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Freedom in the New Covenant

April 28, 2024
Series: Where Glory Dwells
2 Corinthians 3

Do you remember what life felt like before the Internet? Yeah, some of you guys do. I'm looking around. Some of you don't. You're too young. I didn't get the Internet in my house until I was sometime in middle school. I remember before we had the Internet in my house, I had to do my first research paper for school. It was on the astronaut John Glenn. All of my content came out of my mom's set of encyclopedias. That was the Internet back then.

Life was so different. Before the Internet, if you wanted to buy something, you had to go to the store. Do you guys remember this? Like, a physical store. You had to go if you wanted to buy something. Nowadays, you don't have to do that, which is dangerous, by the way. Well, it's dangerous for me, because *this* type of situation will happen.

My wife and I get the kids in bed after a long day, and we kind of sink into the couch. We look at each other. I get my phone out, and then 10 minutes later someone knocks on my front door with two Shamrock McFlurries. (McDonald's is underrated, by the way. That one was free.) The new has replaced the old. The Internet was developed...revolutionary change.

Now, whenever there's revolutionary change, there are always people on the front end of it who are kind of resistant to it. If you were in high school at the advent of the Internet, your teacher was like, "You can't use the Internet as a source for your research paper. It's not a legitimate source." You were like, "Why not? It's the best. Have you been on there?"

She was like, "Nah, there's all kinds of nonsense out there. Use a periodical." You were like, "What's a periodical?" Well, nowadays... Fast-forward 20 or 30 years. Kindergartners across the country get Chromebooks the first week. The new has replaced the old. The new is here to stay. It's revolutionary change.

This is what we're talking about today. If you guys have your Bibles, go ahead and open them up. Turn to or type to 2 Corinthians, chapter 3. You'll see in a lot of translations at the top or somewhere in the middle of the chapter a header that says something like "Ministers of the New Covenant."

For 1,300 years, the Jews related to God underneath the old covenant, and then in an instant, Jesus Christ showed up and introduced a new covenant. That's a long time, 1,300 years, to do things one way and then, in an instant, try to learn to do things another way.

Christians, if we're honest, we have a lot of questions about covenants. Like, what are they exactly? Are they still important? How does a covenant operate? We're going to talk about that today. Actually, that's all we're doing today. Here's my whole outline. We're going to walk through this text and ask questions as they arise, and hopefully we'll find some helpful answers. We'll do that together. We'll talk about it.

Before we get to the text, we have to ask the first question that I kind of just asked: *What is a covenant?* Biblically, what's a covenant? Biblically, a *covenant* between God and man is the set of conditions for God's relationship with his people. That's all it is. God made us. Don't you think he would tell us how he would like to be related to? A relationship with God is on the other side of that set of conditions.

A couple of things about covenants. There's so much to say, but here are a couple of things to frame up our conversation today. First, they are *dictated by God*. God dictates the covenant. Man doesn't dictate the covenant. We don't get to tell God, "Hey, God, this is how I would like to relate to you." It just doesn't work that way. God dictates the covenant.

Secondly, after he does that, it's *unchangeable*. It cannot be changed. You can supersede it (we'll talk about that), but you can't change it. Third of all, all of these covenants between God and man... There are not a lot of them. There are just a few of them. They basically follow a simple formula.

I'm oversimplifying it a little bit, but it's basically, "Keep these conditions and enjoy life with God. If you don't keep these conditions, you'll suffer life apart from God." Biblically, that's death. That's where that goes. That ends in death every single time. Paul is going to spend the rest of our time today comparing and contrasting the old covenant with the new covenant.

Specifically, the old covenant he's talking about... There are a couple in the Old Testament, but the one he's talking about is the covenant God gave the Israelites

through Moses. Do you guys remember this? The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. God sets them free...the plagues, through the Red Sea...this whole crazy deal.

Then they're in the wilderness, and Moses, the man of God, goes up the mountain of God to meet with God while they're in the wilderness, and he comes down the mountain with two tablets of stone on which God has written with his finger a set of conditions for how he would like to be related to.

That old covenant basically says, "Keep these conditions. Keep all of them, and enjoy life with God." It's like man's effort earns God. That's the old covenant. In the new covenant, God's effort earns man. The old covenant is about works; the new covenant is about grace. The old covenant is about man behaving; the new covenant is about man believing.

All right. I think I've framed it up sufficiently. Let's start reading. There's a lot to read, a lot to get to. Chapter 3, verse 1. Here we go. ***"Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all."***

All right. What's going on here? This is the apostle Paul writing to a church he planted in Corinth, and he's talking about "Do I need letters of recommendation for you guys?" It sounds like he's trying to credential himself. What's going on here? All right. Here's what would happen with some of Paul's church plants.

Paul would show up to a place, as he does in Corinth, and preach the good news about Jesus, that there's a new set of conditions for how we can relate to God. A group of people would believe that, and a church would be planted. Then Paul would leave the place and go do that somewhere else.

Well, a lot of times, after Paul would do this, another group of people would show up. This group has come to be known as the *Judaizers*. This group would show up and kind of cast doubt on Paul's new covenant teaching ministry. They were like, "You know, Christ might be supplemental to the old covenant, but he's not entirely central to something new."

This was kind of a grumpy, religious bunch, these Judaizers, but they weren't just crotchety; they actually seemed pretty legit. Right here, Paul is inferring that they actually did have some letters of recommendation. "As some do." Letters on paper from higher-ups, presumably, in Jerusalem, saying they were super-certified to be spiritual teachers for the Jews.

I won't take you there now, but this is interesting. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul infers this other group might have charged money for their efforts and been better public speakers than the apostle Paul. Very interesting. They were the professionals. So, imagine this. Imagine you're the Corinthian church.

Christianity is new, and you're trying to sort through "Well, is Paul right or are these Judaizers? Is Christ supplemental to the old covenant or is he central to something new entirely? What's the emphasis we should put on Christ?" You're asking a question, as the Corinthian church, that would be helpful for us to ask today.

Here's the question: *"What should I look for in a teaching ministry?"* What should we look for? That's a helpful question. How do we know which spiritual teaching to listen to? Well, Paul is going to give us some thoughts. Let's keep reading. Pick it up in verse 2.

"You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."

So, what's the first thing Paul tells us to look for to credential good teaching? *Letters on people*. He's like, "Those guys have letters on paper; I have letters on people." Not tattoos...on hearts. Like, changed lives. He's saying, "What message freed you, grace or works?"

The letter on the man speaks of the legitimacy of the message. Good new covenant teaching leaves behind transformed people, leaves behind joyful, free people. You'll find that around good new covenant teaching. Bad teaching, by the way, usually leaves behind in its wake a group of grumpy, religious people.

All right. Let's bring it down a little bit. Some of you guys have been coming around here for a while, and some of you are newer here, just checking us out, evaluating things. If so, welcome. We're so glad you're here. If you *are* here just kind of evaluating things, checking us out, let me encourage you based on this. Look beyond the service. Don't just slip in and slip out. Based on this, look at the effect of the teaching on the people.

Some of you guys might need to take another step in order to be able to do that. Get to know some people. Meet someone at the welcome tent today. Sign up for a Weekender. Meet some people. Get involved in a Community Group. What do you see? A group of joyful, free people? I hope so. A group of grumpy, religious people? That would be a bad indicator.

Now, for those of you who have been here for a while, it's a different question. What does your letter say? When people read your life (and they're reading it), what does it say about your Jesus? Parents, when your kids read your life and your parenting, do they associate your Jesus with joyful freedom or is it a lot of rules, a lot of information, a lot of behaviors?

"We're doing a lot of stuff, but Mom and Dad kind of look bored with it" or, worse, miserable with it themselves. Y'all, kids can read the letter. They know what Jesus means to you. Your kids need to see your joy. They need to read *that* letter to legitimize the message you're telling them. All right. So, the first thing we need to look for to credential good teaching is letters on people. Is there anything else? Yes. Let's keep reading. Verse 4:

"Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

The second thing we need to look for around good teaching is *confidence*, but not just any confidence. Good teaching and bad teaching can have a confident teacher. When it comes to confidence in a teaching ministry, it's like real estate: location, location, location. Where is the teacher's confidence located? Paul's confidence...he just said it...is on the power of God. It's on the sufficiency of God.

You'll see all of these teaching ministries out there with a very confident teacher. That's great. You *should* be confident, but *why* are you confident? Because you're talented? Eh. Because people like you, you have charisma, a lot of views on the YouTube channel, and the blue check mark or (this is different) because you have the best message in the world, invigorated by the power of God?

That's why Paul is confident. He's not even as talented as the Judaizers, he's saying...the apostle Paul. Confidence in the power of God. Guys, I think there is a lesson for some of us buried in here. Why do I say that? There are a lot of talented people around here. I don't need to give examples. Y'all know. Right? But where is our confidence located?

As a directional elder here, can I be honest with you guys about something? Talent does not keep me up at night. I am not worried about talent. God has done more with less talent all throughout the pages of Scripture. I'm not praying, "God, send Two Cities more talented people so we can do some more stuff."

I'm not praying that prayer, but the subtle lie of self-sufficiency... That's the thing I'm more, long term, keeping an eye out for and praying against, because it grows up slowly, but if it grows up, it's a problem. Look, guys. Hear my heart in this. I love y'all so much. I really do. But some of you guys have more talent than you know what to do with. Praise the Lord. That's not bad. Don't feel bad about that.

You're talented. Great. Praise the Lord. And you're a respectable person, and *that's* great. Praise the Lord. You're like, "What's the problem?" Here's the problem: you don't trust God for very much anymore. You used to, but you kind of hardly pray for things that are beyond your own control anymore. You used to, but you've slowly grown confident in your own abilities and have shifted your confidence away slowly from the one who gave the life in the first place.

Listen, guys. I love y'all so much. Hear my heart in this. Look around this place. God has given us divine results. I'm not talking about numbers; I'm talking about transformed lives, free people. For some of you guys, it's *you*. I'm talking to *you*. Your life has been changed here. For some of you guys, it's someone sitting right next to you. God used you to change that person's life.

That life change, those divine results... They don't come from talent; they come from power. Specifically, the power of the King who's sitting on a throne in heaven right now. So we will be confident, by all means. We will be very confident, but only in the resurrected King sitting on his throne. Amen?

All right. Is there anything else to look for? Yes, there is. Good teaching *submits completely to the authority of Scripture*. Paul is not actually talking about this here. I actually don't think he needs to. Paul has a high view of Scripture, and so do the Judaizers. The Judaizers just have a wrong interpretation of Scripture.

But in Western culture in 2024, the Bible is being disrespected and disregarded constantly, and it's implicit. It's baked in. So, let me just for a second, if I can, explicitly platform the Bible in as simple language as I can think of. Y'all, the God who made you wrote a book and gave it to you. What a gift.

And if it says something, it's true. Someone might be like, "Well, that's overly simple." I don't know. Do we want it to be harder? But we do make this harder. We could make this harder. We overcomplicate things. And I get it. I understand what's going on. It's the approval of man versus the power of God.

There's this intense temptation out there to be approved of by the modern man, to be on the right side of history, but this book confronts the modern man on some stuff, obviously. He chokes on it. He finds it repulsive. He wants to cast it aside entirely.

There are Christian teachers out there who, hungry for the approval of modern man, also want to push some parts of the Bible to the side in favor of some more culturally appealing aesthetics.

How's the aesthetic of the Bible? What's its reputation like these days? Not great. Right? I mean, serious question. When was the last time you saw the Bible portrayed in a positive light in pop culture outside of the church? Can you think of a single contemporary example? I mean, it's rarely portrayed in *any* kind of light outside of the church, but when that happens, it's usually completely mishandled and misquoted.

Have you guys ever heard of *text-jacking*? No, probably not. I learned the term this week. You probably haven't heard of the word, but you know what it is. This is a political strategy where politicians on both sides of the aisle will take a Bible verse and completely misquote and mishandle it in order to support a policy position.

What does that actually do for the reputation of the Bible most of the time? Well, I think most of the time, Christians and non-Christians look at that stuff and kind of roll their eyes, and they're like, "Goofy strategy. Goofy book." It's implicit. So, I just want us to see. Is it all the culture out *here* or is anything happening in *here* as the culture is flowing in a direction?

Here's a good heart check question for you, a good thought experiment. Imagine you're trying to explain what you believe to someone who's interested in that, and you have a Bible verse that pops into your mind that supports your point, and a quote from a contemporary intellectual on the *Joe Rogan Experience* pops into your mind to support your point.

Which one of those two things would be easier to cite? Which one of those two things makes you feel weaker? Which one makes you feel more ashamed? Look. Here's what I'm not saying. I'm not saying you need to quote the Bible every time a verse pops into your head. It's just a heart check question. Do we love the Book or are we kind of ashamed of it? Guys, it's the power of God.

I have so much to say about this I cannot say it all, but I have to say one more thing. Students, where are y'all at? Look at me. Middle school, high school, and college students, do not let your teacher or your college professor make you feel like an idiot because you believe God exists and truth comes from the Bible. He might sound like he's smarter than you. He might *be* smarter than you.

He has the cosmic equation figured out, but he's telling on himself with his own anxiety and his pessimism and his hopeless outlook on things that what he's doing isn't working out for him in his real life. The man might be smart, but the man is not

free. Let your freedom and your joy because you live based on that book tell a more compelling story. So, we have to be, we have been, we will be... Good teaching is completely committed to the authority of Scripture.

All right. Paul has just told us some things to look for to credential good new covenant teaching, and now he is going to dive into how exactly this new covenant operates. He goes deep, guys. Get ready. Here we go. We're going to read this whole next paragraph together. We'll start in verse 7. If you circle in your Bible, I would encourage you to circle the word *glory* every time you see it in this paragraph.

"Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?"

For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory."

The word *glory* appears 10 times in this paragraph. It begs the question (and it's our next question)...*What is this new covenant glory?* *Glory* is another one of those words kind of like *covenant*. You know, we use it around church a lot, but I don't know if we all know exactly what we mean or mean the same thing when we say it.

The truth is there are a lot of faithful definitions of the word *glory* that focus on different aspects. It's a term that's packed with meaning. For our purposes today, we're just going to focus on one of those aspects of the term *glory*. Something that has glory has intrinsic worth, worth in itself, worth because of what it is.

Think of treasure. There are things that have different degrees of worth in the world, and sometimes something has so much worth and is rare enough it could rise to the level that you could appropriately use the term *treasure*. Well, God Almighty, most worth of anything in the universe, the greatest treasure in the universe, not even close... It's the glory of God.

Look. I'm going to get technical for just a second, but follow me here. It's important. The glory of God is always on the other side of a biblical covenant. Remember, what's a covenant? It's the set of conditions we have to keep in order to have a relationship with God. So, there's a glorious God on the one side, and we have to keep these conditions. If we keep the conditions, we get to get over there and experience the glory of God.

God is so interested in people experiencing his glory. It could not be a plainer theme in all of Scripture. God's pursuit of his own glory is driving the universe forward. It's like the ultimate answer to the *why* question, these big, deep questions. Why did God create the world? Why did God create me? Why did God save me? Well, ultimately, biblically, as you start to boil it down, pretty much one thing falls out: for his glory.

If you dwell on that for a minute, from a certain point of view it could start to get a little bit upsetting. It's like, honest question, "Is it selfish of God to demand this glory? Is God vain?" No, he's good. "Well, he seems pretty God-centered." He is. "Well, how is God's God-centeredness good?" I think there are two reasons.

The first one is it's actually true. He actually *does* have the most worth. He *is* the most glorious. If something were to drive God more than the pursuit of his own glory, that would be like God admitting whatever that other thing is is a more worthwhile pursuit, and that's not true. That thing doesn't exist.

Secondly, it's actually most loving of him to invite you into the pursuit of his glory, because the best thing to do for you, if he loved you, would be to give you the best thing, and that thing is himself. You see, in the new covenant, God's glory and our joy are actually connected. They're like the same thing.

People aren't reluctantly giving God glory on the other side of the new covenant. No. They're joyfully doing it. It's natural. But this link between God's glory and our joy can kind of be hard for us. Well, it's hard in theory, but it's actually easy in real life. Watch. I'll show you.

First of all, where's Waldo? There I am. Younger, better-looking version of myself. Second of all, thank you, Dwight Howard, for posting me on your Instagram account. It's the most famous thing that has ever happened to me, so I appreciate that. Thank you. Third of all, and most importantly, this is a photo demonstrating the connection between glory and joy.

Look at these people. Do these people look happy or sad? Mostly happy. A couple people might look like they're in pain. They're happy too, I think. In any event, here's what's happening. This group of people has come from across the country to Dallas, Texas, to the Final Four because a team they love the most (the Florida Gators in this case) has made it to the Final Four. They did something glorious.

So, we're all gathered there, and we're excited about it. During the game, if the team does something particularly glorious...maybe someone hits a contested three-pointer at the end of the shot clock...we get particularly happy. We scream and high-five and

hug random people we've never met before. It's like, the team's glory, our joy. Same experience.

Being mad at God inviting us into the pursuit of his glory would be like me being mad to be at the Final Four to watch my favorite team play because it might be awesome. It doesn't even make sense. Right? No. Team's glory, my joy. God's glory, our joy. Same thing. As that happens, God gets joy, and then, over time (this part is crazy), he makes us glorious. I'm getting ahead of myself, though. We have to keep reading. Let's pick it back up in verse 12.

"Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed."

Honest question. What's going on with the veil? What's he talking about? He's referring to a scene in Exodus 34 where Moses goes back up the mountain to renew the old covenant. He goes up the mountain, meets with God, comes back down, and unaware, he's glowing in the dark. People were like, "Dude, Moses, you're glowing in the dark, man," so he wore a veil over his face.

This is very interesting. There are multiple theories about why he wore the veil. One of them is simply that the people were scared to come talk to him because he was glowing in the dark, so he had to put a veil over his face because he wanted them not to be afraid to come talk to him. That's one theory.

The second theory is Moses was actually ashamed because the reflected glory of God... That's what was happening. He met with God, and that was reflecting off his face. It's unbelievable. That was fading. His face ended up going back to normal. He was ashamed of that, so he wore a veil.

Here's what we need to take away from this. In the old covenant, the veil represents fear and shame. In the old covenant, the glory of God is on the other side of that veil of fear and shame. In the old covenant, the glory of God is on the other side of performance. The old covenant said, "There's a perfectly glorious God, unimaginably so, and you need to be perfect, too, in order to come over here and interact with him. Go away. Get perfect. Come back and interact."

The problem is as people tried to do that, no one could do it. Everyone who tried... Well, all sinned and fell short of the glory, as the verse says. So, this veil of fear and

shame remains and separates the people on the one side from that glorious God on the other side. So, if this whole thing is about us experiencing his glory, this veil is a giant problem. Can we do something about the veil?

Next question: *How do we get rid of the veil?* I'm glad you asked. Let's keep reading. End of verse 14: **"...only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed."** This is so good. Christ takes the veil away. This is the gospel, technically.

Here's what happens. The old covenant says, "There's a perfectly glorious God over here. You need to be perfect to come over here and interact with him. Man's effort earns God." Jesus Christ doesn't throw it away; he fulfills it. He's like, "Yeah, man's effort earns God. You're the wrong man. I'm the right man. I will satisfy the conditions for you in your place." So, he lives the life you can't live, and he *is* perfect for you.

Then, secondly... Unbelievable. He's like, "You know what? Under the old covenant, you do need to die." Whoa! Intense. "And I'll do that too." Unbelievable. Right? So, he satisfies the old covenant, and secondly, simultaneously, he ushers in a new covenant, and it's really complex, guys. Are you ready? Get ready. He says, "You believe and receive what I've done for you."

He gives us new conditions. He's like, "You bring the sin; I'll bring the sacrifice. You get the grace; I get the glory." Then the veil is gone, and he qualifies you to interact with that glorious God. Come experience that glory, but not just behold it and look at it, but have a relationship with him. It's not a movie; it's a relationship. He makes you a son or a daughter, and that glorious God becomes your Father. It's amazing. We get to experience the glory of God.

Okay. Well, what happens as we start to experience the glory of God? A couple of things. Let's keep reading. Verse 18: **"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."**

The first thing that happens is you get transformed. You yourself get changed. As you behold him and interact with him, you start to become like him. You become what you behold as you start to do this. It makes me think of kids growing up with their parents. These kids live 18 years (hopefully just 18 years) at home with their parents. Half the time they idolize them, half the time they demonize them, seeing them every day, and then one day the kids grow up and leave the house.

Then a young man, maybe 25 years old, wakes up one morning, and he's like, "Oh my goodness. I'm just like Dad." He became what he beheld, for better or worse. Well,

the same thing is true of our spiritual transformation. As we start to live our life with him, we become like him. We start to love different things. We start to hate different things. He puts his Spirit inside of us. That Spirit has unique knowledge and a unique nature, and he conforms us into his image.

Guys, this is so practical. It sounds like it's theory, but I have one action item from the sermon today. If you do one thing, just do one thing: know him today. The veil is removed. Jesus Christ is real. He is alive. He's doing well. Get over there and walk with him today. I don't know what this looks like for you.

For some of you guys, your circumstances, your life... It feels like it's swallowing you up, and you haven't really talked with him about it yet. Go talk with him about it. God is your Father. Go commune with him about that. For some of you, he's telling you to do something, and you're like, "Shh! I'm busy with my own stuff." Don't do that. Stop doing that. Put your "Yes" on the table. Say "Yes" to him. Know him today.

Do that today, then do that again tomorrow, and he will do amazing things in and through you...amazing things. I'm convinced that this is the best gift some of you guys can give to the people closest to you, and only you can give it. The vibrancy of your own personal relationship with the Lord is the best gift that only you can give some of these people.

Parents, grandparents, what's a better gift for your kids or grandkids...debt-free college, a big inheritance, or that they see the transcendent joy Mom has because Mom knows God? That's a better gift, I promise. For some of you, your kids don't need more stuff. I know. I get it. I have kids. We want to give them the world, but they don't need more of our stuff, they don't need more of our money, but they could use more of Dad's joy, and Dad's joy comes from his relationship with Jesus.

Young people, what's a better gift to give your friends? That you're a good time? Young people are trading this all the time. "I'm a good time." "I'm a good time." "Cool. Let's trade that together." That's what they're doing all the time. Is that a better gift? Or if you're the only example your friends have ever seen of a person who has joy and freedom not tied to your situation, that would be a shocking gift to give a friend.

The vibrancy of your own personal relationship with the Lord is the greatest gift that only you can give, because people will get to know him better as they get to know you. That's what this is saying. We get transformed into his likeness. You're like, "Well, that sounds great, but I don't feel quite transformed to the point you're talking about."

So you might ask an honest question. "How quickly does this transformation happen exactly?" That's a good question. The answer is "Slowly." Let's read it again. Verse 18 says, ***"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."*** It happens one degree at a time. You can't microwave it. One day at a time.

Again, I think of my kids. I see them every morning. They look pretty much exactly the same to me, but then my phone will... I don't even know what you call it. You know, it suggests some pictures to you, and it starts playing some music. I see pictures of them from last Christmas, and it's like, "Oh my goodness! The transformation."

I take a screenshot. I text my wife. Heart emojis, crying face emojis, back and forth a little bit. You guys know what I'm talking about. The transformation is slow, but it's sure. It's happening. Spiritual transformation is the same way: slow but sure. Guys, this is very hopeful. This should give you hope for yourself and patience for those around you.

For yourself, just walk with him today. Don't make it too big. Don't beat yourself up for yesterday. Don't worry about tomorrow. Walk with him today. You're a finite person. All you have is this moment right now where you are. Be resolved to know him today. Do it again tomorrow. String together a lifetime of days like that, and one of these days, you'll wake up with the same mannerisms as Dad. You will. Very hopeful.

For those around us, I get it. It can be frustrating sometimes. Your spouse, one of your kids, or someone in your Community Group, maybe... I don't know. Not in *my* Community Group, but maybe one of *your* Community Groups. You're frustrated by the pace of change you see in these people's lives. It's like, "Why aren't you different yet? You've been a Christian for 25 years."

Let me encourage you to celebrate the "one degree at a time" change. Actually do that. Let me challenge you. Married people, find something that's one degree better in your spouse this week and tell them about it. That would be very encouraging to them, the same way it would encourage you. Don't be frustrated by the speed; be hopeful that the end is certain. The end, if you want to know... We will be like him, for we will see him like he is (1 John 3).

So, the first thing that happens is we experience his glory. As we get transformed, something else happens. I'm going to go back to verse 17. I wanted to end here. ***"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."*** As we experience him, as we live our lives with him, we get free.

There's a lot of confusion out there these days about what exactly freedom is. A lot of people think freedom is being able to do whatever you want to do, having access to do whatever you want to do. That's not freedom. The problem with that is you don't want to do the right thing.

That's part of freedom, but freedom is actually being able to do what you want to do with perfect knowledge and a perfect nature. We don't have that. That's not human. That only comes from the Holy Spirit. That's why this verse says, "**...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.**" He brings the knowledge and the nature to the equation to end at freedom.

Imagine behind me right here in the center of this stage there is a massive, beautiful grand piano (not that little thing back there; I'm talking about a nice big one right here in the middle), and I have two people come up here, and I give them the same prompt. "You're free to sit down and play whatever song you want, whatever song you love the most, whatever song will make you the happiest."

The first person comes up. She's like, "Oh, I know what I want to play." She's a 3-year-old girl. "I'm playing 'Baby Shark.' It's my favorite." "All right, kid. Knock yourself out. Play 'Baby Shark.' Go for it." She sits down. The problem, though, is she has never sat down at a piano before. She tries, but she can't figure it out. It's not coming out right. She ends up frustrated, just kind of banging on the keyboard.

That access for her is not freedom; it's actually bondage. She's bound by her knowledge. She doesn't have knowledge of music theory. By her nature, she doesn't have the natural ability to play the song she wants to play, and she gets frustrated. She's actually bound up at the end of that.

The second person comes up...different knowledge, different natural ability. This man's name is Beethoven. He sits down. He's like, "I've been working on a little something." He takes a deep breath and launches into Beethoven's Fifth. That's freedom. That man is free.

The life of freedom as we walk with Jesus and in step with his Spirit is so wonderful. It's so special. Some of you guys know what I'm talking about. Jesus is your Lord. The veil is removed. The Holy Spirit came in with his perfect knowledge and perfect nature, and you have a real relationship with him. You're starting to change. You're free. I didn't say you're perfect yet; I said you're free.

Some of you guys don't feel free and don't act free, even though you are, because you're still not perfect yet, but that's a lie. That's old covenant stuff. Listen to me. It's important. You don't get free when you get perfect; you *are* free because *he* was

perfect for you. You're free from needing to clean yourself up sufficiently to satisfy and impress the most glorious being in the universe. Stop that. You don't need to do that.

Some of y'all are doing that. You're in voluntary bondage, and it's terrible. Look. I know what it feels like. It's awful. I used to be there. It feels like he loved you part of the way, but for the rest of it, you need to be good enough to earn the rest of his love. Your guilt keeps telling you you have to keep trying. You're never going to get there, so stop it. Stop it. Lay it down. Cling to Jesus.

Like I said, I know what this is like. I've been there, not feeling free, not acting free. The Lord had to do a series of things in my life to break me out of this, but one thing felt particularly poignant to me. About 10 years ago, I was meeting with a mentor of mine, a godly man in his 60s, and I was beating myself up about something. I can't even remember what it was. I was just beating myself up about it.

He said, "Hey, Nate, do you know the song 'There Is a Fountain,' the old hymn?" I was like, "Yeah, I used to sing that song in church. I know that song." He said, "Sing it." I was like, "What? Right now, to you, sing it? You want me to sing that song?" He was like, "Yeah. Sing it." I did. I think I screwed up the melody, but it worked. Something about that pushed the truth from my head down into my heart.

Here's the truth. The truth is that sinners who get plunged beneath the flood of the blood of Jesus Christ, as that song says, lose *all* of their guilty stains. Not *most* of them. Not 90 percent of them, and you have to do the last 10 percent. That's not how Jesus does it. Sinners lose *all* of their guilty stains. Some of you guys need to hear that. I'm going to say it again. Look at me. Sinners lose *all* of their guilty stains...all the way clean, all the way free. That's how Jesus does it.

Would you guys bow your heads and close your eyes with me? I have one more question, but this one is not about the text; this one is for you. Are you free? Some of you have a sneaking suspicion that you are not. You're the 3-year-old trying to play "Baby Shark." You're trying to satisfy yourself with some super-low-level pursuits...financial freedom, sexual freedom...whatever the case may be.

But you're not getting there. It's not coming out right. You're pretty frustrated. You're banging on the keyboard. Some of you, though, have actually gotten there. You have more money than you know what to do with. You went after it, and you got it. You're doing things with your body you always wanted to be able to do, and you're just doing them. You're playing the song.

You've mastered the song, but you're frustrated, too, because it's the wrong song. As I'm saying it right now, you know it's you. Wrong song. The problem is you're pretty far down the road, and you don't know how to start playing a different song. You feel pretty uncomfortable right now. You kind of just want me to hurry up and finish so you can get out of here.

You're getting ready to walk out of here without doing anything. Do not do that. The Enemy of your soul wants you to do that. He wants to keep you locked up. Jesus Christ wants to give you freedom. He wants to do it right now. Look. You're a finite person. You're caught in *this* moment right now. You don't have yesterday. You don't have tomorrow.

You have *this* moment, and in this moment I would like to invite you to turn to Christ, to get the veil removed, to come and see that the greatest treasure in the entire universe... The best thing you could do with your life is just walk it with him, to get freed up. You don't need to know what all of the next steps are. Just take the first one. I'll even give you some words if you want to pray after me.

"Lord Jesus, I'm frustrated. I am not free. I'm playing the wrong song, but I'm ready to start playing a different song. I'm ready for a new set of conditions, so I'll take yours. I'll bring the sin. I have a lot of it. I'll bring all of it. You bring the sacrifice. I'll take your grace. I'll give you glory.

Be my Savior and be my Lord. You can lead my life. I clearly don't know how to lead my life in a way that makes a lot of sense, so you can do that too. And be my treasure. You're the most worthy thing in the entire universe. I'm ready to start treating you like it. Be my treasure."

If you just prayed something like that, you just opened the best gift in the universe. I'm so happy for you. We're so happy for you. You need to tell somebody. Tell somebody you came with. We're going to have people down here during the next couple of songs. You can tell them. Walk up and talk to them.

If all that sounds too scary, there are cards underneath your seats. Just fill out "I received Jesus," and we'll reach out to you. We'll talk to you. I'm going to pray one more time, and then we're going to sing together.

O Lord Jesus, thank you for that new set of conditions. We get the life. We get the freedom. We get the peace. We get the joy. We get the grace. You get the glory. Get glory now as we sing out our freedom.