



Preparing for the Kingdom-Part 7

Teaming Up to Prepare Our Generation

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Well, here's a stat for you: 10% of the people—so they say in statistical land—in this room will not be here a year from now. Not because you die. That's the good news. Ten percent of you, so the stats say, won't be here because you will choose to leave. You're done.

Now, if you do the research and look at why people leave churches, some of them learn to hate the pastor, which I understand. But a lot of the reason—for instance, I'm just quoting now the Francis Schaeffer Institute of Leadership—they say the reason people leave, the primary stated reasons, they categorize with these three words: gossip, strife, conflict. Those are interpersonal problems that connect the person with some kind of a bump in the road of the people in their church.

It's like the snarky comment I got from a guy when I asked him, "Well, how is your church going?" And he said this, he said, "Well, my church would be great if it weren't for the people." And I thought, you know, I get what he's saying—his snarky comment—but I thought, you know, the idea of church becomes problematic when I run into, you know, something that just torques me, tweaks me, it makes me upset, it hurts my feelings, something goes wrong where relationally there's a conflict, and then I'm out the door. I'm done.

Now, the problem with that is that God has called Christians—though we enter the kingdom one person at a time—he's called us in our mission, see, to advance the kingdom, to invest in the kingdom as a corporate job. It is a team project. It is something that we do together. And as much as we want to resist that—I mean, I think we like the idea of being a team—but we resist it. And you see this in so many people who claim Christ: they really live, even if they are in the doors of the church on the weekend, they still live an independent, isolated, detached Christian life. And that's one that, unfortunately, from every page in the New Testament—I mean, we're shouted at from the pen of the apostles—that's just unacceptable. It's wrong. Not only is it wrong, God is never going to advance his kingdom through Christians that are detached and isolated and independent. God has called us to work together as a team.

So what we need to do, if that's the case, is we need to be able to work on these issues like gossip and conflict and slander—things that happen relationally in the church. We have to remedy those; we have to fix those; we need to safeguard against those.



Well, that's my job this morning. As we reach the last installment of our series in "Preparing for the Kingdom," we've come to the first three verses of Luke 8—which may be odd. And we're going to study the first verses of a new chapter for our last installment of this seven-part series. And that's because, if you open your Bibles and look at it, you'll see this is clearly a transitional little paragraph here in verses 1–3 of Luke chapter 8. The people who put numbers and chapter divisions there in the text in the 13th century had to decide whether this goes better with chapter 8 or better with chapter 7. Now, you can see I just did a series for seven weeks on chapter 7—actually six weeks of it so far—and I'm putting this as the last installment of chapter 7. So my contention is, this fits better with chapter 7, but no one in the 13th century was consulting me. So that's why it starts chapter 8. But you'll see in verse number 4, now we get a whole explanation of the parables. And that's the new series that's coming up. And we'll see that next week. We'll advertise that and give you all the info on that. But today, let's wrap up chapter 7 with the first three verses of chapter 8 as we look at the way God assembled his team.

Christ puts together a team, and it's very diverse—people that are very dissimilar. As a matter of fact, if you look at the people in this text, some that are represented by a number and some by names, you'll start to say, "Well, wait a minute, that's the kind of group that's just waiting for conflict." I mean, this looks like the chemistry you would have for people that are going to have personal problems and interpersonal relational problems. And I totally understand that; that makes perfect sense. But I think this is—everything in Christ's ministry—very intentional, and we can learn from it.

What we can do is look at the dissimilarities in this list, and we can start to say, "Okay, this is how we recognize Christ builds his team." Clearly he doesn't think this is a liability; he thinks it's an asset. This apparently is parlayed somehow in his plan to be something that works in favor of our mission and not against it. And so it's important for us to take this text and learn from it. And as you'll see, if you pulled out your worksheet, I've broken this down into four categories, four different ways to look at this idea of our relationships. And here's the goal: to look at the way we can kind of spell this out and see the things in this text, and then start to say, "Okay, if I run into a problem that relates to any of these—these four things—I want to make sure I don't become the casualty who gets my feelings hurt, has a problem, has a conflict, has some disagreement with somebody, and says, 'I'm done,' and we walk out the door."

I suppose you can be a chronic church hopper—and some of you are, I suppose—you know, you've been here for a couple years, then you're going to leave, and then you've been to another church for a few more years. Some of you people make that your habit. And that's almost as bad as the Christian that gives up on church altogether. But the idea is, we'd like to work through our problems so we don't



have these issues to where people are coming and going and 10% of the church runs out the back door in a given 12-month period.

Okay? With all that said, let's read the text and see if we can't safeguard our hearts and our relationships by learning something about ourselves and our teammates here in the first three verses of Luke 8.

"Soon afterward"—we're in Luke 8 now—Luke 8:1: "Soon afterward" (and again, I guess we've got to ask, "After what?" We'll look back up; you'll remember when your pastor was laying on the ground last week at Simon the Pharisee, and you had the sinful woman of chapter 7, having this meal with Christ, and all of that goes on). "Well, soon after that"—which was somewhere in the region of Galilee; doesn't tell us where, maybe Capernaum—he goes on from there through city to city and village to village. "Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God."

So we get all this discussion that we've had in chapter 7, and now we see he's on a mission. He wants to advance the borders of the kingdom. That's what we should be all about. "I'll make you fishers of men." "Go make disciples of all nations." Our idea should be what this is depicting. And now he's going to describe who's a part of that team. And here's where we can learn from this text and, I hope, safeguard our church from the kind of conflict, division, gossip, strife that often plagues churches.

Ready? "And the twelve were with him." Okay, the Twelve. Who are the Twelve? Well, we've already studied them earlier in the Gospel of Luke. These are the disciples that were gathered together, and from the disciples we pick twelve and we named them apostles—we studied that. So there are the Twelve.

"And also" (v. 2) "some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities." And now he lists them. "Mary, called Magdalene." (Some people, by the way—sidebar—you remember last time I tried to make this clear: the sinful woman of chapter 7 is not Mary Magdalene. If it was, clearly in the next section he named her; he would have named her in that last story. And though it is a very popular supposition of church history to think that the woman of chapter 7, the sinful woman, is Mary Magdalene, that's just really outside the realm of possibility, because it makes no sense that that would be Mary Magdalene. Not that she doesn't have a very sordid past, as we read next.) "Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out." Wow. That's weird. What's that like? Okay, well, trying to think that through.



“And Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager.” Now, the Herod in view during the life of Christ is Herod Antipas, and he is in the region overseeing here in Galilee as a governor. And you’ve got Herod Antipas—he’s got this household manager named Chuza. His wife now has joined the team going from city to city throughout Galilee, and village to village throughout Galilee, and she’s a part of his band. “And” another woman named “Susanna” (bottom of verse 3), “and many others,” but we don’t learn much about her other than this: “who provided for them out of their means.” So apparently Susanna had a pretty big checkbook, and she’s writing a few checks, and a lot of things are being underwritten by people like her.

So: Mary, Joanna, Susanna, the Twelve—that is a very dissimilar group the more you think about it, and we can learn a lot from that. So let’s try and do that this morning, starting with verse number 1 and just thinking about the mission and the designation of the Twelve.

“Soon afterward” (v. 1) “he went out through the cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.” Part of his gang here: “the Twelve were with him.” Now, here’s my question: If you’re going to list a bunch of people beyond the Twelve, then why isn’t the Twelve the fifteen, or the sixteen—or “many others”? Why isn’t it the thirty-two or the sixty-four or the one-twenty-eight? Why is it “the Twelve”? And if you think about that, you can see where the Twelve—if they’re just the Twelve and others are just added to the Twelve, there’s the Twelve plus some people—you can see, can’t you, where that would cause some relational conflict. Because, I don’t know, I’m Mary Magdalene; I’m thinking, “Why can’t I be a part of the Twelve? I’m listed often in some very important historic situations. I’m there at the empty tomb. I’m the first one to proclaim the risen Christ. I mean, shouldn’t I be a part of that?” Well, apparently, according to Christ, she’s not a part of the Twelve. “Well, that seems pretty elitist. That seems pretty—I don’t like—there’s too much distinction here among us.”

Here’s what we need to note as we get started: In the body of Christ today, much like in the band of disciples in the first century, Jesus chooses, by his own sovereign choice, for there to be divisions and distinctions of roles—not of worth, but of roles—in the body of Christ, in his band of disciples. And that’s something we need to—number one in your outline—we need to learn to respect. Because he makes the rules, and he decides what he wants to do with it. If he wants there to be the three or the seven or the twelve or the twenty-four and say, “Well, this band is different; they do a different thing than this,” then he’s got the right to do that. He chooses to place people in his band of disciples any way he wants.



Now, in the Church of Christ you have some very distinct bands or groups. You have two primary ones that are spelled out in the Pastoral Epistles. You have the pastors (Greek word *poimēn*—they’re called; another word for them is the shepherds). There are two other Greek words that are synonymously used: the *episkopos*, the overseers, and the *presbyteros*, the elders. So the elders, overseers, pastors, shepherds—whatever you want to call them—that’s the one group, and that’s designated from the rest of the body of Christ. There’s a distinction there. And if you read through 1 Timothy and Titus, you’ll find there’s a bunch of requirements, and you cannot be in that group unless you meet this criteria. And—you want one to be inflammatory and controversial for 20th-century evangelical churches?—here’s something about it: it can only be men. Ooh. Can only be men. “Only the men? That’s so elitist, patriarchal.” All I’m telling you is that one thing we need to do when we get into the economy of Jesus Christ is start to realize when he does certain things in setting up certain roles within the church (and the home—that’s a whole different sermon), you recognize he’s making his rules and appointing people with the certain criteria that he wants to pick, based on whatever he chooses. He’s got the right to do that. He could have said the pastors only could be women. He could have said pastors can only be teenagers. No—just kidding. Perhaps he could, who knows? He could do it any way he wants. And by the way, for those of you that you’re getting really upset about this part here because you watch culture—I dare you to look at any time the issue of gender is brought up in the pastoral designation within the church: if you can somehow tie that to culture—it’s always transcending culture. And it’s always tied to God’s plan and how he wants it, often tying it to the roles in marriage and home. And you can see these things transcend culture; it has nothing to do with a Greco-Roman or Judaism culture. This is all about his decision to place people within the church the way he wants.

You also have the ministry leaders. You can’t be a ministry leader without meeting some criteria. The word is twofold, and it’s not gender-specific: the *diakona* and the *diakonos*—these female and male ministry leaders that are appointed by the elders, the pastors, the overseers. And those are a certain group that are distinct from other groups in the church. And even within those ministry leaders, they often appoint people—as you see in any church like ours—who do certain tasks and certain roles, and sometimes there’s a form to fill out, and sometimes there’s some kind of vetting process. And you find all these distinctions within the church to make it work the way that God set it up to work.

And the problem is, that can cause issues. That can cause strife. It can make it feel like there are cliques. It can make it feel like, “I don’t know—what—they seem superior and I must be inferior. And I don’t want to be seen as inferior; I want to be...” We start to make the strata within the church be some kind of hierarchy. And here’s the thing: The Bible is constantly addressing that and saying, Do not let the distinctions of roles within the church and the home—don’t let those things ever become issues of interpersonal conflict.

Let me show you the classic text on this in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. Let’s spend a little time there—1 Corinthians chapter 12. Yes, I understand there were the Twelve that Jesus designates from the rest.



That's his prerogative. Why? Verse 18—1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 18. Let's start in the middle of this discussion: "But as it is"—I'm quoting here, verse 18—"God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose."

Now, the context here is not only the appointment or the ordination or the designation of church leaders by a criteria that is spelled out in Scripture. Sometimes it's just spelled out by people's gifting, if you will—their endowment of God to do certain things. We have a worship band up here; some of you will never be in the worship band—praise God for that. Why? Because you don't have the equipment to do it. And I'm not saying you don't have the drum set or the guitar; you don't have the ability to do it. God has not endowed you with the gifts to do it. There's a distinction there, and it's based on his provision in your life. Some of you will never work on the soundboard—and that's a good thing as well—because you can't even, you know, get your DVR to work right or whatever. So we don't want you messing with that thing because it's way more complicated. Some of you will never work with the kids in our church because you don't have the patience for it, or you don't have the skill set. There are all kinds of distinctions made based on the gifting of the people in the church. And the point is, we shouldn't look at the distinctions of roles in the church and start to get all uptight about those. We have to learn to respect them. You do something I don't do; I do something you don't do. We all have our role.

And that's how it starts in verse 12. Let's get the context now—1 Corinthians 12:12: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though there are many, are one body, so it is with Christ." Your body is a homogenized one unit, and that's the thing—something happens to one part, it affects the whole thing. Everyone plays a different role. Certain things in your body function for certain purposes and not for other purposes, and that's just the way it is. It's a simple illustration.

Now look at verse 13: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body"—right? Baptism—we were placed into one body. See, the moment you repented of your sins and put your trust in Christ—whether you could sing or not sing, whether you could teach, whether you're qualified to lead in the church in terms of a pastor or a minister—it doesn't matter. If you were a Christian, if you are a Christian, you've been placed into Christ: Jew, Greek, slave, free, talented—whatever—doesn't matter. "And we were all made to drink of one Spirit." You can see, laid in here under the surface, these allusions to baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are just expressions externally of the realities of being placed into Christ and ingesting the Spirit of God—being indwelt by the Spirit.



“For the body does not consist of one member but of many.” What really makes us a body is that we all have been placed into Christ through that act of justification that God does for us, and being indwelt by the Spirit of God. So now you’re really different in terms of your role.

Verse 15: “If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body’”—that hand’s always up there, flitting around, “Wave! Hi!” The foot says, “They always put me in socks and shoes, and no one ever looks at me, and I hate it. I don’t like it. I don’t get to be seen. No one knows me. Those guys get up on the stage and they do their thing. Hmm, I quit. I’m leaving.” The point is: it doesn’t matter what your role is. If you are part of the body of Christ... Now, again, Paul is speaking to a localized congregation—the congregation at Corinth—and I’m speaking to you, the congregation at Compass AV. And in our church, you have a role to play. And it may not be the role that someone else is playing. And you may look at that other role and say, “Well, that’s more prominent; that’s more important.” And “I am not in that prominent position.” And you have this fleshly, envious desire to be in some spotlight that you’re not in. And you say, “Because I can’t get in there,” or “they won’t qualify me to do it,” or “I’m not vetted to do it,” or “I don’t fit into that—then I’m out of here.” People leave churches all the time for that kind of thought. And all I’m telling you is that’s the wrong reason to leave a church. It’s the wrong reason for you to back out. It’s the wrong reason for you to move from that collaborative, interdependent community of people that are trying to reach people for Christ into that more independent, isolated, detached Christian life, which so many people live.

Verse 16: “If the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body’...” “I am always here hanging off the side of the head. I don’t look as pretty as those eyeballs.” Because you’re not an eye, you can’t say you don’t belong. Of course you belong. That would not make it any less a part of the body. We need the ear—as ugly as it is. Sorry—not that your ears are ugly, but they don’t look as good as eyes, right?

Verse 17: “If the whole body were an eye...” Okay, let’s make the one big eyeball—Twilight Zone, 1960s. Thank you—someone was watching TV back then in the opening credits. “Where would the sense of hearing be?” Thank you—“Where would the sense...” (I’m glad you’re coming; please don’t leave the church, whoever you are. I need the encouragement; you’re playing a very important role in my life.) “If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.” If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

Now we’re going to flip this around. Someone who’s not “in-group” in their mind—they get envious and jealous and they start whatever they start doing to detach, pull back, maybe even attacking those in the “in-group.” Look at this now: Hey, in-group people—“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no



need of you.” One of the things I often pray with our leaders—we always pray; several prayer meetings go on before our service—and one thing I often pray, and they can attest to this when I’m getting a chance to lead in those prayers, I’ll say things like this: “The amazing thing about church is, we could have all of these messages to preach and all these songs to sing and all this stuff—that we could call a meeting, and no one could show up. And then what would we do?” I’m just thinking, just at the basic assembling together on Sunday morning: none of this happens without the totality of the church. And I’m just saying, you’ve got the idea where you can never feel a sense of superiority because you have a position that other people might envy. Because in reality, none of this works without the totality of the body.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘Well, you know what, I don’t need you,’ or the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary”—as a matter of fact, look at this now; this gets important (it’s all important, but look at this)—“on the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.” Think of your human body—the parts that don’t get a lot of, you know, attention; you don’t spend any time making them look good. You don’t want to do without those parts of the body; they’re indispensable. “And on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty.” Let’s just think of the parts that no one sees. Here’s a really gross and weird illustration—but we’ve already had a couple, so let’s keep going. If I were to take my chest here and crack it open and show you the inside of my torso like some horror movie, and you saw my heart beating, my lungs and my liver, my spleen—you’d be like, “Gross!” And if I looked in a mirror at that and then looked in the mirror, I’d be like, “Oh—gross.” And because I don’t want to see it, or because I think, “Let’s just keep that all buttoned up in the rib cage,” what am I saying? It’s not important? Because I never put my spleen on display? Because my liver never, you know, gets any attention in the morning before I go out to preach? No. What’s the point? It’s very important, even though it’s not seen. As a matter of fact, I would much rather have a crooked nose than a liver that doesn’t work. There are parts that you may spend more attention looking at and attending to, but when your doctor says, “You have a problem with your heart,” or “your earlobe,” I’ll take the earlobe problem. See what I’m saying?

The point of the church is: there are parts that are not seen; they’re not the enviable parts of the church. They’re just as important. As a matter of fact—keep reading—verse 24: “Which our more presentable parts do not require.” We treat them with modesty—middle of verse 24—“but God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body.” Can we just get over these divisions? And by that I don’t mean there aren’t divisions—clearly there are people that do this and do that. But the division is the division of value. Let’s not value anybody more than the other; we’re all important in this thing. “And that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”



Very important that we respect the varied posts and positions in our church—they're all important. Let me add this passage. We won't take time to turn there, but jot it down—1 Peter 4:7–11. Here's the bottom line: You look around the church and you see someone directing traffic in the parking lot, and you see someone preaching on the stage; you see someone passing out bulletins; you see someone singing songs on the stage in solos. Whatever the position is, whatever the role is, as a church we are to meld together to try and advance the kingdom. That's what it's all about. And 1 Peter 4 makes that very clear: doesn't matter what your gift is, let's be good stewards of the varied grace of God, and let us use whatever role God has given us to advance the cause of Christ—which in part means that we make this church and all that we do (our programs, our outreach, our preaching, our worship) as excellent as it can possibly be. And that's how it ends: "To him be glory and dominion forever and ever." Let's make sure God is glorified—that every part of our body is doing exactly what it's called to do.

Verse 2—Luke 8, printed on your worksheet. We've got the Twelve. It's not to be the cause of envy or strife among the disciples. Yeah, there are only twelve. There aren't fifteen, there aren't twenty-four. There are people that are not a part of the Twelve. Doesn't mean they're not important. They're very important—as is and has been already highlighted by the fact that Mary Magdalene plays a very important role throughout the Gospels as a key figure among the disciples. And she's described this way: "Some of the women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary Magdalene" (who elsewhere is described as Mary Magdalene who's there at the crucifixion and the resurrection). She's apparently a very important figure among the disciples. She's described here as being one "from whom seven demons had gone out."

Now, that is quite a testimony. Let's picture the testimony night: we're going to have a testimony night—microphones over here. And Mary Magdalene, by the way, is just the city she's from—she's from the city of Magdala (which means tower), which was on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. And she's Mary from Magdala—Mary Magdalene. And she is described here as someone with a past that really makes people sit up during testimony night. "Tell us about your life." "Well, before I met Christ, my life was invaded by, influenced by, seven demons." Now, she only knew that because Christ told her that that was the reality. But the reality was that those seven demons didn't spell good news for her. It's bad. I don't know what it meant, other than I can look through the study of the New Testament and find how demons affect people—and it's never good. Have you noticed that? Never good.

What kinds of things do we see? Let me give you a dramatic example. As long as you're in Luke 8, drop down to verse number 27. Here's an example—just an example—of a guy with multiple demons messing with his life: verse 27. "When Jesus had stepped out on land"—we'll get to this soon enough—"there met him a man from the city who had demons." Okay—who else had demons? Mary Magdalene before she became a Christian. "For a long time this man"—check this out—"had worn no clothes." Now, this isn't stepping from the shower to the closet. "For a long time." Picture that—not for very long, but picture—how long have you not worn clothes? "A long time." "What is wrong with



you?” And then look where he lives: “He did not live in a house but among the tombs.” You go visit your, you know, your family member’s grave—you see a naked guy running around the cemetery. “Problems?” “You got, man—you got serious problems.” “What’s your problem?” “In that case—hey, I got demons.” I don’t know if he would even know that, but Jesus could diagnose the problem and say, “You’re really messed up.”

Now there’s an extreme example. But can you imagine this guy giving his testimony and then being a key figure among the disciples? Now that’s a very different passage. And Peter—a work-a-day blue-collar fisherman running a fishing business. I’m just trying to make you see that: very different background. Very different background. The Sabbath School graduate who becomes a follower of Christ, and Mary Magdalene had seven demons. You keep looking throughout the New Testament at this—and we did this in our Angelology series on Thursday nights not long ago—you’ll see the kinds of things that demons are accredited in doing: things like cutting—cutting themselves—suicidal tendencies, infirmity, sickness, all kinds of things that made them appear to be crazy, all kinds of self-destructive things; the demonic activity, including, you know, the chemical—you know, recreational chemical use—all that kind of stuff we see throughout the New Testament. So I don’t know what her testimony looked like because it doesn’t give us more than this: she had seven demons that were now gone. But that’s a very impressive testimony.

Okay, this—what I’ve tried to paint a picture of—is a varied set of pasts, a varied set of résumés—let’s put it down that way. We need to learn to never disdain them, because Christ didn’t. Mary had a sordid past; Peter didn’t. What are we saying? Well, Peter should not look at Mary and go, “You really shouldn’t be going from city to city with us because, you remember, your past was really bad.” Jesus in no way allowed people to disdain, to look down upon, to scorn, to think less of people because of their past.

Now, let’s think this through in terms of our auditorium. Talk about the microphone—let’s put the microphone up right here—picture it. And we’re going to have testimony night—all day. We’re just going to go through and hear everybody’s testimony, and no one gets out of it. Everyone—if you claim to be a Christian, a follower of Christ—you’re going to give your testimony today (or the next three days—maybe a long service). So we’re going to be serving food; we’re going to listen to everybody’s testimony. And you’re going to start to remember the ones that are really juicy, really crazy. “Oh, tell us more.” And it’s honest testimony—you can’t inflate it and you can’t downplay it; you’re going to tell it exactly. “Tell us how bad it was in your life as a non-Christian; we want to hear it all, man.” And so we get to hear your testimonies.



Now, you can imagine the spectrum we'd have in this room right now, right? Some people—they'd be up there saying, "Well, you know, I grew up in a Christian home, and, you know, I just remember when the gospel was getting a hold of me—I just, I could tell it: a lot of things in my life—my life was just about me. And then I just was—yeah—and then God got a hold of my life and, man, I could just tell—it was so great then to stop with all this stuff that just was living for me. And I was living for Christ. And, you know, it was great. And I just kind of—I saw my priorities change. I love for the Word of God." "Hmm." Yeah—that would be the reaction—boring testimony. And you'd say, "Can we get on to another one?"

And then another guy gets in: "Oh, let me tell you, man—little Mr. Goody Two-Shoes over here—I got a story for you." And off they go. And it's crazy. Let's pick the extreme one in the room: crazy—criminal activity, drug activity—I mean, who knows? You picture it as worse as you can picture it, and there it is. And then they say, "And then I came to Christ, man. Wow—my life was radically changed, but that sordid past, man—well, I mean, I dealt drugs, I pimped, I killed people, I... you know, I..." Whatever it was—kidnapped people; I was terrible—picture it. "No—great." You got those two. And now you're like, "Oh man, isn't it great the Lord got ahold of your life—what a great testimony. Cool—man, it's awesome; I'll remember that one."

Okay, and then I interrupt. We've heard some boring testimonies and some exciting testimonies. And I say, "Oh, by the way, we—we're just announcing our revival (14 out at Lake Havasu as well). I know—we need to pick a couple of camp counselors—going to be living with our teens that week and influencing our teens. So let's see, I'm going to pick some..." And you're like, "Oh—boring guy! Pick the boring guy. Boring guy—my teenager is going on that trip. Keep them away from 'great testimony.' We're going to call you when we have that real outreach program; we'll let you tell your whole sordid story, but stay away from my kid."

Don't tell me that's not part of how your brain would think. You might applaud him for his wonderful testimony—"Wow, how many people did you kill? Oh Lord—you're free from that, you are so godly now; it's awesome to hear. Stay away from the kids' department." Jesus didn't think that way. As a matter of fact, he said this: he lists all those things—you remember in 1 Corinthians 6, he talks about adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, idolaters—he says, "And such were some of you. But you were washed; you were justified; you were set apart—sanctified—by the Lord Jesus Christ." That's an amazing statement. And the point is—to kind of ramp ahead to a passage that I know you know—2 Corinthians chapter 5. I'd like you to look at that because we all memorize verse 17, but we really don't remember verse 16 very often. But the whole point of verse 17—which is this; I'll quote it for you while you turn there: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed" (it's gone away), "and the new has come." Now you go, "Oh, let's teach our kids that, because that's awesome. That's a great verse. Your past is gone; new has come."



Here is the predication; here is the foundation of why that statement was made in the context of 2 Corinthians 5. And you look at verse 16: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh." You know what that means? Past doesn't matter. Not going to disdain anybody's past—doesn't matter who you were, doesn't matter what you did. Keep reading, verse 16: "Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh..." Now, all you do is read the Gospels: how often did they regard Christ based on—"Well, he grew up here; isn't he the son of the carpenter? Didn't his brothers and sisters play with us in the streets here when we were growing up?" How about Philip and Nathanael—"Can anything good come out of Nazareth? I know that town—that's a podunk; no way the Messiah is coming from there." People looked at their past, their résumé, and they said, "Don't believe; don't believe it. You're nobody special." People regarded Christ according to the flesh. But look at the bottom of verse 16: "We regard him thus no longer." We don't care what kind of package he came in; we don't care what his past was; I don't care what village he came from. We know who he is—and who he is is the Christ, the Messiah.

Oh, and by the way, if you are a Christian—a follower of Christ—you are a new creation (verse 17). And that is why (verse 16) we don't regard anybody according to the flesh anymore. Doesn't matter.

Make this very clear: You are never, ever—in the body of Christ—ever allowed to disdain anybody for their past. And in this church there will be factions that will often turn into groups and friends and networks that are based on what the world would base them on; and that is, "We are kind of alike; we have a similar background." Your background doesn't matter, because according to the Bible it's past—"such were some of you." Now all that matters is whether or not I'm a new creation in Christ. That's it. That's what matters. Never disdain someone's past.

You remember Saul, who became Paul in the New Testament? He had a sordid past, did he not? What was he—what does he say in 1 Timothy? Murderer, blasphemer. Remember when he was converted in Acts chapter 9 and he tried to associate with the apostles—what did they say? "Oh, come on, man! It's so great! It's awesome—you're converted, new creature in Christ. Forget your past." Is that what they did? No way. "I don't want you in our group." One guy though, who had this principle right—"We regard no one according to the flesh. We understand your testimony; we recognize you're different; we're not going to hold your past against you." What was his name? Sunday School graduates—Barnabas. Remember? Barnabas was willing to step out, put his arm around Saul (who would later become Paul—right? The Paul of the New Testament) and said, "Hey, come on—you're a new creature in Christ. I don't care about your past."



As a matter of fact, let me quote that passage that I just referenced—and that’s 1 Timothy chapter 1. When Paul is telling his testimony—you don’t need to turn there necessarily, but in verses 15 and 16—here’s the whole point about your past. I know it doesn’t matter. And you think, “Well, if it doesn’t matter anymore, then Paul would never reference it.” He does reference it. And when he references it, he references it for this reason: to advance the kingdom. Let me read for you a little bit from this. “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—that’s the gospel, at least the kernel of the gospel message—“of whom I am the foremost.” “I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display his perfect patience as”—here’s the key word—“an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”

You know what your role—as 1 Peter 4 says—should be utilized and leveraged for the advancement of the kingdom? Your past should be utilized and leveraged for the advancement of the kingdom. The only reason your past matters—I don’t care if you’re a drug dealer or the typical church kid—what matters is that when you tell your story, you tell your story and you utilize that story as an example of God’s patience. Because God, by the way, is patient not only with the tax collector but also with the Pharisee; with the murderer and also with the Sunday School graduate. God’s perfect patience is displayed in both, in different ways. So use your past to prepare our generation for the coming kingdom. Respect the varied posts. Never disdain the varied pasts.

Verse 3—Luke 8 printed on your worksheet. There was another gal on the list that Luke wanted to highlight. Her name was Joanna (who also shows up at the end of Christ’s life as a key figure there—we’ll get to that at the end of the book of Luke, Lord willing). But she’s described here in a way that we don’t have this information anywhere else. Luke tells us—the quintessential historian—he’s done his homework. Joanna was the wife of Chuza, and Chuza was Herod’s household manager.

Now, lots of Herods in the New Testament, but the one here in view is Herod Antipas. We’re still in Galilee—probably in and around the area of Capernaum or the Decapolis or somewhere up there north. And we’ve got this gal—Joanna—name-dropped. Now her husband, Chuza—manager of his household (Herod’s house)—Herod, you know, he’s governor, he’s in charge, he’s got the money, he’s got the power, he’s got the resources. Now, who’s this guy—the manager of his household? If you think of a butler, you’re thinking of the wrong kind of person. This phrase is used in classical Greek to describe someone who is in charge of the estate. This is not the guy with the towel over his arm going, “Oh, can I help you, Herod?” That’s not him. This is the guy—it’s actually, in some lexicons, defined basically as the financial manager—the CFO—of Herod’s estate.

Now picture that. You got Peter, James, and John—and in walks Joanna. What’s she looking like? She ain’t looking like any of Peter’s old girlfriends. This is a different kind of gal here. She’s got contacts



in her smartphone Peter would never, ever have. Thomas is like, “Whoa—your husband works for what? Unbelievable.”

Now, I should juxtapose that to the Twelve—and I already preached a long sermon on that. And you might remember some of that as we worked through the list. Let’s start with Peter—Simon Peter—fisherman. James and John—fishermen. Go down the list to the other Simon—he was called Simon (to distinguish him) “the Zealot.” And if you were with us in that message and you have a good memory, you remember we equated him to some word in our day that makes a lot of sense and compares well to what the Zealot political party was all about. We called him a “terrorist.” Think about that. He’s the guy coming to Bible study with his bandana on—now a Christian, now living for Christ—Simon the Zealot. Now picture that, and throw in guys like Levi, if you want—Matthew—who’s the rich tax collector. You got Matthew; you got Simon; you got the other Simon; you got Peter, James, and John—James and John, Sons of Thunder—these, you know, fiery personalities. And then in walks Joanna. Joanna. You think, “Well, this is the weirdest, dissimilar, most diverse group I’ve ever seen.” And they’re pulling together—here’s our good verb—melded together to do ministry for Christ. And she sits there and talks about people and circles and events these guys know nothing of.

Let’s put it this way—number three: That’s not a liability; that’s an asset—an asset for which we should be grateful. Number three: be grateful for the varied professions. Be grateful for the varied professions.

Now, in this room we’ve got a variety of posts all pulled together for the cause of the kingdom. We have varied pasts—some are very exciting to hear on testimony night, and others are boring. Then we have varied professions. Let’s go in the lobby and let’s exchange business cards. And let’s see what we’ve got going on. Very interesting—“What do you do? What does your husband do? Where does your family live? What kind of office? What’s your nine-to-five look like?” You have people that don’t even have business cards—“They’re not handing out business cards at my work.” Okay—we got those guys. And then we got guys that if we really found out what they were like—and some of you think, “I don’t even know, but I kind of suspect the guy’s, like, really important—some big important...” Look, we’ve got all over the spectrum.

And here’s what I’m saying: This is not an issue of who you are. Follow this logic now. Your profession does not tell me who you are. That’s how the world looks at it. But we “regard no one according to the flesh.” Here’s what your occupation tells us: it tells us where you are. That’s the difference. Now think this through as kingdom-advancing Christians. I don’t care what your job is to tell me who you are. I only care what your job is to tell me where you are. What does that mean? What kind of sphere of influence you have; what kind of network of connections that you have. That’s the



way the Bible thinks. The Bible thinks that way while the world thinks about, “That guy’s important.” And we build the hierarchy again—“That guy’s important; that guy’s not important. That family’s a family of prominence because they have this big influential profession and they’ve got all this stuff,” and “These people are not.”

We cannot build that hierarchy. One passage on this and we’ll be done—James chapter 2. Done with this point—James chapter 2. You might remember this text as a text where there’s a key prohibition, and it’s described this way: partiality. Remember that word? When you make distinctions and you start to gradate in your mind—this person’s more important. And really, though the accoutrements of that importance is spelled out in this text as a money issue, really the money is connected to the power, the prestige, the profession. I mean, that really is usually the backdrop—unless you’re the Hilton girls or something.

So James chapter 2—are you still with me on this? Verse 1: “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory”—which is a great statement, by the way, because all that really matters is whether or not I trust in Christ, who is the Lord of glory. What makes me significant—what defines who I am—is who I’m connected with.

Now, here’s the problem: you’re going to have a man that comes in—maybe this is Joanna’s husband Chuza—right? Here comes Chuza with his gold ring and fine clothes because he’s an important guy working as the CFO of Herod Antipas. He comes into your assembly. “And a poor man”—you got one of Peter’s old friends he used to fish with—he’s in shabby clothes; he smells a little like fish; he comes in. “And if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there,’ or ‘Sit down at my feet’—have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” Now again, there’s the word “distinctions.” And both times we get that: there are distinctions—and they’re legitimate distinctions, and the world recognizes those distinctions. And even in our church we have distinctions in roles and distinctions in pasts. But we don’t consider those distinctions distinctions of value. That’s not the important part. What matters is if you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

“Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith”—isn’t that all that matters?—“and heirs of the kingdom”—doesn’t it just matter if we’re in the kingdom and a part of this?—“which he has promised to those who love him?” Doesn’t it just matter if you love the Lord—isn’t that the important thing? “But you have dishonored the poor man.” Because all you defined him as is by his job and his income and his profession and his money. “Are not the rich”—you want to think all the rich are inherently great? No, they’re not great; they’re not all inherently great. Often—all you do is look at your past—you’ll see a lot of times it’s the rich man who



“oppresses you” and “drags you into court.” “Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?”

“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture”—what’s the Old Testament say?—“‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.” Now, here’s the thing about yourself: you care for yourself regardless of your profession, do you not? I mean, you get up in the morning and you brush your teeth—you don’t refuse to brush your teeth—“Until you get that promotion, I’m not brushing those teeth.” You care for yourself indiscriminate of your status in society. If you would do that with other people—man, you’d be doing well. “But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” Because the law says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

So I have to recognize the varied professions in our church may be the cause for envy, jealousy, and some kind of strife at some point—even the cliques that might naturally form in the church. But that natural tendency to see profession as defining a person needs to be replaced with what? “Hey, I’m really thankful that Joanna is a part of our group, because now we got an ‘in’ with Herod’s household.” “Hey, I’m glad that Peter is a part of our group,” Joanna says, “and Mary Magdalene, because now we got an ‘in’ with those fishermen on the Sea of Galilee.” We want to be ministry-minded; we have to be mission-focused. We have to recognize those professions just tell us where you are.

If you want a passage on that, you’re taking copious notes—Philippians 1:12–14. Paul says, “I’m in prison.” I don’t see that as an opportunity to think of myself as a prisoner; I see it as an opportunity to see myself in a place to bring the gospel where I couldn’t otherwise bring it. Remember that passage? He says, “I’m grateful for this—I’m in prison—but now the gospel has been made known to the whole Praetorian Guard. All the jailers, all the prisoners are hearing the gospel.” Why? Because Paul cares about where he is, not that the circumstances of his life define who he is.

One more passage, if you’re taking complete notes here—2 Corinthians 2:14. Love that. What’s the point? That through us—corporately and individually, as corporate members of the body—he is “spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of God everywhere.” That’s the point. We want to get the message out in the high-rises in downtown LA, in Costa Mesa, in Irvine. And we also want it in the fast-food restaurants of South County. We want the message to go out everywhere. We care about that as an asset, not as a liability; as a strength, not as a weakness.



Lastly, bottom of verse 3—“Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.” I’m assuming Susanna is connected with the “many others,” and the “many others”—there’s a group within the disciples who have enough money for them to pull out their checkbook and to write the check for the meals, because Peter and his buddies no longer have the income of their fishing industry. So they’re underwriting the financial needs of this ministry because they have a lot of wealth. That’s really what the word means; it’s translated elsewhere “wealth,” “riches”—they have money.

Now, this may be closely associated with the third point, but I wanted to tease it out and distinguish it here, because sometimes the money is more of the defining thing in culture’s eyes than the profession. So let’s put it this way: we should never—number four—stumble over the varied paychecks. Because in this room there are people with lots of money and there are people with little money—or some of you would protest, “no money.” So we got the whole spectrum here.

Now envision this as our last point. I want you to picture this room—much like the disciples described in Luke 8:1–3—who all had over their head, in the imaginary TV commercial, the number that defined their net worth. Let’s put it that way. So, let’s just say you looked at that—you would see probably people like Joanna and Susanna with big numbers in green over their head. And then you’d see some people like Peter—who knows if he even finished paying off his last fishing boat—maybe he’s got a red number over his head with a minus in front of it. So let’s picture that for this audience real quick. Right now, in this congregation, let’s just picture the number popping up in green or red over your head—and this means, as you know, net worth: your assets, the money that you have; and you equate that and you cancel out the debt against all that. So we find out, in other words, who can go to the car dealership this afternoon and buy a brand-new car with cash? And what kind of car could you buy? Or maybe you could buy a vacation home with cash. So all those people are toward this side of the room. And so you get to this corner, and here are the super richest people in our church right here. Which is probably not true—I don’t know. Is that true you guys sit there? The rest of you—now we’re going to graduate; we’re going to move seats around until we get over here where the numbers start turning red. And we got people in debt and people with no net worth until we get to these people—and they’re in big trouble. Sorry. Thankfully, it’s not well-attended over here, it looks like.

So picture that. So let me talk to the two sides of the room. Let me talk to you guys first—you people that look at these guys and think, “Must be nice, man. Must be nice. I saw what you’re driving in the parking lot—amazing. Must be nice. What’s that like?” And they’re like, “Well, it’s really nice.” What’s the problem that happens in the church when the person with no money is interacting with the person with a lot of money? You took the bus to church; he’s driven his Tesla—which is his wife’s Tesla, because his is in the shop. Just think now—long as we’re imagining things—what conflict is created here?



Here's my word to you. It's the one that God the Father gave to the people on Mount Sinai. It was rule number 10: "Thou shalt not"—starts with a C—what? Covet. That's your responsibility. You cannot—you must not—covet. You can't covet your neighbor's house—that's how it starts in the Deuteronomy passage (it reiterates it). Can't covet his lands; can't covet his male servants (his butlers), female servants (his maids); can't covet his ox (his race car); can't covet his donkey (his nice family truck—I don't know; I'm really stretching it now). You can't covet anything—that's how it ends in Exodus 20—can't covet anything of your neighbor's. So I've got to detach what that person has—though I'm in the same church with that person. I cannot look at what he has and—here's the parallel Hebrew word in Deuteronomy, I think it's chapter 23—I cannot lust after it in my heart. So stop. That's hard, I get it. But when you're pressed together with people that are not like you financially, that's your temptation.

Now, let me talk to you guys—Richie Rich people over there, right on the east side of the auditorium. Let me talk to you. We may actually turn to a passage of Scripture—we might as well. You can turn to it too—1 Timothy 6. In 1 Timothy chapter 6, he addresses people that have more than other people in the church—calls them "the rich in this world." Let's read this text real quick. I'm not going to stumble over varied paychecks, because we have them in the church. And the problem with those that have less is they covet and envy and lust in their heart after people's stuff who have more. Now, how about the rich people? Verse 17—1 Timothy 6:17 (familiar passage to you, I hope): "As for the rich in this present age"—let's think of it just in terms of the relative wealth in our building right here; you've got more than others—you're sitting in your imaginary place on this side of the room—"charge them"—here's the first temptation you're going to have. Their temptation is to covet; your temptation is to be haughty. It's a good translation. I even like the way it sounds in English: haughty—the haughty. You think you're better than people. You think that you have a superior position as a person because of what you own and how successful you've been; because you're so smart to run your company the way that you have; you feel superior. That's wrong.

"Charge them," Paul tells Timothy (the pastor in a church who's got rich people and poor people). He says, "Hey, don't be haughty, and don't set your hopes on the uncertainty of riches." Because here's the thing: it has no correspondence with—not only what your riches will be in the kingdom—it has no correspondence—your riches right now—with what they will be ten years from now. "You want riches-to-rags stories? I got several of them." I'm talking really rich people that now have nothing. Think about that. So we don't know what's going to happen with your wealth. "Well, I've been very carefully diversified." Listen, I don't care what you've done—it only takes a few things, a few legal issues, a few medical issues to put you in the poorhouse. So don't set your hope on riches; set it rather on God—which the people over here—they're praying to God every day, you know that? You guys—you may not trust in God because you're so insulated with your wealth. These guys over here—they're trying to figure out how they're going to pay the rent in their apartment this month—they're praying, "Oh God, God, God." That's the way you guys need to be—putting your hope on God. Why? Because you realize this: that any good thing that comes your way is provided by God—the God "who richly provides us with everything to enjoy." You go out and buy your car with cash—fantastic; that's a gift of God. This is a provision. You need to see the connection to the God who provides it.



Verse 18—now here's some more: "Do good." Command them to do good. "They are to be rich in good works"—a little play on words here—"and to be generous and ready to share." When you do those things—what's that? I'm not haughty; setting my hope not on my riches but on God; I'm doing good; rich in good works; generous, ready to share—well then I'm "storing up treasure"—now I'm talking about real wealth, eternal wealth—"for themselves as a good foundation for the future," not in this life but in the next life, "so that they may take hold of that which is truly life." What matters is the next life—how rich you are there—that will matter. And you get there, in terms of endowments in the next life, by your activities here with how you treat the wealth that you have as stewards.

This is a great text that should remind those who are doing well financially in our church to never be haughty. As he says in Romans—as Paul says in Romans—we begin to not associate with those that don't have the same position in our lives. He calls them the "lowly." Now, the goal for all of us—I don't care where you are on the spectrum; maybe I can speak to the middle of the church now—verse 6. Go back up to verse 6—1 Timothy 6:6. Here's the goal: The goal is contentment. "But godliness with contentment is great gain." Some people thought if you're godly you'll get all the things you want in this life—and that's not the point. The real gain is that you can be content. "For we brought nothing into the world"—right? There's no purses or wallets coming out, you know, in the delivery ward—"and we cannot take anything out of the world." Right? You stick anything in the casket you want—they can't take it with them. "But if we have food and clothing"—if you're well-clothed, you're covered, and you've got food in your belly—"with these we will be content."

"But those who desire to be rich"—now, that applies to both sides of the room. There's what the temptations are. "They fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." Here's the problem: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving"—you have it; you can be poor or rich and fall into this sin—craving it—"that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." So there's instruction for all of us.

When you look at the varied paychecks in your home fellowship group—maybe the person who's taking you through Partners, or you're going through Partners with somebody, and they're richer than you or poorer than you—listen, can't be haughty; can't be covetous. The goal is contentment.

And really, that does hit the core of what we've tried to say at the end of every point this morning, and that is this: If I've got a ministry post—use it (1 Peter 4)—for the advancement of the kingdom. If I have a past—use it to advance the kingdom. If I have a profession—use it as the means and the



grounds and the networks to do ministry. And when it comes to paycheck—same thing. It's really simple. It's all throughout the Bible. I use money to advance the cause of the kingdom—whether you're the widow with the widow's mite and you can put a proportion of that toward ministry ("making friends by means of mammon") and underwriting ministry. Listen, it's a small amount, I get that, but use what you have—a portion of that as firstfruits—to advance the cause. And if you got this big portfolio and you're rolling in the dough—listen, you want to hold that back, you've got a problem. The Bible says, "You sow sparingly; you'll reap sparingly." The goal is in Scripture for all of us to use what we've been entrusted with to advance the cause of Christ corporately (to underwrite ministry) and personally (to "make friends by means of mammon"). We pick up the check; we take them out; we buy them a gift; we do the things that help build the bridges to be able to bring the gospel across to non-Christians.

The old line—"birds of a feather flock together." Ornithologists—the scientists that study birds—they have confirmed this. You know, this eternal principle is true, right? Of course. They write it this way—as I looked up one ornithologist, his statement this week: "Birds of a single species do readily form flocks because it provides them safety and strength and unity." So birds of a feather flock together, they're saying—ornithologists say, "Well yeah, of course, because it's better that way; it brings them safety, strength, and unity."

I've been preaching just the opposite this morning. When Jesus assembles his flock, it's not birds of a feather. It's Joanna. It's Susanna. It's Mary Magdalene. It's Peter. It's Thomas. It's all these different kinds of dissimilar people. Why? Because it's not a negative. Here's the difference between the bird flocking and the flock that we're a part of: we have a Shepherd. And that Shepherd says if you trust in me—like a vine—you'll be a branch, and you'll bear much fruit. The dissimilarity and diversity among you is an asset that parlays in terms of favor and advantage for our mission. It's better that there's some rich and poor; it's better that there's some in high places of employment and others in low places. It's better that you have a sordid testimony and a pre-Christian story than the next guy. It's better that one speaks and one sings and one serves behind the scenes. It's better that way. Because the diversity—though it is a temptation in our flesh to stumble over it—God sees it as an asset.

Don't allow your life, as you're moving toward connectedness and team play, to hit some snag because your feelings get hurt, or you hear some gossip, or you see something you feel like is a clique, or you can't get into that inner circle. Don't use that as a reason to retract and retreat and leave. Right? Let's work through all of those things and see our diversity and dissimilarity as the asset that happens—and I'll use the verb again; it's a great one—where the Holy Spirit can meld us together to be a more effective team than we could ever be apart.



Won't you stand with me? I'll dismiss us with a word of prayer.

Let's pray.

God, it's very naive to think that the posts—ministry positions—the pasts, professions, and paychecks aren't real issues. When we think like the world, they're going to be. They're going to be issues of division and issues of strife and conflict and envy and jealousy. But God, you've called us to live above all of that—not to be like the world where birds of a feather do flock together—but to make some of our greatest friends and co-laborers in ministry people that, around the world, would scratch their head: "I don't get it." Well, the difference is we have a Shepherd—a Shepherd that unifies us, who sends the Spirit into our lives to overcome the petty, fleshly temptations of the kind of factions that grow up in churches because we're different in the past. And I don't care—and we shouldn't care—not a single person in the room should care what your past is or was. New creations in Christ. Shouldn't matter what the post is—whether you're in a prominent post or some obscure post in the church. Shouldn't matter whether you make millions of dollars or whether you're on minimum wage. Shouldn't matter whether you're the most prominent person in our community or someone that the average person would just see as nondescript.

The point is that together we are strong to make a difference in this world for the kingdom—to share the gospel both individually, but more importantly, corporately—as we not only coexist but pull together in genuine love; that the Bible—just the truth of that statement in John 13—would be true: that by this they would know that we're your disciples, because we have love for one another. We're a team of people that the world may see as mismatched, but because of our diversity we're effective.

So God, make that the reality for us as we overcome temptation. May this be a safeguard for those that sit here and hear my words and think, "I love the church; I love our diversity." Great. May these reminders be a safeguard for the next bump that we hit along the road. Let us get over our hurt feelings quickly. Let us forgive as we've been forgiven. Let us show mercy and long-suffering toward one another when things are said or things are done that do feel bad or make us feel excluded. Let us recognize that we can overcome those as we continue to preserve Christ in this church and care about becoming the fishers of men that you said we should be.

So God, make our church effective in this—that we may make a difference in South County and around the world for Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.