



Exodus (Part 11) – Just Men

Matt Chandler – November 6, 2016

[Video]

Female: From darkness to light, this is the story we all share as the people of God. He draws us out to draw us in. From the birth of Israel to the church today, God delivers and dwells with his people. He draws us out of our sin, our Egypt, and draws us into his presence, into relationship with him.

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Well, good morning. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in Exodus 6. I thought Jamin Roller really knocked the first 13 verses out of the park. I have the genealogy, so I'm excited about that. I know that for many of you, the genealogy is actually your favorite part of the book of Exodus, and you've been eagerly anticipating this moment. Away we go.

One of the great delights of being the pastor of The Village Church is the men and women who God has brought onto our staff who I get to co-labor with in the mission of God, in this location, among you as the members of The Village Church. One of the things that makes it a lot of fun for me is we genuinely enjoy one another.

We spend a lot of time laughing and crying and praying and hoping. It's a real delight to kind of wake up and get to come do work that I feel called by God to do among men and women who burn with the zeal to see you fully formed into the image of Christ, that you would be, by the grace of God, molded and shaped into all God has for you in Jesus Christ.

That plays itself out in significant ways. What I mean by that is you really are prayed for probably more than you know. That prayer can come with tears and an immense amount of hope. We're constantly evaluating, talking, trying to listen, trying to hear, to do all we know God has called us to do.

We know that if we're going to be the vibrant community of faith that God has called us to be, that salt and light to the world around us, we know as staff members, as elders, as deacons that part of that is you growing in your personal relationship with Jesus Christ, a greater understanding of who God is, of what he's like, of what that means for you, but it also means we have to learn that not only has God called us to himself, but he has also called us to one another.

We feel the weight of that, so when we're on white boards or looking at budgets or kind of planning events, those are the kinds of things that are pulsing through our veins, a zeal to see you understand rightly this vertical relationship with God while simultaneously understanding the horizontal aspect of the Christian faith.

We feel immensely the weight of trying to get you to fully embrace that church is not just an hour-and-20-minute gathering. What it means is to belong to the people of God in such a way that the rest of the week is decidedly marked by your understanding of Jesus. You aren't to be pew dwellers but really to understand that all we're talking about in the gathering has implications for what occurs outside of this gathering.

We know we need to be serious about justice, and we need to be serious about mercy. We need to be serious about oppression. We need to be serious about these things. We feel the weight of that in a way that I think is unique as pastors and ministers and deacons and elders because we know what we're up against. We know the hurdles to see us accomplish or have formed in us the accomplishment of being men and women fully formed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, if we stay at the high level, everybody knows what the hurdles are to becoming a vibrant community of faith. The hurdle is sin. For the purpose of our time together, I want to nuance sin, and I want to nuance sin the way the New Testament has nuanced sin. I want to talk about the idea of strongholds and what strongholds are.

If you have a background in church, specifically if you have a charismatic background in church, when I say *strongholds*, you're probably thinking about demonic strongholds. That certainly is found throughout the Scriptures, and I don't disbelieve those things, but I think if we're going to be real honest about what the New Testament is actually talking about, rarely when it talks about strongholds is it talking about demonic powers but rather broken mindsets.

Here's how Dr. Eric Mason explains them. "...a stronghold is a mind-set, value system, or thought process that hinders your growth [the growth of others], and your exalting Jesus above everything in your life." I love Mason's explanation of strongholds, that we're believing something false, and in believing that false thing, what happens is we've hindered our own personal relationship with Christ growing. It has hindered other people growing, and it has kept us from fully surrendering to Jesus Christ.

Mason goes on and quotes David Wilkerson as further explanation, "A stronghold is an accusation planted firmly in your mind. Satan establishes strongholds in God's people by implanting in their minds lies, falsehoods, and misconceptions, especially regarding God's nature." What is being described around the idea of strongholds is that we believe something or see the world in such a way that it's distorted.

Everything that we're doing, even though our intent is good, has been distorted because we're seeing incorrectly. The Bible calls that a stronghold because it's hard to spot because the very lenses we're wearing keep us from seeing it. Are you tracking with me? We're actually operating out of what we think is correct, and it's causing some carnage in our lives, and we can't quite figure out what is wrong because the lenses by which we're operating and seeing are lies themselves.

This week, I sat down with some of our group leaders and some of our pastors, and we just started talking through our experience. I've been pastor here for 14 years. There are other guys who have been on staff with me for 8 years, 10 years. Then we have people who have been on staff for a couple of years. We got a good mixture of men and women together in a room, and we just said, "Can we name the strongholds that we see the most consistently at The Village Church?" To be stuck in a stronghold doesn't mean saved or unsaved.

We can all be stuck in strongholds, to see incorrectly and then live a life based out of a lie that is rooted deeply in our hearts. We sat down and talked about The Village Church. We talked about the men and women at The Village Church. We talked about the community in which The Village Church has been placed to be salt and light to the world around it. We started coming up with, "These are..." We really came up with six pretty consistent strongholds that we think are just part of this area and the spiritual dynamics in this area. I want to run through those really quickly.

1. *Individualism*. The rise of personal autonomy, the belief that everything is ultimately about the individual person. When you're stuck in this stronghold, when you're seeing the world through

individualism, through autonomy, what ends up happening as you live life is there is in one sense a type of laziness that undermines what you're really after, because when you live your life based on autonomy, then everything exists to make you happy. You are the sun. They are the planets. They all revolve around you.

You become what the comedian Brian Regan calls a "*Me*" *Monster*. "Me, me, I, me, me, me, me, I." When you live this way, you are literally sucking the life out of others. You become a consumer. When we talk about consumerism, we're almost always thinking about trinkets and toys and upgrading to the next iPhone even though our regular one is fine, but they've just convinced us that we'll be cooler people if we upgrade. We're not. We're the same person we were, just with a new phone, but it makes us *feel* like we're better.

I'm not talking about consumerism in regard to stuff. I'm talking about consumerism in regard to people. See, when you're self-absorbed, when you live life in the stronghold with the lenses of autonomy as the ruler, as the lenses, then you're forced to use people. You use them. You consume them for what you can get out of them. This thins out all of your relationships. This thins out your emotional capacity. This forces you to feel alone with a lot of people you know. This is a stronghold.

2. *Sexual deviance*. We see this one quite a bit in our area and, therefore, in our church. We are willing, because of the day in which we live, to trade in our souls for momentary bodily pleasure. Adultery... On and on I could go with the perversion, not just in this area, but some of which has leaked into the church.

3. *Economic selfishness*. We see this all the time. Now, when I'm talking about economic selfishness, I'm not necessarily talking about a lack of generosity. In fact, you might be some of the most generous people I've ever been around in my life. What I'm talking about on this one that we really need to kind of ferret out is what we see happen often is an inability to be grateful and glad at where we are; we're always wanting more.

When I'm talking about this kind of economic stronghold, I'm talking about how we seem to lack the ability to go, "Look at how generous God is. Look at what he has given us. How gracious and great is God that he has given us all of this?" We all seem far more dialed in to what we don't have than what we do. This robs us of gladness. This robs us of gratitude. It steals from us the ability to rejoice, despite the fact that God has been so generous to all of us.

4. *Fear*. We see a lot of fear, but it's a strange kind of fear. Again, we wanted to kind of dig into this. Fear is a blanket term. What we have found, especially among men and women at The Village, is there is this fear of being found out. "I'm going to be found out. They're going to find out I'm not all they think I am." I don't know what you think we think you are. We're banging the drum every time I put this face mic on. I try to lovingly every week say that you're not awesome. In fact, you're just kind of average.

I'm not doing that to be mean. I'm trying to get you to breathe and just rest in the fact that Christ has outed you on the cross that all of us are in need, all of us are broken, all of us need help. So we don't need to be afraid of being found out. We have already been found out. In fact, what we testify about when we're baptized is that this guy is dying with Christ and being raised to walk by the Holy Spirit's power into the newness of life.

I'm going to stumble and fall and trip and get muddy again, and the grace of God is going to cover me anew. We celebrate that together as a family of faith, not that we're perfect, but we celebrate that in our imperfection, his perfection sticks. This is what we're celebrating as Christians. There is this fear that we're going to be found out.

In fact, I think nine times out of ten, the reason boldness is nonexistent in Christians' lives is because they're operating under a fear of being found out, to not measuring up to some imaginary standard that certainly isn't the biblical one. In fact, I think even if you would search your heart now, you're embarrassed to evangelize. You're embarrassed to live boldly for Jesus. I wonder how much fear dictates that, a fear of being found out, a fear of not being good enough.

5. *Disappointment*. I want to keep saying this to you. I know this is not the way to build a big church. I don't know where we're getting the idea that life is always on an upward trajectory and shouldn't be difficult. I don't know where we're getting that. I have theories. I think the self-esteem movement has far damaged us as people, the, "Everybody gets a trophy," thing. It's just a tough deal. When disappointments come, we don't know how to deal with them.

What disappointment does when it comes and we're not ready for it is disappointment ultimately gets laid at the feet of God. "I'm disappointed in God." Then we begin to take it out on others. We're disappointed in God, and that leads to taking that disappointment out on others. Maybe you're listening to me and going, "Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope." That leads me to the sixth one.

6. *Self-righteousness*. What happens is... Here is why self-righteousness is so insidious and I'll say heartbreaking. Self-righteousness has at its roots some really good things and some things that are biblically informed, some things that are correct. It's in their application and the lack of grace for others that we become self-righteous.

We begin to look down our noses at other people because they have not applied the Scriptures to their lives like we have applied them to ours, believing our application is the best. I'm not being a relativist here. Let me give you some illustrations. In my 14 years here as pastor, here are the two that stick out to me the most.

There was a season and time in which where your kid went to school was just a really big deal. "You don't homeschool? They're not getting a Christian education. Oh, they're in public school. Have they started buying and/or selling meth yet? No? I'll pray for you because they will. It's the only way. They're in public school. They're going to learn evolution. They're going to do drugs. Good luck with your grandbaby. You're going to be a young grandparent. It's going to be awesome."

What is the root of Christian education? What is the root of homeschooling children? It's all beautiful. It really is. It's a beautiful thing. It shouldn't be mocked. It's a beautiful thing to say, "I want to raise my children this way," but it's not a universal principle that you ever get to look down your nose at others yet. That's not even the crazy one. That's one that you're like, "Okay."

The crazy one was the one the near church split that almost occurred over how you have a baby, whether you have a midwife or go to a hospital. I don't know if you were around on that one. I thought, "Am I going to have to address this from the stage?" "Oh, you pump drugs into your baby before you have it. Okay. I mean, I guess that's one way to do it. I don't know if Jesus would have done it that way." You're like, "Okay. First of all, Jesus isn't having any babies."

This was something we went through as a church. What is it? It's self-righteousness. It's rooted in good things. That's what makes self-righteousness so insidious, and it's why self-righteous people just think they're truth-tellers. They don't think they're self-righteous. They just think they're right. Look. They might be. They might be right, but the looking down the nose, the harsh judgment of others, that is never right.

The truth behind it might be right. The application of it and the judgment of others is sinful, evil, and wicked, and Jesus saved some of his harshest words for the self-righteous. We think these are

some of the strongholds that mark us as a community of faith because of the context in which this community of faith is playing itself out in this area.

These are the strongholds of this area, so it makes sense that it would be our strongholds, things we would have to wrestle through, as those being saved out of that to be light to it. Maybe at this point, you're going, "Now what does the genealogy of Moses and Aaron have to do with all of that?" I say this every week. I love it when you're asking the right questions. Let's look at this, Exodus 6, starting in verse 14.

"These are the heads of their fathers' houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the clans of Reuben. The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the clans of Simeon. These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, the years of the life of Levi being 137 years.

The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, by their clans. The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, the years of the life of Kohath being 133 years. The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites according to their generations. Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses, the years of the life of Amram being 137 years.

The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri. Aaron took as his wife Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the clans of the Korahites. Eleazar, Aaron's son, took as his wife one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their clans.

These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said: 'Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.' It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron. On the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, the Lord said to Moses, 'I am the Lord; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you.' But Moses said to the Lord, 'Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?'"

Now, when it comes to genealogies, if we're really honest, we just kind of blow through them, right? If they're on the Bible reading plan, we might even just skip over them altogether and kind of get past them. Yet, the genealogies are in the Scriptures because God is wanting to communicate something to us. What is interesting to note if you ever get into the genealogies, if that becomes a hobby of yours or something, is what you'll find is usually when a genealogy is given, there is a singular truth that God is trying to communicate.

What happens is oftentimes, who makes the list in the genealogy is more about the point the Bible is trying to make than it is when we look up ours, and it's all about the accuracy of who is where and who is related to some famous person back in the past. It seems like everybody I meet has Queen Elizabeth for a great aunt or something like that.

Where we're bent like that, all of the genealogies in the Scriptures are actually opposite of that. They're more interested in making the point that God wants his people to make. There is a singular point being made here, and I'll give you that robust point here in a second, but here's what I want to point out. What we see because of this genealogy is this is almost all caught up in the Levitical line, out of the tribe of Levi, which is the tribe of the priests in the Old Testament.

What we see in this genealogy is that Aaron and Moses come from a really broken and nasty line. Almost everyone listed in this genealogy is either never heard of again or what we know about them isn't pretty. I'll just point out a couple of these things. I don't know if you were paying attention when we were reading through the genealogy, but did you notice here that Moses's dad married his aunt? Did you see that? I tried to slow down and read that a little slower just so you could go, "Wait. What?"

That family reunion is a little weird. What do you call your mom-aunt? "Mom" first would be my guess. Then Korah, who is on this list, ends up being swallowed by the ground for orchestrating a revolt against Moses. Two of Aaron's own sons, Nadab and Abihu, die from offering strange fire to the Lord. Here is the kind of family unit we're talking about. We have all sorts of sexual deviance and incest, all sorts of broken stuff in the background.

Even as we watch Aaron and Moses live their lives, there is so much brokenness and weirdness going on. You have Aaron's two boys who were wild and out. Aaron is not a good dad. Someone is like, "Hey, eventually, the Lord is going to light those fools up." Then God does it. He literally burns

them alive. This is just like one family reunion. If you go back a couple more generations, you see Abraham married his sister on his father's side.

Jacob simultaneously is married to two sisters while both sisters are alive. Judah has an incestuous relationship with his daughter-in-law. Reuben commits adultery with his father's wife while the father is still living. This is our line, the people of God. Whenever somebody wants to argue that the Bible has been tampered with, here's what I always say.

Whoever did that failed miserably at taking out what we need taken out so we look good. This genealogy is the equivalent of you finding out that one of your great-great-grandfathers actually was an SS commander for Nazi Germany. I'm guessing that when you share that, you probably kind of leave him out, right?

"What is your ancestry?"

"Oh, I'm of German descent. It means I like a good beer and some sauerkraut on my dog. Yeah, I'm German."

"Really? Have you done that Ancestry.com thing?"

"Yeah, it's great. We're from Germany. I drive a Volkswagen. We're Germans. *Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*"

You're just leaving out that, "Hey, one of my relatives killed millions of people." You're just kind of leaving that out of the narrative. Well, the Scriptures aren't doing that here. They're just letting all of the ugliness and brokenness of this family's line just lay out there for all of us to see. Now, because we're Americans, here's the way we kind of see Moses and Aaron.

If you watch *SportsCenter* or *60 Minutes*, these kinds of biographies they do, it's the kids from these broken homes, and it's dark and broken and wicked, and they're the ones who made it out. We kind of celebrate them. "Oh, look at this. Moses hasn't slept with his sister. That's a win. Hey, look at Aaron. They've made it. They're kind of setting things on a new right course."

Yet I think what we tend to overlook... There tends to be in the American psyche a denial of how the past affects the present. If we pull this now back into the story, where we are in the story is Moses

yet again arguing with God about what he will and will not do. Remember this genealogy is almost like a commercial break.

If you remember from last week, you have Moses really arguing with the Lord. "I'm not going to do it. Nobody is going to listen to me. I'm just telling you. No one is going to listen to me." Moses already botched it up earlier when he went and said something different than what the Lord told him to say. If we go back and look at Moses through the lenses of this genealogy, it starts to make a bit more sense.

If you grow up in a home like this, in a shattered home like this, then you're forced (psychologists can tell you a lot about this) to kind of take on these veneers to survive. You cope. One of the ways you cope in a broken environment is you become the hero. You can be the guy who fixes it. You can be the one who doesn't do it that way. You're going to make things right. You're going to do it differently.

Now, what does Moses do when he's 40? He tries to lead a revolt. "I'm going to make this right." He plays the hero. We know he struggles with anger. Remember that time he killed a dude with his hands? He's an angry guy. In fact, although he will grow in that, it is ultimately his anger that leads to him not going into the Promised Land.

He has a very difficult time trusting God. Throughout the story, this will be one of the last times he and the Lord get in this kind of touse. He struggles to trust the Lord almost all of the days of his life. Where did that come from? Well, it comes from this environment that he is birthed out of. Now, let me just clarify something here. I'm not giving anyone in here permission to blame Mom and Dad for current struggles.

Here's what I'll tell you about your folks without knowing them. They did the best they could with where they were. Here's what I know about them. They were sinners. They were imperfect. They might have done some horrible things. Maybe not, but probably. Yet, they did the best they could with where they were. I want to encourage you to try to extend grace to them, especially if you're a parent, lest your kids one day remind you of all of the ways you failed them.

There isn't anyone who nails parenting. Every one of us has begun to see our parents' weaknesses when we got to college. What we want to be as grown men and women is gracious to our folks. Understand they did the best they could in the spot they were, but we've all been affected by the sin

of others in our lives. We just have. This is really drawing attention to the fact that Moses and Aaron aren't just from this terrible past, but they still have residue from it.

I found this quote, and I wanted to track down who originally said it because it's ascribed to about 30 different people on the Internet, but I was able to track it to a woman named Wendy Mass. I think this is the originator. She said, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about." Be kind.

What this information does about this bloodline and the present struggles is it's laying out this truth that we don't talk about much. That's that all of us got to where we are, quirks and all, hang-ups and all, brokenness and all, by experiences that are behind us or that we're currently in. What we see in this text and in this part of the narrative is the urging to be generous and kind to one another, to be gracious to one another, and that's not to give a free pass for people to behave however they want. We're not saying that.

We're simply saying that although there are standards of behavior we should hold people to, we want to be gracious, and we want to be kind. For as long as I think I've been your pastor, I've just been really honest about the first seven years of my marriage. They were awful. There is not a better word than that. It was the kind of awful where I would lay in bed and imagine, "Oh my God. Is this the rest of my life?"

Just in case you were wondering, Lauren wasn't lying beside me going, "All of my dreams have come true." It was contentious. It was lonely. I felt trapped. I felt like there was no way out for me, which is the same thing as trapped. I felt stuck in it, which is the same thing as trapped. Anything I say now is in that space, so I'm just going to move on.

Because of where I came from, I kind of made a promise to myself that I would never scream at my wife, and I would never use my size to intimidate her. I'm 6'5" and about 210. I know I look gangly out there, but I'm a decent-sized boy. I was never going to use my size to intimidate my wife. What I did was the more manly thing of just pouting.

I don't even remember what started the fight or what happened. I know Lauren had failed yet again. I was in the kitchen just cleaning plates and slamming around. Lauren does what any sane human being can do. She said, "Hey, are you all right?" How did I respond? "I'm fine. Just serving you over here." This had been seven years of this, kind of this crazy roller coaster ride.

This night, things changed. She came in. She was in the living room area. She came across our bar into the kitchen. She just walked right up to me. She buried her face in my chest, and she just started sobbing. She wrapped her arms around me and just started sobbing. Then she took a step back and looked at me right in my face and said, "Matt Chandler, I don't know what is going on in your heart, but I love you."

When she said that to me, I realized for the first time, "I'm the problem." I spent so much of my energy trying to fix her, trying to get her to understand what she needs to do better to make this work, and I was the problem. My insecurities, my fear that I was... I just committed to it after that. "I'm going to get help for this." I went and saw some... I needed to navigate some things I didn't know how to navigate. I could preach. I could memorize. I could teach, but I couldn't navigate my own heart. I was broken.

It was kindness and grace that led me to see my brokenness, knowing who I was. Had she responded with aggression, I would just turn up. My defense mechanisms would turn up. We're to be gracious and kind toward those around us because we know that they're operating almost always out of hurt, out of brokenness, out of fear. We want to be marked by compassion, kindness, patience.

We see in this text really the thrust of the genealogy. Look at verses 26 and 27. I think you will see those verses a little bit different now that we've covered the genealogy. **"These are the Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said: 'Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.' It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing out the people of Israel from Egypt, this Moses and this Aaron."**

It's like the Bible itself is like, "These guys? *This* was the Moses." It's like there was this understanding that ancient Near Eastern people would be reading this and go, "Well, I know a Moses, but that can't be him. I know an Aaron. The dude won't discipline his kids. We don't even hang out with him anymore for that. One day, the Lord is going to light those fools up." These are the men.

See, here is the point of the genealogy. In spite of our past failures and present struggles, the work of God and the plan of God move inevitably forward through broken people. I'm going to say it again. In spite of our past failures and present struggles, the work of God and the plan of God move

inevitably forward (it cannot, will not be stopped) through broken people. That's what we see in this genealogy. This is what is being taught to us in this long list of names.

Broken pasts and messy presents do not cut us out of God's big plan to seek, save, redeem, establish human flourishing. In fact, it qualifies us for it because all there are are broken people. There is no one whole. There is no one righteous. The Bible goes through an exhaustive length of effort to convince us that that is all there are, broken people. It's why the veneer of Instagram is laughable.

It's why you can take a picture of all of the beautiful meals and fun times you've had, and I'll still bank on the fact that you ate some Ramen noodles some time last week, cried yourself to sleep, and got in a big fight, because the Bible bids me that you and I are sinners. What does this have to do with strongholds? What does this have to do with mindsets that have us living falsely while understanding that ultimately, God can move and work in broken people?

I want to go back over our list of six things. What do all of these things have in common? Individualism, sexual deviance, economic selfishness, fear, disappointment, and self-righteousness. I think what we could do is we could take all six of those, and we could distill it once again. We took *sin* and nuanced it down to these six strongholds. I think you can take these six strongholds and nuance it again to one massive stronghold that we will need to fight with for probably the rest of our lives.

Here's what that stronghold is. *An overblown sense of self*. That's the nice way to say it. The true way to say it is *we tend to be narcissists*. We struggle with narcissism. The real bondage we're in is we're narcissists. We think everything is about us. What on that list is not narcissism? Which one of those strongholds is not an overinflated view of the self?

Certainly, individualism is. *Self-righteousness* has the word *self* in it. If we kept going, what is sexual deviance except narcissism? "I don't care about my soul. I don't care about others. I'm going to get this physical thing I want." That's narcissism. Economic selfishness. That's narcissism. We could read through all six of them. It's an overinflated view of the self. It's what makes us miserable people.

How do you fight this stronghold? How do you fight narcissism? Narcissism is hard to see because we're narcissistic. It's hard to spot narcissism when you're so busy being the point, because narcissism can even feel right. If you're staring at yourself all the time going, "I have to get better. I

have to be a better husband. I have to be a better mom. I have to be a better Christian," all of that feels right, but all of it is narcissism. It's still, "Me, me, I, me, me, I."

What the Bible does to kind of waken us out of that is in the Old Testament, the prophets and David would say things like, "Lift up your head, you sinners. Look up." In the New Testament, it would say things like, "Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of your faith. Quit looking at you. Get your eyes up."

How do you do that? By the way, none of these things I'm about to say next are popular at all, and they're not popular at all because we're narcissists. If we're going to put on lenses... If you remember, we're talking about strongholds. We're talking about a way of seeing the world that is inconsistent with what God has for us.

Therefore, we live life through these lenses in a way that keeps us from growing in our relationship with Jesus, keeps others from growing in their relationship with Jesus, and keeps us from fully surrendering to Jesus, into the life he has for us. It keeps our lives thin rather than thick. It keeps them shallow rather than deep. How do we move from the thin to the thick? How do we move from the shallow to the deep? There is only one answer, and I'll put two sub-points underneath it. It starts by...

1. *Denying ourselves.* Now, when I'm talking about denying ourselves, I'm not talking about physical harm or self-hate. I'm talking about a hedonistic type of self-denial that knows there is a better treasure to be had via restraint than there is at unbridled living. To show restraint marks us as humankind.

Do you know who doesn't have restraint? Your dog. Your dog doesn't have restraint. Any pet you have doesn't have restraint. I know you've trained Bootsie to be a real good boy, but I'm saying if you let that dog go for a bit, all of the rules that you have set up for little Bootsie will be gone, and he will not show restraint because he is an animal, not made in the image of God.

As humankind, we show restraint. It's what makes us human. We don't give in to all of our impulses because we know to live by our stomachs will be to die by our stomachs, so we restrain ourselves. We have impulses we say no to. If we didn't, we probably wouldn't be here. We would be in jail. Correct? We want to deny ourselves for a greater treasure.

What is the best way to work that out? Maybe even that is too high-level. What does it mean to deny ourselves? Let me give you two ways. Again, I don't think it's going to be popular, but I think the best way to punch narcissism in the face is to...

A. *Serve others*. Get your eyes off of yourself and begin to serve others. Philippians 2:3-4 says, "**Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.**" Has there never been a more un-American sentence ever written in the history of mankind? "Consider others more significant, that I'm more insignificant than others? There's no way that's true. Are you looking at me? Do you see what I've done, what I've accomplished, how I've done it?"

No, no, no. He's saying there, "You consider others more valuable than you." That's painful to read. "**Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.**" How do you do this? Do you see what the Bible is saying? "Get your head up. Look at Jesus. Now serve others. Now you're not all about you, always staring at you, always worried about your marriage, always worried about your kids, always worried about your addiction..."

No, no, no. Get your eyes up and serve others. Give to others. Be generous to others. Just so we don't... I want to clear the table of any kind of romanticism around serving. I don't tend to watch scary movies anymore. I used to when I was younger. When I was growing up, the bad guys weren't demons or just kind of weird, like a camera showing a lady standing there for 30 hours or whatever it is on these new *Paranormal Activity* things. We just call that Tuesday around here.

In our day, it was just murderous guys who couldn't be killed. How many *Friday the 13th* movies were there? There were like 14. I didn't see it, but in one of them, I think Jason went to space. How did Jason Voorhees get to space to kill campers? Or Freddy Krueger. These dudes just wouldn't die. You could blow them up, drown them, burn them, dismember them, bury them alive. They just came back for the next movie, same weapons.

I say all of this because narcissism is much like those villains. Narcissism just doesn't want to die. As you try to kill it via service to others, you will have to pay attention to that stronghold because you will hear the voice inside of you say, "Why isn't anybody serving you? Why are you always the one giving? When is it your time to be served? Nobody else in your group is doing this? When is someone going to take care of you? You work hard every week. Shouldn't you have some space where it's just all about you?"

It will sound right. It's called a stronghold because it's a stronghold. You lift up your eyes and deny yourself by serving others and being serious about serving others. No romanticism about how awesome it's going to be. No silver bullet, "This is going to solve all of my woes." Serving others is difficult because people are difficult. Amen? Not only do we serve one another, but another wildly unpopular idea is we want to commit to a people for the long haul. We want to serve others and we want to...

B. *Commit to a people for the long haul.* Let me read this, Colossians 3:12-14. **"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."** I'll stop there for a second.

I want to point out a couple of things. This text really lends itself to the reality of relationships in a given context. Look back at it again. We need to put on "**...compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...**" Where does it go after patience? "**...bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other...**" It's like the Bible knows what being human is actually like.

If we're going to have any kind of real relationship with one another, not some surface-level one, but some deep, real, emotionally connected, not stunted, not thin but thick, not shallow but deep relationship, that means I'm going to offend you and you're going to offend me, and we're going to have to figure out in that space how to forgive one another, how to bear up with one another.

Yesterday marked the end of the fall flag football season. I have been with my son's team for three or four years now. I have coached the defense. We had a great playoff run yesterday. It lasted about 50 minutes. Then we went and had pizza. That's what you do when you get thumped in the first or second round of the playoffs. I don't even remember. We went to Grimaldi's on the patio, and we handed out trophies. That group of men and women... Almost all of them are believers. They go to Valley Creek. A couple of them are evangelical Catholics.

There is this whole group of men and women who I have gotten to kind of see every fall and then every spring and then fall and then spring and occasionally at Edison's, and every once in a while at Chili's. It ended yesterday, and we're done in that league now, and I said goodbye to many of those people. Several of them attend here, not all of them. Just a couple of them attend here. That will be

that. There is no emotional loss for me in that. Life won't really change or be affected much because of that.

I'm just telling you that in the climate in which we live, this is most people's church experience. They treat churches like ecclesiological buffets that exist to serve them rather than that they exist to serve the body of Christ. There is no commitment; there is just constant turnover every four to five years. You're just looking for the next best thing.

Hopefully, if you've been around for a while... If you're a guest, you might not know this about me. I can tell you this. My understanding from the Word of God is that I will, as an elder and the primary teacher here at The Village Church, be held accountable to God for the souls of the members of this church. I'm never on a membership drive, ever, because the bigger that is, the more account I will have to give. The smaller that is, the better it is for me.

If it were like six of us in my house, how awesome would that be? I would be like, "Lord, I've done all I can. I know all six of them. I know..." Right? This is crazy. I'm not doing a membership drive here because here's what I can say. Whether you join here or not or join somewhere else or not, I can say before the Lord that my hope for you is that you would be able to put down roots somewhere, stop sitting in the pews, and plug in. Don't go to church; belong to one. Dive in. Get deep. Quit being a spectator.

What happens is the expectation... I'm not sure where it came from, maybe the revivalistic movement in the early nineteenth century. The idea that a sermon is somehow going to form you in a way that only life with the people of God can form you is a misnomer. We can feel it. We can feel that it's not happening, so we pick places based on criteria that the Scripture certainly doesn't give us. After about five or six years of just listening to sermons, we start saying really crazy stuff like, "I just don't feel fed there."

Transformation is life-on-life, not sermon-on-ears. Transformation occurs life-on-life and through the highs and lows and the monotony in between. A good way to think about it is marriage. Tiff and Doreen Cothran are long-time members here. They were here when I got here. They were maybe here before I was born. They've been married for I think 60 years. I'm not joking. They've been *married* for 60 years. That's unbelievable.

If we could have a real conversation about marriage, here's what we would be able to say, in all honesty, regardless of how long you've been married or who you are. Marriage is... There are really beautiful days and weeks and months in marriage, and there are really difficult days and weeks and months in marriage. Then there is a whole lot of monotony in between. There are beautiful seasons. There are hard seasons. Then there are just seasons when you get up and make the coffee and go to work, and it's just Tuesday.

You go to work. She goes to work. You come home. You figure out what's for dinner. You have dinner. You put the kids to bed. Then you both exhaustedly go to bed yourselves. It's not a high. It's not a low. It's Tuesday. That's what marriage is, but if you want to get to where Tiff and Doreen are, if you want to see your kids grown and even your grandkids almost grown and see a couple of great-grandbabies, rejoicing in the God of your youth, you have to survive through the difficult days.

You commit. You stay, in the disagreements, in the difficulty, in the hardship. You stay. In so doing, you move from the thin to the thick. You move from the shallow to the deep. Now, I want to put an asterisk on this. I think by doing this, I will prove to you what I said earlier about if we're for you, praise God, and if not, just plug in somewhere.

Ladies, if you are in a marriage with an abusive man, a bully who tears you down verbally, who uses his size to intimidate you, who makes you feel like you're always the problem and does that with force, I am not telling you to stay there. I am not saying that the way for you into the thick life is to stay with that guy.

If anything, I'm telling you to get help for safety. You are not the problem in that relationship. If you're being bullied, harassed, physically intimidated, physically harmed, any fool who is using the Bible to justify that behavior is demonic in his being, and you are not under that authority and watch. I would plead with you to let someone help you find some space and safety.

Far too many of the daughters of the King are battered and belittled by weak, broken men under the banner of what the Bible says. When I'm saying the way to thick life out of thin is rooted commitment, I am not saying to the woman being abused, intimidated, harassed, and torn to pieces that that is what I'm saying to you. In fact, I'll say the opposite to you.

Now, my hope for us moving forward as a community of faith is that we would be marked by victory over the narcissistic spirit of our age and the stronghold it has over so many of our lives and

the lives of so many people in this area, that it could be broken by us seeing clearly the beauty of Jesus Christ and being formed more fully into the image of Christ by the Spirit of God, but the only way that happens is if the corrective lenses of denying ourselves, serving others, and being committed actually are steps of obedience we take.

All I said up front about personal growing, about understanding our growth as a community, about being salt and light to the world around us, being about justice, about pushing back darkness, all of that gets tied into how we see the world around us and how we see the nature and character of God. The Scriptures say that it is for freedom Christ has set you free. This is my prayer for us. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for these men and women, an opportunity today to just let your Word press us. I thank you that all there are are broken people. We don't need to hide that fact about us today. We don't need to put on a pretty face or wear some false veneer. We get to be honest that we're not quite there yet, and that hasn't taken us out of the game or removed us from the mission of God, to push back darkness and seek and save the lost and lead to human flourishing. We do ask for your help. We are narcissistic.

To the man and woman in this room, we are primarily concerned with ourselves. We have our eyes on ourselves and are most concerned with ourselves. Help us, because by being most concerned with ourselves, God, we have harmed ourselves. It's going to take faith and power from the Holy Spirit to believe that really becoming others-focused is really the way to thicker life, deeper life. It seems so counter-intuitive. Help us, Spirit of God. We thank you that you know who we are. You know where we are, and you're for us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.