



Enter the Story of Jesus

Matt Chandler – November 26, 2017

[Video]

Male: Stories are powerful. Stories captivate us and shape us. We can get distracted and disoriented by the false stories of our culture. We buy into these tall tales because they project a picture of the good life we think we need, but each day God is calling us to be part of a greater story, the true story of the world.

How do we get back to this one, true story? For over 1,500 years, the church calendar has given Christians a way to order our lives around God's story, the story of Christ through five distinct seasons. Each of these seasons tells a part of the story of Christ, starting with Advent and his coming to earth. It is a time of waiting and longing and ends with celebrating the birth of our Savior. Epiphany takes us to the manifestation of Christ, the revealing of his divinity and his saving plan for the nations.

Lent looks at the temptation and death of Christ and is a time for believers to examine and repent of our sin. At Easter, we celebrate the resurrection of Christ and the future hope we have in him. Pentecost reminds us of the mission of Christ to share the gospel by the power of the Spirit. For us, participating in the seasons is more than ritual and rhetoric. It's a rhythm that turns our heads and hearts away from the false stories of the world and toward the story of God, the story of Jesus.

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Good morning! I hope you had a great Thanksgiving. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. Ephesians, chapter 2, is where we're going to camp out in our time together. Last weekend, I was in New York City with Lauren and a group of our closest friends. We were celebrating a friend's fortieth birthday, a friend who will not go named per my fear of her.

We were in New York City. Everybody just kind of saved up their miles, and we cashed it in. We went, and we just played last weekend. That's what we did. On Sunday afternoon, we all headed down to Broadway. Depending on what you were willing to pay and how you were willing to kind of operate while you were in New York, we ended up all seeing different shows.

One couple was willing to get up at 5:00 a.m. and go stand out in 30- to 40-degree weather in that line in the hopes that they might land *Hamilton* tickets. I don't care that much. So no! I'm on vacation. I'm not getting up at 5:00 a.m. and standing out in the freezing cold just to see *Hamilton*. I will see it like the rest of us cheaply when they finally make a movie. I said no to that.

Then another couple went and saw *Wicked*. We've seen *Wicked* a couple of times, so I didn't feel like I needed to see *Wicked* again. That left me and two other couples going to see the Broadway play *Cats*. I never thought I would say that sentence, and there it is. This is me just trusting you with my heart.

For two and a half hours, I watched grown human beings dressed up as cats sing and dance. A couple of things struck me while I was watching this. One is I can't do what they do. Had I given my entire life over to dressing up like a cat and dancing, I lack the coordination, ability, and desire to do so.

Lauren and I took a couple hundred bucks, and we threw it into a pool of what is \$957 million spent every year by Americans on Broadway shows, not just going to Broadway, but watching those shows as they travel across the United States. It's \$957 million spent on Broadway shows either on Broadway or in their traveling troupes.

That's nothing compared to the \$490 billion we spent watching movies last year. If you went and saw *Justice League* or you went and saw *Wonder* during the break, what you did is you kind of threw some cash into this massive pile of money we're spending being entertained by stories.

Then if we get into TV, the average American watches five hours and four minutes... I don't know what kind of algorithm they used to come up with that last four minutes. It just seems simpler to me to go, "Around five hours." Right? But it's five hours and four minutes daily watching television. That number actually increases if you have a streaming service like Hulu, Netflix, or Amazon Prime and watch it on your tablet or your phone.

I'm not going to dog it. Let me just start by saying that. How many of you have a streaming service and tend to watch some of your favorite shows on your phone or tablet? It's okay! It's safe. I'm not going to dog it. I have some concerns, but that's a different sermon for a different day. I think one of the things you're seeing in our willingness to throw that kind of money and that kind of time into being entertained by stories either that we can relate to or that we can escape from our story in...

That's why we watch these things. One is it's a means of escape. "I don't have to think about my life. I can watch something nonsensical." Or, "Man, I can really relate to that. I want to see that." We have been hardwired by our Creator to be drawn into stories, to enjoy them, and to in a real way kind of need them.

Before it was movies, it was plays. Before it was plays, it was stories shared around a campfire or a dinner table. Before it was those stories, it was symbols and stories written on cave walls. We can't escape the need for story. In fact, we were created *in* a story and *for* a story. Now the problem with our consumption of these stories (and if you were here when JT English taught on the inerrancy of Scripture, he touched on this) is the profound impact stories have on us is they disciple us. They shape us. They give us a worldview or a way of seeing the world around us.

There are five predominant false narratives you and I are consuming on a daily basis. If you're in the average category... For the record, I don't know that anybody I'm friends with watches five hours of TV a day. Most of the crew I run with doesn't have five hours a day to give to those things. The average American has five hours and four minutes (don't forget about those four minutes) they indulge in the intake of these false narratives.

I'm going to walk through them very quickly. The first false narrative would be *consumerism*. It's the story that the good life means you have the kind of stuff other people would look to you and say, "This person has value. This person has wealth. This person is to be emulated." Consumerism says the point of life is you getting more stuff.

Now that's a false story. That's a false narrative. You will never be happier with more of what you already possess. Are you with me? If your Datsun Maxima didn't make your soul happy, then your 2017 Tesla sports car isn't either, because the problem is your heart, not what you own. This is a false narrative. "More will make you happy."

The second false narrative would be *secularism*. Secularism is there are no fairies. There's no God. There's no magic. All there is is what you can see, what you can taste, what you can touch, and what you can verify. There's nothing besides that. When you die, you die. The sooner you dial into that, the happier you'll be. I mean, if you think about how our culture tries to actively shame faith and belief in the supernatural, you can see this narrative.

The third one (don't fill up my inbox) is *nationalism* or the idea or concept that if we could just maintain the purity of our own nation, then that would make the world a better place. Then from there you have the false narrative of *progressivism*, the idea if we just keep making forward progress and reject yesteryear we'll somehow work our way toward utopia.

Then the last one (and I think this is probably the most modern of them all) is *cynicism*. The narrative of cynicism is, "Nothing can be trusted. Everybody is in it for their own gain. Nothing is really beautiful. Behind everything that's beautiful is something ugly. So nothing can be trusted." It's kind of the cynical twisting of our souls to doubt anything that's beautiful or good.

These are kind of the false narratives. We are drinking these in with every commercial, with every TV show, with every movie. Everybody is telling a story, and these are the most popular of the false narratives of our day. As Christians, we're going to tend to at times stumble back into these stories. This is the air all around us.

From time to time, we're going to believe the lie. We're just going to believe the lie, "Just a little bit more of *this* is going to make me better." Or a doubt here or an, "I'm not sure that's okay" there... We're going to find ourselves stumbling into the story, but really how you and I must discipline ourselves is, first, knowing our own story, the one true story really well so we can spot the false narratives and then begin to live actively in our own story. The story we believe as Christians is the only true story there actually is.

Now if you just got jostled by that sentence, I would just lay before you that my guess if you got jostled by that is you've actually been disciplined in these other narratives. For me to say the Christian story is the only true story and that bothers you... You're like, "Well, surely that can't be true because *this, this, and this*." I'm just saying pay attention to what story you've been disciplined in then.

We've been shaped by these things, so if we're going to have this conversation, it's probably pretty important to know we know our own story, okay? Let's look at this. This is Ephesians 2, starting in verse 1. We're just going to read 10 verses here.

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature [by birth] children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Now I love this text. If you're a Christian, this is our story. You and I have this story in common. While you and while I were dead in our trespasses and sins, God made us alive in Christ. I don't know where you were, but I was 17 years old when someone began to start to kind of cultivate in me a curiosity about the person and work of Jesus Christ. Three days before my eighteenth birthday, the Spirit of God awoke in my soul, and I became alive in Christ. I was dead in my trespasses and sins, and God made me alive.

If you're a Christian, that is your story...the only story there is! Dead in trespasses and sins, which explains what's wrong with the world, which explains where we've come from, would explain all that's broken around us is wrapped up in this: dead in trespasses and sins. God deep in love even while we were sinners sends the Son. By grace through faith, we are resurrected from death to life, broken to put back together. This is our story, and it didn't happen because God was putting together an A team.

It's not by any works of our own. You aren't saved because your parents were good disciple makers. You weren't saved because God looked at your unique skill set and said, "Hmm. Yeah, I could take some of *that* in my kingdom." No. You weren't saved because you used to get high and now you don't. You weren't saved because you used to do *this* and now you don't. That's not why you were saved. You were saved because God is gracious, kind and, in his mercy, saved you.

This is our story. This is what we have in common, and this commonality transcends all of our differences. That's why we can come together as a community of faith despite the fact that politically, ethnically, socioeconomically we would be in different places. Yet what has made us one is this shared story.

Then he didn't just save us to himself. If you see there in the very last verse (verse 10 of Ephesians 2:1 through 10), then God is now releasing us to do good works which he prepared for us to do. Now you have where we've come from, what went wrong, how God has fixed it, and our purpose in life, all in 10 verses. This is our story, and this story is incompatible with the five false narratives. It's incompatible! You cannot embrace our story and embrace these other stories.

See, our story bids us be generous. The false narrative consumerism would tell you to hoard or get your own. The story we're living in is that everything we have has been given to us by the grace of God and, therefore, is to be held with open hands where we look for opportunities to be generous to others as we have been the recipients of such stunning generosity. They're incompatible.

Here's the weight of pastoral ministry. We get an hour and 20 minutes with you to help reorient you around the only true story. We get an hour and 20 minutes versus the five hours and four minutes of false narrative you get, and I'm not even wrapping into that the movies, the dollars, and the Broadway shows. Without really the Holy Spirit's power, I'd be doing a different job, because I just don't stand a chance.

Humanly speaking, I don't have a chance of in an hour and 20 minutes undoing the false narratives and setting before you in remembrance what is true. That's why we're just going to lean on the Holy Spirit's power, and the church has been given over to reorient us around the story of Jesus. Now how does the church do that? Well, two ways.

The first is the gathering that occurs every week. Again, my guess is you're more than likely like me. Growing up, you kind of came to church occasionally, or maybe you even came frequently. None of

what we do on the weekend (this might surprise you) is random. We didn't show up yesterday at around three o'clock (a couple of hours before the five o'clock) and me ask Grant, "Hey, what are you feeling? What songs do you really like right now?" "Oh man. I like these. What are you feeling?" "You know, I'm just thinking about maybe doing a talk on the church calendar."

No, no. Everything we're doing from beginning to end has been meticulously prayed over and planned. We're telling the story even in the gathering. There are different songs, different campuses, maybe even different flow, but it's always the same elements. What did we do? We came in, and we started doing...what? We started singing praises to God. "Your praise is ever going to be on my lips. You are the Creator. You are the maker. You are our God."

Then immediately we went into...what? Confession. Confession of sin. Confession of need. Confession of desire. Then we went back to praising God for his mercy. Then we ended our singing with, "Be the center. Be the center of our hearts. Be the center of our lives. Be the center of this church." Now we're sitting under the Word of God and remembering our story. We'll conclude our time together in the breaking of bread and in the drinking of the cup in remembrance of mercy and grace.

In the weekly gathering, every week we're telling the same story. I once had a woman who told me I say the same things every week. I said to her, "Yes, I do. You don't want me like making up something new." You know, "I know last week I said Jesus died, and he rose from the grave. This week, however, he didn't quite make it. He quasi made it and didn't fully make it." That's heresy. We don't want to.

We have a story. We need to retell that story over and over and over again in unique ways, engaging the imagination, rooted in the Word of God. This is our story, and every week why we come in here is for an hour and 20 minutes we want to press pause on the false narratives. We want to draw your attention in practice, using your body, using your mind to reorient around the only true story there is.

The weekly gathering is one of the ways, and then the other is this idea of seasons or the church calendar. Now if you have a Catholic background, you're probably like, "Give me a break, brother. I don't need to learn this." Most of us are Protestants, and this is scary for us. So if you'll just be gracious to us while I explain this, I think this will help.

Now usually when you start talking church calendar, you don't need to take a picture of that or anything like that. This is actually in your seasons guide. You can find this digitally on our webpage. When I put quotes and stuff up, I see people try to take pictures. You don't have to. This is actually in a guide you might even be holding in your lap right now.

Usually when you start talking about the church calendar, people immediately kind of default into kind of legalism or ritualism. What I want to do is I want to spend some time talking about the *why* behind the *what* of the church calendar. I want to explain to you *why*. Here's the irony of the day and why I love this. This is a tool. It is not inerrant, nor is it to press on us something the Spirit of God isn't leading us into. Let me give you the perfect example.

According to the church calendar, this is the first weekend of Advent. Am I preaching on Advent? You should know the answer to that. I'm not. Are we decorated for Advent? We're not. Are there trees, lights, and all of that around me? There aren't. See, the puritans would want white walls and the freedom to preach Leviticus 3 on Christmas morning if they wanted to. Here's what I would say to the puritan: "God bless you. Go get it!"

We're not a slave to this. This is a tool the church has been using for 1,500 years. We just want to consider how it might be used to shape us as the people of God. Again, this isn't authoritative. It's just something given to the church that helped shape her, and I just want to walk you through it. The first season in the church calendar is...

1. *Advent*. By the way, if you see that big orange block, a little less than half of the year is what's just called *ordinary time*. I don't know why I like that. I just like it. It's like, "Yeah, it's just ordinary. God is just doing ordinary stuff in that ordinary time." The first season outside of ordinary time is the season of Advent.

Now we've been doing Advent here for five to seven years. Advent celebrates the coming of Jesus Christ. It begins with a time of waiting and longing and ends in a celebration of the birth of our Savior, the Messiah. The posture of Advent is yearning, expectant, hopeful, celebratory. The symbols that will often be used in Advent are a wreath, candles, or trees.

The season progresses from dark to light, from longing to the arrival. We'll start Advent next week. When you come in here next weekend, we're going to be decorated out. I'm going to talk about the

second coming of Jesus Christ in our first week of Advent. If you're like, "Why would you talk about the *second* coming of Jesus before you talk about the *first* coming of Jesus...?"

I think if we could get our minds around Christ stepping into this broken space in this moment of history, making all things new, and healing all that's broken, we might get a sense of the longing of our brothers and sisters 2,000 years ago for the coming of Jesus. We'll start Advent next week. It will be a few weeks leading up to Christmas morning where we celebrate the Messiah has come. It's a beautiful season that orients our hearts around the coming of Jesus.

By the way, Advent has its own colors. The colors are blue, gold, and white. So historically, when the church would decorate for Advent, they would use those colors to decorate their auditoriums. If you grew up in a traditional Baptist church, a traditional Anglican church, or something like this, you know all about this. You might have even had like a "hanging of the greens" on a Thursday night or something like that where you kind of came together and decorated the sanctuary as a body. Then Advent moves into...

2. *Epiphany*. Epiphany is about the manifestation of Jesus Christ. When we talk about the manifestation of Jesus Christ, what we're talking about is that Christ is revealing he is divine and his plan is the nations would be saved. Epiphany is marked by, its posture is, celebratory. It's joyful. It's restful. It's evangelistic. The symbols are candles (again, I think candles are a symbol in each of these seasons), a star, three crowns. We'll talk about why the three crowns on Epiphany Sunday. We'll be preaching a sermon around this.

This is focusing on Christ revealing his divinity and his saving plan for the nations. Now I want you to watch how the calendar starts to shape us as a body. In the first sense, you're creating an Advent, this longing, this desire, that gives way to this celebration.

Then you enter into Epiphany where Christ has manifested himself as divine and has revealed his plan to not save one small ethnic group in the Middle East but to go to the ends of the earth and to bring unto himself men and women of every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth. You and I are in this room because of the manifestation of Jesus Christ.

Now this is a season historically where the sermons and the season of the life of the church are to call the people of God to recommitment and to renewal. You can see how this starts to shape a people. We've gone from longing to celebrating now to considering how we might repent, how we

might recommit those areas of our lives where we're not wholeheartedly following Jesus. It's a pull on those places where we've drifted into false narratives to repent of that and come back to the true story. That's what happens during Epiphany. Then we move into...

3. *Lent*. Lent is about the temptation and death of Jesus. It begins with 40 days of prayer and fasting. Now we've done a Lent guide here for the last few years. If you think all of this is new, you just haven't been paying a lot of attention. We've done a Lent guide. We consider the seasons like ambient music. Are you tracking with me on that?

The seasons for us are never going to be like up front. "We're in the season of Epiphany." It's going to be like background music, just kind of like the soundtrack of our church. Are you with me in that? It's like ambient music. Like when you're watching a movie, and all of a sudden you're feeling emotions and you're not sure why, it's probably because some guy is on the synth in the background.

What happens then at Lent is we enter into a season of lamenting and mourning. We don't practice Lent so we might *be* righteous but rather to line our hearts up with the sufferings of Jesus Christ, to remember Christ heads to the cross to bear my sin, my shame. In a day and age in which instant gratification and getting all we want is really, really easy, giving ourselves over to a season of wanting, of creating longing, of identifying with the sufferings of Jesus Christ thickens our experience, deepens our understanding, and expands our joy at the next season.

Lent is a darker season. In fact, in churches that really operate in this liturgical calendar, the lights would be low the entire season of Lent. All my Catholics and Anglicans right now are like, "Absolutely! I remember that. I never understood it." It was dark, and then you wouldn't sing a lot of peppy songs. You'd even kind of remove certain portions of certain songs that were a little bit too much focused on resurrection or new life. You want to feel the weight of the temptation, torture, and death of Jesus Christ.

The only celebratory moments in this season of Lent would actually be Palm Sunday (the weekend before). That's when (again, if you grew up in this tradition) the little kids would kind of come out with palm branches. It would be your first, "Oh wait! Maybe there's hope here." Then Maundy Thursday and then Good Friday.

How many of you have been to our Good Friday services? All right. Now you know the weight of that, how even on "Glorious Day," we took out the last verse about the resurrection of Jesus. Why? Because we were focusing on the death of Jesus. It's dark. It's quiet. It's somber. This is the posture of Lent. By the way, the colors around Lent are purple, black, and red. It's a time of examining our hearts and repenting of our sins.

4. *Easter*. Then that gives way to Easter, and Easter is about the resurrection of Jesus. If you have done Lent well, then Easter will not sneak up on you. If you have done Lent well, Easter will be a time of celebration at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is a time of ongoing celebration about and consideration of the future hope, because Jesus has defeated sin and death. Its colors are white, purple, and gold. That will be the suit I wear this year. The posture is celebratory, courageous, joyful, and hopeful. The symbols are an empty tomb, sunrise, lilies, and a flowering cross.

Let me chat about Easter, celebratory, all of that. I read Martyn Lloyd-Jones' book *Revival*, and in it he said one of the great enemies of revival is a lack of enthusiasm among the people of God. I long for us to be more enthusiastic about Jesus. I'm not sure what it is that dampens and dampers our celebratory capacities. I really don't know what it is, because I live among you. I know you have an extra gear. I know you do!

My kids play sports. I'm at all these events. I've been at Marcus football games for 8-9 years. I've seen you explode in celebratory praise until it comes to something like, you know...I don't know...Jesus killing death forever. Then something like that, you're like, "Oh, that is exciting!" It's like the Dallas Cowboys, even when they're terrible, get all kinds of priority and celebratory oomph from you. The resurrected King gets barely a clap. We have to get better at this. We just have to get better!

Whatever this is that dampens our enthusiasm... I don't know if it's we want to look cool, we want to look altogether, or we don't want somebody to think we're an overly emotional freak. Again, I just want to point out that none of that fear exists when you're watching your college team play. It just doesn't! Brothers, you in particular yell at the television. You yell at the television. You're emotionally affected. Right?

I know what happens when your son hits a double, your daughter gets on base. We freak out about that stuff! "I just can't believe it! It's here!" Then when it comes to kind of these eternally significant, unbelievable, true realities, we're like, "Yeah." Even that was more than I think we usually give.

Right there, some of you are like, "I would never do that. You are crazy." There has to be another gear in us where we learn it's okay to celebrate. It's okay to be joyful. It's okay to live like we believe this is true. I mean, can you imagine? Then this gives way to...

5. *Pentecost*. Pentecost is about the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This season ends the official church calendar by reflecting on the sending of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. It reminds us of our unity with Christ and our call to share Christ by the power of the Spirit. Again, the posture is joyful, excited, intentional, missional. The symbols are fire, wind, doves, and red flags. How Pentecostal does that sound?

What's happening here? We've been filled with the Holy Spirit. We've been sent, and we haven't been sent by our own power. We've been sent by the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot fail. Again, this is a great time to reorient our hearts around evangelistic fervor because the nations will be glad. There are men and women out there right now in our neighborhoods, at our workplaces, around our kids' activities who have been bought with the blood of Jesus. They need only hear. They need only hear!

They need only to be invited in. "I'm just not sure what to say." Okay. You're putting too much weight on yourself. It's Jesus who saves, not your presentation of him. It's your courageous belief in and a life marked by zeal for him that's the apologetic. Any other question you can find the answer to. This is what Pentecost does. It reorients us.

Now how God has shaped his people since we have record... If you begin to study the Bible, God shapes his people like this. He shapes his people through *feasts*, he shapes them through *fasts*, and he shapes them through *festivals*. That's how. I just did some alliteration there. You're welcome. You have these three Fs. Let me walk through this. Here's the first one. The idea of a...

1. *Feast*. There are few things that communicate in a very tangible, visceral way God's invitation to us to join him like a good feast. I have a friend who pastors a church in New York City. It's actually a church plant there. One of the congregations was about 40-50 people. He could just get a sense they were losing heart and there wasn't a lot of zeal for the Lord. The weight and difficulty of life in New York City was just sucking the life out of them.

He had his wife and his staff go all across the city and buy the best breads, the best bottles of wine, the best cuts of meat. The best! He had it all set up on a table behind this curtain. He got up. Think

40 people jammed into a room, a feast behind a curtain. He began to just talk about the love of God, the invitation to join him, that God had set a table for them in the presence of their enemies.

They weren't invited to that table with heads hanging low but with bright eyes and new, spiritual robes, invited to sit at the King's table. Then they pulled back that curtain, and just the best of everything was there. For the next few hours, they just feasted together as a community of faith. My friend said at the middle of that, this woman came up to him just tears streaming down her face. She just said, "I have been a prodigal. I came to New York running from the Lord. I was able to recreate myself here. I have been miserable. This feast is for me. I'm the prodigal coming home."

That's the power of feast. Listen to me. Learn to do this well. That same crew I go to New York City with, we have done a New Year's Eve feast for over a decade. Here's what happens. We kind of start going through who is bringing what. You don't get to bring a can of pickled beets. You don't get to do that. You can bring that, but I'm not unlocking the door. You're just going to stand out there with your can of beets and not enjoy the feast.

The Lord's feast is far more generous than ours is. Last year, everybody showed up at my house at like 4:00 p.m. It ended at 2:00 a.m. We cooked together, and we laughed. This is very intentional. "What has God done in your life this past year? What are you longing for him to do in this next year?" We had just some great dialogue over great food and great wine. We laughed a lot, and we told stories.

There are no kids at this other than mine kind of lurking in the background because they live there even though they're getting old enough now to want to go out and do their own things. They were there last year, and I want them to see this. I want them to see Mom and Dad and their friends laughing, eating, drinking, feasting. This shapes us, reminds us of the generosity of God. We have to get better at doing this. It's not just feasting. It's also at times...

2. *Fasting*. I said this earlier, but I want to flesh it out a little bit more. You and I live in a day and age that if there is not some sort of difficulty, some sort of disease, some sort of unmet expectation, a real sense of longing is easy to medicate. If we're hungry, it's really easy for most of us to get food. If we have a headache, it's pretty easy for most of us to grab some meds. That's not true about all of us, but it is true about most of us.

If we want *this*, we want *this*, we want *this*, we can go get it. If we have a sense of longing that we don't know what to do with, it's really easy to numb! Do you know how? By binging on your favorite show on Netflix, which happens to be in your pocket. We can numb longing, and yet it's the cultivation of longing that ultimately leads to greater celebration and joy when we meet what we actually most long for, whether we know that's what we most long for or not.

I love this quote by John Piper. This quote probably will make you think you don't want to hang out with him, but he is a good dude. Here we go. "The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night."

Do you hear what he is saying? What dulls our senses, what dulls our appetite for the things of heaven, is not the X-rated video. It's the endless nibbling at worldly, fleshly things that fills up our spirits with the faux sense of satisfaction that ultimately leads us into really thin living. Fasting. Creating seasons in which we purposefully cultivate longing.

This is why fasting from food is more than just a health benefit. I think that's the way people talk about it now. "Oh, intermittent fasting. It will make you healthier." That's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about, "I am going to rob myself of something I want for something greater." That is a profoundly powerful spiritual practice, to cultivate longing, to cultivate a desire for more. Then you have feast, and you have fast. Finally you have...

3. *Festivals*. Here's my friend, Jeff Vanderstelt. "Every culture has celebrations—your job as a Christian is to engage in the celebration with those people. We bring the better wine—we bring what is lacking. We ought to be known as the greatest party people on the planet—we ought to party like crazy because we actually have something to celebrate—the resurrection of Jesus!"

Here's Vanderstelt's point. If you'll really give yourself over to a study of this, in the Old Testament, do you know what God is setting up for his people? Festivals, over and over. They're like the kind of festivals where the nation shuts down for a couple of weeks and gives themselves over to the best of what the nation had to offer to rejoice in the goodness of God.

In fact, God will threaten them on more than one occasion for not doing it. I mean, you want to think about a picture of God that few of us have? God, on more than one occasion, threatens the people of

Israel what will happen to them if they show up to the party late or if they don't come at all. He literally threatens death. "If you continue to work, if you continue to have your servants work, if you show up late so you can get a little bit of extra work in before you come to the party, I will kill you."

I'm not making that up. That might be the New Living Translation of that, but it's in the Bible. You have this God who invites his people into...what? To feasts, to fasts, and to festivals. What does this do? It shapes us. It shapes us as the people of God. The church calendar helps orient us around these things. We will not be slaves to this, but this will be a tool we utilize.

Now a couple of things I want to chat about just in conclusion here. Yesterday morning I was reading 2 Kings. Don't ask any questions. "You are a loser." Maybe. Here's what I came across. Let me set the context. The people of God (Surprise! Surprise!) are disobedient. They're rebelling against God. Yet again a portion of their land is taken from them, and the portion of the land that was taken from them is resettled by the Assyrians. They tear down the altars to God, and they build the altars to Baal.

God sends lions to kill the Assyrians. These lions are kind of... Think *The Ghost and the Darkness*. I just dated myself. Some of you don't know what I'm talking about. Some of you are with me. These lions are killing everybody. They can't figure it out. They can't get rid of the lions. They kill one lion, and another lion comes back. They can't stop these lions.

In the ancient Near East mindset, they thought, "We have angered the god of this territory. We don't know how to live in this land." They send word to the king of Assyria, "Lions are killing. We don't know how to please the god of this land. Will you send us one of the exiles? Will you send us one of the people we have captured to teach us how to live according to this god's way so these lions will go away?" It's a fascinating story.

The king of Assyria finds a Levitical priest and sends the Levitical priest into the land who then teaches the Assyrians who have mixed with the people of God how to live in such a way to please the God of that land. Then you find this verse in 2 Kings 17:33: **"So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away."** Both the Assyrians and the people of God feared God but still worshiped other gods.

Then chapter 17 ends in verse 41 with this one, and this one really kind of struck me to the heart yesterday. **"So these nations feared the LORD and also served their carved images. Their**

children did likewise, and their children's children—as their fathers did, so they do to this day."

Now my great concern for us is that in a day of such vast consumption of false narratives, the tendency you and I are going to have is to fear the Lord but worship other gods, to combine the stories, to say, "Jesus is Lord, but my money is mine. Jesus is Lord as long as he doesn't do anything supernatural that wigs me out.

Jesus is Lord, but the United States of America is the hope of the world. Jesus is Lord, and yet I think everybody in organized religion is actually about themselves. They're in it for the money, and they're not really serving the Lord. They're just trying to fleece the flock. Jesus is Lord, but..."

Do you see how these are false narratives woven into the true story? Now here's my appeal and my fear. I think Matt McCauley said this last weekend. Matt McCauley is our family minister here at the Flower Mound Campus. We're a part of this growing, young cohort out at Fuller Seminary with Darrel Amen (one of our elders), Bruno, Chris Groover, Matt, and me.

Here's what we learned. There's data now to back this up. Kids are not being secularized in college. They're being secularized at home before they're sent to college by well-meaning Christian parents who can't tease out the value balance between sports, activities, and the gathering of the people of God.

They just get disoriented by it, and I'm watching it even play out in my children's peers. Look. I can use my son as an example. My son loves football. He loves basketball. He *loves* it. He is disciplined around it. He is eager for it. Sometimes he doesn't want to come to church, but guess who doesn't get to decide that? Reid!

Do you know why? Because he is 12. I don't let him choose what he gets to eat, or he would eat terribly. I don't let him choose what time he can go to bed. I don't let him handle a firearm whenever he wants to. Do you know why? Because I'm Dad, and I love him. I have a long view for his life that at 12 he couldn't possibly fathom.

What ends up happening... I'm telling you. I have a front-row seat to this right now because of the age of my kids. I just hear these nonsensical things from moms and dads. "Oh, you know, just trying

to get them out of bed on Sunday morning is just like a whipping. I just want to give him the freedom to kind of figure this stuff out."

Would you do that in any other area of your kid's life? If your kid was like, "Do you know what? School... I just can't. Mom, I just can't do it. Look. The teacher is mean. I don't even understand what she is talking about. Do you know out of that 7- to 8-hour day, we only get to play and have fun for one 45-minute block of that? I'm just not doing it. I'm not doing it, Mom!"

Can you imagine going and trying to wake up your kid for school at whatever time you have to wake them up and them just going, "I'm not feeling it. I'm not going"? "Oh, okay. Well, never mind then." To parent that way... Listen. I'm for you. I'm not against you. I'm not trying to shame you. To parent this way... This is what's true about the data. Half-hearted obedience to Jesus Christ in this generation leads to full rebellion against him in the next.

Now here's what's crazy. The kingdom of God can't be stopped. If it's not our children who live faithfully to follow Jesus and make much of his name and renown, he will save from among the lost and broken so the kingdom continues. Don't forget Paul didn't exist. He was Saul of Tarsus, killing Christians when Stephen was martyred, and they had no view of how this was going to play out. What did God do? God saved from among the most broken and the darkest for the glory of his name.

Now I'm dedicated to as best I can (and I don't control it) helping my children see and understand what is of supreme value and what's a good gift. Look at me. Football is a good gift. Basketball is a good gift. Softball, soccer, band are good gifts but terrible gods. They're terrible gods! I wonder sometimes if we've wrapped up our own value in it. We need our kid to be the best at these things because it's a reflection on us.

You cannot combine these two stories. They're incompatible. Let me walk through them again. Consumerism will never mix with generosity. These are opposing belief systems where the world says what you need to be whole, what you need to be happy, what you need to satisfy yourself is more stuff, bigger things, bigger barns, more money, and a 401(k) where you can live to be 190,000 years old.

This idea is incompatible with everything you have that's been given to you by the grace of God and should be held with openhanded generosity. They're two different stories. They can't be the same

story. Secularism will not mix with radical faith. It just won't. It might be able to mix with halfhearted faith, but it's never going to mix with radical faith.

Nationalism will never mix with the kingdom of God, and I'll just say it. I have more in common with an Iranian Christian than I'll ever have with an unbelieving American. I have more in common with an Iranian Christian than I'll ever have with an unbelieving American because the two of us will be together for eternity, worshiping the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Progressivism does not mix with God's sovereign rule, and cynicism can never mix with gladness.

Again, I've said this to you multiple times. I want to just say it again. One of the greatest apologetics you could have in our day and time is to have a heart of gladness, to not give into the cynicism and anger of our day, to be an optimist, to speak life about people, to not participate in the tearing down of others, to recognize their strengths and bring up their strengths even as others are tearing them down.

Do you know how weird of a human being you're going to be if they're like, "Man, she is always *this*. He is always *this*. I can't believe him. He is really doing *this*." You're like, "But have you ever watched how he...? Man, that guy really loves his kids. I'll tell you what. He is doing the best he can to do *this* and *this*."

If you start speaking life about people, it's going to give people whiplash. In 2017, being kind is this massive apologetic. Being grateful, being glad... It could be offensive to be glad! To have a smile on your face, to treat people like they're humans, this is an apologetic. It can't be told along the same story of cynicism. They're opposite narratives.

I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful moving into Advent next weekend. If all of this is too much for you, let me just lay this before you. Let's just take some baby steps. Can we do baby steps together? Let's do this because maybe this is all too much. You're like, "Oh my gosh, bro! I haven't read this much since college. You killed me as soon as you rolled this out, bro. If this had been like the size of a blog (and a really short blog), I might have been with you, but this is... Nuh-uh. You just assured right now that I'm not even going to try."

Okay, so let's talk. Baby steps. Baby steps! Now I know if this was the Cowboys playbook, you might dig into this. It would probably be shorter, but it would still... It's been a tough year. It's been a tough year! Forgive me. I won't do that again. I know where I am. Let's do this. In this guide you can

grab on your way out (or if you're less tactile and more technological, you can just download this onto your device and check it out between shows)...

In here, let's just do this. Let's just do Advent together. Can we do that? You can do anything for three and a half weeks. That's how much I believe in you. You can do *anything* for three and a half weeks. What we're going to do is you have Advent. Then in the Advent guide, what you've got is an explanation of what it is. Then you have these readings, devotionals, and family activities, because what we're wanting to do is orient our hearts and lives around the coming of Jesus. That's what we want to be about the next four weeks.

Somebody actually has seen you while you're sleeping, and they also know when you're awake. They also know you've been far more bad than good, and his grace will cover you anyway for goodness' sake. If we could orient around... Oh, that? Really? I talk about the resurrection and nothing? I take a shot at Santa, and you applaud that? All that's wrong with evangelicalism...

Now here's the plan. This is week one. There are readings Sunday through Friday. We're giving you Saturday off to catch up. We're going to do these readings together, and there are family devotionals and reflections. Then one of the things we want to add during Advent... We're not going to do it during Epiphany. We are going to come back to it in Lent.

One of the things we're going to do during the Advent season here in Flower Mound is starting next Monday (not this Monday but the following Monday), we're going to open up Suite 165 next door, and we're going to come. Anyone who wants to come during their lunch hour, we're going to read these texts out loud, and we're going to pray together to orient our hearts around the season of Advent.

If you have 12:00 to 1:00 open, come and join us in Suite 165. If we overflow out of that, we'll just come in here. It's a good way to just kind of orient our hearts. You can do this. It's three and a half to four weeks of reading the Word of God together as a family of faith, coming together if you can during your lunch break from Monday through Thursday. We won't do it Friday or Saturday. We are going to do it Monday through Thursday.

It will be led by either one of our staff members, some of our prayer team members, some of our Home Group leaders. We're going to be in Suite 165. We're just going to read it out loud, and we're

going to reorient our hearts around the things of God in this season. I'm hopeful for what all this means about us being shaped moving forward. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women. I thank you that you love us enough to shape us and mold us, to make us more like Jesus. I thank you for even how you go about that through feasts of celebrations, festivals of partying, and fasts meant to stir up and cultivate longing in our hearts. I pray even as we enter into Advent next weekend that our hearts would not get swept away into the shadows but rather cling to the substance.

We celebrate not winter solstice; we celebrate the coming of the King. We celebrate not spring; we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus and his victory over death. We cultivate mourning and longing. We cultivate a desire for the kingdom of God to be made more visible. We celebrate being filled with the Holy Spirit. We ask you, even now, shape us. Mold us. Make us more like you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.