



The Apostles' Creed (Part 4) – Who Was Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary

Matt Chandler – September 13, 2015

[Video]

Male: I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth...

Female: And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord...

Male: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary...

Male: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.

Male: He descended to hell.

Female: The third day he rose again from the dead.

Male: He ascended to heaven...

Female: And sits on the right hand of the Father Almighty...

Female: From whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

Male: I believe in the Holy Spirit...

Female: The holy catholic church...

Male: The communion of saints...

Male: The forgiveness of sins...

Male: The resurrection of the body...

Male: And the life everlasting.

Male: Amen.

[End of video]

How are we? Doing okay? Okay, for the seven of you who are doing great, that's awesome. For the rest of you, if you would grab your Bibles, let's go to Luke 1. We're just going to hang out there in Luke 1. If you're thinking, "Isn't Luke 1 a Christmas text?" Yeah. I figured since the weather broke, we would just go ahead and dive in.

If you're with us today and don't have a Bible, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. If you don't own one, that's our gift to you. We would love for you to just take that and begin to read the things the Creator of the universe would want you to know about himself and how he thinks about you and what he sees when he looks at his creation. That would be our gift to you.

We're in week four of a series on the Apostles' Creed. What we've said up until this point... I'm not going to reiterate the entire series, but what we've said each week is that the Apostles' Creed, well over 1,000 years old, has been used by the church for really primarily two reasons. One, it has been used to correct error. Secondly, it has been used as a tool, not *the* tool, but *a* tool in the spiritual formation of God's people.

What you see as we walk through the creed is you can see where mankind, humankind, has historically made some errors and some false assumptions about the nature and character of God, and you can also see how God is shaping and molding us to understand him more rightly for our own joy and for his glory.

I want to just right out of the gate tell you that that correction and that formation takes place in what we as Christians would understand as a Genesis 3 world. If you don't have a church background or are not familiar with the Scriptures, in Genesis 1 and 2, you see the creation narrative. God creates everything, and on repeat, there is a great refrain that when he creates it, it's

good. He creates this. He creates this. He creates this. And it was good. And it was good. And it was good. And it was very good.

You get this picture of the universe having a kind of rhythmic peace to it, a real beauty where God's glory is seen, where man and woman are flourishing. In Genesis 3, sin enters the world through the rebellion of the man and the woman, and that fractures the cosmos. That fracture in the cosmos is universal. What I mean by that is there is nothing created that is not touched by sin entering into the creative order.

Now your experience and my experience in a Genesis 3 world is one of... We experience brokenness. We experience loss. We suffer. We are perplexed. We question God, simply because the brokenness around us pushes us in that direction. In this space of a Genesis 3 world, with all of the testimonies in this room... Just so you don't feel alone, how many of you have, at this point in your life, experienced either the kind of loss or a situation that has left you perplexed and somewhat shaken in your confidence in who God is? Does anybody want to be bold enough to confess this?

Keep your hands up. Everybody is so quick on this. It's like we're half Baptist or something. If you can look at this, I want you to start feeling safe in this. Look. You're not alone in that. You don't need to feel guilty about that. If you're recognizing that that one dude doesn't have his hands up yet, maybe it just isn't his time yet. Maybe next week is his week for that, okay? Nobody gets out of a Genesis 3 world unscathed.

It's in this mess that the creed, derived from the Word of God, really begins to shape us and mold us and correct us and point us to what is true and what is right and what is good about the Creator of the universe. With that said, we've been reciting the creed together every week for four weeks, regardless of what campus we're on. I've just tried to say, "Hey, we're doing something Christians are doing all over the world are doing in this very moment."

We read the creed together. When we read the creed, we're doing two things simultaneously, especially when it's publicly read in a congregation. First, we are rejecting real popular narratives of the day that we would not believe are true. Then we are saying, "We reject that, and we believe this." When we recite the creed together... Let me give you some examples. I've tried to change the example every week.

When we stand and recite the creed together as the covenant people of God, what we're saying is, "We reject individualism. We reject that I'm going to be able to solve what is wrong with me with the right mixture of effort and moxie and discipline. I'm going to reject that I can fix what's wrong in me, and I'm going to believe that the Creator of the universe can." We reject individualism, and we pledge allegiance to the God of the Bible.

We reject nationalism, and we put our allegiance in the God of the Bible. What I mean by nationalism is we reject that the values and ideas that drive the United States of America will solve what is wrong in the human heart. Now don't email me. I'm a military brat and a patriot, but I am not, when all is said and done, a believer that the values and systems of the United States of America will fix the hearts of men globally or even in America itself.

We reject nationalism. We reject individualism. We say, "Here's where the answer is." With that said, why don't you stand with me? If you're not a believer, you can stand. You can sit. You can do whatever. This isn't an incantation. Saying it out loud isn't going to save you or put a curse on you or anything like that. We're just going to say it together as we reject popular narratives and put our confidence in the God of the Bible.

Before we read... I have noticed this is happening. Historically, the word a-m-e-n has been produced "ah-men," but I know I'm in Texas. In Texas, it's "amen." I'm fine. See? Amen. I've been here for 20-something years now, so I just wanted us to get on the same page. Let's forget English and history and just go with "amen," all right? At the end, we're going to say "amen" instead of "ah-men" because it has gotten confusing for some of us. With that said, let's get it.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting, amen." Praise God. Why don't you have a seat?

The phrase we're tackling in our time together today is actually a phrase that was attached to last week's phrase as it continues to talk about Jesus. Last week, we looked at and tackled Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the King, the only Son of God, unique in that he is co-eternal with the Father. He has

always been. He will always be. He is our Lord, our Savior. He alone can rescue us from the real trouble that is in our hearts. Only he can do that as our Savior.

Now we learn more about Jesus in the next phrase. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit through the Virgin Mary. There are two ways to do this. I'm not going to do either. We can't do a full-on sermon on the Holy Spirit because in week nine, we have, "I believe in the Holy Spirit..." We'll unpack in a robust manner the third person of the Trinity in week nine. I also don't want to do a full sermon on Mary. I don't have anything against Mary. She's awesome. She's just not the point, so I just don't want to do a sermon on what's not the point.

What I want to do in our time together today is now, at this point in the creed, you have the Godhead all present and active. You have God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, doing what C.S. Lewis called "the dance." You have the Godhead in this beautiful dance within himself, three distinct persons yet one God, bringing about the glory of God and our good and our joy. I just wanted us to marvel together at the Godhead.

I want us to watch the three persons of the Trinity, this distinct three-in-one that belongs to those of us who are believers in Christ. I want us to see that out of what I think, if you have a church background, is a very well-known text in the Scriptures, Luke 1, starting in verse 26. For some of you, this will harken back to days when you went to Christmas Eve services with your parents.

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from..." Who? "...God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!' But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?'" That's a legit question. "And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."

Now it's important to know that one of the reasons I started our time together with explaining a Genesis 3 world is that the invasion of the Godhead in Luke 1 is an invasion into a Genesis 3, broken world. If I could unpack that just a bit further... Everyone knows something is wrong with humankind. It doesn't matter your philosophy or belief system. It doesn't matter your religion or background. There is a longing in us that can't seem to be quenched.

We are constantly feeling like there is something we can attain that we have not yet attained. There is a type of gnawing in us for greater beauty, for greater experience, for depth of life we feel like we can't seem to get to. Capitalism has a lot of people cashing in on that. Everybody knows something is broken with us, and we're eager to fix it. The easiest place to see this... I've used this illustration for going on 13 years now. If you've been a member here for 13, you know where I'm going.

The easiest place to see that is in Barnes & Noble. Right? We could all load up right now in a couple of buses or some kind of super vehicle and head down to Barnes & Noble at The Shops in Highland Village. If you're in Plano or Fort Worth or Dallas, yeah, a bookstore of some kind. We could get there. You could order your \$9 coffee, your caramel frappe with extra espresso or whatever. Then we could go. The largest section of books in any bookstore is... What? Self-help.

What is self-help except, "Hey, we know what is wrong with you. For \$29.95, we'll tell you, help you solve it." You go to the self-help section of books. There are categories for them, right? There is financial peace. If you could just get to a certain spot financially, if you could just do these nine things, could shift to a cash system where you used envelopes, if you could have good debt and not bad debt, if you could just use credit cards this way or never... Right? There is a whole list of things. "Do this thing and that will solve your financial ills."

Then there is another section of books that is more on the physical side of things, all about smoothies and kale and super foods and doing the right kind of stretching and getting core strength. "If you get healthier, you'll feel better, and that will solve that in you. Then you have that kind of nebulous, over-spiritual section of books. I've just historically called this the Oprah Winfrey books. It's stuff that sounds good, but you're not quite sure what to do with it.

"Become a whole person." You're like, "That sounds awesome." What are you doing? "I'm becoming a whole person." What does that mean? "I'm not sure." Yet, think of the brilliance of it. Doesn't that... I mean, I want to be a whole person. I can feel at times that I'm not. Gosh, if I can buy three, four, five different books that help me become a whole person, I certainly want to do that.

Then you have the relationship books. Good Lord. Aisles and aisles and aisles of relationship books. "Men are from Mars. I have to figure that out. I've been married to this dude for 15 years, and he can't put the seat down. I have to figure something out here." Right? "She's crazy. I can't figure this out. She's from Venus. I have to figure this out." Row upon row upon row of relationship books. Is that not what you see around you as probably the number one felt need of men and women, trying to figure out and navigate relationships?

God help us. The church has not helped. We have kind of jumped on this bandwagon ourselves at times. "Here are six ways to remove all your doubt." A sure way to make somebody wrestle and be crushed by doubt is to preach a sermon on how to remove doubt. What happens when they walk through your steps, and it's still there? Are you really cutting the guys out of the Bible who struggled with doubt throughout their lives?

What's really wrong with you and what's really wrong with me, according to the Bible, is not our finances or our relationships or our physical bodies. Now, those might be symptomatic, but they're not the disease. They're symptoms of a greater disorder within us. The Bible calls that disorder *sin*. There are two ways sin plays itself out. That's why it's so confusing to people.

Sin can be an outright rejection of how God designed the universe to work. "I don't care what he says. I don't care how he designed it to work. I'm the king. I want what I want, and I'm going to get what I want." We reject the biblical narrative, and we embrace what I will fight and argue are the false promises of the -isms of our day. Materialism, individualism... These are bankrupt pursuits.

If you live long enough and don't self-deceive, you'll come to find out just how bankrupt they are, how false they are in their promises. That an emotive, flirty love is better than a covenantal, steadfast commitment to one person. That's a lie you hear all the time. You are being disciplined by something. You get that, right? Everyone is a disciple.

It's just what is discipling, what is shaping how you see the world, how you think about marriage, how you think about relationships, how you think about money, how you think about your life. You're being disciplined. It's what narrative are you buying into? What story do you actually believe? I wonder if we're not even thinking that way. We're just kind of stuck in a rushing stream and being carried away.

Some of us reject, we sin by saying, "Forget the way God designed things to work. I know better than he does." This is where it gets really confusing. Some of us sin not that way but by using religion to not need God. "I don't need him. I have Sunday school and worship service." You've learned to play the game. Right? You know at what point in the song you're supposed to raise your hands. At this point, you've even learned to kind of tap the chest there.

Where to sit, what to say, how to go. You've picked up Christian language and suffer from a terrible case of fine-itis. "How are you?" "I'm fine, doing well. I'm blessed. I'm blessed, brother. Thank you." In reality, your heart is far from the Lord. The benefits of being in Christ seem to escape you. There's no real relationship there. It's a funny thing to think you can sin against a holy God with a bunch of church stuff.

Yet, it seems to be this place where people get into rote, empty religion that God tends to speak most aggressively. Let me show you some of that found in Isaiah 1:11. Here's what God says through the prophet Isaiah to the people of God. **"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?' says the Lord. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.'"**

This is confusing because this is a sacrificial system that God himself instituted. God himself says, "This is the sacrificial system," and his people go, "Let's do that sacrificial system," and he's like, "I hate this system! Do you think I desire bulls and goats and the blood and fat of well-fed beasts?" Shouldn't somebody down there go, "Um, you said you did. You said you wanted that. That's what you told us to do concerning our sin, concerning our rebellion. You said to do this. How can you now say you don't delight in it?"

In fact, later on in the book of Isaiah, God will even say, "I hate your singing. I hate when you sing to me, when you gather and sing. I hate it." It's not because someone in there is off key, right? This isn't like the first week of *American Idol* type of, "I hate this." It's, "This reeks to me. This stinks. I am weary of your gatherings. I am weary of your sacrifices. I am weary of your singing." Why?

You start to get a glimpse of it. We could use Isaiah, but I've always appreciated Jeremiah 31:33, and I'll tell you a little bit more about Jeremiah here in a little bit, but here's what God says through the prophet Jeremiah. **"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel [the people of God] after those days,' declares the Lord. 'I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.'"**

What you see happening here... We could have used Isaiah. We could have used Jeremiah. Heck, you can pick a book, and we can use that book. What God is after is not external, rote religion. That's not what he's after. He wants our hearts. The God of the Bible, the triune God of the universe, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, three in one. He's after the hearts of men. He doesn't want just mere action, but heart-driving action.

He wants, in his delight and love for us, us to be moved to love and delight in him. The moral transformation that occurs in our hearts occurs because of his great love for us, not our great discipline to try to earn his love. Those are wildly different ideas, to earn the love of one rather than to be freely given love. That's a night-and-day difference.

Our wicked, insidious hearts can't seem to comprehend a love that is freely given and not earned. This is the mess we're in, that we're broken and sinful. Even if we just try to be religious, we can mess that up too. You're just trying to be good, and you're just screwing it up even worse trying to be good, like a 2-year-old trying to clean up a mess. They just smear it and get it down into the cracks and make it harder for you.

That's why there's a certain age you start letting your kids help. It reverses when they're 2, going, "Why don't you mop that up?" Well, you know they're not. You're going to mop it up after your foot sticks to the floor. What we see here now is the Godhead, back in our Luke 1 text, beginning to enter this space. In fact, let's look at it together. Look at verse 26 of Luke 1. **"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth..."**

You have Gabriel being sent from God, that's God the Father. God the Father sent Gabriel to have the conversation with Mary. He has it. Mary has some legitimate questions. Then here's the answer in verse 35. What I'm trying to do is show you the dance of the Godhead in the Christmas story. You can see it in a lot of places. You can see it in Genesis 1 in the creation of all things, but we're taking a look at it here in the incarnation.

Verse 35: **"And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.'"** Follow me here. You have God the Father sending God the Son, and God the Son being conceived in Mary by God the Holy Spirit, and all of this is a type of divine invasion. It is our God, the God of the Bible, showing that one of the attributes of the Godhead is he is a God of initiation. He is a God who takes the initiative.

At our rebellion against him, either through irreligion or religion, God's response to that is not to lean away but to lean in. God sends, Jesus comes, the Holy Spirit conceives and empowers. God is an initiating God. He leans in. He doesn't lean back. This is phenomenal news. God has not abandoned us in our mess. He leans in. He takes initiative. He gets his holy hands dirty. He gets them dirty.

In Psalm 40, King David says it like this. If you don't have a church background, Bono ripped off King David and wrote the song "40." The text says he reaches into the muck and the mire and pulls us out. Clean, holy hands getting dirty. The God of the Bible is a God who takes initiative. God the Father sends God the Son, conceived by God the Holy Spirit.

The triune God is dancing for the salvation of men. This is profound, but it's not the only thing we see. In fact, through this dance, we'll see later on that God, through that dance, writes the law on our hearts. It's no longer outside-in but starts to be inside-out. Then, from there, I want you to see that not only is our God an initiating God, but I want you to see... Look now in verse 31.

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Verse 34, and then let's talk. **"And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?'"**

Throughout the Old Testament, you see the Holy Spirit of God opening the wombs of infertile women. You see it in Abraham's line. You see it in Hannah. You see it throughout. You have God opening the wombs of infertile women. Although that is miraculous, it's not impossible. A woman who has a husband whom she is enjoying as a husband can get pregnant, even later than she wanted to. Can somebody in here say, "Amen"? Yes? No? If you're sitting by your kid, don't do that. We'll see your kid in recovery.

I have met several people. In fact, my wife's uncle is older than my father-in-law and has a son my daughter's age. He's a 70-year-old man with a 12-year-old. Yeah, somebody just threw up. What happened there is you're not really planning on having a child when you're in your 60's. It's miraculous but not impossible. Are you tracking? That, what we just read, is absurd. That's scientifically impossible. You check somebody like this in a mental institution.

"Oh, I see. How far along are you?"

"Eight months."

"Oh, that's awesome. Boy or girl?"

"Boy."

"Who's the dad?"

"The Holy Spirit. I've never been with a man."

"Yeah, we have one."

Right? It's absurd. There is no way this is possible. Mary knows it. Even Mary goes, "Now, what? How? How are you going to accomplish this? What's going on? I've never been with a man. I'm betrothed, but I haven't been with a man. How are you going to accomplish this?" Just for the record, I just want to state that this is scientifically absurd, impossible. Nobody accidentally gets pregnant without another human being involved.

Yet, that's exactly what happened. How do we know? Since we know it's impossible, since we're saying it's impossible, look at verse 37. **"For nothing will be impossible with God."** Now I said a

couple of weeks ago that one of the things you see in our God is he is infinitely powerful and intensely personal. Well, in that immense power, you see throughout the Scriptures and really throughout human history that the laws and designs of the universe that very much apply to us simply do not apply to him because he is the King of all.

The immensity of his power knows no bounds. This is such a small thing for him that it's hard for us to even get our minds around it. I took my son dove hunting when the season opened last weekend. We were out in Carbon, Texas. I don't know if you know where Carbon is. It's barely a stop sign. Buddy and I walked away from the house late at night, and we just looked up, and it was staggering. They're always up there, the stars. It's always up there.

It's just so not common that you get to actually see it and rare that you get to see it in all the glory that can be seen when you get away from the lights. We just sat out there, and it was blowing little Buddy's mind, and Reid and I were just kind of marveling at it. In Job, the Bible tells us that all of creation is but the fringes of his garments. The immensity of the universe... I'm sitting out there, and I'm just thinking, "It goes on and on and on and on forever."

The Bible is like, "Those are the fringes, man. That's not even the shirt. That's nothing. That's my backyard." It doesn't take God four or five light years to get from the farthest reaches of the universe to here. He is in both places always, in equal power and equal presence. If that hurts your mind, it should. You begin to feel and sense how small we are. He simply doesn't have to obey the rules of nature because he is the Creator of all things.

He created the rules to begin with, and he created the rules to bring him glory, and he can step into that space and do whatever he pleases. This is one of those moments, one of hundreds, where God reveals, "There is nothing that is impossible for me, nothing. I am not constrained by limited resources. I am not constrained by rules of natural law. I am not constrained by anything. I am the God, the Creator of all things."

You see in the Godhead, in this little phrase "...was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary..." a God who initiates toward his rebellious creation and pushes out impossibilities. This is amazing news for those who are in Christ. Now if we took those two truths and plugged it into our grid of symmetry and clarity and community and counsel, then really it should really begin to shape us. Some of this is really heavy. It should be heavy. We need to be able to be honest with where our lives are and what we've experienced and the difficulties we've endured in a Genesis 3 world.

The Bible doesn't shy away from that. The Bible is a grimy, grimy book. If you could take your Sunday school glasses off and read it again, it's not for the faint of heart. When we talk about symmetry, here's what I mean by that. I've been in pastoral ministry for 20 years. I think pastoral ministry is very much a front-line kind of first-responder type of life. Oftentimes, we show up right after the ambulance. Sometimes, we show up right before the funeral home.

I have experienced with the people of God, many of you even in this room, horrific loss. Some of you have experienced really dark things. Some of you have been horribly abused by people who were supposed to protect you and care for you. They didn't protect you and care for you. They actually wounded you, and that mark on your soul is so deep and hurts so badly that you've kind of decided to live certain ways because of that wound.

So when I start talking about an initiating God, when I start to talk about a God who overcomes the impossible, it's just near impossible for you to see through those lenses because from what you've been through and what you've endured, and these people who were supposed to protect you didn't protect you, and this person you trusted betrayed your trust. Loved ones have died, and good friends have betrayed. There are just these real wounds in our souls, and it makes it hard to believe that the God we worship is an initiating God of love. There seems to be evidence against that.

The way I've prayed all week is that in some place, as we have this conversation today, in some spot, while we're talking about this, the Holy Spirit might do some healing in that place, and that you might see and sense by the power of the Holy Spirit... You can't preach it into being. You can't manipulate it into being. That the Holy Spirit of God might heal those places in your heart, and you might believe for the first time that God has never been on his heels concerning you, has never been indifferent toward you.

He has leaned in, has stuck his hands into the muck and the mire, and has not abandoned you. Others of you find yourselves in what feels to be an impossible situation. You feel your heart losing hope. Good symmetry is to know that because our God is a God who initiates and because our God is a God who knows nothing of impossibility, God might, in what feels to be to you impossible, encourage your hearts.

Let's just be frank with one another. Sometimes I think God is slow. Anyone else? Are you just going to wait and see if he kills me before you admit it? Okay. Sometimes I'm just like, "Golly, can you

knock this out? Can we hurry up here? I've got this. I've figured this lesson out." There are times you just feel like the Lord is moving so slowly. It's like, "I've got the lesson. Okay." I've always tried to be real honest. I mean, the first seven years of my marriage were awful. Not like...eh. Awful.

I was lying in bed, and a couple of times, I prayed, "Oh my God. Is this the rest of my life?" For seven years, I asked the Lord to intervene. For seven years, I asked the Lord for wisdom. For seven years, I asked the Lord to work in my heart, to work in her heart. For seven years, I pled with the Lord. For seven years...not two, not three, not five...seven. Seven years, when you're working 60-70 hours a week and coming home to nonstop conflict seven days a week is soul-stealing, heart-crushing desperation. The Lord kept me there, generously and graciously kept me there.

Then he began to heal. Then he began to work. Then he began to move. I needed to see some things about me I couldn't see. I needed to see some arrogance I couldn't see. I needed to see some pride and some idolatry I couldn't see. The Lord ruthlessly loved me. By saying no to me for seven years, he humbled my heart, healed some places that needed to be healed, and has done a beautiful thing in my relationship with Lauren.

Maybe you're sitting in here like, "Seven years is nothing. Try 15, brother." That's not what the Lord had for me. It sounds like it might be what he has for you. God isn't a genie in a bottle. I'm not telling you that you rub the lamp, and it eventually goes your way. I'm saying that the theme of the Bible is not that the world is not messy, but that God is at work in the mess. Symmetry is growing confident in there being nothing impossible for God, and God has not abandoned, but he leans in.

What do we need to do on clarity? Here's the clarity that I'm hopeful that, considering these two things, settles into your heart. It's also why I believe that how you understand how you were saved really matters. See, the more you understand that *you* did not save you but *God* saved you, the more confident you'll be in God of your salvation. The more distinguished a role you think *you* played in your salvation is to question your salvation all the more.

You know you, and you know if you're involved, there's a chance you messed it up. But if God saved you, God cannot fail. The clarity you and I need if God is a God of initiating love and that God knows nothing of impossibilities is what we see the apostle Paul confess concerning the church at Philippi in Philippians 1:6. Here's what the apostle Paul says: "**And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.**"

Our God started this. He initiated it. There's nothing that is impossible for him, so he will keep us. He will keep us. We need that kind of clarity. "He saved me. He will keep me. He initiated this, and nothing is impossible for him. He will hold me." That brings us to community. How should this shape our community? One of the narratives... I don't have a good -ism for it. I don't think there is one. Our culture, the day in which we live, is looking for something to be angry, frustrated, and outraged about. Have you noticed that?

How many of you are on Facebook? Then you've noticed it. We just want to be angry about something. "Can you believe this? Have you looked at this? I can't believe this. Hashtag *this*. We should let everybody know this. Post this on your wall. We're going to boycott this. I can't believe this. Dear God, help us. The country is going to hell in a hand basket. I am appalled!" Right? It's just like... For goodness sake.

We thrive on pessimism in this day and age. We want to be acutely aware of the brokenness of things and others, and I think that reveals something about us; God help us. In light of this, should not Christians be annoyingly optimistic? In light of this, in light of the fact that our God is an initiating God, in light of the fact that there is nothing that is impossible for him, should we not be almost annoyingly optimistic?

Shouldn't we always be the ones who go, "Yeah, but the silver lining is *this*"? I hear you. I'm not saying we're not... Let me just clarify, lest you think I'm saying the wrong thing. I love football season, love the sport of football. I hate it for the cheerleaders when their team is losing 60 to 10 and they're still cheering. I just feel like there should be a number where they just drop the pom-poms and just leave. What are you going, "Go! Go! Go!" And what, score nine touchdowns in four minutes? I think it's just time. Just move on. At this point, I think it's just embarrassing.

You don't need to email me. I know cheerleading is a sport in and of itself. Don't do that. I do understand that. I just have been to games where it's literally like 54 to 3 at half, and they're just cheering their guts out, and I'm like, "It's over. It's just a mercy killing here. We should just call the game at this point." I'm not talking about that kind of fake, weak, spirit sprinkle optimism that's not rooted in a joy that is birthed out of knowing these things are true.

Not understanding in our minds, but knowing in our hearts. I'm not talking about that weak sauce, fake, "I'm okay." No, I'm talking about a deep-rooted joy that understands that nothing is too hard for God. Nothing is impossible for him. We believe and trust and know that he is good and gracious

because he started this. We should be a community of optimists, and we should stand in contrast to the pessimism of the world around us.

I want you to keep this in mind as we head toward November and not get swept away in outrage and fear. Look at me. Our God has never panicked. Our God has never worried. He has never wrung his hands. He has never had to gather a huddle of the Trinity to figure out what went wrong and how to fix it. That's not our God. That's the King we serve, though. Breathe. Nothing is out of his control.

I'm saying we mourn with those who mourn. We weep with those who weep. We are a people who are easily heartbroken but not easy to whip into a frenzy over silly things. If this is true, we have no reason to be pessimistic. Finally, on counsel. How do we counsel ourselves? In Psalm 42:5, King David gets into an argument with himself. Has anybody ever been there? He gets in an argument with himself.

Psalm 42, starting in verse 5: **"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation..."** Look at it again, especially the first part of the text. **"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation..."** You must learn to win the argument with yourself.

If these things are true, if God is an initiating God and God knows nothing of what is impossible, you must learn to win the argument against yourself. Inside of every one of us is a weak, whiny, pessimistic, complaining, doubting, fleshly, wicked residue that wants to point out what is not true, to perpetually lie to us, to perpetually point out half-truths and full lies and to confuse.

You see what David does here. He argues with himself, and he argues down that part of him that is that pessimistic, weak... "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God. There will be a day again that you praise the God of your salvation. Why are you doing this, heart? Why do you believe this? Why are you buying into this?" He wins the argument with himself.

If these things are true about God, how much more are we able to counsel and love others who find themselves on the dark night of the soul? Again, clarification. When people are really in the depths, that's really not the time to make sure they have a good theological grid or to do a drive-by texting. Do you know what I'm saying? That's not the time to come in and just go, "Do you know what? All

things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose, brother. I hate that this horrific tragedy has occurred, but just keep that in mind."

I feel like I'm a pretty mature Christian, and I would want to put a chokehold on you. Right? What do you do, being confident that God is on his throne, that he's an initiating God, and that nothing is impossible with him when you walk into a room where there is devastation and heartbreak? Are you ready? You cry with them. You just be there. Whatever they need, you try to help with. In time, if they ask or long for counsel, *then* you can give it.

Brothers, sisters, gosh, that's not the time. Just be there. In our dark night of the soul, when I was diagnosed with malignant brain cancer, it was the people who would just come weep with us and were just as confused as we were who were so peace-bringing, that the Holy Spirit so used to calm my heart and build my confidence in the Lord. I had friends who came to the house, and they didn't have anything to say. They just hung out with me.

They came up to the hospital and just cried with me. They let me say really crazy, bad theologically driven statements without correcting them. They just pulled up a chair and said they were sorry and said that they hated it for me and hung out and wept. Man, God used that to minister to my heart. It's the ministry of presence. That ministry of presence is informed by your own confidence in the initiating love of God and the fact that nothing is impossible for him.

Now here's how I want us to close out our time. I know there are those of you in here right now, in our other campuses, watching this later in a podcast or vodcast. Here's what I know. You can totally relate to what I was saying earlier when I talked about the fact that there have been things that have happened in your life that have kind of fractured the lenses by which you see the world, and it's very difficult for you to believe in the initiating love of God toward you.

If we were really honest, the confession that is really underneath a lot of other statements is, "I don't trust God." That's it. That's the confession. But it feels like we shouldn't say it, right? We shouldn't say, "I don't trust God." We certainly shouldn't say it in church. Right? We're going to actually say that in *church*? God is not going to be happy about that. "I don't trust you God," is something that's under there.

It wreaks havoc, and it rots out our guts, and it takes away from our confidence. It's there. We just don't feel like we can say it because it's something that shouldn't be said by Christian people among

Christian people. "I doubt God's goodness. I don't trust him." Yet, that's where some of us are. Here's what's crazy. I'm trying to plead with you today. You haven't hidden that from him. He knows. Don't you know that in Psalm 51, he says he will never despise the broken and contrite? The confession of, "I don't trust you," God doesn't despise that if it's coming from a broken heart.

The Bible tells us in Hebrews that we have an empathetic High Priest, that Christ knows it's scary to be us. Just as an attempt to try to serve you, brother or sister, if you're in here, whether you're in Plano or in Fort Worth or in Dallas or in this very room or in Highland Village, and you would say, "Matt, if I'm really honest, I struggle. I really, really struggle to trust God fully. There is something in me that struggles to trust him. I don't think I trust God like I'm supposed to."

If that's you, would you just raise your hand? No shame. You don't need to be afraid. If King David can say this, then I think you're all right, if he's called a man after God's own heart. Go ahead and get your hand high. Don't half-Baptist me. "There is something in me. I have a hard time trusting God." All right. Thank you. Praise God. You can put your hands down now.

Let me ask you this. For some of you, although there might be some of that, the reality is you feel like you're in an impossible situation. You can feel as if late you losing hope, and you have fought for a while and have tried to hang in there. You know what is right, and you're trying to do what is right, but the situation is starting to feel too heavy. Your legs are starting to feel real weak, and you can feel that in what you perceive to be an impossible situation, you feel yourself growing weaker and weaker.

If that's you, would you raise your hand? "I'm losing hope, Matt." All right. All right. Praise God. You can put your hands down. Just something to quickly think about. None of those confessions and the ones that weren't made but God is still aware of jostle this God we've talked about today. The interesting part of Jesus engaging sinners in his earthly ministry is he never shows up in their tears and snot with a lecture. He never shows up after an accusation or regret and starts to lecture or give a new sheet of rules or, 'You'll have to try harder at this; you'll have to work toward more of this.' He just doesn't do that.

In fact, what we see is our God pulling up a chair and letting us rant and letting us cry and letting us cuss and letting our souls break all the way to the bottom so he can start to put them back together. Remember I said I would tell you a little bit more about Jeremiah? Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet in a time Israel was in great rebellion against God. God said this to him. "If you'll do what I

tell you to do and say what I tell you to say, I'll give you the power to build up nations and destroy them."

Jeremiah buys in and does that and begins to prophesy. He gets beat up a lot. When all is said and done, the whole nation goes into bondage, and Jeremiah goes with them. In this real poignant scene in the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah prophesies against the nation of Israel that they're going to go into bondage if they don't repent, and a mob beats him bloody and naked in a ditch, and he looks up from the ditch, and he says to God, "You have..." The Hebrew word is *patah*. "You have seduced me. You tricked me. You lied to me."

God doesn't strike Jeremiah. God doesn't give Jeremiah leprosy. God doesn't seal his mouth shut. God lets the created rant at the Creator, and he extends forgiveness and grace. If you know of anything more beautiful in all the world of religion and philosophy, send me the book because I haven't read it. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for sending the Son. Jesus, thank you for coming of your own will and accord. Holy Spirit, thank you for the ongoing work of creation and recreation, for the conception of Jesus who lays aside his privilege and enters his own creation as a created being to save. God, we thank you and praise you that you are an initiating God of love, and we praise you and thank you that there is nothing in this room or in the rooms represented that is too hard for you, that is impossible for you.

I thank you that you always give us what we need. You use both joy and sorrow to shape and mold and chisel. Help us now as we respond to you. Help us now as we respond to what is true and good and right about you. Holy Spirit, do a profound and beautiful work in our hearts today. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

We're going to close out our services by celebrating today. We're going to do that via Communion, celebrating the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ. We provide Communion primarily for our members, but if you are a guest with us today who is a believer in Christ, and you're from a church that preaches the same gospel we do, I want to invite you to take Communion with us.

If you're not a believer, haven't come to that place where you've put your faith in Christ, I want to just lovingly ask, will you abstain? Will you just let the elements pass? I'm not trying to make you

feel like an outsider or anything like that. In fact, you've been invited to this table. You've been invited to celebrate.

If at any point you want to repent and put your faith in this Christ, there is a seat for you at the table to rejoice in our God and our King and these things we've talked about today. For now, would you just abstain? I want to give you just two questions to think about as we hand out the elements. Then we'll take Communion together as a family.

I really pulled the two questions right out of the sermon. Here they are. *Are you in a season where you simply don't believe God is for you or able to help you?* I want you to really think through that. I want you to be honest with yourself and with God who already knows that that's exactly where you are. If you can get to why, get to the why, not just the *what*, but the *why*.

Get down there and go, "Here's why, God, I struggle trusting you. Here's why, God, I don't think you can accomplish the impossible in me." The second thing I want you to consider is... *Is your life marked by gratitude and gladness, or have you been pulled into the overt pessimism of our day?* Just an opportunity to think, consider, confess, pray. Here in just a moment, I'll come back out, and we'll celebrate the Lord's Table together as family.

It has always been in this moment that the gospel makes the most sense to me. It's not when I just memorized a verse or got the chance to share the gospel with someone, and they responded well. It's not when I was the kind of husband I thought I should be or the kind of dad I thought I should be. It's not when I feel like I'm nailing it. It's in this moment when I see that deep down in my heart, I still have questions about the goodness of God.

Despite all he has done, despite how gracious he has been, despite his healing power in my life, despite his generosity to me, to find that insidious, "I still don't believe you're good," in me, to see that doubt still in me, it's in that moment that the gospel has always seemed most lovely to me. In the midst of that, God's response is not to lecture me. God's response is not to punish me.

God's response to my foolishness and hardness of heart and lack of gratitude isn't to do anything other but to hear me out, remind my heart, stir my confidence anew, and remind me that my righteousness was purchased by the blood of Christ and not by my own works or mustering of my own faith.

Will you stand with me? If you're not a Christian, you can stay seated, or you can stand with us. I want you to stand. I want you to just look around. I love this moment. I always like to just point out that we don't have a lot in common. I mean, we are from different backgrounds. Some of us got saved as teenagers, some of us as children, some in the last couple of years, some in our 60's, some in our 40's. We're from different socioeconomic backgrounds. We're from different parts of the country if not world.

Yet, look at us. Look around. This is us, bought by the blood of Jesus Christ. What a beautiful picture of the initiating God of love, and how many here would have a testimony of God overcoming the impossible in their lives? So many of us. Here we stand today, weak, fragile, Genesis 3 world, leaning in once again to the initiating love of God seen in the coming of Jesus Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit, believing that in his broken body and shed blood, righteousness can be found, and there is nothing too hard for him.

On the night Jesus was arrested, he took the bread, and he broke it, and he said, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." After the meal, he took the cup, and he blessed the cup, and he called it the blood of the new covenant. And he said, "As long as you gather, as long as the saints get together, drink this in remembrance of me." We remember today.

Brothers, sisters, I love you. Will you do me a favor? So many of you raised your hands and said, "Man, I just doubt." More raised their hands and said, "I just feel like I am losing hope in an impossible situation." Will you trust me? If I have any chips with you at all, will you trust me? Will you let us, allow us the privilege of walking with you in that?

Will you trust that whatever you're struggling with, whatever you're doubting with, whatever impossible situation you're losing heart in, that we can be trusted to encourage you, to pray for you and walk with you in that? Will you just trust me that we're for you, and we're here in legitimate concern for your soul and your life and your marriage and your children and the fullness of life that Christ has come that you might have?

There will be men and women who are up front. We're going to sing a song called "Come to the Altar," and I want to invite you to come and let us pray for you. Be bold in your confessions, and let us minister to you. Then we'll sing a doxology and be dismissed. I love being your pastor. God bless you. Let's sing "Come to the Altar.