

Heaven on Earth (Part 11) – A Love That Gives and Sends

Trevor Joy – November 4, 2018

Good morning. Grab your Bibles and turn to John, chapter 3. We have a lot of ground to cover, so we're going to dive right in. If this is your first time joining us, we're in our series of John. We started it a while back, and I don't know when we'll be done. We'll take a little break for Advent, we'll dive back in sometime at the end of January, and then we'll just go until we're done.

Right now, for today, we're in chapter 3. We started chapter 3 last week. The first part of chapter 3, Jesus is in this conversation with Nicodemus. We're actually going to pick up in the second half of that conversation. There are two parts of the text we're going to be in. We're going to be in verses 9-21. The first half is the conversation with Jesus and Nicodemus, and then the second half is John's commentary on that conversation.

Theologians argue where the conversation with Jesus stops and where John's commentary starts. For our purposes, we're going to treat it at the verses 15 and 16 mark is where it's going to stop. Though there are two different sections, there are actually going to be three different parts that we'll walk through this morning. Let's do this. Let's read through the whole thing together, kind of get oriented to the text we're going to be in, where we're at, what we're going to be talking about, and then we'll go forward. Let's start in verse 9.

"Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his

only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

I've crafted this sentence. This will be the driving theme and point of our time today. What I hope you walk away with is understanding this sentence that hopefully will get more and more clear as we walk through this together. Let me read it out loud to you. *One can only enter the kingdom through belief in the saving work that the Son came to do, a mission that was a consequence of the love of the Father, a love that gives and sends, fully and freely, to save and redeem.* Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I just ask by your Spirit's power that you might help us to see that which we cannot see apart from your help, believe that which apart from you we are not able to believe, and to live in such a way that apart from you we are not able in and of ourselves to live. We ask that you would do this all for the exaltation of your name, amen.

We're going to dive into this first part, verses 9-15. Let's read through just that part together again in isolation, and we'll tackle it. **"Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?'"** What he's referring to there is the first part of their conversation where Jesus has told him, "You have to be born again to be saved." That happened in the first part of the conversation.

"Jesus answered him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.'"

Then he ends here. This is going to be really critical. **"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the**

wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Some background here. We know from last week that Nicodemus is a very serious man about religion. We know that because he's a Pharisee. In fact, this is the first direct encounter we have with Jesus and a Pharisee recorded in the book of John.

The main thing to know about Pharisees is their zeal to obey God's law. There are over 613 commands laid out in the Old Testament, and Pharisees were very zealous about strictly obeying these dos and don'ts. We know not only that Nicodemus was a serious leader, not only that he was a pious leader, but as we know from verse 1, he's also a powerful leader, most likely a member of the Sanhedrin. This guy, this leader, Nicodemus, comes to Jesus not in broad daylight; he comes in the cover of night to question him about his teaching.

So that's the scene that this conversation is taking place. Jesus responds to him with the worst possible news a Pharisee could hear. We know what he says in verse 3: "Unless someone is born again they cannot enter the kingdom of God." Why this was really, really hard news for a man like Nicodemus is what Jesus is saying is, "Nicodemus, your religious credentials are not enough to get you into heaven."

Throughout this conversation, Nicodemus has recognized that Jesus is a teacher who has come from God. We see that in verse 2. But at this point he neither understands him (verse 10) or believes him (verse 12). So Jesus moves to use an Old Testament story with Moses that Nicodemus would have known very well. In fact, Jesus closes this discussion with that reference to the Old Testament narrative.

What's happening in this story with Moses and the bronze serpent is while the Israelites were in the wilderness (recorded in the book of Numbers) the desert's poisonous snakes were killing God's people, so Moses crafted a bronze snake, affixed it to the top of a pole, and when people were bitten by these deadly poisonous snakes they had only to look to this bronze serpent to be saved from death. Nicodemus is being challenged to turn to Jesus for new life in much the same way the Israelites were commanded to turn to the bronze serpent to be saved.

He says, "As Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness for the Israelites to see and be saved, so the Son of Man must also be lifted up." This phrase *lifted up* occurs four times throughout this gospel, and it always occurs with the combination of two notions: Jesus being lifted physically onto the cross and Jesus spiritually being exalted, like we see in Isaiah 6.

We not only see this symbolically portrayed in the story of the bronze serpent; we also see this prophesied in a ton of places. For example, Isaiah 52, where it says, "**Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.**" It continues to say in Isaiah 53, when it's talking about what the suffering servant came to do... At the end of Isaiah 53 it says, "**Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.**"

Jesus is trying to point out to Nicodemus our radical corruption from sin requires a radical redemption from God. As Jesus has been saying to Nicodemus, we need a brand new birth. "Lifted up" points us to the crucifixion where Jesus was lifted to the cross, like the bronze serpent was lifted up in the wilderness. To trust or believe in the cross is necessary for new life.

These words *trust and believe* are actually used 241 times throughout the entire New Testament, 98 times just within the book of John, and 8 times just in this passage alone. What is Jesus doing? He's drawing the line with Nicodemus that new birth comes by one way: trusting and believing in the cross of Christ. Romans 5 says:

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."

Romans 10:9 says, "**...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**" Ephesians 2:8 tells us, "**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...**" The single unmistakable sign of new birth is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This faith is not something, Nicodemus, that we attain but we receive.

R.C. Sproul talks about it this way: "If you have in your heart today any affection for Christ at all, it is because God the Holy Spirit in his sweetness, in his power, in his mercy, and in his grace has been to the cemetery of your soul and has raised you from the dead." Jesus, in this closing discourse to Nicodemus, also shows that all of the Old Testament is pointing to the cross, that through the lifting up of the Son we can be fully, finally, and forever free from sin and death.

As we started this way we'll continue. We enter the kingdom of God only through the belief in the saving work of the Son, and as we're going to see, the Son's mission is a consequence of the love of the Father, a love that gives and a love that sends, fully and freely, to redeem. This brings us now to our main passage in verses 16-21.

Pastors and theologians in abundance have said it's nearly impossible to mine all the gold out of these verses in one sermon alone, but we're going to handle this section a little bit differently. I deeply sense the Spirit's leading to speak to two different groups of people here this morning through the two different ways that God's love is described in this passage.

The first way it's described is in verse 16. It's described as a *love that gives*. Here I want to speak to anybody in this room who is not a follower of Christ, who is not a believer of Jesus or who is walking through a deep season of doubt and struggle about the beliefs of the faith or maybe you're walking through such a significant season of struggle it has shaken the foundations of your faith. What you once believed, through what you're going through it may be really difficult for you to believe that today. That's who I want to speak to.

The second way it's described in verse 17 is a *love that sends*. Here I want to speak to everybody in this room who claims to be a follower of Christ. From brand-new believer to wise sage in the faith, I want to speak to that group. Let's start with verse 16, a love that gives. Let's read verse 16 together. **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."**

Again, I want to speak to those in the room who are not followers of Christ, having a deep-struggle difficulty with the claims of Christ or just not there yet or maybe you're walking in a deep season of struggle where you're just going, "I'm having a hard time holding on to those beliefs right now with what's going on."

The first word in verse 16 is *for*. What this means is that what is about to be said is directly connected to what was previously said. What was previously said? What we just talked about. What did Jesus say? He said the Son must be crucified for us to be reconciled to God. That's the point Jesus is making to Nicodemus. Here in verse 16 he's answering the question, "Why did the Son of Man go to the cross?" What's the answer? Because of the love of God, because God so loved the world.

Though this is probably the most popular and consistently quoted verse in all of the Bible, it is also probably the biggest hurdle for those of you who don't believe this message. There are a lot of you in here today who are like Nicodemus who are really confused and disoriented by this entire conversation. Belief for Nicodemus was rooted in his works. For others it may be in another god, something or someone, but be assured everyone in this room has belief in something.

We're never neutral when it comes to belief. Everyone in here today believes and is following something. What I don't want you to miss in this passage is the primary message communicated in this verse is what separates the Christian faith from every other religion or belief in the world. Other beliefs, like Islam, for example, believe that no part of creation resembles the likeness of God, that he cannot be seen but sees all.

This god of Islam requires absolute obedience to things like the Five Pillars, memorizing the Qur'an, prayer multiple times a day, journey to Mecca, fasting on Ramadan, being charitable, strict adherence to this life, but the Bible says we were created in the image of God and we have value, worth, and dignity because we bear that image. Our God, who exceeds all human understanding, made himself known to us in the Word written and in the Word made flesh.

This Christian God is perfect and holy and absolutely condemns sin and disobedience, yet this God in whom there is no sin took our sin upon himself, that we might be saved, and empowers us to walk out the obedience he commands. Buddhists, for example, believe we actually don't die but, rather, we enter a perpetual cycle of life and reincarnation until we've achieved nirvana, which is this perfect state of enlightenment, and every life we live either moves us closer or farther away from nirvana. The Bible says:

"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

What separates Christianity from every other religion in the world is that our God not only has declared his love for us but has demonstrated his love to us. The Bible says he loved the world, but how much did he actually love the world? To what extent did he love the world? He loved it enough to give his one and only Son.

You may be saying, "Yeah, I've heard that before, but I'm just not there yet. Those thoughts are not connecting for me." What I want to draw your attention to today is not another religious system but a God who before the world was created knew you, loves you, and has brought that love to you in Jesus. Follow me here. Let me propose something to you. Let me tell you a story.

Imagine there is actually a God in heaven, and suppose this God created the entire world. Imagine that in the process of creating everything in the world...trees, animals, etcetera...he formed human beings and gave them the highest designation in all of creation because he fashioned them in his image to live in perfect relationship with him. Imagine he gave them only one command, but it took them about 15 minutes to rebel against him by doing the one thing he told them not to do.

Suppose God then said, "You deserve judgment for your revolt against me, but I'm going to provide a way for you to escape my judgment." He then called Abraham out of paganism and brought him to himself with the promise that he would make him the father of a great nation and through this nation he would bless the entire world. Because this nation would also repeatedly turn against God, imagine he would send prophets to this nation to call them back to him.

What did this nation do? Instead of heeding what the prophets said, these people would rise up and actually kill them. Imagine then God finally said, "I love you so much that even though you don't deserve it I'm going to send my eternal only Son to you." Again, the people rose up, and what did they do? They killed him. Close your eyes and listen to this.

Imagine that God loved these people enough that while they were in the very act of killing his Son he transferred the sins of those people to his Son and said, "If you will receive my love for you through the work of my Son, through the death of my Son, and turn your eyes to him and follow him, death and judgment you deserve for rebelling against me will be gone and, instead, you will have eternal life with no pain, no tears, no evil, only joy that will increase continually for eternity."

If God were to do all of that, would you believe that he loved you? He did, and no other pleasure in the world, trinket, treasure, culture, or religion can accomplish for you what the God in the heavens has done for you in Christ. C.S. Lewis said all of human history is a long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God to make him happy. Church, person out there in doubt and despair, all you have to do today is place your trust in the finished work of Jesus on your behalf. Look to Jesus, and the fullness of life now and into eternity is waiting for you.

The Bible says in Luke 11, "**...ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.**" Why? Because God's love gives freely and fully to save and redeem. It's a love that gives, but that's not where it stops.

In verse 17 this love is described a different way. This is where I want to transition and speak to the Christians in the room, anybody in this room who claims to be a follower of Christ, from brand-new believer, just started, to "Man, I've been walking with the Lord for decades." Verse 17 says, "**For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**"

Again, we have that word *for*. This verse is building on the last verse, which said that because of God's love for us he gave his Son. He was sent not to condemn the world. Why? Because the world was condemned already. Since the garden, when Adam and Eve decided to rebel against God's gracious rule, mankind has been condemned to death. Romans 3:23 covers all of us. It says we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

We needed something no human agent could devise. We needed a solution to the problem of sin and death that we could not provide for ourselves. John 3:17 is saying God provided the solution. In the sending of the Son to take flesh, die on our behalf, absorb the wrath of God for us, and grant us life through faith, God sent the solution. The Son's mission as the Sent One of God is not a coincidence but a consequence of God's love for us.

As followers of Christ, we're now grafted into the story of the Father demonstrating and declaring his love through the mission he gave to the Son. Being brought into the kingdom through faith in Jesus means we're now advancers of the kingdom with the message of Jesus. God sent the Son, and the Son is now sending you. One of my favorite authors, Michael Goheen, says it this way:

"The coming of the kingdom of God means a cosmic battle between God and Satan for the whole of creation and the whole of human life. God's power has been poured out to liberate the entire world from the power of sin, misery, death, idolatry, and Satan himself. An invitation to follow Jesus is an invitation to take sides in this battle: to align oneself with and experience God's redemptive power." To me, there's no better place to see this than in the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John 17. Jesus prays this:

"Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." He goes on to say, "Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you." Then he said...

"I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

Later, in John 20, he's speaking to the disciples and says, **"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."** Romans 10:14 says, **"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?"** We're not done. **"And how are they to preach unless they are sent?"** Second Corinthians 5:18: **"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation..."**

On and on I could go, but an overwhelming theme of the New Testament is that there are no neutral people in the kingdom of God. We have been saved and sent. Our allegiance is now the kingdom of the beloved Son, and the orientation of our lives is now directed toward moving this gospel forward until we die or Jesus returns.

I want to say that again. The overwhelming theme of the New Testament is there are no neutral people in the kingdom of God. We have been saved and sent. Our allegiance is now the kingdom of the beloved Son, and the orientation of our lives is now directed toward moving this gospel forward until we die or Jesus returns. What drives us as a sent people, following the Son on the mission of God, is answered in these next few verses. Read it with me, starting in verse 18.

"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed."

Jesus didn't come to condemn the world, because the world was condemned already. This passage is reminding us there's a world of people out there who do not believe on the name of the only Son of God and their path is headed directly to hell. This is why our understanding of what it means to be a sent people is such a big deal. The mission has not been completed. That is what we have been sent to do. There's no room in the Bible for a follower of Christ to stand still.

A couple of weeks ago, maybe a month ago now, the elders were going to go on a retreat, and we had to cancel the retreat last minute because of some things that came up out of our control. Most of the guys had somewhat of a freed afternoon, so we decided, "We're going to redeem the time. We're going to get lunch together." So we decided to meet up here on a Friday at 10:30, load up in a couple of different cars, and drive and go have lunch together.

I was kind of organizing it, so I was driving one of the cars. At 10:30 I'm getting gas, and I arrive here right at 10:30, and I see all of the cars out there. The elders were here, but nobody was standing outside ready to go. I get really pretentious about time. I like to be on time. I like to finish things on time, as you'll see today. So I was sitting there, and I was like, "Okay, where *is* everybody?" I'm sitting there. "Okay. Maybe they're doing something."

I wait two minutes, three minutes, four minutes. This is where I'm kind of getting peeved. I'm like, "Okay, we've got to go." I kind of give a little love tap on the horn to let everybody know I'm out here. Maybe they just didn't know it was time to go. Nothing. Now I'm beyond peeved; I'm frustrated, whatever the next level is above that. I'm like, "We need to go." My Achiever is flaring. So I pull the car into the parking lot and walk inside, and I see all of the guys right inside the doors. They're kind of huddled around this other person. They all seem to be praying.

Just full confession. My first thought as I walked in was, "Hey, guys, it doesn't take all 12 of you to pray for this dude." I know that's bad. It was just what was there. I'm like, "Some of you guys could get in the car. The rest of the guys can finish. We can meet you there and be on time." I know. You'll hear the rest of the story, where it goes for me. I'm standing there, and everybody is around praying for this guy. I'm just kind of standing there, trying to be patient, like, "Okay, I'm sure this is really good. Okay, let's get going." I get really preoccupied with the mission, so I just have to go finish that thing.

So I'm standing there, and Matt all of a sudden looks at the guy and says, "Hey, I want you to talk to God now, and I want you to tell him what you want." This guy starts to pray. Lo and behold, right in front of me this guy comes to Christ. He professes belief in Christ, says, "God, I want to know you, love you, and follow you." So I go from frustrated to really excited. "Okay, somebody just came to faith. This is amazing. That's awesome. Will somebody tell me what is happening? Let's get in the car, and you guys can talk to me about it."

A couple of the guys go to exchange numbers with this guy, and then Stin, one of our elders... I go, "Hey, man, what's happening?" He goes, "I'll tell you in the car." I said, "Okay, great." So we get in the car, we're driving, and I'm like, "Hey man, fill me in. What just happened? This is amazing." He said, "I was at home at like 9:30, and I just felt kind of restless and prompted like I needed to leave." So he left and came up here to the church. He had a work phone call he had to get on, and then he was just going to listen to music and pray and kind of wait until time for us to get here.

He said, "I was sitting there, and about 10:00 I saw this guy pull up on a motorcycle." This was on a Friday morning. He got off his motorcycle, walked up to the doors. The doors were locked, so he started walking back out. Our offices are closed on Fridays. He rolled down his window and said to the guy, "Hey, can I help you?" The guy was like, "Yeah. I was at home doing dishes, and I heard a voice tell me, 'Stop what you're doing, go to the church, and they can tell you what it means to follow God.'"

He said, "So I did that. I put the dishes down, followed the voice, and came up here. Can you help me?" Stin was like, "Yeah. Yeah, I can help you." So what I was showing up to were these 12 men testifying to this dude about the gospel of Jesus Christ and him coming to faith. It was amazing. A little backstory. He had been to the church the past couple of weeks. His wife had brought him, but he didn't understand... He comes from an Islamic background. He didn't understand anything that was being said in here. So this voice said, "Go to the church, and they'll tell you what this means."

A couple of days after that... I'm just impacted by this. You can imagine that just changes the day. I quit being such a jerk from there on. I just kind of chilled out and said, "Okay, Lord. Whatever you want to do with the schedule you can do. You want us to hang out here in the parking lot a little bit longer? You want us to do whatever, that's fine. You have it. I feel well rebuked." Yeah, that was embarrassing. It's fine. This is part of my penance.

A couple of days later, I'm just thinking through this, completely blown away by what God did. "God, did you really just save this dude right in front of us here on this day? We didn't do anything. We just showed up. He was there. You really just literally put the cookies on a lower shelf for us here. This is incredible."

I'm thinking about that, and I'm going, "Man, how incredible was it that when this guy was doing his dishes and was prompted by the Holy Spirit..." He didn't know it was that when it prompted him. He was prompted by the Holy Spirit to go and find somebody to tell him about Jesus. All he had to do was get in his car and drive up to the church, and there were 12 ready, able, mature, godly men there ready to testify about the gospel of Jesus Christ to this guy. How incredible is that? What a gift.

The sad side of that is there are about 2.6 billion people in the world today who are destined to hell with no available witness of Christ, that if the Holy Spirit spoke to them and said, "Drop what you're doing; go find somebody to tell you about God," they would have no person or word or piece of paper to tell them about Jesus. That's a reality.

That's the rest of the world. Let's bring it a little bit closer to home. Did you know about 58 percent of the people in Denton County claim no religion at all? That means over 400,000 people within reach of us here in our town, in our city, probably don't know Jesus, safely. That means there's roughly a 1:3 chance that your neighbor is actually a Christian.

You stand out and look at all of the houses around you. There's a 1:3 chance that one of those neighbors is actually a follower of Christ, but there's a 100 percent chance that they're broken people who need to experience the love of God. If all this freaks you out, if you're going, "Man, this just feels condemning. This is hard. I don't feel equipped to do this. I'm not brave enough. That's scary to me to start that conversation..." You don't feel up to the task, whatever it is. "I don't have the tools to do this. I don't know where to begin."

In the Bible, Christians are primarily armed with three things: the gospel of Jesus, their story of salvation, and the Spirit of God. That's really it. If you're a follower of Christ today, you have everything you need to be a faithful and effective witness for the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is also why we push so intentionally for you to get into a Bible study, get into the training program, get into one of our classes: so you can be more comfortable and confident in what you believe about God. Not so you can have some facts to throw out when you're hanging in the pick-up line at school to sound cool. No. It's so you can be a maturing and faithful witness.

This is why we have things like Go Trips or Go Groups, these environments where you can learn what it is to share your faith in a hands-on way and experience the power of God working through you as you step out on faith and live on mission. So, let me end *this way*, church. For followers of Christ in this room, please hear me: do not settle for the neutral Christianity peddled to you by somebody who is afraid to make you uncomfortable and miss out on a life of the power of God working through you.

We're called to be a Bible-believing, Spirit-filled, missional people giving our lives away for the gospel of Jesus Christ. I'll end how we began. *One can only enter the kingdom through belief in the saving work of the Son, a mission that is a consequence of the love of the Father, a love that gives and sends, fully and freely, to save and redeem.* Let me pray.

Father in heaven, I know that this message lands on so many different people in so many different ways. God, I know that you know all of them and are actively speaking to all of them right now. Father, I just ask for those in this room who are far from you, that when this news is brought to them and is either not believed by them, not seen by them, not heard by them, not known by them, or not understood by them, Father, would you give them eyes to see, ears to hear the voice of the Father crying out to them, that today what they would not hear as a message, what they would experience as your love for them.

Maybe they don't hear it, maybe they don't believe it, ultimately, because they do not see themselves worthy of love. As somebody who has been in that seat, God, would you do for them what you did for me? Would you push past the shame? Would you push past the fear? Would you push past the memories? Would you push past the wall they've erected out of pride or fear or isolation, and would you show them today just how much you love them? Would today be the day that they're called out of darkness into life?

Father, there are a lot of people in this room who claim to be followers of Christ who love you and may be trying to give their honest best but are just really missing it. Maybe they don't feel neutral today. Maybe that's not how they'd describe themselves. Maybe they don't feel neutral. Maybe they just feel stuck.

Whatever that is, whatever is holding them in place and keeping them from experiencing a life lived on mission, being used and empowered by you to advance the kingdom, all that they're missing

staying in this safe, comfortable space where nobody gets challenged, nobody gets worried, nothing gets uncomfortable, nobody has to die, move, sell, whatever it is, God, would you pull them out of that, not just to make them uncomfortable but so they might experience life to the fullest?

God, would you break all of our hearts? Some are sitting in this room, but we know thousands, millions exist in the world today with no hope, yet so many of us in this room today have that hope and do nothing with it. Convict our hearts. Give us that 30 seconds of courage to walk up to the person we know needs hope and share with them the hope we have in Jesus. Burden our hearts for kingdom business, that what might be said about this church is we are people about the Father's business. Mark us in that. Awaken us for that. Send us out in that. Would you do all of that for the glory of your name? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

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