



Ears Up-Part 7

Your Fraternity of Hearers

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Well, I went out this week and I bought some new walking shoes. I usually like to go—especially when I’m by myself when I’m shopping for something—to buy the cheapest possible thing that they have there, whatever’s on sale, whatever is clearance, whatever is discount. But when it comes to shoes, having once been a shoe salesman myself... You didn’t know that, did you? No, I used to sell shoes a long time ago. I realized that just the things that are on sale and cheapest—the ones that just happen to fit—aren’t always the best thing for you. As a matter of fact, they can have a real bad effect on your life, and when I cared about these things more, when I was in that business, I would read the studies about what the long-term effect of wearing the wrong shoes could be: bad on your ankles, bad on your feet, bad on your knees, can have an adverse effect on your hips, your back, your posture—your overall health can be negatively affected after a lot of time wearing the wrong shoes.

Now, it was interesting that I was out shopping for shoes that evening this week because I had just been teaching all day—I was lecturing in the afternoon on the Greek word in the New Testament, *peripateō*. And its Old Testament equivalent, *halak*—*halak* and *peripateō* in the Old and New Testament—translate the word “walk” or “walking,” walking, walking. Now, what the Bible does with *halak* and *peripateō* is usually to take that word and use it in a figurative way in a context that is not about literally putting one foot in front of the next. It speaks about “walking” as the equivalent of our daily lifestyle, day-to-day life—how we live our lives. And we see that word “walk” employed that way.

Now, what’s interesting about them in those days using that word for our daily life is that when it came to literal, physical walking, they walked a whole lot more than we do—think about that. I mean, they would walk, and we walk very little in our average sedentary life, but they would walk 6, 7, 8, 9 miles per day just to get about their work, whether it was in the field or in the marketplace, going to and from the place where they would sell things or buy things. I mean, they walked a lot. And when they were traveling, they could walk 25, 27, 30 miles in a day. That’s a lot of walking.

So when they went to walk, they really prepared for that a whole lot more than we do. And they were certainly concerned about what they put on their feet. They were concerned about their clothing, they’d be concerned about taking the right cloak with them, headwear and covering—make sure they would be protected from the elements and the sun—the right kinds of provisions that they would take. They did some planning. Their commuting or their traveling—walking—they had a lot to ensconce themselves in so that they would get there safely and be rightly protected along the way.



When they enlisted this word to talk about our daily life, it's interesting how often the same kind of story or moral comes up in the instruction in the Bible about "you better be careful what you surround yourself with." Or perhaps I should say, the Bible often says, "Be careful who you surround yourself with," because that will make all the difference. The long-term, oftentimes imperceptible damage that can be caused by who we walk through life with is often warned against. If you don't know this memory verse, it would be a good one to memorize. Proverbs chapter 13, verse 20 says it well when it says, "The one who walks with wise men will be wise." Now that's not about putting one foot in front of the other—"be sure you commute with someone." No, it has to do with your relationships. Those who are closest to you—"he who walks with the wise will be wise." You know the rest of that: "and the companion of fools"—you want to make those your best friends?—"they will suffer harm."

I mean, the warning in the Scripture is very, very clear: be careful who you surround yourself with. Those closest relationships will have a big impact on your life. Now before you start saying, "Well, this sounds like a youth group sermon—you know, you're in the wrong building here this morning, Pastor Mike"—or you start taking notes this morning preparing for your parental lectures toward your kids and how they should choose their friends wisely, let me get very clear right up front: I'm talking about your friends. You. I would like you this morning to think of your friends—the people you surround yourself with, the people you, when you have the freedom, pull into your life. Those people who, when something interesting happens, you call them, you text those folks—the people you're chatting with, sharing conversation, sharing thoughts. Those are the people we need to think through this morning.

In life, what we've come to at the end of our series on this hearing and responding to the Word of God—we've called it "Ears Up." It's about those who have ears to hear being sure that they hear. And the whole point of this passage in Luke chapter 8 has been about receiving the information from God's truth into our lives and responding rightly to it. And we saw the parable of the soils—that was kind of the centerpiece of this. Then last time we were together, we looked at all of those illustrations that surrounded the warning: "Be careful, then, how you hear."

Well, Luke, then, here as we get to verse 19 in Luke chapter 8, he takes this scene—it was very popular and apparently well known just by the way he presents it here without a lot of background. Both Matthew and Mark also record this scene—where now he turns our attention to our relationships, our friendships if you will, as it has an impact on and as it relates to our priority of hearing the Word of God and responding rightly to it. So take a look at this text and see if we can glean this morning from what's happening here in the life of Christ—still within the context of hearing the Word of God and responding to it—as he does something that really should, if you understand it rightly, kind of ring strange in your ears. It's like, "What? This is a weird thing that's happening." Take a look at it with me—follow along with your eyeballs. Luke chapter 8; I'll read verses 19 through 21.



“Then his mother”—we’re talking about Christ, his mother—so who’s that? Mary. Not a trick question. So Mary and his brothers—Christ had brothers; four of them are named in Matthew chapter 13. So you’ve got Christ’s mom, Mary, and his brothers come to Christ—they come to him. But they could not reach him because of the crowd—a lot of crowds gathering all the time when he’s teaching. “And he was told”—Christ was told—someone said, “Hey, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.”

Now, we’ll look at the cross-reference over in Mark in a little bit, but let me just say ahead of time—and it’ll be proved to you in the Mark passage—that this was not just a benign request: “Hey, we’d like to speak with you,” or “Why don’t you teach us now,” or—this is not benign. They’re trying to stop him from doing what he’s doing here. They don’t have great motives. They may be well intentioned, but they’re not great motives. It is not in keeping with all that we’ve been learning in this passage. So they’re trying to take him out of the situation.

“And his response,” verse 21—here’s the real kicker, here’s the punchline: “He answered” these people who were saying, “Hey, your mom and brothers are here—they want to talk to you; go talk to them outside.” He said, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

Wow. Now, if you think about that rightly, that’s a big deal. You got Mary standing outside, saying, “Hey, tell Jesus I want to talk to him.” “You know who my real mother is? You know who my real brothers are? The people who hear the word of God and do it.” Can you see the prioritization of relationships here? And as I’ll show you over in Mark in a little bit, their motives weren’t perfect—well-meaning but not good. And he says, “The ones who are willing to hear the word of God and respond to it—those are my relational priorities.” That’s a big deal.

Now, if you’ve noticed the worksheet, you’ll see I want to look at verse 21—the punchline—first. Then I want to—you see the third point there—I want to get back to verse 21 at the end; and then, in the middle of this message, I want to look at verses 19 and 20 that deal with the whole setting and scenario. So as strangely as it is, but you’re used to this, now let’s start at the bottom of this passage—look at the punchline. And I want to think of it, first of all, as we begin this, in terms of Christ’s statement regarding me—if I’m in the crowd—making sure that I qualify in the statement; that I’m the one who hears the word of God, and that he considers me his closest relationship—that I am a friend of God’s, or a friend of Christ’s, or, as he puts it here in a metaphorical sense, his mother and his brothers. I want to be in that circle.



Which makes a lot of sense—we’ve been dealing with the four soils, the centerpiece of this chapter. And we’ve always been saying, “Well, I’m going to make sure I’m the fourth soil. I don’t want to be the second soil, the third soil; I want to make sure I’m in that fourth soil.” So we’ve been concerned about that. Now he’s summarizing what that looks like. The fourth soil, you might remember, hears the word of God, holds it down—*katechō*, right? *Katechō* is that compound word—holding it down, grabbing onto it and seizing it, if you will. And then I’m going to bear fruit. And I’m going to do that with patience—or *hypomonē*, with endurance long-term.

Now, that is the kind of soil I want to be in. If I’m in the crowd listening to the Christ and he’s saying those kinds of things, and then he says, “You know what? My mom—my biological mother—and my biological brothers... You know what, when it comes down to it, you’re the relational priority in my life if you’re the kind of person who hears the word of God and does it.” And that stands in contrast to what they’re doing at this particular point in Christ’s ministry—trying to keep him from doing the will of God. More on that—I’ll prove that to you in a minute. If that sounds strange to you, let me just start with, “Am I”—to put it in metaphorical terms—“his family? Am I Christ’s man?” I want to make sure I am.

So, number one—let’s put it down that way—be sure you’re Christ’s family. I’d like for him to say, “Hey, you’re my closest relationship. You’re closer to me even than the biological family that I have here on earth.” I want to be his friend; I want to be in that circle. We’ll talk about friends that you walk through life with; make sure Christ is your friend. Or, better put, make sure you’re Christ’s friend. I want to make sure I qualify. And the text says, if you qualify for this, here’s the explanation. Let’s read it—verse 21: “But he answered them and he said, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who put their faith in me...’” Underline “put their faith in me.” You see that? Under—now, if I’ve read this wrong, you’ve got to correct me. Is that what it says?

Okay, let me try it again: “But he answered them, he said, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who bask in the grace of God...’” No. “Who frolic in the shadow of the cross...” No. “Who hang tightly to the wonderful mercies of the Lord, who have the right doctrine, who have deep abiding faith in their life...” Those who hear the word of God and do it.

Now again, if you want to say, “Well, the word of God, what he’s telling you to do is to trust him, to bask in the shadow...” That’s not what he’s doing. Have you read with us what we’ve been learning here in Luke? They’re very specific commands about doing the right thing, shunning the wrong thing, saying yes to righteousness and no to sin. Now, is Christ a legalist or a moralist here, as people like to



impugn other folks who talk this way? I don't think so. I think if anybody understands grace, it would be Christ.

But here's the thing—and you know there's a bit of my soapbox here the last few years—if you're willing, out of your concern to protect the fidelity of grace, to make that a doctrine that is not besmirched or anywhere impinged upon, and you are willing to take passages that clearly speak to the issue of doing good works and dismiss them, downplay them, or ignore them out of your lofty, noble motive to make sure we protect the doctrines of grace—then all I have to tell you this morning is: you're mishandling the Word of God. I'm supposed to “study to show myself approved unto God, a workman [who] doesn't need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” And here's the thing: Christ has no problem saying, “Hey, if you're a friend of mine, you hear the word and you do it. You respond to it obediently.”

And if you look back in the first eight chapters of Luke—what he's commanding people to do—he's commanded them to do more than just trust in him, although clearly that's foundational. No one misunderstands that. But we also see that what he expects from those who have faith in him—participants in grace—is that when they are instructed in the precepts and principles of God's truth, they hear it, they hold it down, they bear fruit, and they keep on bearing fruit with *hypomonē*—with endurance. That's what Christ says. And he says it repeatedly.

Here's another passage—you can jot this one down—John chapter 15, verse 14. John 15:14: “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” Ever heard that passage? “You're my friends—you're relationally tight with me—if you do the things I command you.” Now, that's important for us to catch in a day when people in the same ilk of Compass Bible Church—who believe in grace, who understand that salvation is all of grace, who understand the problem of depravity and the issues of God's redemption given through Christ with unmerited favor to us because of faith—even the faith that's generated by Christ—I get all of that. But we've got to look at texts like this and be careful to respond to them the way that they're intended. And it's intended for us to recognize that Christians—Christians that walk in step with the Spirit, Christians that are considered the tightest relationships with Christ—are those who live obediently to the precepts and principles of God's Word. We obey him. “If you love him and you don't obey his commandments, you're a liar,” the Bible says, “and the truth is not in you”—quoting 1 John.

We've got to catch this, because all throughout the Scripture we see this concept of tight relational association with God being tied to us responding obediently to his word. Let me think about the first person in the Bible that's called the “friend of God”—Abraham. Abraham is called the friend of God. As God speaks to Israel in latter centuries about Abraham, here's how he describes it. Here's one



example (and there's a few in Scripture): Isaiah 41:8: he says, "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob [Jacob is a synonym for Israel], whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend."

James—who happens to be one of the brothers who at this point is calling his Brother to come out and stop teaching the people, who's not yet converted (as John 7 says, even during this middle part of his ministry his brothers did not believe in him)—so James would later be converted and write the book of James in the New Testament. He says this about Abraham. He describes Abraham as being a friend of God based on his faith—no—based on, in the passage (James chapter 2), that his faith was not dead but his faith was living, expressing itself through works. And when the works were demonstrated through Abraham's life, it is based on that (in James 2—you can go home and study it yourself) that he's called a friend of God.

We read it in our Daily Bible Reading not long ago—if you're keeping up with us; if not, jump on with us here in the middle of the summer. We read through the entire Bible every year here at Compass—we want everyone to do that with us. We have it on our worksheet on the back—there's the reading schedule—we have it on our website, you'll have it all over the place. If you just look for the reading schedule, you'll be able to keep up with us through the Bible. We just read through Psalm 25 this week. In Psalm 25, there was a great text in that passage that just jumped off the page at me—partly because I'm studying this text this week. But it was Psalm 25:14, and I shouted it out as best I could electronically to the few Twitter followers maybe that I might have here. I tweeted it—did you get it? Because you're all following your pastor, right? @PastorMike—easy to find. You can do that now; take a second for you to follow me there.

But when I'm preparing for a sermon like this one, I read this in verse 14: it couldn't have jumped off the page more dramatically than it did. And it simply says this: "The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him." And I thought, you know, the Bible talks so much about the fear of the LORD, and the fear of the LORD is that relationship with the living God that is the kind of relationship that, when he speaks, I respond to his authoritative voice on the pages of Scripture with a real sense of fear. What kind of fear? The fear of being cast out into outer darkness—the fear of condemnation? No, absolutely not talking about that. Two kinds of fear—you can quote 1 John all day long and say, "Well, you know, fear is cast out by perfect love—perfect love casts out fear because fear has to do with punishment—and if you're forgiven, you're not going to be punished, so there's no fear." No—that's not what the Bible teaches, not New Testament or Old Testament. That kind of fear is excluded in our relationship with God. But the kind of fear spoken throughout the Scripture that is to be resident in the friends of God is the kind of fear that is referred to and alluded to in Isaiah chapter 66:1–2. (No time to turn there.) But you know the verse: "Heaven is my throne; earth is my footstool. Can there ever be a house on this planet that you can build for me that's big enough for me? I supersede and transcend all of that. But to this one I'll look—I'll condescend to this person—the person who's contrite of heart, humble of heart—the one who"—here's the last line—"trembles at my word."



What is that trembling? It's an expression of fear. What happens when he hears God? He responds. When Abraham heard in Genesis 22 to "take your son, your only son, the son that you love; take him to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him," as hard as that was, he obeyed God. And so James says—the brother of Christ—he was called a friend of God. God looks to the one, condescends to the one, relates to the one, draws close to the one, says, "You're more important, in terms of the tightness of my relationship, than even my own biological family at this particular point in their spiritual journey, if you will"—because you hear the word of God and you respond to it. Not casually, not flippantly, not as an option, but you tremble at my word.

One text I'd like you to look at—Psalm 15. Let me turn you to Psalm 15—not far from Psalm 25 (and we read this recently, too). Psalm 15—a psalm of David. It starts with a kind of an inviting set of questions, which basically, in terms of what we're talking about here, can be summarized with, "Hey, who wants to be a friend of God's? Well, here—I'll tell you how to do it." Now it uses a word you probably didn't use in your vocabulary this week. I doubt—unless you're, I don't know, studying Shakespearean plays or something. And I wish it were translated differently, I suppose—although it's accurate; it's a good translation—but it's a bit out of the normal common usage of today's American English speakers. Verse 1, Psalm 15: "O LORD"—you see this is in all caps. Whenever you see that, you know the translator's trying to tell you this is his proper name—Yahweh. "O Yahweh, who shall"—here's the word—"sojourn..." Did you use that this morning? Meet someone on the patio: "So where do you sojourn?" No one talks that way anymore—sojourn. It's from a Hebrew root—the idea of pulling people into your tent, bringing them in your tent. Who do you bring into your tent? People that are your friends. Other words in lexicons you'll find translating this: to stay, to reside, to lodge, to abide—to hang out with. (That's not in any lexicon, but that's the idea.) The people you hang with. "Who do you hang out with? O Yahweh, who do you hang out with in your tent?" Double usage here—it also uses that as the object: "Who do you attend with in your tent?" Bottom of verse 1: "Who's going to dwell on your holy hill?" Who's going to, in this metaphorical sense, live there in the middle of your dwelling place?

Well, Isaiah 66—we've already quoted—we know the kind of person. He gives us the summary statement at the top of verse 2—he answers the question: "He who has faith in me..." No. "He who basks in the shadow of grace..." No. "Who frolics in grace..." No. "He who really has abiding faith in the heart..." No. That's not how it's described. The description of someone—though they may be fully trusting in his grace, and certainly may be resting fully in the finished work of Christ (they get all that)—he's described, though—the friend of God—as one "who walks blamelessly"—underline it—"and does what is right." Hears the word of God, and he does it.



Now, there are five things that are itemized here for us. First one—bottom of verse 2, top of verse 3—these two go together. (I don't think the verse divisions are perfect in this particular chapter—they weren't original, you know that—put in many, many years later.) “Who's the one [who] abides with God?” Well, “he speaks the truth in his heart; he does not slander with his tongue.” He's truthful—that's how I'd summarize that one: truthful person. God is the God of truth. He wants us to be sanctified in truth. He wants us to speak the truth. So he wants us to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Satan is the father of lies; he's the twister of facts; he's the one who fudges on reality; he's the one who deceives; he's the storyteller, not the truth speaker.

Bottom of verse 3: he's kind. Someone who dwells with God—who is a friend of God—“does no evil to his neighbor,” loves his neighbor, “takes up no reproach against his friend.” He's not a gossip; he's not a critic; he loves his neighbor.

Speaking of neighbors—people he relates to—when it comes to his friends, verse 4: he chooses them wisely—“in whose eyes a vile person is despised.” “You want to go to the game with that guy?” “No—no interest in hanging out with you.” Why? You're a vile person; you disregard the truth of God (as Psalm 119 says). You look at God's word, you despise it, you cast it behind you—that's the kind of person that just builds up a whole sense of repulsion in my heart. (Mike Fabarez paraphrase of a section of Psalm 119.) “But he honors those who fear the LORD”—who does he want to hang out with? People who hear the word of God and do it—people who love the Lord enough to tremble at his word.

Fourthly, bottom of verse 4: “He swears to his own hurt and does not change.” Now, he's not swearing to his own hurt—that's not how he intentionally starts his commitments and his loyalties. But when he does make a commitment, if it begins to hurt, he doesn't say, “Well, I'm out of here. I said I'd do that, but it's gotten too hard.” No—when he speaks the truth, he is loyal. When he says he'll do something, he's faithful—even when it costs him.

Fifthly, verse 5: “He doesn't put out his money at interest, and he doesn't take a bribe against the innocent.” That's the theme of money—he's not, as 1 Timothy 6 says, a lover of money (which is the root of all kinds of evil among people). So he's truthful; he's kind; he chooses his friends wisely; he's trustworthy; he doesn't love money.

And then this last promise is bookended by the summary statement at the top of verse 2, and here in the bottom of verse 5 we have the promise: “He who does these things shall never be moved.” Now, you can preach that and speak of that in the broadest terms—stability in life: “That person won't be



shaken.” But this started with the promise of who’s going to hang out in the tent of God—who is going to dwell on his holy hill—who’s going to be his friend, who’s going to be relationally tight with God? Well, the person who does these things—never going to be moved. That’s the person that stays tight with God. That’s the person that walks in sync with the Spirit. That’s the person that has this connection with the living God—one that Jesus would say, “Hey, you’re my friend. You’re so much my friend—let’s just metaphorically speak of it this way—my mother and my brothers: people [who] hear the word of God and do it.”

You start looking for this pattern throughout the Scripture—you’ll see it everywhere. God is a God, as Psalm 11:7 says, who’s righteous, and he “loves righteous deeds.”

Now, Psalm 25 is a homework assignment—I just don’t have time to take you there. Oh—we’ve got to go there. We’ve got to go there. I want to show you there’s no contradiction here. This is not, “Well, it’s Old Testament; they don’t believe in grace in the Old Testament; it’s all about works in the Old...” That’s not true. Chapter 25—and I quoted this verse 14, “The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him.” Let’s get a little bit more of the context to let you know this is not about dutiful legalism or anything like that. It’s about people who realize what it means to obey Christ, but it is all based on the foundation of understanding grace—they get it.

Verse 4—let’s start there: a statement about response and obedience—“Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me”—this is Psalm 25:4; now we’re in verse 5—“for you are the God of my salvation.” Now, no one needs salvation unless they realize they’re sinners and have a need—so he understands that God is his deliverer. “For you I wait all the day”—not, “I’m trusting in all the good deeds I do.” Of course not. Verse 6: “Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.”

So he realizes he needs forgiveness—he’s not claiming to be perfect. He recognizes that his relationship with God is based on grace. “Good and upright,” verse 8 says, “is the LORD; therefore he”—what?—“lets sinners stay sinners and keep sinning all they want?” No. “He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness”—that’s what he wants from us—“for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.” “For your name’s sake,” verse 11 says, “O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.” “Oh, he’s just a self-righteous Pharisee.” No—he understands his sin. He realizes his guilt is great. “Who is the man who fears the LORD?” Well, him—“him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.” God is going to direct him based on his path—that guy doesn’t make his own rules up.



Verse 13: “His soul shall abide in well-being”—there’s blessing in obedience—“and his offspring shall inherit the land”—there’s a residual effect, a cascading effect even in those around him. Verse 14: “The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him”—he’s close with those who hear the word and do it. “He makes known to them his covenant.” Like we saw last week: you live up to the light you have, there’s even more knowledge to come.

“My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. Turn to me and be gracious”—there’s grace; he understands grace—“for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.” Now, can you see both of these—grace and works—always in the Scripture? Not that ever anyone has any confusion that works somehow save me, forgive me, make me right. This is not penance—we’re not making up for the problems of our past. But we’re coming to God with the foundation of grace and mercy. As we cling to that, he instructs us in the path so that we will do the right things. Both grace and works are always present in the text—grace that saves and forgives, and works that respond and endure in the lives of the forgiven.

Be sure you’re Christ’s family. I’m not talking about obeying God so you’ll be accepted. We’re talking about the accepted obeying God.

Secondly, back to our text printed on your worksheet there—Luke chapter 8, verses 19 and 20—it sounds a little strange if you really think of the players here. “Then his mother”—Mary—and his brothers, which are stated in the text: James, Jude (his long name is Judas, but people kind of stopped calling themselves that when Judas became the notorious sinner), there’s Simon (not Peter—son of Joseph), and then there’s Joe Jr.—Joseph, which is Joseph’s son. “Where’s Dad?” I don’t know—good question. No one knows. We assume he’s dead by the early ministry of Christ—nothing said about him. But Mary has an interest—James has an interest—Jude, Simon, and Joe Jr.—they all have an interest in Christ’s ministry. The problem is their interest is in him backing down from the ministry.

“Really? Is that what this is all about?” Yeah. Let me show it to you—go over to Mark chapter 3 and let me show you the context for this encounter where the family—the biological family of Christ, who Jesus should be most responsive to, I would think; at least in human terms he should be really tight with his mom (she’s Mary, after all), he should be really tight with his brothers (I mean, they are his brothers)—and yet he’s saying, “You’re not the priority in this situation. The people that hear the word of God, are receptive to the word of God, are responsive to the word of God—that’s my priority. That’s my relational priority. You guys take a back seat to that.” This is a phenomenal thing. Why would he be so stern?



Verse 20—Mark chapter 3. Let's get some context for this. Matter of fact, if you want to first just look down at verses 33–34—there's the scene. Just scan your eyes at 31 through 35—there's the scene. I want to set it up, though. The same scene we have in Luke 8 is there in Mark 3:31–35. But here's the context, verse 20: "He [Christ] went home, and the crowd gathered again"—this is Mark 3:20—"so that they could not even eat." Now, they're so engaged in ministry—this is not the first time this happened—Jesus is so busy just working right through lunch, right through dinner; he's not even taking time to eat a meal. He's teaching; he's doing his ministry. "And when his family heard it, they went out"—very strong verb here—"to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'"

Now, you see what is between these two—verses 22 through 30? What's the section heading in your Bible read? "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit." Now, we just come from a historical account of Christ's family thinking the guy's crazy. We have—and as I said, John 7 makes it very clear—his brothers do not believe in him. His mother's trying to—and it's maternal, well-intentioned, I get that—but "You know, Jesus, you've got to stop and have dinner, man; you've got to stop doing this. I think you've lost it here—you've gone a little too far." His family thinks he's crazy.

Now, think about this: the next scene is he responds to the Pharisees who are attributing his work not to being crazy but to being demonic: "You're casting out demons by Beelzebul; you are infested with demons, and that's how you're doing this miraculous work." And he says, "Wow—you know what? Here's the thing: some sins are not forgiven." When it comes to this—"You're watching with your own eyeballs my miraculous ministry and you're attributing it to Satan—that will never be forgiven. Ever."

Now, Mary and the brothers are getting really close to that—saying "He's crazy." They haven't gone that far, obviously; and by God's grace, by the end of his ministry we see the brothers now converted; we see Mom now in favor—she's in prayer with the brothers in Acts chapter 1. When we see that scene in Acts 1, when the Spirit comes, Mary's there—the mother of Jesus, it says—and the brothers of Jesus. So they come around. But at this particular point: "I don't know—Jesus has gone too far." And you'd think with all that Mary had heard with this miraculous birth she'd never think that, but this must have been an amazing scene of self-sacrifice where Mary's even saying, "We've got to curtail all of this." And Jesus says, "Now, you may think I'm crazy; my enemies may think I'm demon-possessed." And then the scene—pick it up, verse 31: "His mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him." This is the expression of what they want to do—they want to seize him. "And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.' And he answered them, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking about at those who sat around him"—at his feet, learning from him, responding to his teaching—"he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'" (Now if you're Mary and you heard him say that—



“Oh... wow.” Right?) “For whoever does the will of God,” verse 35—underline it—“he is my brother and sister and mother.”

“My tightest relationships, my friends, are those that are obedient.” Now, I’m thinking to myself, “This is not a Norman Rockwell moment for Christ.” Your family relationships are strained right here. And all I’ve got to say is: Jesus often warned us that’s what real Christianity will do. That’s what commitment to the truth will do. He warned in Matthew 10—if you’re a note-taker and want to jot down verses 34 through 39—he warns that sometimes because of the truth, “the members of your own household” become your enemies.

Jot it down this way—number two (we’ve talked a long time about it, but let’s put a heading on this): we need to expect relational disruptions. Even relationships we think should not be affected by my Christianity sometimes are negatively affected by your Christianity. This is not Mary and Jesus arm-in-arm, going, “Hey, this is great—isn’t it great that we’re doing the work of the Lord together?” No—Mom’s going, “You’ve got to stop that,” and he’s going, “Listen, you think I’m crazy. The people that I’m going to be closest to—my closest relationships—are those who hear the word of God and do it.” The ultimate things have to take priority.

Maybe you’re in that situation right now. You’re saying, “I don’t want to give up this relationship, but I know that if I keep this relationship, it’s going to impinge on my obedience to the truth.” Let me just—we didn’t turn there—but the end of that discussion in Matthew 10, after talking about the problem of sometimes our relationships: “We love our mom more than we should; we love our children more than we should.” He says, “If you love them more than me, you’re not worthy of me.” And then he ends with this: “Whoever wants to find his life is going to lose it.” You want to hang on to that over the truth? Hmm—it’s a losing proposition. “But those who are willing to lose their life for my sake will find it.”

It reminds me of that news article I read about the mom who was in a burning building—she had a child, and I don’t remember how old the child was, but apparently the firemen who had set up the net down there said, “If you jump together, you’re going to be injured, so you’re going to have to go one at a time. Let the kid go first.” Can you imagine that scene if you’re the kid? “Mom’s throwing me out of the window right now.” Or, “You have to let go of my shirt—you have to let go.” The way to save the kid was to let the kid go. The way for the kid to be saved—and even Mom to be saved—“Hey listen, you’ve got to let go.” You want to hang on? There’s damage. And when it comes—that’s a poor illustration, because this is not a temporal damage—this is an eternal damage. You want to keep your life? You’re going to lose it. All you need to say is: no matter what your relationship is, is it—well—



are you having that “on the altar”? And by that I mean, are you willing to say, “If God’s truth comes in conflict with this relationship, God’s truth will win”?

Jesus was even willing to demonstrate in Luke chapter 8 and in Mark chapter 3, “I’m willing to say ‘no’ to my own mother (that people build cathedrals in honor of). I’m willing to distance myself from her and willing to align myself with people that hear the word of God and obey it. And right now Mary’s not doing that; right now my brothers are not doing that.”

And by the way, that must be a dissonant sound in the ears of those of you who grew up in some kind of church that was all about venerating Mary—the “Mother of God,” as they call her. Let me speak to that for just a second on a little sidebar. Are you ready for this? I say these kinds of things because I love you—you know that. If I didn’t love you, I’d avoid all these topics because I wouldn’t want the hate mail. But I tell you these things because, as Paul said to the Corinthians, I have a jealousy for you—that you would have and keep and maintain a pure and undistracted devotion to God. People that have exalted Mary—whether it’s, you know, the Episcopal Church, or whether it’s the Orthodox Church, or whether it’s (in the worst case offenders) the Roman Catholic Church—exalting Mary to a place she never was intended to be in, it distracts your single-minded devotion to the Lord. So let me say with Paul: I’m jealous for you. And some people didn’t like that, and he said, “Have I become your enemy because I’ve told you the truth?” I know that feeling. I’m not your enemy; I’m your advocate.

But here’s the thing: if you grew up with some kind of veneration of Mary in your past, I’ve got to fix that for you right now. I have to challenge that in your life. She should not be venerated. She should not be a mediator. You should not pray to her. It wasn’t until the sixth century that the church actually demanded that Christians pray directly to Mary—became the official teaching of the Church. They say—and I’m not just quoting off the top of my head—if you pick up the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church (quoting now the Catechism of the Catholic Church, second edition, published in the year 2000—the latest doctrinal issuance from the Vatican): that is their official doctrine. And they use words like this—I’m quoting now, section 721: “Mary is all-holy”—she’s perfect, sinless—and she is “ever-virgin.”

Let’s just think through those two things in light of what we’re studying in the middle of Luke 8. She’s never sinned, and she is perpetually a virgin. Now, the church may have taught that in church history. The question is: does the text give any room for that? Not only does it not teach it, is there any room? We’re talking about Jesus’s brothers here. Matthew chapter 13 even names them by name. Catholics may say, “Well, that’s cousins.” But, you know, if it were cousins, there’s a great Greek word in the New Testament you could use for cousin. It doesn’t use that word—it uses the word “brothers and sisters.” He has at least two sisters—we don’t know their names. He has four brothers that are named



by name in the Bible. She is not a perpetual virgin. Nor is she perfect, nor is she sinless. I would say right now—as she’s being demoted in the conversation to a second-tier loyal relationship in Christ’s life over those who are willing to hear the word of God and obey it—I’m going to say to myself, “You know what? She’s got some issues.” And you know what? She knew that. Matter of fact, the first time we meet her—though she is stated to be “highly favored” by the angel—what happens in that text? She cries out in an exalted praise to God, and she calls God her “Savior.” What did I say earlier in Psalm 25 about “Savior”? You don’t need a Savior unless you’re a sinner.

Now, I’m going to stand in line and be very respectful when I meet Mary, but I will not worship her. I will not pray to her. She’s not, as the church has said, the “co-redemptrix.” She’s not a mediator. It wasn’t even until 1854 that the church sanctioned her position as sinless, which created problems like: if “the wages of sin is death,” why did she die? In 1950 they officially said that she never died—the “Assumption of Mary” was penned into Roman Catholic law.

If there was ever a time for Christ to clarify how we ought to exalt Mary in our worship and liturgy and in our lives, I think it would be Luke 11. Just at least take a quick peek at that passage with me. And again, maybe I’m speaking to a friendly crowd here, but I know this goes out to countless people on the radio. You’re Catholic listening to my words right now. I’m not here to unnecessarily offend you; I’m here to clarify your focus on Christ and never to make Mary into someone she was never intended to be. And trust me—she’s wincing in heaven right now over the way they build cathedrals in her name. And it isn’t just the Roman Catholics that are doing this—the way they call her, like the church I had to pass and explain to my kids on vacation in Orlando, “Mary, Queen of the Universe.” That was the name of the church—and it wasn’t a small church on the corner that was named by some wack priest. I mean, this was a gigantic cathedral, and you know this if you come from this background.

Verse 27, Luke 11: Jesus makes a distinction all the time when it comes to people—even in this case, who almost just inadvertently want to elevate Mary. Verse 27: “As he said these things,” Jesus was saying these things and teaching, “a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Christ, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed.’” Now, of course, that’s kind of a detached, anthropologic way to talk about the body parts of the person—and meaning that person is blessed. If there’s ever a time for you, Jesus, to say in verse 28, “You’re darn right—she’s blessed. Hail Mary, full of grace. Bless her.” You know—great; clarify the doctrine of Mary right here. Next verse: “But he said, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it.’”

Which, by the way, maybe would help us understand why not a single apostle in any writing—I’ve named the only reference outside of the Gospels to Mary (Acts chapter 1), where she’s just named to be a participant in a prayer meeting. Beyond that, not a single chapter about her, not a single book about



her, not a single verse about her, not a single mention of her. Now, I'm telling you: if she's as important as section after section after section of the teaching of church history makes her out to be, I'm saying, "Where is all the instruction in the Scripture?" Zero.

"Well, you know—church history—we have to take that into account." Listen, you can have the hobbyhorse of church history all you want; you can love the ancient frescoes; you can love the liturgy of the church; you can want all the trappings of church history. You take church history; I'll take the Scripture. It's going to be one or the other for you. And don't tell me you've got both. Don't tell me you've got both—because when two authorities come in conflict with one another, you always have to choose one. If Mary is "preeminent"—which, by the way, that's not my word; here's the wording of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, section 967: "She completely obeyed God's will and is preeminent as our example of obedience in the Church." If she is, I want to know why there's not a scrap of evidence in the Bible. And if you say, "Well, church history has venerated her to be so," then I'm saying, "Listen, you pick your source of authority; we'll pick ours—the written, active Word of God, the codification of his mind on paper—or the ins and outs, ups and downs, right turns, left turns of church history." You take church history; I'll take his written word. We'll meet up at the Bema Seat, and we'll figure out who made the better choice here.

And again, if I'm fired up a little—and you don't really see me fired up if you think I'm fired up right now—if you think I'm fired up, this is only out of my jealousy for you to have undistracted devotion to Christ. You're welcome. Very important for us to catch this. The role and status of Mary—it's been made into something it was never intended to be. She's wincing as I speak in terms of the way the church has made her out to be something she's not. I could go on and on (and I have in other settings) about the disastrous doctrines of "Mariology" in church history.

Here's the focus of what I want to say—point number three, verse 21. I started this by saying: make sure who you pull around you—those are wise decisions. And I said, first of all, make sure you qualify as being a friend of Christ. And that's the first place to start. I want, as I walk through life, for Christ to be my friend. I want to recognize: if Christ is my friend, sometimes my friends that I think should be my friends long-term—sometimes they won't be my friend. Sometimes they'll oppose my friendship with Christ. Let me close with this by looking at verse 21, and I say: Christ becomes the pattern. And as John says, I ought to walk as he walked; I live my life as he lived life; I ought to prioritize my relationships the way he prioritized his relationships. Then I look at verse 21 and I say: his closest friends were going to be those who hear the word of God and do it. That's what I want to have in my life.



Number three on your outline—just put it this way: cultivate godly friendships. Those are the people in my life that I choose to have around me—text, talk to, email, spend time with, hang out with—those are people I want in my life who hear the word of God. And they, as a general practice—no one’s perfect, I get that—but their intention, their passion is, and their trajectory in life is, to obey what it says. I want to have godly friends in my life.

Paul (and again, to not sound like a youth group sermon—on the other side of this, thinking about when you choose wrongly, this is detrimental) put it in a phrase—actually he stole this phrase from a fourth-century BC playwright—and it was a simple quotation in 1 Corinthians 15:33: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” Bad company ruins good morals. He started that quotation from Menander, who was a fourth-century playwright, with this phrase: “Do not be deceived.” As he enlists that phrase that was popularly known in the first-century Hellenistic world, he says, “You know what? It’s true. Don’t be deceived.” You can think you can wear bad shoes and not have problems. You think you can pull people around you who do not really zealously and ardently seek to hear the word of God and do it, and you think it won’t affect you—but bad company ruins good morals. You may be on the path of hearing the word of God and doing it, but the people around you—if they’re not—there’s a problem.

Just say this in light of the context. The context is this: the soils. First soil—checked out. Second soil—responds positively to the word, but when a time of testing comes, they fall away. Third soil—they respond positively to the word, they seem to be hanging in there, but the slow, chronic pressures of life—the pleasures of the world, the riches, all the temptations of life—they finally start to quell the passion and zeal, and eventually they’re not on fire for God and they’re not fruitful. Only the fourth soil bears fruit with endurance—it bears down on the truth; it hangs tightly to it—*katechōs*—it holds it down. It bears fruit with *hypomonē*. That is the fourth soil.

Now think about this: I don’t know the second soil and the third soil’s eventual progress until time has its time to do what time does—that reveals people. You may be a true fourth-soil person. And if you are, you may have pulled people around you that you thought were all fourth-soil kind of people—and then they end up being soil two and three. Now, you know what—you’re a Christian; you’re supposed to be friendly; you’re supposed to love people; you’re supposed to be loyal and faithful. “Well, I’m just going to hang in there with them, and I wouldn’t want to be seen as mean or backing down.” Here’s the deal: there are times for you, in your life, to back down from your relationships. There are times for you—the people that you used to text and talk to and hang out with and go to coffee with—those people you need to stop hanging out with. You need to stop. Why? Because their commitment and loyalty to the Word of God as their authority—obeying it, hearing it, and doing it—they’re not doing that anymore. Maybe they hit some crisis and they’re just not going to do that anymore. And now—I know this is a microcosm and I’m not saying that John Mark in Acts chapter 15 was not a Christian—I’m not saying that. But the pattern of him hitting a crisis and John Mark, on that missionary journey, saying, “I’m not going to do this anymore,” and he abandons them, and he deserts Paul, and he goes



back home. The next time Paul had a chance to go on a missionary journey, and Barnabas goes, “Hey, let’s take John Mark,” what does Paul say in Acts 15? “Ain’t taking him.” Why? Because he abandoned us.

Now think about this: where’s your friendliness? Where’s your kindness? Where’s your compassion? Why aren’t you nice? Why aren’t you loving, Paul? Because he says, “You know what? That’s not the kind of person I want to be in the trenches of ministry with. These are not going to be my closest friends who, when the pressure’s on, they bail out.” “Oh, he’s not forgiving?” Oh, you know the story—he is. Not because he gets soft in his old age, but as he writes to Timothy at the end of his life, he says, “You know what? Bring John Mark—he’s useful.” Why? Because he had redeemed himself. He had gotten back on the road with Barnabas—who Barnabas said, “I’m taking him anyway”—and they split directions. And apparently he proved his fidelity, and Paul said, “Great—fine. You can be faithful now? Great. You’re going to hit hard times? You’re going to hang in there? Great—come on. I can use a guy like that.” Now, if this were sin for Paul to do that, I’m thinking as he keeps saying five times in the New Testament, “Follow me, follow my example, imitate my life,” he would have said, “But not that.” He would have said, “Now, that’s not something you should do—I really blew it when I parted ways with Barnabas over John Mark.” He didn’t say that. There’s no exemption there. When he talks about things in his life that were bad, he said, “Oh, that’s not good; don’t follow that example.” In this case, he didn’t.

All I’m saying is this: there are times for you to look at people that you may walk through life with, talk to, have been friends with, close with—but if they are not exemplifying fidelity to Christ, you confront them (I get that); you exhort them. If they’re not willing to get back on the beam, then “You know what? I’m not calling you for coffee. We’re not hanging out at the ballgame. We’re not golfing together. This is not the way it used to be—because you’ve moved; you’ve changed.”

The second soil may be easy to reveal in the time of trial. It’s the third soil that’s very hard—it’s when their passion and zeal for the word of God gets worn down by the pressures of life, the temptations of the world, the desire for riches. Watch out for that, too. There are times you need to start backing out because “You know what? I don’t think you’re the kind of person anymore that really hears the word of God and does it.”

That may sound snooty to you; you may think people are going to call you “arrogant” and “cliquish” and all that. Don’t worry about what people say. The Scripture is very clear about this: when it comes to those who ought to be closest to you, ought to be those who hear the word of God. I’m not talking about ministry—obviously, we minister to people—all kinds of people. I’m not talking about—“Well, clearly, we’ve got to work in the world”—Paul said that; “I can’t avoid non-Christians.” Of course I’m



going to interact with non-Christians. I'm going to be compassionate; I'm going to be kind; I'm going to be friendly. But my real friends—my closest friends—those are going to be people who hear the word of God and do it.

Real quickly—take you to one last place—two passages in Philippians. Go to Philippians chapter 1 with me, if you would; with this, we'll wrap it up. There are some words that Paul uses regarding his best friends. And they're great words, and they're helpful words—they're words, I think, that will help you sort out who it is that you ought to be hanging out with this afternoon and next Friday night, and who you should be texting this week and praying with and talking to and sharing your thoughts with. Your closest friends—who should they be? Here's some other words besides just re-quoting "hearing the word of God and doing it." Here's what they look like—verse 27, Philippians 1:27: "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel"—there's a good descriptor for us: I want to live a life that's worthy of the gospel—that reflects that kind of fidelity to the truth of the gospel, that responds with bearing fruit—"so that whether I come and see you," Paul says, "or am absent, I may hear that you are"—now here it comes—"standing firm in one spirit"—I love this—"that all you guys have that same mentality about living worthy of the gospel; with one mind"—together we have the same priorities, the same zeal, the same objectives—"striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." That word translates those four English words—"striving side by side"—see those four words? It translates one Greek word—compound word: *syn* (which means "together") *athleō* (athlete)—*synathleō*. Does that sound like a word you know? Athlete—*athleō*. *Synathleō*—the *synathletoi* could be translated, even just saying it out loud, like "a teammate," like your fellow competitors on a team. Take that for just a second and work with it.

Let's say we built a brand-new gymnasium next door—wood floors, great professional-grade baskets. Now here's the thing: after church—we're going to break here in just a minute; I'm going to pray, let you go—we're going to have a basketball tournament this afternoon. The winner of the basketball tournament who puts together the best team that can win this five-on-five basketball is going to win a million dollars. I came into some money this weekend—a million dollars in cash in a briefcase—give it to you; just win this basketball tournament this afternoon. That would be awesome, wouldn't it? Okay, now before I say "Amen," you're not listening to my prayer—you're thinking about who you're going to snag for your team. And before I say "Amen," you're going to run to the people that you know in this auditorium who look like they may be good basketball players: "Be on my team; be on my team." Why? Because there's a million dollars at stake—we can win a million dollars if we win this basketball game this afternoon.

Paul said this: he said, you know people that compete in sporting events—they compete for wreaths that perish. If I gave you a million dollars, you'd think, "Well, that would be great—set for life." But here's the thing: you can't take it with you—even if we stuff what's left in your coffin. It does no good for you when you're dead—it perishes. But he says the wreath that we compete for is an eternal one.



Please make this comparison now. I think you might be more discriminating and careful—you might be willing to even be seen as less compassionate—when you pass by some people you think, “They’d be terrible at basketball,” but “You know what—we’re competing for something really important.” You’d be more discriminating about choosing a basketball team for a million dollars than you would choosing your team of friends to live the Christian life. And all I’m saying is: that makes no sense. Here he says, “You know what I want you guys to be—*synathleōs*—to be fellow competitors, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” And I love this—and you’d want to pick basketball players like this: “You’re not frightened in anything by your opponents”—fearless.

Now, I don’t know who you continue to relate to at that close, intimate level just because you don’t want to hurt anybody’s feelings—and I’m not talking about sending them a breakup letter or anything; I’m just saying backing out and picking people that you say, “I want the strong Christians surrounding my life to walk through the Christian life; but not people that fudge on the Word—not people that read it and go, ‘Well, you know, it’s a suggestion’—people that see the truth and fight to do what’s right; striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” Pick those carefully.

I said two passages in Philippians—this will be the last one—Philippians chapter 4, verse 2. Let me quote this passage for you, because some of you have some relationships in this church, in your small group, and you’ve got a problem in that relationship—and it has nothing to do with obedience to the Word of God. It’s some dumb reason that you’re fighting—that there’s this barrier. Something’s come between you and another person that really shouldn’t come between you because it’s not of eternal significance. It has nothing to do with your sanctification. It’s not about the kinds of doctrinal matters that should matter. It’s not about obedience. You’ve got that person, and they’re committed to the Word of God and doing it, and you’re committed to the Word of God and doing it—it’s just you’ve got some personal thing where feelings were hurt. Here’s the other side: patch that up. Get over it, man.

Verse 2—he writes this letter—now can you imagine if you’re these two people in the church, and this is being read in the church of Philippi, and your name shows up in this—and it’s not a compliment. Verse 2: “I entreat [I beg, I exhort] Euodia, and I entreat Syntyche, to agree in the Lord.” Now, think about this: if Paul knew one of them was all about applying the Word and hearing the Word and obeying the Word, and the other one was not—and that was the source of their conflict—do you think he’d have any problem saying, “Euodia, repent. Syntyche has told you the right thing to do and you’re not doing it”? Of course he’d side with the person that had the Scriptures and the Word of God on her side in this case. But he doesn’t do that because this is not one of those issues. “Agree in the Lord. I’m not asking you to compromise any biblical principles—I just need you guys to agree.”



And then he asks the person—I'm assuming now (this is up for debate because he doesn't name who it is)—he calls him his “true companion” (which probably, I think, is Epaphroditus, who is carrying this letter to this church), and he addresses him as the “true companion”—that translates the word “yoke-fellow.” That's the way it's literally translated. That's the oxen with the bar across their back, with the leather straps around their neck, and they're pulling that plow together. Paul says, “Now I've got someone who's one of my co-workers—my yoke-fellow—and I want you to get in there and help these two ladies. I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have”—now look at this—“labored side by side with me.” Remember that word up there in chapter 1—*synathleō*? Same word—instead of being translated “strived,” he says “labored side by side.” They've done that in the gospel together with Clement, and let me just talk about Clement and his kind—they're also my “fellow workers”—*synergoi*—they work together. I love those words—*synathleō*, *synergos*, “true companion” or “yoke-fellow,” literally. Now they've all got their names in the Book of Life, but these have designations where Paul makes distinctions in relationships, and he says, “You know what—here are the people I'm in the trenches walking through my Christian life with. They're my fellow workers, my fellow laborers, my yoke-fellows, my true companions.” Don't let something get in the way if it doesn't need to be in the way. Cultivate your godly friendships—and maybe, for some of you, go back and re-cultivate ones, because it's not an issue of obedience to the Word—it's something silly that's gotten in the way of you two.

Now, in our church we have this ministry called the “LINK” cycling ministry, right? Some of you know—you're part of that. Those guys wear those slick outfits with green and white and black that they get poured into before they go out on their rides. Now, let's just say for the sake of illustration I'm going to go join them for one of their arduous long rides. (No, it's not going to happen—this is an illustration.) But let's just say, for the sake of illustration, I show up to go on one of these long rides with LINK, and when I get there they've already got one of the, you know, spandex things for me—“Right—here we go, Pastor Mike—get into the spandex.” And I say, “You know what—I'm not comfortable in that. I brought my own outfit, and I'm wearing it now.” And they're looking at me going, “You're crazy.” And it's a suit with a tie. And I say, “You know what—I never really get to wear my really nice overcoat that I bought when I travel to places and preach in other places where it's really cold, so I brought my trench coat—my overcoat—because, you know, I just don't get to wear it much.” So I've got my trench coat, I've got my tie, got my suit, got my coat, got my slacks on—and then I say, “And I know it looks funny down here—my shoes—my wife just bought me these rollerblades, and she says, ‘When you're out there, just—love you...’” So I'm wearing my rollerblades today just in honor of my wife, because I love my wife. And so I've got rollerblades and a suit and a trench coat on. “That's what I feel comfortable in.” They let me know, “You really need to get into the spandex—this would be better; you know, it's just better; that's not going to work.” And I say, “Listen, man—stop trying to, you know, micromanage my life. Don't be the Holy Spirit in my life, man—I'm going to wear this suit and this trench coat and these rollerblades.” “Okay, Pastor Mike—if that's what you think—fine.”



So I get on my bike, and we start our arduous, long LINK cycling ride. And not very far into the ride I start complaining: “Dude, you guys are going way too fast; and this is—I mean, I can’t keep up with you; and my feet keep slipping off the pedals; and I’m sweating like a pig and we haven’t gone two miles; and I’m very uncomfortable; and I don’t like this LINK cycling thing.” They look at me, and I complain about it, and I say, “I’m not doing very well, and it’s too hard, and it’s too...” How much sympathy do you think I’d get from the LINK guys who had to put my jersey and outfit in their backpack and I wouldn’t put it on? They’d be, “You know, you’d be doing a lot better to just put on the right stuff.” Not much sympathy at all.

The Bible says, Proverbs 13:20: “He who walks with the wise will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” What we ensconce our life with—if we put on the wrong things, if we associate and pull close the wrong people—I don’t think there’ll be a lot of sympathy at the Judgment Seat of Christ when you look at the trajectory of your Christian life, how it really is and how it could have been. And when you say to Christ, “Well, you know what—everybody was just going too fast; they were too into it—too zealous—and, you know, I had these relationships, and they weren’t really into it; so I was trying to pull them all along; and, you know, I just—I didn’t really maximize my potential because, you know, the people in my life...” Not much sympathy—because the Bible’s been very clearly saying, “Listen—be careful who you take this journey with.”

And I can tell you—and I don’t want to end on a sour note—but I can look back at people who two years ago, twelve years ago, twenty-two years ago—pick a period of time—who chose relationship over obedience to the Word of God. And it was subtle. It took the long-term effects of that decision to say, “Well, I’ll stick with these relationships because I’m comfortable with this.” And I’d say, “Well, it’s the relationship that you need to shed, but we need to be concerned about is fidelity to the truth.” And so—those relationships—leave them behind and come with us on this journey. And I can watch their lives—and I just had a conversation yesterday about someone—and their lives tank. And they’re still kind of going to church sometimes. And it was all because of relationship.

All I’m saying is that you need to understand that when it comes to your closest relationships, Jesus couldn’t have said it clearer: those who hear the word of God and do it. Prioritize your relationships, because the long-term effects of foolish decisions in this regard can have lasting and serious consequences in your Christian life.

Stand with me—let me dismiss you with a word of prayer.



God, we love your word. We love you. We understand your love for us in these very stern and terse and poignant statements that you make to us. Help us, please, God, to be responsive today. Like I said, not being cruel to people in our lives, but really readjusting the time that we spend with certain people—stepping up, cultivating, investing in relationships that we know are like-minded, that reflect our desire and our passion to live for you in this world. Let us team up and be able to look around at our lives and say, “Man, here are my fellow workers, my true companions, my teammates in this.” These are the people that, when something happens, I call them on my phone, or I text them and I email—we hang out, we go to events together. Those are the people who love God like I do and love his word and are responsive to it the way that I want to be.

God, make that the reality for us. And for those that are isolationists in our crowd here—there’s got to be plenty—who just have painted themselves in a corner and they don’t have relationships the way they should—please convict them this morning. The Christian life was never intended to be lived in isolation. And allow us to reach out and make time—make the kind of time that we need—to invest in relationships, so together we can walk through this world with wise people by our side, knowing that the companion of fools will suffer harm. Dismiss us now with a renewed sense of purpose and direction and clarity about this principle. In Jesus’ name, Amen.