon Tyson is coming, and a lot of you don't know who he is. That's a shame, but it's understandable. I really... I went back and forth whether I should say this, but I'm just going to say it.

We got incredible guest speakers this year. You heard Lee Strobel. That was awesome. Everybody knew who he was. We had church vans pulling up to hear him, because he's kind of a celebrity Christian. I'm telling you, I've sat under the teaching and preaching of all of the guest preachers we're bringing in. There is nobody even close to Jon Tyson.

This man has an anointing on his life, and he is not coming here to just give some men's seminar; he's coming to impart something to the men. So, I'm just saying, guys, show up. Invite your friends. All of you know somebody, some dude who's wasting his life. All of the women know a couple of guys. Hopefully they didn't bring him with them. Hopefully it's not the person next to you, but you know somebody who's wasting their life.

Sometimes men just need a catalytic event in their life. They need to be brought to a place and space they've never been brought to. Guys, that's why we built this room. We built this room to create environments where men and women can hear the gospel. So, I hope you'll invite somebody, and we hope to see a lot of you here on Friday night. Let's pray.

Lord, I want to particularly pray for the men, because we need it, and nothing changes in a home of real significance until the man sees himself as the spiritual leader and shepherd of that home. I pray for men in here right now who are passive. Part of their passivity is even them not wanting to go to this event.

We pray, Lord, that you would wake up the men, that you would give them a vision for their lives, that you would use this event on Friday night to strengthen, encourage, and equip men. I pray we would use it strategically to invite people who are far from God and close to us but might be open to a men's talk. We pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, have you ever been discouraged? Of course you have. I mean, everyone gets discouraged or deflated, and some of you get downright depressed. Right? I had to go back to seventh grade, but I can remember the first time I was really discouraged. Anyone else try out for a middle-school basketball team at some point in their life?

So, here's what happened. My parents said, "We're going to help you." My dad bought the basketball hoop for the backyard, and I practiced every night. Dad and Mom sent me to the best basketball camp you could go to for the summer for a couple of weeks. My dad said, "Work on your left-hand layup, not just your right hand." I mean, I was working on my foul shots, passing dribble...all that.

I remember in seventh grade I went to tryouts, you know, two days long. At the end of tryouts, they put the list of people who made it on the sheet. I went over to check the list, and my name wasn't on it. I mean, this is humiliating. You're like, "How bad were you at basketball?" There were only three of us who didn't make it.

This was before Apple Watches and iPhones. I couldn't text my parents, so I had to wait. I was like, "This is terrible. I've got to go home and tell my parents after all the

investment in me that I didn't make this team." I rode back with Pat Stollo and his mom, and Pat made the team, and I didn't. That was an awkward 10-minute drive. I went home, and I can remember... It's weird how you can remember things from seventh grade. Like, I can go there in seventh grade.

I remember going into the basement. My parents had just gotten us a pool table. This is so sad. I shot pool by myself and cried. I remember thinking... You know, in seventh grade, you're like, "Am I just terrible at sports?" Then you think, "Middle school is hard enough. Now I've got to go back tomorrow. Are they going to make fun of me?"

Guys, I remember being discouraged in ministry. I remember doing ministry at Duke, and I remember meeting with a guy one time at Duke, an arrogant 18-year-old kid. I was trying to share the gospel with him, and he said, "Stop. I feel bad for you." I was like, "I'm older than you. Don't talk to me that way." That's what I was thinking.

He said, "I feel bad for you because you're oppressed by the Bible. It's written by a bunch of people who are now dead, but I bet you feel good about yourself because you think you have the truth." I was shaking. I had to call Andy Davis, who will be here in June. He was my pastor. I was like, "A kid was mean to me. He said he doesn't believe the Bible." Andy went to MIT, and he helped me.

Guys, I think Satan's greatest strategy is to discourage you, if you're a Christian. If you're not a Christian, I think Satan's greatest strategy is to distract you, even right now. "Don't pay attention to what he's saying. Don't give thoughts to God or the Bible or spirituality." But I think if you're a Christian, Satan's greatest strategy is to discourage you.

So, here's a simple word at the beginning: stop discouraging your spouse. That's Satan's job. "Well, who else will keep them in line?" It doesn't need you. Stop discouraging your kids. One of the lessons I've learned in life is people need so little encouragement in their life, and they get it almost never.

Satan wants to discourage you, because if your sins are forgiven and you have the Holy Spirit and you're headed to heaven and you have the Bible and you have the church around you, it's like, "Oh my gosh! We could do anything." So, Satan is like, "Yes, I just want to discourage you not to try."

I believe that, today, Satan is discouraging some of you in your marriage. You came in here, and you're like, "Our marriage is a 4 out of 10," and you've said, "It'll always be a 4 out of 10." Satan wants to discourage you in your fight with sin. "You gave in

again. I know you said you wouldn't, and you said if you gave in this time you were going to tell someone." You know, all that.

Satan really likes to discourage people in their parenting. This week, I was away, and I was with some pastors. I was with this guy. I'm not going to say his name, but basically, he has written a lot of books on discipleship. My wife and I were having dinner with him and a few other couples, and I was surprised at how honest he was.

He was telling us this story. He said, "Guys, I have a confession. I've written, like, five books on discipleship, and I'm struggling to disciple my own kids." He said, "It's embarrassing, because I've literally written the book on it." He said, "I was discipling my two teenage boys like this. I tried to disciple them one way, and it didn't work. I went back to the drawing board."

He said, "I had a whole plan." He said, "So then I re-took them, and I said, 'We're going to do it again.'" He said, "I took them out, and all they wanted to talk about was Pokémon." That's what he said. Teenagers. He said, "I went home and told my wife, 'They're heathens. They're done.'" But as he told us the story, he said, "But we're going to try again. We're working on another plan."

I don't want you to get discouraged. What I want to show you today from God's Word in 2 Corinthians 4 is how to fight against discouragement. For some of you, you're like, "I don't even know what..." Life is going well. For other people, discouragement is a constant companion. For others, it comes in waves and seasons. I want to show you this.

Here's the big idea for today: *we do not lose heart, because God works in people's hearts*. I want you to see this right out of the text. Paul's word for "I don't get discouraged" is "We don't lose heart." I'll show you this. Watch this. Verse 1: ***"Therefore, having this ministry..."*** That's the ministry Pastor Nate did a great job explaining last week. ***"...by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart."*** That means to be cowardly. It means to shrink back. It means to lose heart.

"But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God." Again, Paul loves to talk about the conscience. ***"And even if our gospel is veiled..."*** There's that veil that we talked about last week.

"...it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not

ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

Here's where Paul is basically going to take this letter. He's going to say, "There are a bunch of things we don't do, because at the end of the day, we know that God's Word does the work." Basically, he's like, "We don't know where God is at work until we bring the Word." Our job is not so much to create spiritual interest as much as it is to discover it.

I want us to go back and look at this verse by verse. First, I want us to see... Why does Paul not lose heart? Verse 1: ***"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart."*** This is such a big theme. If you have your Bible, you can drop down to verse 16 in chapter 4, and Paul says, ***"Therefore we do not lose heart."***

So we're going to talk about it next week too. Next week, he's like, "We don't lose heart even though our body is falling apart." So, all of you old people, come back next week. We'll talk about that. He says it twice. He bookends the whole chapter with "We don't lose heart."

Now, why would Paul lose heart? I mean, some people think (we don't know this for sure) that maybe he was being accused of giving up on Christianity, on Christ, on the Corinthians. Paul says, "Guys, I don't lose heart." Now, a lot of people *do* lose heart. I read this stat this week. This is from Barna, which is a good research company. Thirty-eight percent of pastors quit during COVID.

I want you to think about that for a second. I know some of them. It was just too much with all of the shepherding issues and the social distancing and the vaccine and the mask wearing and the political *this*. I mean, a lot of people just said, "Uncle. I'm done." They were so discouraged by their churches.

How about people deconstructing their faith? Have you heard of this? This is what young people do. Every once in a while, a celebrity comes up, like Derek Webb or Josh Harris, if you know who those people are. They all have this Instagram post where they look off into the distance. Right? It's like the exact same thing every time, and then there's a really long thing about them deconstructing their faith.

Here's what they did: they lost heart. They did not have some intellectual awakening. They did not. They're discouraged that their mom died or they've been dealing with some sin in their life, and they thought, "Well, maybe the power of God is not..." I'm just telling you, underneath all of that... It's very popular to say, "I've deconstructed. I've learned new information." It's like, "You lost heart. That's what happened."

Why could Paul lose heart? There are two main reasons Paul would lose heart. First, he was suffering so much. I mean, think about this. Paul was shipwrecked. We're going to talk about this in a couple of months. Paul was shipwrecked three times, he says in chapter 11. Why did Paul get on a boat? Was he going on a cruise ship? Obviously not. The only reason Paul ever got on a boat was to take the gospel to somebody.

So, imagine you're Paul, and you go on a boat, and then the ship wrecks. What do you think? "Maybe I don't want to do this anymore." Then it wrecks again. You're like, "God, do you want me to go take the gospel to people or not?" Then it wrecks again. Paul is like, "No more free swim lessons, please."

You know, he was beaten with rods. He was stoned. He got 40 lashes. It's so extreme, guys. I feel safe saying this, even though I don't know all of you. No one in this room has ever suffered as much as Paul, and no one in this room even knows anybody who has ever suffered as much as the apostle Paul. Please.

Here's the thing about suffering, guys. Normally, when you experience pain... Pain is normally the way to tell you "Don't do that again." What's the classic example of this? "Don't touch the hot stove." Then, "Ow! Oh, okay. I'm not going to do that again." Why? "Because when I did that, it hurt."

Paul is like, "Every time I open up my mouth, people beat me up. Every time I tell someone about Jesus, I suffer." It's like, "Paul, how do you keep going?" Some of you posted your baptism picture on Facebook, and you had 33 comments on it, and 28 of them were good, but two or three or four were mocking or made a joke about it or made a snide comment. The temptation, when you read that little comment, is like, "I'm not posting about my Christian faith anymore." The littlest amount of suffering and we can lose heart.

The second reason Paul lost heart is... He was accused of this. His ministry is not very successful. He's seeing very little fruit in his ministry. By the way, the great thing about being in 2024 is there's no question... There's nothing new under the sun. There's no question that we're going to deal with what other generations have already dealt with.

One of the questions people ask... Especially if you go on the mission field as a missionary or give your life to a people or go do college ministry and give your life to a college campus for four or five years, here's what you'll ask. Everybody asks this. I've asked this. "Why do so few people believe?" You read the Bible, and you're like, "All right. If the Holy Spirit is in me, and the Word of God is powerful, and I'm not

ashamed of the gospel, for it's the power of God, and Jesus is alive and saving people, why do so few people believe?"

I saw this again and again in college ministry. We'd hire some new guy to go on the college campus. (Not here. This was when I was in college ministry.) He'd be like, "I'm going to win this whole campus to Christ." We'd be like, "You're going to, man," but then we were also like, "Good luck." It's just hard. You share the gospel all year, and one person comes to faith in Christ.

Some of you know this with your families. You're like, "We spent 100 grand sending our kid to private Christian school from kindergarten to senior year, and we had him or her in youth group. We're not perfect, but we tried to model the faith, and he doesn't believe." It's a big deal, guys. Suffering and the lack of people believing... I mean, those two things together...

You almost wonder, "Paul, why would you even continue?" He'd go preach in a synagogue, and one person would believe. We read these accounts. He goes over to this area, and Lydia believes. This one lady believes. He's like, "All right. We'll try to start something in your house."

There are other reasons when they ask people why they're discouraged in their ministry. Here's what other people say. It's the hiddenness of the work. Think of a mom who says, "No one knows how much I've prayed for my son." That's what's the hardest.

A Community Group leader might be like, "Man! Group was horrible tonight. No one knows I spent three hours. I felt like it was awkward, and my questions... But I spent hours." People get discouraged because they have unrealistic expectations. They think fruit is going to be immediate and obvious.

Well, look at verse 1. I'll show you how Paul fights this. He says, "**Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God...**" You see ministry as a gift from God. That means it's not a duty. It's not an "I have to"; it's an "I get to." A lot of people don't see ministry that way.

A lot of people see it like, "Okay. When Jesus dies for me, one of my gifts is forgiveness. Oh, that's so awesome. Another one of my gifts is eternal security. I'm going to heaven. Oh, another one of the gifts is the Holy Spirit inside of me, and another one of the gifts is the Bible." You could go on and on. "Another one of the gifts is the church." You know what? I think people forget one of God's gifts is "Here, I'd like to give you a ministry to other people. I'd like to work with you and use you in the lives of other people."

This makes me think of Christmas. My wife is very, very organized. We have three kids, so there's a total of five of us, so Christmas morning can be crazy. We had to figure it out. We have all of these rules, and one of the rules is the youngest opens first, and then the next, all the way to the oldest, so I open up my present last. We get a couple of presents, so we go back to the youngest.

You know, all moms know this. There's an order to the gifts. Right? "Okay. We're going to open *this*, and then..." For us... Not every year, perfectly, but we always try to save an experience to the end. It's usually a gift for all of the kids, and when they open it, it's like, "We're going to Great Wolf Lodge." You know, that kind of thing. "Like, today." It's this experience.

I feel like, for some of you, you've opened up all of the gifts under the Christmas tree except the gift of ministry. It's like this present, and it's this experiential present. God would want to use you in the lives of other people. I'm just telling you, there's nothing more exciting than that.

If you realize ministry is a gift from God, it will lead you to not fall into the two categories people fall into, the two ditches. One category is to be prideful. Your Community Group grows. Your church grows. You start to think... What do they say? "Too much time in the spotlight makes you blind." You start to think, "Maybe I'm special."

Or the other side... Something happens, and it doesn't go well, and the ministry is hard. Sometimes God gives people an Isaiah ministry. Do you remember his call to Isaiah? "Go preach to people who will never believe." It's like, "Can someone else do that ministry?" Anyway, sometimes we have this ministry, and we get discouraged. Paul says the way you fight it is you have a ministry that's by mercy.

Again, I would love if everyone in this church could say what Paul says. "I have this ministry." We all have the same ministry in the sense that we all have ministry that's a gift from God, but we all have different ministries based on... Only you can minister to your kids in the way that you can based on your life stage or lifestyle.

What I want to show you next is really interesting. Watch this. Paul says in verse 1, **"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart."** Then look at what he says in verse 2. I want you to see the logic. That's part of what we're doing here. We're just seeing the logic of Paul's argument. **"But..."** Okay, Paul. Why are you saying, "But..."? That *but* is about contrast.

Paul is actually going to go, "We don't lose heart, but we have..." Look at this strong language. "...renounced..." Sometimes (and maybe some of you need to do this

today) you need to go, "This is what I'm not doing." That's where Paul always starts. Paul always says, "These are all of the things I'm not doing, and then I'm free to do the right things. But these are the things I'm not doing."

Look at this. "***But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.***" That's *methods*. "***We refuse...***" Paul, such strong language. You're so intense about this stuff. "***We refuse to practice cunning...***" That's *motives*. "***...or to tamper with God's word...***" That's *message*. Listen. Paul says, "We don't lose heart, but we refuse and we renounce." It's like, "Paul, what are you saying?" Let me explain it.

Paul is saying, "The three things I don't do are the three things you *do* do when you lose heart." Does that make sense? Paul says, "I don't lose heart. If I did, I would do these three things, but I don't do those three things, so we need to talk about those three things." All three of those things have a lack of trust in God's Word as the powerful working agent in people's lives.

I love Martin Luther. He was this great Protestant Reformer. Toward the end of his life... He didn't just change a church. He changed a city. He changed a continent. I mean, God used him. He's one of the most significant figures in all of human history. Anyway, they interviewed him at the end. They said, "Martin Luther, how did you do it?" He's a little salty character, so he said, "Well, here's what I would do. I would preach the Word of God, and then I would go down to the pub and drink beer."

He said, "As I drank my beer, the Word of God did the work." He said, "Then I would get up the next morning, and I would preach, and then I would go to sleep at night, and while I slept, the Word of God did the work." He said, "It did more for people's lives than any king or emperor could."

I want to show you the way people go wrong. Let's just cover these briefly, because we have a lot of other things to look at. First, let's look at "disgraceful, underhanded ways," *methods*. Basically, when you lose trust in God's Word, you turn to different methods. The method is simple. We bring God's Word to God's people and let God take care of the results.

Our whole church is built on that. We sing the Word, preach the Word, pray the Word...all that. What are "disgraceful, underhanded ways"? Well, those are methods, and let me give you two that I see in the church today. The first is *pragmatism*. Pragmatism basically says, "We will do whatever works."

Churches become goofy. Have you seen these churches before? I'm not thinking of any one church. They start doing the silliest things, because they want to do whatever it takes to get people in the door. There are problems with that. That's how

you build a crowd, not how you build a church. The other problem with that is whatever you win people with you have to keep them with.

This is why we don't do the dog and pony show on Easter. It's like, "What is it?" Well, it's like a normal service so that people don't come and be like, "There was an elephant on stage. I wonder if next week there will be..." There's never an elephant on the stage! Whatever we win people with we have to keep them with.

If we win them with "The pastor is so funny," then we have to keep them with "The pastor is so funny." If we win them with "The music is so awesome," we have to keep them with "The music is so awesome." But as Paul is going to get to, if we win them with the clear teaching of God's Word, then that's what we can keep them with: the clear teaching of God's Word.

The second disgraceful, underhanded way we see today... Pragmatism, which is different than being practical... We try to be practical, but based on the Bible. Pragmatism says, "The ends justify the means." Then there's *emotionalism*. Emotionalism is just trying to get people to make decisions. "Let's dim the lights, slope the floor, play the right music, make the right appeal, and just get people to make decisions instead of being disciples." That's the first thing.

The second thing he says is "I don't practice cunning." That's interesting. Paul basically says here... He says this throughout. "Guys, my motives are pure. I love you." The number-one motive that can creep into people in ministry, full-time ministry or just people doing ministry, is self-promotion. I mean, this is how broken our hearts are. We can even take something as simple and godly as ministry and somehow make it about ourselves.

The third commandment says, "Do not use the Lord's name in vain." A lot of us teach our kids (it isn't wrong, but it's really low resolution), "Okay. The third commandment says, 'Don't use the Lord's name in vain,' and this is what it means. When you hit your thumb with a hammer, don't say Jesus' name angrily." That's like 2 percent of what that commandment means, to not use God's name as a cussword. That is not what that commandment is about. It's a good implication of it.

Here's what the third commandment says: "Do not use the Lord's name in vain." Translation: "Do not use God's name to advance your agenda." All of a sudden, you start thinking about that and going, "Okay. That could be a huge temptation to exalt the name of Christ in hopes that somehow it benefits me."

Finally, Paul says, "We don't tamper with God's Word." *Tamper* means to distort. This is probably the greatest temptation for Christians and churches. I'm going to talk

about the opposite of this in a minute. Basically, people tamper with God's Word a lot of different ways.

One way is they take verses out of context. You can make the Bible say anything. Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." It's not about playing football, if you didn't know that. That is not about playing football. Read the whole context. That's Paul learning to be content in every situation, especially poverty. That's what that verse is about.

Or we can take a verse out of context and just quote half of it. Do you know that the Bible says, "There is no God"? The Bible says that. I didn't quote the first part. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" So, one way people tamper with God's Word is they take it out of context. Like with buying real estate, the most important part of a Bible text is its location, location, location. What is it surrounded by?

The second way people tamper with God's Word is they only talk about the positive parts. Here's what happens. Every once in a while, people leave our church because they're transitioning to a different medical community or moving or moving near their parents, or whatever, and they'll always email us, which we appreciate. They say, "Hey, we're moving to Kansas City. Do you know any good churches in Kansas City?"

There are good churches everywhere, but they're hard for us to find. So, one or two of our pastors will go on websites. We're trying to listen to pastors and who they are. Here's the hard thing about false teachers. It's not what they say; it's what they *don't* say. They'll talk a lot about grace and not a lot about sin, a lot about heaven and not a lot about hell, a lot about faith and not a lot about repentance.

Just so you guys know, one of the ways we've tried to build in... We've tried to future proof this church by basically saying we're committed, as the primary diet of this church, to expositional preaching. That just basically means I have no idea all of the things we're going to talk about in 2 Corinthians over the next 10 weeks. We just open up the text.

Okay, the last thing on tampering with God's Word. People tamper with God's Word wherever the culture is pressing on the Word the most. You don't know you're a Christian just because you agree with the things the Bible says that the culture also says. You know you're a believer if you believe the Bible even when, or especially when, the culture is pushing against what the Bible is teaching.

I've told you this before, but listen. Because the Bible is an eternal book, not just an old book, it transcends every culture. So, in every time period, the Bible will

commend different things in one culture because they line up with what the Bible says, and it will confront or convict things in the other culture.

Now, right now... Sometimes this stuff sounds political, but it's not. Basically, just so you know, right now the issue is sexuality. Sexuality is almost always the issue. It's the main issue in the church. What is the main pastoral issue in the church? You know what it is. It's pornography. What is the main issue in the culture? Gender and sexuality and pronouns and all that kind of stuff.

You know something is a big deal when it's the biggest issue in the church and in the culture at the same time. For example, this week... This church is bankrupt, so I'm just calling it out. Basically, this week, the United Methodist Church voted to normalize or allow (I don't even know their language) LGBTQIA pastors and ministers.

Everybody who has been watching this at all has seen this. The United Methodist Church... I mean, John Wesley is turning over in his grave. God bless the old Methodists who rode on horseback and shared the gospel. It was the largest Protestant denomination on planet earth until very recently. They slowly left God's Word, and now they have replaced, as the main symbol...

The main symbol for the United Methodists used to be the cross with fire. Now their main symbol is the pride flag. Whenever I say this... We're not mad at the gay community. We're not afraid of the gay community...none of that. I'm just saying... Look. It is impossible to make the Bible say that homosexuality is okay. The hermeneutical gymnastics you would have to do... It can't be done.

In doing that, you leave God's Word. So, the United Methodist Church is no longer united, and it's no longer a church as of this week, sadly. I'm sure there are some faithful United Methodists out there, but they're going the way of the Episcopalians, the way of the dodo. You know, you leave God's Word. All of a sudden, you have nothing to say to the world, and you know what that looks like.

I want to show you what Paul says in response to that. This is it, guys. It's not easy, but it's simple. **"...but by the open statement of the truth..."** That's in contrast to everything else...to practicing cunning (I have a different motive), to disgraceful, underhanded ways (I'm trying to do something else), to I'm tampering with God's Word.

Look at this. **"...by the open statement of the truth..."** Paul goes, "That's my method. That's my message. That's my motivation." Look at what he says here. **"...we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."** Truth is the issue today. The younger generation is dying for truth, but they're also deathly afraid of it.

Here's the younger generation. The younger generation loves to use the same words as Whole Foods does...*natural, organic*. That's what they want. They want to be transparent. They love that. They want to go to therapy. They want to be authentic. These words are like buzzwords. They want to be vulnerable. They want to be honest.

They're tapping into something. The younger generation says something like, "I'd like to be honest with you about who I really am. I want to tell the truth to someone. I want to tell the truth of what it feels like to be..." Whatever it is. One of the things we can't stand is when someone isn't telling us the truth.

See, the job of the church... Guys, the only thing we do better than the world is tell the truth. We do not have better music than the world. You can go somewhere else and hear better public speaking than this. We try to do a good job and park your cars, but we do not have the customer service of the Ritz-Carlton or Disney. That's not what we offer.

According to the apostle Paul when he writes to Timothy, we are the pillar and buttress of the truth. But it's hard to handle truth. Nietzsche said the character of a man is determined by how much truth he can handle. We decided when we moved into this building that we had five main values in our church. I won't bore you with all of the details, but they are *gospel, community, mission, truth, and stewardship*. You'll hear about that in the future.

We didn't want more than five values. They're all super important. I don't want to say one is more important than the other, but the one that I just feel in my gut when I say it, "This is the moment; this is the timely word" is *truth*. I mean, we're lied to so much I'm getting upset about it. I'm trying not to get too upset about it. I'm trying to be godly and Christian about it.

When the government is lying to you and the media is lying to you and... Okay. I went back and forth on whether or not to show you this picture, but I'm going to show you a picture. The picture I'm going to show you in a minute is... I had to think of the absolute most absurd lie we've been fed in our culture today. I don't mean this in a political way, but I just had to think, "What is the most ridiculous...?"

The apostle Paul says in Romans 1, "They suppress the truth in unrighteousness." It means they push it down because they don't want it to be true. I want to show you a picture of a person. Have you ever seen this person before? I showed it to our staff. Most of our staff didn't know who that is.

This person goes by the name of Rachel Levine. If you can't tell, that's a man. He is transgender, and everybody is acting like he's a woman. It's absurd. And do you

know what he does? Do you know what his role in our government is? He's the assistant health director. We live in a time where *that* man is over the health of our nation.

I couldn't think of something more ridiculous. And I don't mean any disrespect. He's lost. He's made in the image of God. I'm not afraid of him. I'm not mad at him. I love him, as much as I can from a distance. But it's the absurdity, guys. We live in a time where we are... I just want to show you.

I thought about putting a picture of a baby up here nine months in the womb and being like, "Yeah, we're told that's a fetus." I can't handle the lying anymore. So, we just need to say... Listen. We're not upset at anyone, but we're committed to telling people the truth.

Okay. I want to ask you to have a relationship with truth. You *can* because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. So you can. And the Bible says Christians are those who love the truth. So, guys, you have to stop lying. You have to stop lying to yourself. You have to stop lying to your wife or your husband.

Paul says, "I want the open statement of the truth." Here's what Paul is saying. "I'm eager to talk about the truth." I think, too often, instead of revealing the truth, we're concealing the truth. Have you ever been at work and been like, "I hope they don't ask. I hope they don't ask. I hope they don't ask"?

"I hope they don't ask my opinion on it. I hope they don't ask me what I think about what God thinks about cohabitation. I don't want to talk about it. Oh man! I hope I don't get put on the spot and asked if Jesus is the only way or if I believe the Bible is God's Word." Paul is like, "I can't wait to tell them." That's what Paul is saying.

Here's what I've seen. And I have my own struggles, just like all of you do, but I have found the more you tell the truth, the more solid you are as a person. You're not disintegrated anymore where you're saying *this over here* and *this over there*. It's as close to a superpower as I would know how to describe.

When you become a truth-teller, you're on the side of reality. That's the side you want to be on. You start talking about it, it's like... Then you have to have this deep conviction that truth is for human flourishing, even if it's going to be hard for people to hear.

Let me show you what he says in verse 3. ***"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing."*** Paul is saying, "Guys, there are going to be people who are not going to believe. As sad as that is, it's not shocking." Here's another thing.

Paul is like, "I don't lose heart because people don't believe, because I'm more focused on who *will* believe than who *doesn't* believe."

It's hard for us to get here emotionally, but Paul is like, "I am so excited about all of the people who will believe that I'm less focused on all of the people who won't." There are some people whose eyes are veiled. Look at what Paul says in verse 4. Translation of verse 4: "It's worse than you think, guys."

"In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Paul goes, "Guys, the people who don't believe... The reason I'm not discouraged is the problem has nothing to do with me." This is a deep problem. It's not an intellectual problem.

You don't need to just get them Tim Keller's *The Reason for God*. C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* isn't going to fix this. This isn't a background problem, like, how they were raised. I've had *that* thought before. I remember one time I was at Duke, and I met with this guy. I was sharing the gospel with him, and he said, "I don't believe any of this. I was raised in San Francisco, and my parents mocked Christianity in my house the whole time I grew up."

I'm ashamed of this, but I remember thinking, "You're never going to believe," because I thought the problem is your family background, which is why we're so surprised when certain people *don't* believe. "Oh, they had the best parents. They were in church and youth group every week." Dude, there is a deeper problem than your background.

Here's what Paul says. He says Satan is blinding them from seeing the glory of Christ. People can see Jesus as an example or Jesus as a good teacher, but they just can't see Jesus Christ in all of his glory as the risen, reigning Son of God, Savior, and Lord of the world.

Look. I want you to see this. In verse 4, Paul says, "The god of this world..." That's Satan. By the way, this is the only place in the New Testament Satan is called the *god of this world*. He says, "The god of this world has blinded unbelievers..." Skip down to verse 6.

Verse 6 says, ***"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*** So, there's a god in verse 4 (the god of this world), and there's the speaking God of the Bible in verse 6.

In verse 4 there's blindness. In verse 6 there's light. Then you have to ask, "Well, what's in between? What's in verse 5?" The answer is "You and me." I'll show you this. This is to be encouraging. It's like, "People are blind." Paul goes, "Here's what I'm going to do." ***"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."*** That's the key.

Paul says, "We don't proclaim ourselves." Everybody is so obsessed with self-awareness. What about self-forgetfulness? It's like, "What am I on the Enneagram?" Who cares? Forget yourself. This is not about discovering the true you. This is about losing yourself and making Christ known.

He goes, "I don't proclaim myself." Guys, how many of you are just proclaiming yourself? Your entire Instagram account is about proclaiming yourself. No one can see Jesus Christ when they're staring at you. It doesn't mean you can't talk about yourself. It doesn't mean you can't reference yourself. It does mean don't be the hero in all of your own stories. Beware of *that* person.

It does mean don't talk about your life as a biography, but as a testimony. A *biography* is all about "Then I went to *this* school, and then I did *this* and was so awesome *here*, and I'm so smart *here*, and I got this job, and then I got promoted." Great job proclaiming yourself. *Testimony* is "Man, it's incredible," and you just start to tell the story of what God has done in your life. Now you are just a spectator in what God is doing in your life.

Paul says, "I don't proclaim myself; I proclaim Jesus Christ." Then he says, "And then I serve you for Jesus' sake." It's really popular to serve right now. You know, people serve so they can watch themselves serve. People serve because they feel unbelievably guilty for all they have. We don't serve for either of those reasons. We serve, it says, for Jesus' sake.

It's like, "Look. I don't know how it works, but God uses me serving." There are two things God uses. You're like, "What's God going to use in my dad's life?" You speaking and proclaiming Christ, not yourself, and you serving him. You get Christ up, and you get down. What does God use? The John the Baptist "He must increase; I must decrease." That's it.

How are we going to reach our kids? Parents get together, and they say, "Here's what we're going to do. In this home we're going to do two things. We're going to serve our kids, and we're going to speak about Christ a lot. We're going to talk about Christ more than we talk about my job and how successful it has been. We're going to proclaim Christ more than our favorite sports teams in this house." That's when the house starts to change.

Verse 6 is the miracle. I read it to you, but let's look one more time. ***"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness...'"*** When did God say that? At creation. Here's what Paul is going to say. Creation and conversion happen the same way. We do not believe here in coercion. I don't believe in that. I don't believe I can word everything just right and manipulate your mind to make a decision.

I don't believe in coercion; I believe in conversion, the dramatic work of the Holy Spirit on the soul of a person. Look at what he says here. ***"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."***

He's pointing back to creation, and he says, "How did creation start?" Well, you have to go, "What was that creation?" At the beginning of creation it says there was darkness, emptiness, and void. There was nothing. You go, "What is nothing?" As someone famously said, nothing is what rocks think about. It's hard to even think about nothing. *That's* nothing. Nothing is what rocks think about.

He's saying there was nothing, there was darkness, there was emptiness, there was void, and God spoke light, and life and light and creation happened. Why do I tell you this? Because some of you are discouraged by your one. We started that ONE Initiative last year, and you're discouraged.

You're like, "He's not interested" or "She's not interested" or maybe "He's actually antagonistic. It's worse than I thought." You're like, "His heart is black and cold." That's exactly how creation was, and God can speak and change it. That's our great hope. Then in between, what do we do? We speak, we serve, and we pray and ask God to open up people's hearts.

I told you this last week I was with some pastors. It's hard to explain. It was this one event, and they brought this pastor up at the end. They bring these pastors up who are doing a really good job in certain areas, and they just say, "Talk to us." So, they brought this guy up. He's 71 years old, still pastoring. They brought him up, and they said, "Hey, I heard you're an incredible evangelist." He has led so many people to the Lord. They said, "Will you tell us about it?"

He said, "Well, the number-one thing in evangelism is intentionality. Be intentional." He said, "Every environment I go to, I try to serve people and speak of Christ. I love to golf, so I got to go to Scotland to go golf at the great St. Andrews." If any of you know golf, this is a special place.

If you've ever been on a great golf trip or a great hunting trip, or whatever it is for you guys, what are you doing on the golf trips and hunting trips? It's okay. You're normally

thinking about yourself. "This is incredible. Let's get the pictures. Where are we eating? The hotel is awesome." You're loving the golf course and all that.

Well, he said on the first hole at this golf course... When you go to a really nice golf course, you have to have a caddie. They're caddie-only courses. So, he gets assigned a caddie who's going to carry his bag the whole time. He said, "I'm on the first hole at the tee box with this caddie, and I say to him, 'Hey, this will not affect your tip, but I'm a Christian, and throughout the round of golf, I'd love to share my faith with you if you're okay with that.' The guy says, 'I'm okay with that.'"

So, he told us the story. He said, "It takes me about nine holes to talk about the creation of the world, God's love for humanity, and our fall into sin. We turn in the back nine, and I'm telling him about Christ and his sinless life, his substitutionary atonement for us, and his resurrection."

He said, "I get to the fourteenth hole, and we're in the middle of the fairway. He stops me and says, 'I'm ready.' 'You're ready for what?' He says, 'I'm ready to give my life to Christ.'" He said, "I pray with this man, with tears rolling from his eyes, and I lead my caddy to Christ while I'm on a golf trip with my buddies." Don't you want to be that kind of person?

He said afterward the guy was crying, and he said, "I've got to ask you. I'm just interested. How long have you been caddying here?" He said, "Well, sir, it's the only job I've ever had. I started at 17, and I'm 57 years old. I've been caddying here for 40 years." He said, "Can I just ask you this? Has anyone ever talked to you about Jesus in the 40 years you've been caddying here?"

He said, "Not one, sir. I've heard Jesus' name a lot on this golf course, but I've never had somebody tell me about Jesus." I wonder if the reason so many people are still lost and blind is because we have not served and we have not spoken like we should. Let's pray.

Lord, would you encourage us? Lord, you're at work, and there are people who won't believe, but there are people who just currently don't believe but *will* believe. Lord, would you encourage us in our marriages? Would you encourage us in our parenting? Would we not lose heart? Would we continue to lean in and believe in the power of your Word?

Lord, would we, by the open statement of the truth, commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and would you find us, wherever we are, lifting up Christ and getting down low to serve others? We ask this in the name of Jesus who served us, amen.