

SERMON OUTLINE 1

The Invitation

Mark 1:1—3:6

I. Introduction

- A. Jeff Manion introduces himself and this study through the book of Mark.
- B. The book of Mark:
 - 1. There are four biographies on the life of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are commonly referred to as the four gospels. Mark is the shortest.
 - 2. The book of Mark focuses on the action, the activity, of Jesus' life. It is fast-paced.
 - 3. It's believed to be authored by John Mark. He was not an original disciple, but was a close friend and companion of Peter who had a front row seat to the activity and mission of Christ.
 - 4. Mark is believed to have been written in the late 60s AD. The primary audience would be the Jesus community in Rome where things were not going well.
 - a. The leader of the Christian Church, Peter, was executed and then the apostle Paul was killed.
 - b. Believers in Rome are suffering so John Mark may be encouraging them in their faith during a really challenging season.

II. Teaching

- A. Throughout Mark two questions surface: "Who is Jesus?" and "What does it mean to follow Him?"
- B. The book of Mark begins with introducing "Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1 NIV). Mark tips his hand as to who this is we will be reading about.
 - 1. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.
 - 2. There's no manger scene. There are no wise men, no Mary, no Joseph, no shepherds.

3. Rather than the birth narrative of Jesus or one of those lengthy, tedious genealogies, we are immediately introduced to a man named John the Baptist.
 - a. John appears in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance, and people from the countryside begin to flow out to see him.
 - b. To repent means to turn, a significant life turn. It's like a change of mind, which results in a change of heart, which results in a different life.
 - c. It is my hope that there will be moments where you turn from one way of looking at life and one way of looking at God, to a new way.
- C. In the crowds that funneled down to the Jordan River to be baptized is Jesus, coming from Nazareth in Galilee.
 1. Jesus is baptized by John. The heavens open and He hears the voice of his Father say, "You are my Son whom I love; with you I am well-pleased" (Mark 1:11 NIV).
 2. After the baptism of Jesus, Jesus goes into the desert to be tested.
- D. When Jesus emerges from the desert under the power of the Holy Spirit, he begins to speak about the kingdom of God (see Mark 1:15).
 1. The kingdom of God is God's reign on earth. When God is King, the forces of evil are pushed out. When God is King, those who are broken are made whole. When God is King, those who feel like they're on the outside are pulled into community.
 2. The kingdom of God came with Jesus and in Jesus and through Jesus, and yet we long for a day when the kingdom of God will come in its fullness.
- E. On the north shore of the sea of Galilee Jesus sees two brothers, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew. Jesus issues the invitation, "Follow me. Peter and Andrew, follow me" (see Mark 1:17).
 1. They left their nets and began to follow Christ.
 2. Jesus gave the same two-word invitation to John and his brother James: "Follow me." They left their father, they left the boat, and they begin to follow Jesus as well.

3. We're watching these disciples watch Jesus. As they watch, observe, listen, learn, and grow, it's our opportunity to enter into the company of Christ. We learn as they are learning.
- F. Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum and the people were amazed because Jesus taught with authority, not like the teachers of the law. This was different.
1. A man stands up in the synagogue and begins to scream. This person is possessed by an evil spirit, by a demon. Jesus says to the demon, "Be quiet and come out of him" (see Mark 1:25). The man shakes, the demon leaves, and the people are astonished that he has authority over demons.
 2. Mark is returning to the questions of "Who is this, and what does it mean to follow him?"
- G. Jesus and his disciples leave the synagogue and they travel to the home of Simon Peter. Peter's mother-in-law is ill and Jesus restores her health (see Mark 1:31). Jesus has authority over demons and now authority over sickness.
1. Jesus heals a leper—an unclean person separated from the community. Jesus has the authority to make unclean people clean.
 2. This is a beautiful image of the crucifixion that we will encounter at the end of Mark. Jesus comes to take our place in order to make the unclean clean.
- H. As Jesus' popularity grows, so does conflict in several areas.
1. The first conflict is a conflict over forgiveness. In the story of the four friends bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus, Jesus says, "Your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5 NIV).
 - a. The religious leaders come unglued and think "blasphemy"! Jesus is skipping all the steps of forgiveness to be followed at the temple in Jerusalem.
 - b. Jesus is saying in essence, "I am that place where heaven and earth meet. I have the authority to forgive sins."
 2. The second conflict is with friendship. Jesus calls a tax collector by the name of Levi (Matthew) to be one of his followers.
 - a. Levi holds a dinner with Jesus as the guest of honor and many of the guests come from all kinds of sketchy backgrounds. Sharing a meal with someone was to share a life.

- b. The religious leaders question Jesus' disciples about his choice to participate, but Jesus answers (see Mark 2:17).
 - c. Do you sense something powerful about Matthew's dinner? There's room at the table for you. Don't think you have to come to Christ once you're cleaned up.
 - 3. The third conflict is a conflict over fasting.
 - 4. The fourth and fifth conflicts are both over what you could do or couldn't do on the Jewish Sabbath.
 - a. These conflicts with the religious leaders are now boiling over into murderous rage (see Mark 3:1–6).
 - b. To the Pharisees, Jesus was a threat to their whole way of viewing life, their way of viewing God, and their way of viewing holiness.

III. Application

- A. Who is Jesus?
 - 1. Jesus has authority over demonic forces, physical brokenness, sickness, uncleanness. He has the authority to forgive sins.
 - 2. Does he have authority over me?
- B. What does Jesus want?
 - 1. Jesus gave Simon, Andrew, James, and John a two-word invitation: "Follow Me."
 - 2. Jesus' invitation echoes right into our lives. Will I join the company of Christ? Will I join with Him in this project of expanding the kingdom of God?

Lessons for Disciples

Mark 3:7—5:54

I. Introduction

- A. Jeff welcomes the listener back to *40 Days Through the Book of Mark*.
- B. Jeff reviews the two core questions that Mark focuses on in his gospel:
 - 1. Who is Jesus?
 - 2. What does it mean to follow Jesus—what does he want?

II. Teaching

- A. Jesus chose 12 disciples.
 - 1. He chose them to hang out with him, and then to send them out (see Mark 3:14–15).
 - 2. The 12 disciples will join Jesus in his ministry of expanding the boundaries of the kingdom of God by doing much of what he is doing—preaching and casting out demons—but they need to be with him so that he can then send them out.
 - 3. Jesus had literally dozens of followers, but he narrows the group to 12 who will have some of the most significant interaction with him and some of the greatest responsibility.
- B. Jesus experienced opposition from his own family.
 - 1. They came to take charge of Jesus.
 - 2. His family thought he was “out of his mind” (Mark 3:21 NIV).
 - 3. Jesus answered their actions by saying basically, “I am here constituting a new spiritual family from those who listen and those who respond.”
- C. The religious leaders opposed Jesus.
 - 1. They’re being pressured to make a public statement about who they believe Jesus is.
 - 2. They can’t deny that Jesus is driving out demons, but they question the source of his power, believing it comes from Satan (see Mark 3:22–23).

3. This is a serious accusation that Jesus strongly rejects.
- D. It's kind of amazing that people could listen to the same teaching, watch the same activity, witness the same miracles, and come up with such radically different opinions as to who Jesus is and what he's about.
- E. Jeff refers to a painting called *The Sower* as he introduces Jesus' parable of the sower from Mark 4:1–8.
1. Jesus says that a sower, a man planting seeds, describes exactly how the kingdom of God lands in different people's lives.
 - a. Some of the truth, the message of the kingdom of God, lands on hard-packed soil. But it's like it never even gets into the heart.
 - b. Other seed, the message of the kingdom, lands on rocky soil where the roots can't go down deep. It starts to grow and then it gets scorched and it dies.
 - c. Another type of soil, when the seed begins to grow, has thorns or weeds that choke it out preventing it from bearing a harvest. The worries of life, deceptiveness of wealth, and the desire for other things choke it out and make it unfruitful.
 - d. Jesus explained that the seed is the teaching of God landing in the soil of the human heart. He encouraged the people to listen to what he's saying (see Mark 4:9).
 2. Persecution was beginning to bubble up toward the Jesus community in Rome. The rocky soil seed starts to grow, but persecution like the blazing sun burns the plant that is growing. In the thorny soil something starts to grow, but the worries of life choke it out. As Jesus is delivering this message to the crowd, I believe it had special application to believers in Rome who just a few decades later had to face persecution and might be plagued by the worries of life.
 3. Jesus gives this parable of the sower, the parable of the soils, in order to talk about the way that kingdom of God lands in our lives.
 4. In Mark, chapter four, Jesus gives other teachings to describe the kingdom of God that came with him and that will someday come in its fullness.
- F. Mark places four episodes together.
1. Episode 1: Jesus and his disciples are on the sea of Galilee together. Jesus falls asleep in the boat and a storm begins to rage. Jesus speaks to the storm and suddenly the lake is like glass—the storm is gone.

- a. Jesus asks two questions: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” (Mark 4:40 NIV).
 - b. Jesus’ disciples are supposed to be trusting him, the one who has power over nature. That’s Mark’s question, “Who is he?”
2. Episode 2: Jesus and his disciples are met by a raging demon-possessed man on the shore.
- a. Jesus delivers this man and the village from this demonic darkness and horror.
 - b. Jesus has power over spiritual darkness.
3. Episode 3: Back in Capernaum, a synagogue leader named Jairus pleads with Jesus to heal his daughter who is close to death.
- a. Surrounded by a mob on his way, Jesus suddenly stops and asks, “Who touched me?” (see Mark 5:31).
 - b. Jesus heals a woman who had suffered for 12 years and who reached out and tagged the edge of his garment. Jesus calls her “daughter” and says, “your faith has healed you” (see Mark 5:34). It’s like he’s welcoming her into the family.
 - c. Remember the question about faith Jesus asked the disciples after calming the storm.
4. Episode 4: Imagine what Jairus is going through—his daughter is dying and there is Jesus in the street, listening to this woman tell her life story.
- a. Someone comes and tells Jairus that his daughter is dead.
 - b. Jesus tells Jairus, “Don’t be afraid; just believe” (Mark 5:36 NIV).
 - c. Remember the second question Jesus asked the disciples after calming the storm.
 - d. Jesus raises this child to life and restores her to her family.

III. Application

- A. Jeff refers to Revelation 21:1–4. It states that God’s dwelling is with man. I think we need to remember how the story ends when the kingdom of God comes in its fullness. Every disappointment, every disaster, every frustration and setback will be gone like a bad memory.
- B. What does our Lord desire?

1. I do not know how our gracious Lord will be pleased to intervene and interact with a crisis or a situation that you experience.
 2. I do know that he desires to be near, he desires to be present, and he desires to hear the words from us: "I trust you."
- C. One of the most powerful prayers that we can offer up in a complicated season is just "I believe that you can be trusted. Help me trust you in this space."
- D. As you read through Mark's gospel, spend time with your Lord, watch him, listen to him, sense his tenderness, power and authority, and join with him in expanding the boundaries of the kingdom of God.

Hearing and Seeing

Romans 6:1—8:26

I. Introduction

A. Jeff welcomes us back to *40 Days Through the Book of Mark*.

1. Jesus is the main character of the gospel of Mark and his disciples are almost always in the picture.
2. In our last session, Jesus chose the 12 disciples. He chose them to be with him, but also that he might send them out to preach and have authority over demonic forces.

B. Jeff tells a story about packing for a trip.

II. Teaching

A. In Mark, Jesus gives the disciples a very specific packing list when he sends them out: a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in your belts, wear sandals, but not an extra shirt (see Mark 6:7–13). As Jesus sends his disciples out, he is attempting to stretch them.

1. They're still learning as they go, and they are invited into the journey of trust.
2. Jesus stretches them by placing them in a situation where they are not likely to have everything that they will need.
3. Often a season of shortage is when we need to turn to our gracious God, asking for His help and seeking His provision.

B. One of the first stories after the disciples return from this preaching tour, is the feeding of the 5,000 (see Mark 6:30–44).

1. Jesus' intention was to get away from the crowds. Jesus has compassion on them and He begins to teach the people.
2. As the day gets late and the people get hungry, Jesus responds to his disciples' urging to send the people away by telling them to give the people something to eat. The miracle of the loaves and fishes occurs.
3. Jesus is including the disciples in the feeding of the 5,000 by saying, "I want you to see people like I see them. I want you to love people like I

love them. I want you to engage in this journey of trust where you see me as the provider, but you give them something to eat.”

4. Jeff tells of a woman on their street who asked his wife, Chris, spiritual questions. They started studying the book of John and other women on the block started inviting themselves to the study.
 - a. Many came from radically different backgrounds, different perspectives on God, the Bible, and spirituality—they had different worldviews.
 - b. Chris felt inadequate to answer their questions, but God asked her to just bring what she had. This was a great moment of growth for Chris and she was stretched beyond her adequacy.
- C. The very next story describes Jesus walking on the water (see Mark 6:45–52).
 1. Jesus commands the disciples to get in the boat without him and cross the sea of Galilee. The wind is blowing and they’re straining at the oars when Jesus is about to walk by.
 2. Jesus wants to show them something of his essence, of his character, of his being that they had not glimpsed to that point. When the disciples, see Jesus they flip out.
 3. They were terrified because they had not understood about the feeding of the 5,000 and their hearts were hard. They’re not making the connections that they’re supposed to be making.
 - a. Remember the parable of the sower? On the hard ground, the hard heart, the seed isn’t getting in.
 - b. The disciples are at risk of being hard-hearted.
- D. Jesus, wanting some alone time with his disciples, heads northwest to a place called Phoenicia, to the city of Tyre.
 1. A Syrian-Phoenician woman, whose daughter is plagued by a demonic force, finds Jesus and begs him to cast the demon out of her daughter (see Mark 7:24–30).
 2. Jesus responds by saying his responsibility right now is to the children of Israel, using the image of feeding children before pets.
 - a. The woman will not take “no” for an answer and Jesus loves her faith.
 - b. Jesus, telling the woman the demon is gone, sends her home to find her daughter whole and her spiritual affliction is gone.

3. The disciples may be hard-hearted, but here is a picture of someone whose eyes and ears are open.
- E. Jesus heals a man who is deaf and a man who is blind. In the middle of this we see what the disciples are not learning.
1. Jesus travels across the sea of Galilee to a region called Decapolis where Jesus heals a deaf and mute man (see Mark 7:31–35).
 2. In the middle, we find Jesus beside the sea for the second feeding miracle in this section—the feeding of the 4,000 (see Mark 8:1–9).
 - a. Jesus calls the disciples and says the people need food. I think this is where Peter, or Andrew, or Philip, or John is supposed to jump in, knowing exactly what to do, but they don't.
 - b. Again Jesus has to ask them what food they have, and he multiplies their seven loaves and few fish and feeds the people.
 3. Back in the boat, they go across the lake.
 - a. Jesus warns them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. The disciples think Jesus is saying this because they didn't bring bread along.
 - b. Jesus basically says, "Are you kidding Me?" He asks a series of questions to penetrate the hard hearts of the disciples (see Mark 8:17–21).
 4. Landing in Bethsaida, Jesus touches a blind man's eyes and his sight is partially restored. Jesus touches him again and his sight is fully restored. This is the only two-phase healing in the gospels (see Mark 8:22–25).
 - a. The disciples are learning to trust Jesus in phases.
 - b. The disciples' slowness to learn might be discouraging. I find it hopeful because Jesus is involving them and growing them. He has not given up on them. And I don't believe that he will give up on you.

III. Application

- A. There's just one expression that I would just love for you to latch onto: "Just bring what you have."
1. Some of you may have a messy situation in your extended family and you want to run the other way, but you sense your Lord guiding you to step toward that situation, not run away from it.

2. Some of you, your heart is being moved toward a ministry leadership position.
 3. Jesus says, "Bring what you have."
- B. When you get hit by a wave of insecurity, hear the words of your Lord. When we bring what we have, often we stand in amazement at how our gracious Lord will work far beyond what we ever imagined.

The Way of the Cross

Mark 8:27—10:52

I. Introduction

- A. Jeff welcomes us back to the book of Mark.
- B. Jesus' disciples have been following him and seeing amazing things. They witnessed how he has authority over dark forces, authority over demons, authority over illness, even authority over storms on the sea of Galilee.

II. Teaching

- A. Today we find Jesus and his disciples at the northernmost point of Israel. He's at a place called Caesarea Philippi.
 - 1. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And his disciples begin to give him kind of the public opinion: John the Baptist, a prophet like Elijah (see Mark 8:27–28).
 - 2. Jesus asks them their opinion. Peter says, "You are the Messiah. That is you are the one with the anointing. You are the promised coming King" (see Mark 8:29).
 - 3. With this announcement by Peter, the book of Mark shifts.
- B. Up to this point in chapter eight, we've asked the question, "Who is this?" We've been detecting Jesus' person, but from this point on Jesus will begin clearly to explain his mission.
 - 1. Jesus' mission is to be a humble, suffering servant king who will die.
 - 2. Jesus repeats his passion prediction in chapters nine and ten.
- C. Let's follow these three passion predictions, the way the disciples respond to these predictions, and the teaching opportunities that will come out of them.
 - 1. The first passion prediction is in Mark 8:31. Jesus taught them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law. He must be killed, and after three days rise again.
 - a. To Jesus' disciples, his death comes as an absolute, horrible shock. Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him.

- b. Jesus rebukes Peter and then opens up the conversation to the crowd.
 - c. Jesus describes the mission of the follower of Christ as the way of the cross, and Jesus desires humble, selfless, sacrificing followers.
 - d. The original readers in Rome experienced hardship, suffering, and persecution. As they follow the way of the Christ, they too will follow the way of the cross. It will require humble, sacrificial servanthood.
 - 2. After Jesus' first passion prediction there is a stunning event called the transfiguration (see Mark 9:2–8).
 - a. Peter, James, and John ascend a mountain where Jesus appears before them in glistening, stunning white with two Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Moses. A voice from heaven says, "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!" (Mark 9:7 NIV).
 - b. I believe that Jesus intended for his disciples to see not only the suffering that was to come, but also the glory that was to come.
 - 3. Jesus second passion prediction was not just of the crucifixion, but also the coming resurrection (see Mark 9:31).
 - a. After the prediction, in Capernaum, Jesus asks the disciples what they were arguing about on the road. Crickets. They were arguing about about prestige, about greatness.
 - b. Jesus sits down and teaches them again about the way of the follower, the way of the cross: in the economy of the kingdom, down is up; whoever wants to be the greatest must be the least (see Mark 9:35–37).
 - c. He illustrates his point with a little child. To welcome a child means to include someone, involve someone, honor someone without clout, without position, without status.
 - 4. Jesus third passion prediction gets detailed and graphic about his death (see Mark 10:32–34).
- D. Who is the greatest?
- 1. There is another misunderstanding about what kind of king Jesus is and what kind of kingdom he is launching.
 - 2. James and John, who witnessed the transfiguration, pull Jesus aside to make a power grab (see Mark 10:37).

3. When the other 10 disciples hear that James and John had made an audacious request for positions of power, they are livid.
4. This provides a third opportunity for Jesus, our Lord, to talk about the nature of greatness and the nature of humble sacrifice. Mark 10:45 shows us that, as followers of the servant king, we are to serve and give our lives away.

III. Application

- A. Throughout Mark's gospel we've asked two questions: "Who is Jesus?" and "What does it mean to follow him?"
- B. The passion predictions in Mark 8, 9, and 10 show us who Jesus is: the selfless, servant, humble king who will give his life for us.
- C. What does it mean to follow Jesus?
 1. Down is the way up. The path to greatness is the path of servanthood.
 2. Ask yourself how much is your life marked by humble, faithful, consistent serving of those who won't necessarily do anything for you.
 3. Greatness will not be determined by who invites you. In Jesus' economy, your greatness will be determined by who you invite—someone who doesn't have prestige, who doesn't have clout, who doesn't have status, and who can't return favors.
- D. Imitating the servant king might include faithfully staying in contact with a prison inmate. It might include faithfully and consistently working in the children's ministry of your church—close to the heart of Christ—or cleaning in a place where nobody sees or applauds.
- E. This is the way of the Christ. This is the way of the cross. Jesus calls this greatness: be the last, serve the least, and imitate the servant king who came for you.

Purchased by God

Mark 11:1—13:37

I. Introduction

- A. Jeff welcomes us back to the book of Mark.
- B. In this study we will explore Mark 11, 12, and 13—the last week of Jesus' life.

II. Teaching

- A. Jesus is in the city of Jerusalem and specifically in the temple area.
 - 1. Something critical happens on a Sunday, then something on a Monday, and then a series of altercations happen on a Tuesday.
 - 2. Watch Jesus carefully, listen to what Jesus does and what Jesus says. This is going to stir up a conflict that will accelerate the animosity that will lead to Jesus' trial and his crucifixion.
- B. Let's begin on Palm Sunday, the triumphal entry (see Mark 11:1–11).
 - 1. It's Passover season when pilgrims would flock to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the Exodus from slavery in Egypt when God intervened in the past and rescued the Jews from exile.
 - 2. The Jews were now under Roman domination, and many of them were looking for a new king, a new deliverer, a new Moses, who would again lead them out of the exile.
 - 3. It's Sunday and Jesus commandeers a colt. People throw down cloaks and begin to shout: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Mark 11:9–10 NIV).
 - a. These are the voices of those wanting to be delivered from their current exile—pilgrims, not leaders in Jerusalem.
 - b. What we have from the religious leaders of Jerusalem is silence. Jesus is arriving in Jerusalem as the coming king and he finds himself unwelcomed, unwanted, ignored, and rejected by the leaders in Jerusalem.

4. Jesus comes into the temple area, looks around, and then goes to Bethany just a couple miles away where he will spend the night.
- C. Monday morning Jesus and the disciples awaken in the village of Bethany and travel back to Jerusalem (see Mark 11:12–19).
1. Jesus approaches a fig tree, but it is empty of fruit. It has all leaves, but no fruit.
 - a. Jesus curses the fig tree.
 - b. The next day the tree is withered from the ground up (see Mark 11:20). This story explains a lot that will happen in Jerusalem that week, particularly around the temple system that is all leaves and no fruit.
 2. After cursing the fig tree, Jesus enters the temple area.
 - a. Money exchange is happening. Animals are also being bought and sold. The entire temple area has been turned into a marketplace.
 - b. Jesus flips over the tables of the money changers. He chases out people who are buying and selling doves there.
 - c. Jesus taught the people that, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers’ ” (Mark 11:17 NIV).
 - d. The religious leaders know he is talking about them and they come to the conclusion that they’ve got to kill this guy fast before his following grows to riot proportions.
 3. I think it’s very significant to note here that I don’t believe Jesus is simply improving the temple system. I think he’s replacing the temple system.
 - a. The temple in Jerusalem was viewed by the Jewish people as that place where heaven and earth met; the place where the presence of God was found.
 - b. Jesus has been acting like a walking, talking temple—like he is that place where heaven and earth meet. You no longer need to go to a building for forgiveness. You come to Christ.
- D. On Tuesday Jesus arrives again at the temple area and the religious leaders meet him there.
1. “ ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you authority to do this?’ ” (Mark 11:28 NIV).

2. Jesus answers with a parable about authority, about a vineyard the owner rented to tenants. The owner sent servants to collect some of the fruit and the tenants treated them shamefully. The owner finally sent his son and they killed the son and dumped his body outside the vineyard.
 - a. Jesus tells this story inside the temple, communicating that they have a responsibility to recognize God's authority and return to God what is rightfully his.
 - b. This story about a vineyard kicks off an interrogation.
3. Later, the Pharisees and Herodians have question after question designed to trip Jesus up. I believe that all of these conversations take place in the courtyards of the temple in Jerusalem.
 - a. The first question is about taxes. They show Jesus a coin with an image of Caesar imprinted on it. Jesus says, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Mark 12:17 NIV). Jesus is talking about ownership, about authority, about bringing my life in concert with the will of the Creator, because I'm made in his image.
 - b. The second question is a complicated one about the resurrection. Jesus refers to Moses and the burning bush, saying in essence, that not only does he belong to God now, he belongs to him then. There is life after death (see Mark 12:18–27).
 - c. The third question they bring is about what is the greatest commandment—out of the hundreds of commands. Jesus answers, also throwing in the second greatest: love God and love others (see Mark 12:28–34).

III. Application

- A. There are two images that would be very good for us to turn back to.
 1. The fig tree that is all leaves and no fruit. Beware of a religious life that does not lead to true heart transformation.
 2. The coin with the image of Caesar. Jesus has a right to direct your life because you are made in his image. Because Jesus came and suffered and died for you, he bought you; you are his. You need to recognize his authority to direct your life.
- B. When Jesus taught us to pray, forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us (see Matthew 6:12, 14–15), he calls us away from a life of

grudges and bitterness based on the wounds of the past. He has a right to direct your life.

- C. When Jesus said “love your neighbor as yourself,” he has a right to direct your life because he made you, he bought you, and you are his. So may our gracious God empower you to bear much fruit. And may you honor the God in whose image you are made.

A New Beginning

Mark 14:1—16:20

I. Introduction

- A. Jeff welcomes us back to the book of Mark.
- B. We will explore the last events in Jesus' life.

II. Teaching

- A. Jesus is again in the town of Bethany, reclined at a table, when a woman with a very expensive bottle of perfume breaks it open and dumps, this expensive perfume on Jesus' head.
 - 1. Jesus' disciples are beside themselves, and Jesus rebukes them.
 - 2. Whoever this woman is, she gets what's going to happen. She seems to want to honor Jesus before he dies (see Mark 14:8).
- B. During the day the religious leaders can find Jesus when he's teaching in the temple area, but at night he kind of evaporates into the crowd, he disappears.
 - 1. They need someone close enough to Jesus to know his movements. They need an insider to take them to him at night.
 - 2. Just after Jesus is anointed in Bethany with perfume, we read these chilling words. "Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus" (Mark 14:10 NIV). Jesus will be betrayed by a friend.
- C. It's time for Jesus and his disciples to celebrate the Passover meal. Jesus sends two of his disciples into Jerusalem with cryptic instructions.
 - 1. A man carrying a water jar will meet them and take them to an upper room all furnished and ready.
 - 2. I don't think Jesus wants Judas to know where they're having dinner. If Judas knew where they're having the Last Supper, Jesus could have been arrested there. I think Jesus wants every last hour that he can get with his disciples.

- D. The Last Supper is the Passover Feast where the Passover lamb had been killed in preparation for the Israelites exiting Egypt. During the meal, Jesus flips the script.
1. He takes the bread, breaks it, and hands it to his disciples and says, “This bread now represents my body, that will be broken for you” (see Mark 14:22 and Luke 22:19).
 2. Jesus then takes the cup, asked all of his disciples to drink from it and says, “This represents my blood that will pour out of my body for you” (see Mark 14:24).
 3. The beautiful imagery here is that wherever Christians travel, through the simple properties of bread and wine, they remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for them.
 4. In the upper room Jesus drops a bomb saying, “One of you will betray me. One of you at the table sharing this meal with me is going to stab me in the back, going to turn me over to the authorities” (see Mark 14:18).
- E. Jesus and his disciples head to the garden of Gethsemane.
1. Jesus breaks the news that all of them will fall away from him (see Mark 14:27–31).
 2. Peter declares that he will not fall away, but Jesus predicts Peter will deny him three times in one night.
 3. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus is vulnerable and overwhelmed. He prays to his Father, “If possible, take this cup from me. But not what I want, but what you want” (see Mark 14:34–36).
 4. As Jesus prays, the disciples sleep, Judas arrives, Jesus is arrested, and the disciples run.
- F. Next, we have the trial of Jesus, which unfolds in two phases.
1. First, there is the Jewish trial. As Caiaphas the high priest has witnesses come forward to accuse Jesus, they can’t get two witnesses to agree on the details.
 - a. Caiaphas, asks Jesus what he has to say. Under Jewish law Jesus did not have to testify against himself, so he remains silent.
 - b. Again Caiaphas asks, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” (Mark 14:61 NIV). If Jesus remains silent, I do not believe he will be found guilty. Jesus chooses to answer: “Yes, yes to everything” (see Mark 14:62).

- c. This is where the abuse begins (see Mark 14:65).
 - 2. The Roman trial begins. In this change of custody a new accusation is brought.
 - a. Pilate asks, “Are you the king of the Jews?” (Mark 15:2 NIV).
 - b. Pilate finds a loophole. Every Passover a condemned criminal would be released. Pilate offers Jesus or the criminal Barabbas. The high priest stirs the people up to ask for Barabbas.
 - c. The people scream for Pilate to crucify Jesus. Crucifixion was the worst possible death for the worst possible people.
- G. Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified.
 - 1. The Roman soldiers now have their fun. They host a violent mock coronation. A Roman audience would have understood what they are doing as they mock Jesus as king.
 - 2. Not only does a crucifixion have an extreme, unbearable level of physical torture, Mark acquaints us with the emotional harassment, the taunting that Jesus receives as “The King of the Jews” (see Mark 15:17–19, 26).
 - 3. Jesus endures until a darkness falls. Jesus cries, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34 NIV). He breathes his last and it’s over. Jesus’ body is lowered from the cross and placed in a tomb. He is gone.
- H. Early Sunday morning, some women who had been faithful followers come to the tomb to anoint his body.
 - 1. There’s a man dressed in white who says, “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here! See the place where they laid him” (see Mark 16:6).
 - 2. Mark’s gospel ends not with the crucifixion. Mark’s gospel ends with the resurrection story.

III. Application

- A. As you read the account of the last events in Jesus’ life, engage all of your senses.
- B. One of the impressions we should have in reading the last events of Jesus’ life is the experience of abandonment, betrayal, and desertion.
 - 1. Jesus moves to the trial and to the cross alone and unsupported—Judas betrays, the disciples run, and Peter denies that he knows him.

2. There's something powerful in realizing that Jesus embraced the whole human experience—including disappointment with others.
 3. As we walk through this life experiencing abandonment, betrayal, and desertion, we need to remember that Jesus stepped into that broken world.
- C. If you've come to know Jesus as your Savior and your Lord, what was done for you is far more significant in who you are than what was done to you.
- D. Jesus came to be our king. The kingdom came not in spite of the cross but through the cross. The kingdom comes through powerful weakness and redemptive suffering.
- E. Who is Jesus and what does he want?
1. He is our servant king. He is the resurrected one. He is the one who one day will bring the kingdom of God in its fullness.
 2. Those first words to the first disciples echo down to us, "Follow me." It's the invitation, "Follow me and discover forgiveness. Follow me and know mercy. Follow me and learn my way."

The Problem We Face

Romans 1—2

I. Introduction

- A. Max Lucado's study *Romans: In the Grip of Grace* describes true heroes. True heroes can be hard to identify. They often don't look like heroes.
- B. The apostle Paul is an example of a true hero. When we look at his life, what we find is often more harrowing than heroic. Two decades of travel and trouble planting churches, and what does he have to show for it?
 - 1. There's squabbling in Philippi, competition in Corinth, legalists swarming in Galatia, and money grabbers plaguing Crete.
 - 2. Many of his own friends have turned against him.
- C. His missionary journeys have spread the gospel throughout the world. He's debated philosophers in Athens, been part of a jailbreak in Philippi, and witnessed a boy being brought back to life in Troas. But the misfortunes have outpaced the successes.
 - 1. He's been rounded up for execution in one city and stranded in another—beaten with rods on numerous occasions.
 - 2. If he spent more than one week in the same place, it was typically in a prison.
 - 3. He never received a salary and kept a part-time job on the side to make ends meet.
- D. Paul doesn't look like a "hero." Certainly no one could have guessed that his letters would begin to shape the world within 200 years of his death. Or that today we would regard those letters as the core doctrines of our Christian faith.

II. Teaching

- A. Setting the scene for the book of Romans:
 - 1. The year is AD 57. Almost thirty years have passed since Jesus' resurrection and the birth of the Church.
 - 2. Paul has been on his third missionary journey, visiting churches he previously planted in Asia Minor.

3. A riot in Ephesus forces Paul to journey on, eventually arriving in Corinth.
 - a. Paul feels the familiar stirring of the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel to new people in new places. His goal is Spain.
 - b. He decides to make a stop in Rome to visit the Christians there. In doing so, he hopes to drum up some support among the congregation for his new venture.
 4. Paul knows that he is a controversial figure in the church in Rome, so he sends a letter first.
 - a. He explains and clarifies the gospel he is preaching.
 - b. Paul writes one of the clearest and most powerful presentations of Christian doctrine that has ever been recorded.
- B. Paul is clear as he writes that he views himself as the worst of sinners. After all, he was a Christian killer before he was a Christian leader.
1. For Paul, the true hero of the story is Christ. It is all about *grace*.
 2. Heaven is a perfect place for perfect people, which leaves each of us in a perfect mess.
 3. Paul well understood the reality of the human condition. There is nothing we can do to cover up our sins. We are all clothed in the tattered garments of our sin.
- C. Max compares a suit he used to wear to his past understanding of living the Christian life—it was an elegant ensemble and he considered himself quite dapper, confident that others agreed.
1. The pants were cut from the cloth of his good works—deeds done and projects completed that were complimented by many people.
 2. The coat was woven together from his convictions and religious fervor. He was often asked to model his zeal in public gatherings to inspire others.
 3. His hat was a feathered cap of knowledge formed from the fabric of personal opinion.
 4. Over time Max's wardrobe began to suffer and wear thin.
 - a. He resolved to solve the problem by working harder, but his resolve was threadbare.
 - b. He feared that God would be angry with his tattered suit so he did his best to stitch it together and cover his mistakes.

- c. Finally he gave up and stepped into God’s presence.
- d. God answered Max’s prayer and traded his remaining threads for a regal robe—the clothing of God’s own goodness.
- e. Perhaps you have sewn your own garments and are sporting your religious deeds. Yet already you have noticed a tear in the fabric.

III. Application

- A. In the book of Romans Paul gives us the bad news before he gives the good news. He knows we need to understand the *problem* before we can accept the *solution*.
 - 1. The problem we all face is that our sin—our *ungodliness* and *unrighteousness*—results in God’s wrath (see Romans 1:18).
 - 2. God gets angry because our disobedience results in self-destruction. God loves his children, but he hates what destroys them. Call it “holy hostility,” a righteous hatred of wrong.
 - 3. Our sin separates us from our Father.
- B. The first response to the problem of sin is to pretend that God doesn’t exist.
 - 1. These people live as if there is no truth beyond their perspective, no purpose to life beyond their own pleasure, and no consequence for their rejection of God’s standard.
 - 2. This claim doesn’t hold water because creation is God’s first missionary (see Romans 1:20).
- C. The second response is to ignore our own sinfulness and condemn the sins of others. These people are judgementalists.
 - 1. These people filter God’s grace through their own opinions and dilute God’s mercy with their own prejudice.
 - 2. They tally up the sins of others while conveniently overlooking their own (Romans 2:1).
 - 3. Judging others is a quick and easy way to feel good about ourselves. God doesn’t compare us to others. Our standard is Christ.
- D. The third way we try to deal with the problem of being separated from God is to use religion and religious piety to earn our way back to God. This is the approach of the legalist.

1. A large portion of the legalists in the early church were Jewish believers still infatuated with the law of Moses (see Romans 2:17–20).
 2. Circumcision proclaims there is no part of our lives too private or too personal for God. Yet, with time, the Jews began to trust the symbol more than the Father.
- E. Paul points out that salvation is God’s business—and God’s alone. There is only one name under heaven that has the power to save, and that name is not mine. Nor is it yours. The only solution to our problem is God’s infinite, marvelous, unparalleled . . . grace (see verses 28–29).

The Gift We've Been Offered

Romans 3—5

I. Introduction

- A. Max tells the story of when his two oldest daughters traveled to the Midwest to spend their first week at a camp far away from home.
 - 1. They missed home and the family missed them as well.
 - 2. When it came time to pick them up, Max arrived early and waited at the main entrance along with a number of other dads.
 - 3. When the time came, he began with a brisk walk, then a run. He wanted to see his kids.
 - 4. God feels exactly the same way about his children.
- B. God is separated from his children and will do whatever is necessary to take them home.
 - 1. His desire leaves our desire in the dust. We're talking incarnation and sacrifice.
 - 2. He went from the state of being worshiped in heaven to being a baby in Bethlehem, all because he knows that his children are without their father, and he knows we are powerless to return without his help.
- C. We learned that what separates us from God is our sin. That's the bad news. Every person on God's green earth has blown it. The even worse news is that we have no way of bridging the gap.

II. Teaching

- A. We have no way of finding our way home. Not in our own strength. Paul hammered home that reality in the first three chapters of Romans.
 - 1. Sin infects the entire person, from eyes to feet (see Romans 3:13–16).
 - 2. For sixty-one verses, we have sat with Paul in this darkened room as he has described the problem—the fatality of our sin. Unable to see even our hand before our faces, all we can do is stare into the night.

3. Just when we wonder if there is any light to be found—any goodness to grab hold of—Paul throws open the shutters and focuses on the gift of grace through salvation (see Romans 3:21).
- B. The gift of grace is a one-way ticket home to our Father who loves us. This gift is Jesus (see Romans 3:22–24).
1. We, as human beings, have no way to solve our biggest problem on our own. We can't plead ignorance because creation is God's first missionary and proves his existence (see Romans 1:20).
 2. We can't solve the problem by judging the sins of others and comparing ourselves with those we deem worse than ourselves. God has made it clear that we all stand condemned (see Romans 2:1).
 3. We can't try to earn our way out of the problem through good works, because even the best we could ever hope to do would be unacceptable as payment for the debt we owe (see Romans 3:10–11).
 4. Humankind has no way to save itself from sin. *But God has a way!* God's goal is to make us right with him.
 5. How can we be made right with God? How do we resolve this dilemma? Does God lower his standard so we can be forgiven?
- C. Holiness demands that sin be punished. Mercy compels that the sinner be loved. The answer, as we've already seen, is Jesus. By his perfect life, Jesus fulfilled the commands of the law. By his death, he satisfied the demands of sin.
1. God doesn't condone our sin, nor does he compromise his standard. He doesn't ignore our rebellion, nor does he relax his demands.
 2. God assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself. God's holiness is honored. Our sin is punished. And we are redeemed. God is still God.
 3. The wages of sin is still death. Yet we are made perfect (see Hebrews 10:14). Our guilt has been removed. We become right with God—no longer separated from him.
 4. We are justified *freely* by God's grace (see Romans 3:23–24).

III. Application

- A. The problem is that most of us don't believe it. Or, at least, we act like we don't believe it. Instead, even after we experience that moment of salvation—even after we are justified—we keep on trying to earn a level of righteousness by doing good things and avoiding bad things.

- B. We have a difficult time understanding the concept of grace because we have a difficult time accepting that something as incredible and valuable as eternal life could be free to receive. Christians of Paul's day had a hard time believing that as well. In fact, in his letter Paul countered three specific arguments that had been raised up against the revolutionary concept of salvation that cannot be earned but is offered freely by God's grace.
1. The first objection is that grace is risky. There is the possibility that people will abuse God's goodness (see Jude 1:4).
 - a. Someone who sees grace as permission to sin has missed grace entirely (see Romans 6:1–2). Mercy understood is holiness desired. God's trust makes us eager to do right. Such is the genius of grace.
 - b. The law can show us where we do wrong. But it can't make us eager to do right. Only grace can.
 2. A second objection is that justification by grace means letting go of the law as a way to be justified before God. Paul responds by saying that it is faith, not good deeds, that God uses to make people right with himself (see Romans 4:1–2, 6).
 - a. Grace is nothing new. God's mercy predates Paul. It predates David and Abraham.
 - b. Max uses the illustration of a credit card. Let's say all month long you rack up the bills, dreading the day the statement arrives. When it comes, you are shocked to see a zero balance. Mr. Lucado has sent a check to cover your debt.
 3. The third objection to grace is not that people don't understand God's offer, but that they believe they don't deserve it.
 - a. Do you worry you've overextended your credit line with God? Is there a chapter in your biography that condemns you? Is there no hope that God could ever forgive you?
 - b. Max describes the life of Abraham and God's promises to him. In spite of the years that had passed waiting for God's promise of a son, he in hope believed (see Romans 4:18).
- C. There's not a one of us who hasn't racked up more bills than we could ever pay. But there's not a one of us who must remain in debt. The same God who gave a child to Abraham has promised grace to us.

The Battle We Fight

Romans 6—8

I. Introduction

- A. Max begins with an illustration of the main entrance of a prison where a man has just been set free. After taking a few steps past the gates he turns on his heels and walks back through the gate—and back to his cell.
 - 1. Does this scene make sense? Of course not! No discharged prisoner would ever choose to stay locked up in prison. The entire scenario is absurd to the point of being laughable. Or is it?
 - 2. For a portion of your life, sin held you in prison.
- B. Jesus came and paid your bail. He served your time, satisfied the penalty, and set you free. When Jesus died, you also died to sin's claim on your life. You have been set free. The price has been paid (see Romans 6:6–7).

II. Teaching

- A. The good news of the gospel is that, although the wages of sin is death, we have been given the gift of life (see Romans 6:20–23).
 - 1. So, then, why do we return to the prison of sin? What does the prison have that we desire?
 - 2. These are the kinds of questions that Paul addresses in Romans chapters 6 and 7.
- B. Max shares a story about a time he broke the law while commuting to the office.
 - 1. Every morning, he would sit for what felt like hours in line at a particular traffic stop.
 - 2. One day he spotted an alley behind a shopping center that he thought could serve as a short-cut.
 - 3. A few days later, with his daughter Denalyn in the car, he took his secret pathway to freedom. “What do you think of my shortcut?” I asked. “I think you just broke the law,” she said. “You just went the wrong way on a one-way street.”

4. Now I had a new problem. Even though I knew my shortcut was against the law, I still wanted to use it. The temptation was strong.
 5. Before I knew the law, I was at peace. Once I learned about the law, an insurrection occurred. I was a torn man. I knew what to do, but I didn't want to do it.
- C. We all had our share of shortcuts before turning to Christ. But then we found Christ. We found grace. And now we have a much greater knowledge of sin and its influence in our lives.
1. Yet we still feel tempted to succumb to sin—in spite of the consequences we know it brings. Call it the civil war of the soul.
 2. Paul faced the same battle (see Romans 7:18–19). Like us, he was amazed by God's grace but equally amazed by his own propensity to sin.
 3. Max tells the story of a red bird that would see his reflection in a window and fly into it. The resounding crash would cause him to retreat. But for just a moment. He would gather himself, see his reflection, and do it again. And again. And again.
 4. Perhaps you notice this same pattern in your life. You are stunned by your ability to return to your former sinful ways of speaking, acting, and living.
- D. You are *much* better off having your debt paid and your freedom restored. But it does mean that you now have a war to wage.
1. Remember your position. You are a child of God, and he claims you as his own. Some Christians interpret the presence of spiritual battles in their lives as a sign that God has abandoned them. This logic is Satan sowing seeds of shame. If he can't seduce you with your sin, he'll let you sink in your guilt.
 - a. There are many who believe him. They spend years convinced they are disqualified from the kingdom.
 - b. If you've entertained such thoughts, let me remind you that you didn't deserve forgiveness the first time you received it! That's what's so wonderful about God's grace.
 2. When we are under attack, God still guides you.
 - a. The tendency is to question the validity of God's commands (see Genesis 3:1).

- b. When we question the validity of God’s commands—of his Word—we decrease its authority in our lives.
 - c. God’s commands in his Word are holy because they come from a different world, a different sphere, and a different perspective (see Romans 7:12).
 - 3. Left to our own devices and our limited perspective, we make bad decisions.
 - a. God doesn’t give laws for our pleasure. He gives them for our protection.
 - b. In seasons of struggle, we must trust his wisdom, not ours. We must trust his guidance and his Word, not our desires.
- E. There are two terms theologians use for this battle that is being waged between our old selves and our new selves.
 - 1. The first term, *positional sanctification*, describes the work that Jesus did for us at the cross. We receive salvation not because of what we do but because of who we know.
 - 2. *Progressive sanctification*, on the other hand, describes the work that Jesus does in us.
 - 3. Hebrews 10:14 says, “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (NIV). See the blending of tenses? “He made perfect”—that’s positional sanctification. “Being made holy”—that is progressive sanctification.
 - 4. You are a work in process. An *ongoing* process. So don’t give up in the battle. Stay engaged in the fight. And take encouragement from Paul’s words in Romans 7:25: “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (NIV).

III. Application

- A. Paul has good news for anyone who is still struggling with the idea that they have “done too much” or are “too far gone” for God’s forgiveness.
 - 1. Paul entered the pages of Scripture as Saul, the self-professed Pharisee of all Pharisees and the most religious man in town. But all his scruples and law-keeping hadn’t made him a better person.

2. His attitude began to change when Jesus appeared to him, knocked him off his high horse, and left him sightless for three days. Paul could see only one direction: inward. And what he saw he did not like.
 3. Paul embraced the improbable offer that God would make their relationship right through Jesus Christ—regardless of the atrocities that he had committed in the past. There is no condemnation (see Romans 8:1–2). This is God’s version of grace.
- B. We are children of God (see Romans 8:14–15). And what does God give his children? *No condemnation*. More than that, you are a conqueror in Christ! And nothing can ever separate you from God’s love (see Romans 8:37–39). Stand on this promise. Choose to believe it. Step out of the prison cell—and then never look back.

The Story We've Joined

Romans 9—11

I. Introduction

- A. Max tells the story of growing up in a camping family. He remembers one day his father returned from the army surplus store with a tent that became part of the Lucado family lore. It was huge. It could hold a dozen cots. Of course, such a big tent required stable tent poles. This one came with two made of cast iron and were as thick as your forearm.
 - 1. The tent was sturdy. It wasn't going anywhere.
 - 2. When camping at Estes Park, Colorado with family a storm came up. Everyone made a dash for their tents. Within moments everyone left their tents and scampered toward ours. With two cast iron poles, it was the only one capable of providing shelter against the approaching storm.
- B. The Bible contains two poles—the Old and the New Testaments.
 - 1. Each Testament is a crucial column that allows the canvas of God's revelation to cover us.
 - 2. Both Old and New work together to weave the same overarching story. Both are necessary to communicate the full splendor of God's work in history: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

II. Teaching

- A. Many Christians think of grace as a New Testament concept.
 - 1. They think the Old Testament is all about obedience to the law—sacrifice, blood, fire.
 - 2. They think the New Testament is all about grace, forgiveness, and redemption.
 - 3. Grace is a biblical concept—as in the *whole* Bible (see Romans 9:4–5).
 - a. God, in his sovereign will, chose the Jewish people as his vehicle to reveal himself to the world. It started with a promise that God made to Abraham (see Romans 9:9).
 - b. God's chosen people did not always live up to this designation.

- c. But God promised to send a Messiah. He took on the role himself, put on flesh, and stepped into the world as a Jewish carpenter named Jesus.
 - d. But this created another problem, for the Israelites, God’s chosen people, had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. All this caused many in Paul’s day to wonder if God’s plans had been frustrated.
- B. In Romans, Paul sets out to address that, from the start, God’s plans *never* fail (see Romans 9:6).
 - 1. Paul reminds us that Abraham had many sons, but only Isaac carried the promise of God’s special covenant.
 - 2. The story of God’s people has everything to do with grace because the blessings these people received were *given*, not earned.
 - 3. God chose to establish a connection with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and to use that connection to bless the world—simply because he *chose to do so*.
- C. Grace is all about God’s mercy (see Romans 9:16). None of us are worthy of knowing God, yet God invites us into a relationship. It’s the kind of grace we find throughout the Old Testament if we only take the time to look. And we *need* to take the time to look, because the story of God’s people is our story as well.
 - 1. Max tells about his grandmother telling him about his grandfather and his family tree. He learned where he came from and how he is connected to something greater than himself.
 - 2. Knowing our story reminds us that we aren’t isolated threads, but part of a grand tapestry—and God is the Master Weaver.
 - 3. The same is true throughout the Old Testament. We find God stretching the yarn and intertwining the colors. Everything is at his command as he passes the shuttle back and forth across the generations. As he does, a pattern of grace emerges.
 - 4. Everything God has done in the Old Testament leads to the ultimate act of grace through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- D. The fact the Israelites had rejected Jesus as their Messiah grieved Paul deeply (see Romans 10:1–3).
 - 1. The Jewish people in Paul’s day had begun think of themselves as above all other peoples and nations. They had focused on their “chosen” status and forgotten they had been chosen for a purpose—so God could reveal himself to the world.

2. They were quick to trust in their own righteousness and moral goodness. Paul understood from his own experience as a former religious zealot that this was a dead-end street.
- E. *All* people could now be considered God’s chosen people (see Romans 10:4). Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross had fulfilled the penalty of our sin under the law.
1. Now the door was open for us to become a part of God’s own family—“grafted in,” as it were, to his own family tree (see Romans 11:11).
 - a. Max describes how grafting allows the abundance produced by one tree to be shared with another, resulting in two incredible fruit-bearing trees instead of just one.
 - b. Those of us who are not Jewish have been grafted into the established relationship between God and His chosen people (see Romans 11:12–13).
 2. The word *Gentile* that Paul uses refers to all the non-Jewish people who had joined the church—and all the peoples and all the nations who would join in the centuries to come. In other words, it refers to you and me.

III. Application

- A. The good news of God’s grace is that it doesn’t matter what sort of person you are. God only cares about *you*. End of story.
1. For this reason, God has made a way for you to know him and be known by him.
 2. He wants you to join the story he has been telling for thousands of years, in both the Old and New Testaments.
 3. How do you join that story? By grace (see Romans 10:9). If you’ve not taken that step, today is a good time to do so.
- B. To join God’s story, simply confess that Jesus is Lord. Say it out loud or quietly in your heart. It doesn’t matter. Just mean it. Then believe that Jesus was resurrected. He’s not a man in the grave but God in the flesh with the power over death.
1. Be humble about it (see Romans 11:18–21). Grace is all about what God does out of his *mercy*.
 2. You’ve been invited into God’s story not because you’re special in any way, but simply because God likes you. He loves you!

- C. How amazing indeed, this gift of grace. Just confess and believe . . . and you will be saved.

The Path We Follow

Romans 12—13

I. Introduction

- A. Max begins by telling about a time he had granddaddy duty with his two-and-a-half-year-old sweetheart Rosie. They played, ate, danced and, to top it off, walked down the path to the front gate.
 - 1. It was a ten-minute walk, and night had fallen. Rosie wanted to walk by herself. I paused and lingered back just far enough to let her *think* she was on her own.
 - 2. I saw her stop and look around. I was close enough to hear her say, “Papa Max!” I was at her side in two seconds. She looked up at me and smiled. “Come with me?” she asked. We walked the rest of the way hand in hand.
- B. We preachers tend to overcomplicate God’s grace. We fixate on long words like *atonement*, *sanctification*, and *justification* when perhaps the best illustration is something like Rosie walking in the dark, crying out for help, and her Papa hurrying to oblige.
 - 1. Our heavenly Father is just a call away when we need help.
 - 2. Grace is *eternal*. Millions of years from now, when the sun is cold and we are as ancient as the galaxies, we will still be enjoying this gift of God’s salvation.
- C. As Paul writes Romans 12, the question *What is our response to God’s gift of grace?* was certainly on his mind.
 - 1. He began his letter by discussing how our sin has separated us from God and brought us under his judgment.
 - 2. He moved on to talking about the solution to our problem—putting our faith in Christ and accepting the sacrifice he has made on our behalf.
 - 3. He also instructed us on the impossibility of relying on works for salvation.
 - 4. He even tackled the issue of God’s plans for the nation of Israel, which had sadly chosen to reject Jesus as their promised Messiah.

II. Teaching

- A. Paul knows that the principles that he has outlined have to travel the distance to our heart so it results in true life change—in the transforming and renewing of our minds.
- B. Our response to God’s gift of life to us is to offer that life back to him. We choose to become a “living sacrifice” in service to Christ and to others (see Romans 12:1).
 - 1. When Christ was on earth, he often went against the pattern of the world. He called his followers to seek the lowly path of humility rather than strive to climb the ladder of success.
 - 2. In the end, the pattern that emerges in the life of a Christian is one of meekness, humility, and sacrificial love (see Romans 12:3–5).
 - 3. The pattern of the world in which the recipients of the letter lived was the principle of *power*—of the strong subjugating the weak.
 - 4. Followers of Jesus are cut from a different cloth. In God’s system, we put the needs of others above ourselves.
- C. Paul is clear that loving other people requires effort on our part. It requires intentionality. It requires giving up our own rights and giving of ourselves (see Romans 12:14–21).
 - 1. We will only exhibit this kind of grace toward others when we truly comprehend the oceans of grace that we ourselves have received from God.
 - 2. Armed with that understanding, we choose the path of humility.
- D. When we choose the path of humility and show this kind of love, we fulfill the law of God (see Romans 13:8).
 - 1. The Greek word that Paul uses for “love” in this verse is *agape*, which could also be translated as “unselfish affection.”
 - 2. When the disciple John wrote, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16 NIV), he was talking about *agape*. *Agape* is love that gives.

III. Application

- A. What does *agape* look like today? Max tells a series of stories:

1. An elderly man and woman who had been married for fifty years. The last decade had been marred by her dementia. He feeds her, bathes her, and stays with her. He says, "I will until one of us dies." *Agape* love.
 2. Another man would spend each night in a recliner out of love for his son. A car accident left the son paralyzed, and his limbs had to be massaged every few hours to maintain circulation. At night, the father took the place of the therapists. Though he had worked all day, he woke himself every other hour until sunrise. *Agape* love.
 3. A father was struggling with liver and lung cancer. When his only son was going to be a father, he resolved to see that happen. He endured the torture of chemo, but when his granddaughter was born, he insisted on going to the hospital. His arms were so weak that his son had to hold the baby. He leaned over, kissed her, and said, "Grandpa loves you very much." Within days he was dead.
- B. What is this love that endures decades, passes on sleep, and resists death to give one kiss? Call it *agape* love. A love that bears a semblance of God's one love to us.
1. Do you find such love difficult to muster? *Agape* love for others begins, not by giving love, but by first receiving the love of Christ (see 1 John 4:19).
 2. We don't love people because people are loveable. We love people because we are beneficiaries of an unexpected, undeserved, yet undeniable gift—the love of God.
 3. The source is not within us. It is only by receiving our Father's *agape* love that we can discover an *agape* love for others.
- C. God starts the process. He doesn't just love, he *lavishes* us with love. His grace is exceedingly abundant and indescribable.
1. He overflowed the table of the prodigal with a banquet, the vats at the wedding with wine, and the boat of Peter with fish—twice. He healed all who sought health, taught all who wanted instruction, and saved all who accepted the gift of salvation.
 2. When God gives, he dances for joy. He strikes up the band and leads the giving parade.
 3. He even promised a whopping return on our service (see Matthew 19:29).

- D. Maybe you've had trouble in the past showing this kind of love to certain people. You can love them when you understand God's grace. God can love them through you. God will create a new attitude in you. He indwells you.
1. Each person you meet is fearfully and wonderfully made—God's creation destined for a heavenly assignment and made in the image of God.
 2. May we be men and women who live out the love that God first demonstrated to us to everyone we meet. And may we do so actively and intentionally.

The Fellowship We Find

Romans 14—16

I. Introduction

- A. Max begins by telling about a Fourth of July holiday. He took his three daughters and friends on a boat ride.
 - 1. His daughter warned him that the lake level was low, but who had time for such trivialities?
 - 2. Max drove into a sandbar and bent the rudder trying to free it. When he started the engine, the boat vibrated like a three-wheeled jalopy. Their speed peaked at five miles per hour.
 - 3. He realized it was probably best to leave such traversing of uncharted waters to the real captains.
- B. The apostle Paul was a good captain to the churches he founded. Although he was often forced to traverse through “unchartered waters,” he always steered a straight course.
 - 1. This often meant life wasn’t smooth sailing. His fellow passengers would get unruly. They argued with each other over trivial matters.
 - 2. Paul would then step in and teach the congregation how to ease the throttle back so they could get back on track.
- C. The apostle Paul had not founded the church in Rome.
 - 1. Luke writes there were “visitors from Rome” who heard Peter’s first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, so it is possible those early converts carried the message of Christ back with them.
 - 2. Paul was concerned for the *entire* body of Christ, so when he learned there were problems in the Roman church, he felt obliged to offer his help.

II. Teaching

- A. As we come to Romans 14, we find the conflict in this church was over their choices in food.

1. The Roman Empire was known for housing a wide variety of gods, and the priests of those religions had quite a racket going on with the local butchers.
 2. For Christians, it was impossible to tell which cuts of meat had been a part of an idolatrous offering.
 - a. Some in the fellowship responded by avoiding meat altogether. They didn't want to take any chances it had been dedicated to a god that wasn't God.
 - b. Some avoided the problem by holding on to dietary restrictions outlined in the law of Moses.
 - c. But others held that Jesus had given them freedom to eat and drink *anything*.
 3. The opposing viewpoints were rocking the boat and creating disharmony among the crew. There were divisions where there should have been unity—and those divisions were threatening to capsize the entire craft.
- B. Paul wanted the church members to right the ship by showing love and grace to each another (see Romans 14:1–3). It was dangerous to allow this silly argument to divide the church (see verse 13).
- C. Paul recognized an important truth that many people miss today:
1. Doctrine is important. In fact, it is critical. Paul was always quick to point out serious doctrinal errors that threatened to lead people astray.
 2. But unity and love should prevail when more trivial disagreements erupted.
- D. Today, there are more opportunities than ever for divisions to break out in the church. The truth is that God has enlisted every one of us to serve on the *same* ship. We each have a uniform mission: to spread the word about Christ so that everyone can climb aboard.
1. We aren't called to a life of leisure but to a life of service. Each of us has a different role.
 2. Though different, we are the same. Though unique, we share the same goal. Given this, we should be helping one another achieve whatever role we have been given (see Romans 15:2).
 3. The reality is that we often find the ship has run afoul. There are even times when one group refuses to acknowledge the presence of others on

the ship. Most tragically, some adrift at sea have chosen not to board the boat because they see the quarreling of the sailors.

III. Application

- A. “How can there be harmony on the SS Fellowship?” Paul provides the answer by pointing to the example of Christ (see Romans 15:7–9). It’s all about grace.
- B. Unity matters to God. Disunity disturbs him. How will the world believe that Jesus was sent by God? By how we love one another and extend God’s grace to each other (see John 13:34–35).
 - 1. Unity creates belief. Disunity fosters disbelief. Could it be that unity is the key to reaching the world for Christ?
 - 2. Does this mean we abandon the truths we cherish? No. But it does mean we look long and hard at the attitudes we carry. Max describes the scene beginning in Mark 9:38:
 - a. Jesus helped his disciples walk through a potentially divisive moment. Someone who was not part of their group was driving out demons in Jesus’ name, and giving the credit to God.
 - b. John wants to know if the disciples did the right thing in asking the man to stop.
 - 3. Max tells about his appreciation for his church heritage. But he also acknowledges how his faith has been supplemented by other Christian groups and people.
- C. *What do you do when you see great works done by folks of other groups? Good works that give glory to God?*
 - 1. According to Jesus, we should look at the fruit. Is it good? Is it healthy? Is what the person is doing helping people? The fruit is more important than the name of the orchard (see Mark 9:39–41).
 - 2. Look at the faith. In whose name is the work done?
 - 3. It should be simple. Where there is faith, repentance, and a new birth, there is a Christian. When we meet a person whose faith is in the cross and whose eyes are on the Savior, we meet a fellow shipmate, a fellow brother and sister in Christ.
- D. Accept one another. Agree with one another. Seek unity. These are all marks of grace (see 1 Corinthians 1:10).

1. Just as a ship has many rooms, so God's kingdom has room for many opinions. But just as a ship has one deck, God's kingdom has a common ground: the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
 2. When the members of God's kingdom stand together and strive together on the foundation of that sacrifice, the results can be incredibly powerful (see Romans 16:20).
- E. May we pray for the day when we all come out of our rooms and stand together to salute our captain. And may we pray for the day when the world is won, because the church is one, and we see the enemy crushed beneath our feet.