

# When Life Does Not Go the Way You Planned

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*Psalm 119*

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This morning, I actually want to invite you to open your Bibles to two very specific places. Our primary passage today is going to be Psalm 119 beginning in verse 41. I'll deal with that in just a moment. But there's also a secondary passage that if you're able I'd like you to turn to and that's found in 2 Kings chapters 22 and 23. We're going to spend a brief moment in 2 Kings later, but the reason I'm asking you to turn to it is oftentimes I allude to, I quote, I reference this passage is within the scripture, but 2 Kings chapter 22 is just one of those passages that if able, it just kind of makes a greater impact if our eyes can see the words on the pages. Today, though, primarily we're going to be in Psalm 119 beginning in verse 41 and if you're a guest if you're a visitor with us or maybe haven't worshiped with us in some while, I want to invite you to a very specific and strategic study not just of Psalm 119 but of the longest chapter in the Bible. Psalm 119 has 176 verses divided into 22 what we might call subsections, but within its 22 subsections, we have one primary theme, the impact and the influence that the word of God, that the Bible should and can have in our lives.

And the reason for addressing this chapter in the Bible at this season of time is really twofold. The first reason is if you're new to us, you may or may not be aware, but we as a church body, we as a family of faith, this entire calendar year, we are challenging ourselves to put the word of God within our heart, to memorize the scripture, not just to read it, but to actually memorize it. And we have set forth a goal to memorize the entirety of God's word, from Genesis to Revelation. Now, not one or two people have the burden to bear of all that. In fact, what we're doing is we're reserving a respective chapter per person with the goal and the hope of accomplishing that very audacious task. That's the first reason. The second reason is this, that as you study the word of God, you discover more and more how it is fit and it is tried for our lives, and we discover that when humanity tries or attempts to do things in our own energy, effort, or endeavors, it most assuredly fails but when we subscribe to the word of God, it always works as it's been designed to do so.

And no better transition than the title of today's message, "When Life Does Not Go As Planned." Now I know that I'm not the only one in the room who can quote amen to that statement because there's not a one of us today whose life looks the way that years ago you wrote it out. Now there's some of you, you're into spreadsheets and you put your

spreadsheet out there and I got news for you, it didn't end up the way you thought your spreadsheet would have it end up. In fact, life is like that. It never goes as we designed it. It never ends up working out the way that we had, quote, hoped. And so today, each and every one of us has the privilege of going to Psalm 119 beginning in verse 41 and discovering what do we do when life doesn't unfold the way that we had hoped. We're going to discover it doesn't matter what that looks like, the solution is the same.

Psalm 119 beginning in verse 41. It says,

41 Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation, according to thy word. 42 So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word. 43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments. 44 So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever. 45 And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts. 46 I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. 47 And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. 48 My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes.

Now, this passage begins with the desire, a craving, a longing for the mercies of God, and when you look at the word mercy or you define what that word means, it simply means to not receive or be the beneficiary of the consequences or the responses that are most assuredly reasonable and should be done. In other words, when somebody says, "I received mercy," it means that the consequences should have been graver, they should have been worse, that you received less than what you know you rightfully deserved. And what we discover from the beginning of this passage is who qualifies for the word of God and for the Lord to direct our paths as he need do, those who would say, "God, you have given mercy unto me."

Now many of us, when we look at our life that hasn't gone the way that we hoped or planned, we think much the opposite of God. We think, "Well, I don't have a whole lot of mercy. In fact, I have much the opposite." In fact, many of us would begin to whine and gripe, maybe even complain like the Israelites in the wilderness, that for some reason, because it hasn't gone the way you had hoped or desired, that God has not been merciful to you. But I can demonstrate unequivocally, every single person here in person listening to my voice is a product of the mercy of God. You know how I can prove it? You're vertical and you're ventilated. And the reason I mean that is this, because the Bible says in Genesis chapter 2, in the day that you sin, you will surely die. In the book of Romans chapter 6 in the New Testament, it says the wages of sin is death. The very fact that you and I collectively throughout our lives, we have rebelled against God, we've thumbed our nose at God, we've lived contrary to God, and we're still breathing means we are the recipients of his mercy.

According to the word of God, what we deserve, what should rightfully be ours is nothing less than death but the fact that here we are, in fact, one of the things that you see

in verse 1 when it says he craves his mercy, it reminds me a lot of Psalm 51. I don't know if you're familiar with Psalm 51, but it's David's heart cry to the Lord. Let me kind of set the scene here. Nathan the prophet has come to David, and he's basically challenged him that he has sin in his life that has not been addressed. In fact, there was a situation in his life with a woman by the name of Bathsheba. And not to get into all the gory details, but basically David is in a place he shouldn't have been, at a time he shouldn't have been, with a person he shouldn't have been with, that ended up not only the breaking up of a family, but the death of one of his greatest commanders in the army. When Nathan confronts him and says, "Do you realize the decisions you've made? Do you realize what God can and should do unto you and the fact that you're still vertical and you're still ventilated?" You know what David does in Psalm 51? He uses the personal pronoun 32 times. He says, "I was shaped in iniquity. I have rebelled." There is this personal plea realizing that the very breath in our lungs is the mercy of God, and until you and I as individuals realize what not only the gift of mercy of God, but we are living mercy, we will never allow God to lead us the way that he so desires to direct us.

And then it says he craves for salvation. Basically what this means is our perspective. If we want God to be the author, the finisher, the one who directs our paths, we not only have to understand his mercy in our lives, but realize that the life that we live here is but just a short period of time compared to all of eternity. "I crave thy salvation," so essentially the who of this passage is someone who realizes the power, the authority, the presence of God in the respective lives and that this life is much shorter than the one that's to come.

And the second issue we deal with in verse 42 is this, what is it that will give us direction? What is it that will give us guidance? It says, "So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in my opinion." It's early. Just making sure you're awake. "I trust in my feelings. I trust in the latest poll. I trust in the..." No. It says, "I trust in thy word." And I know that in an environment such as this, at a time such as this, you expect that to be the answer. In fact, I'm almost assured there's nobody surprised today for the word of God and for me to declare that the "what" of life is to live according to the word of God. But the real issue isn't just the "what" of life, but how that transpires.

In the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 10, verse 10, there's this great statement that the Lord inspired Solomon to give us. It says, "If the iron be blunt and it is not wet, it takes more time and energy." Let me kind of contemporize that for us. If your knife is dull, it's harder to cut with. That's really what it says. And you and I understand that. If you've ever had one of those experiences with a knife, whether that's a blade of a chainsaw or a knife within the kitchen, whatever it may be, you understand that any time you have a dull blade, things are a whole lot harder to do than they, quote, should be. You know, the Bible says in Hebrews chapter 4 that its words are sharper than any two-edged sword.

So kind of let me allow that illustration to resonate with us if kind of the "what of the solution here is the word of God and you have a quote dull blade, it's going to make things harder. Now, let me illustrate kind of two ways that I've observed throughout the

years that you and I come to the word of God and allow it to become, quote, dull. There are two ways that we see this in the physical world, but I think we also see it in the spiritual world. The first way is this, when you misuse a knife, it can become dull. For example, that kitchen knife that is typically small in stature and very sharp in nature. If you've ever taken a kitchen knife, not that I would ever do this, and used it instead of a Phillips screwdriver and screwed it in a cabinet drawer. Maybe I've heard of somebody doing that before. If you misuse that knife, it's going to have a tough time with the tomatoes, is it not? We understand that if you misuse something, most assuredly it's not going to be for the purpose that it was originally designed. And there are times in our life, don't get me wrong, where we misuse the word of God. There are times where we make it say stuff it never says, and there are times that we neglect what it says, and there are times that we use it in a manner that's completely contrary to the design of it.

But that's probably the minority position. You know what the majority position is? You know what the number one way in my own life and maybe yours that I've observed physically but most assuredly spiritually that causes a knife to go dull? Just don't use it. Just neglect it. I've been the beneficiary throughout the years of some tools that I've inherited throughout time. Not only my own dad's tools, but his dad's tools. My paternal grandfather was a diesel mechanic by trade. That being said, there are these tools that because of his life being gone, he hadn't used in 50 years. You can go out to the toolbox, you can take those blades, and without fear of anything, I mean, you can rub it right across your hand. They're as dull as dull can be. Why? Simple neglect and lack of use will cause a blade to go dull. So if the word of God is sharper than two-edged swords and we neglect it, if we don't adhere to it, if it's not a part of our life, then why are we surprised that life is as difficult as it is and as tough as it is to do the things that we know we're supposed to do because we're trying to cut with a dull blade?

On a much more manly illustration. There was a time some years ago where there was a tree in our backyard that needed to come down. Now, I don't know about you guys, but anytime I hear a tree needs to come down, that's an excuse to get out the chainsaw, just to be honest with you. That chainsaw hadn't been used for probably 18 months. I didn't cut the tree down. I burned it down. Now some of you guys know what I mean by that. I took that chainsaw and just... And I literally burned through the wood. What should have taken 30 to 45 seconds took about 30 minutes. Why? Because I had neglected the blade. If you and I neglect the word of God in our life, if it's only on the shelf or when times get tougher, it's only on the dashboard if we have a question of life, then guess what's going to happen? It's going to become dull in our life and according to Ecclesiastes chapter 10, it's actually going to be harder to implement and not serve the purpose it was designed to be.

So the next question is, when in our lives do we discover that it's become dull? When do we discover that it's not functioning as it should? This is where we go back into 2 Kings chapter 22. As you turn to 2 Kings, I want to read verse 43 to you. It says, "And take not the word utterly out of my mouth." Now that's a fascinating request. Why would the Lord make that statement that the word of God should not come out or should not be removed from our mouth? Because one of the things that I've discovered is that the less you utilize

the word of God, the less it becomes a part of your life. Do not take it utterly away from me or out of my mouth. Essentially what the word of God is saying there is, there can come a time where you don't even realize that your knife has gone dull and that the hardness of life is simply a, quote, self-inflicted wound.

In 2 Kings chapter 22, allow me to set the stage. There is a king that has risen by the name of Josiah. Historically speaking, it was about 30 years before what we're about to read, where the northern kingdom went into captivity. You remember in 722, the Assyrians came and took the north. In 586, the Babylonians came and took the southern kingdom. Josiah was a young man when he became king. But to set the stage, the prophets of old, they warned Israel collectively, if they do not adhere to the word of God, judgment is coming. Consequences are coming. Captivity is coming. But as you know, they did not heed. They did not listen. The northern kingdom goes into captivity. You would think that it would get the attention of the southern kingdom, but it did not. The prophets continued to prophesy. They continued to preach. And Josiah comes to be king. He's a young man and there's actually what we call a revival that breaks out here in chapters 22 and 23. And what I want you to see, I want to begin in chapter 22 verse 13 and I want you to see what statement is made about the culture and the life that is being lived out. It says, "Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found." Push pause. Found means it was lost. It means it hadn't been read. It hadn't been quoted. It hadn't been preached. It most assuredly had not been lived. "For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us." Let me summarize that. Basically what's being said in 2 Kings 22 is the reason that they're in a mess, the reason that things aren't going the way that they desire it to is because not only they but those that came before them have neglected the word of God and allowed it to go dull in their lives, so much so that if you read the backstory, they didn't even know where it was. They actually had to quote go dig it up and find it.

Now fast forward to chapter 23 verse 24. Now before we read this verse, the Lord has an amazing strategy when it comes to communicating the ills and the deficits of our life. One of the things that I've noticed throughout scripture is that the Lord always reveals to us when we have gone a contrary path. Let me give you an example. In the Ten Commandments, Exodus chapter 20, have you ever thought about why those Ten Commandments? I mean, why not eight? Why not 12? Why not 14? I'll tell you why, because if you look back at the story, everything that God said that they shall not do, they were doing at the bottom of the mountain. Now, this is where it gets interesting and for those of y'all that are memorizing or should be memorizing in Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, there are some passages in there. You discover all the ways that humanity has gotten creative with our sin, okay? You find all the relationships we have no business being a part of, all the things we do. In other words, God is having to call it out and say, "Do not. You should not, No, don't do that."

Why is that important? Look at verse 24, 2 Kings 23. Listen to what it says about their lives before they found the word of God, "Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and

the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiyah the priest found in the house of the LORD." Now that's just a summary statement. If you want to get a little flush in the cheeks, read the verses around it and it goes into detail of some of those things. But there's two categories there. The first one talks about familiar spirits and all this spiritual stuff that is happening and if you read Jeremiah, who's somewhat a contemporary here, Jeremiah lays all of the blame at the foot of the pastor. Some of you have heard me say this before but it's true, in our culture and in our respective lives, as goes the pulpit, so goes the pew. As goes the pew, so goes the culture. So if there is no proclamation of the word of God, if there is no declaring what is against God, then how do you expect anybody to live for God?

And they're seeking the familiar spirits. They're seeking all these other things. So what did that result in? The pulpit went to the pew, which went to the marketplace, and it said abominations. Now, there's a multitude of abominations that you discover in your Old Testament, but the two that just leap to the top of the page, that those that were entered into, shall we say, interpersonal relationships that were completely contrary to how God designed it originally in the Garden of Eden, and secondly, those that worshiped Moloch and they took their babies and they killed them before they could breathe a breath. Now, ladies and gentlemen, do I need to put a neon sign up here? Our culture today is obsessed and celebrates both of those issues. That's who we've become. You know why? Because when it comes to the word of God, it's as dull as dull can be. When's the last time it was opened in the White House? I don't know the answer to that one. When's the last time it was opened publicly in the schoolhouse? I didn't mean at a respective teacher's Bible study. Do you get the drift here? Why would we expect anything else than what we're observing because it's dull. And Josiah says the reason we're in this mess, not only corporately but individually, is because it was hidden. It wasn't a part of our lives. It was just something that little was or not addressed and so we went the way we desired. The book of Judges, chapter 2. It says that the Israelites found themselves in a similar situation because there was not a man who was alive who had seen the mighty works of God.

And so when we talk about our lives individually, our lives corporately, the thing we need to address is this, that if you want to question if the Bible has become dull in our culture, you don't need to question, it's real. The big question is this, what about you? Has the word of God become dull in your life? Have you begun to become more like the world than the word? Because I got news for you, the world out there is not going to encourage you to open it, read it, study, memorize it, or live it. So here's the bigger question. How? How do we fix this? Well, go back to Psalm 119 and the thing we discovered in verse 44 is this, "So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever." Well, if that's not a challenge, I don't know what is, that the word of God continually and forever. That's a pretty long time.

Now, let me kind of bring this more to everyday life. In the book of Amos, we have the exact same story as 2 Kings chapter 22. It's 250 years later. Now remember the Israelites

in Josiah's days, the southern kingdom, they'd watch the Assyrians go into captivity. They had the opportunity to do what God said and for the most part they did not. They had somewhat of a revival but it lasted for some say about 18 years and they went back to their old ways. Who we know as Nehemiah, it's a whole different time period. About 250 years later, the southern kingdom has been taken into captivity. They've gone into Babylon as Jeremiah prophesied for 70 years and then we meet these characters such as Esther, Nehemiah, and Ezra, and through the Spirit of the Lord and the power of God, they return to the homeland and we know Nehemiah as one who rebuilds the wall of Jerusalem. There's that famous passage where he's got a brick in one hand and he's got a sword in the other. They rebuild that wall. We know that Ezra is the priest of God that reestablishes the worship that should have been central in their life to begin with. But there in Nehemiah chapter 8 and 9, the people of God who've been through all that I've just shared with you come to location. Chapter 8, it says that Ezra the priest, I love this verse, you're going to know why in just a moment, it says he stood upon the pulpit. Now in our culture, we think a pulpit is something you stand behind. The only time that word is used in the Bible, he stood on it. Okay? It says he stood on it. Now the next part of that verse can be difficult for me. It says, and he stood above the people. It is what it is. But it's chapter 9. Chapter 9, Ezra opens up the scriptures. I want you to hear the how. You ready for this? You can read it, verses 1 through 4 of Nehemiah chapter 9. Ezra's the priest, but Nehemiah's writing it. It says that he read the scriptures for three hours. Whoo, that's a worship service. Oh, no, but that's just intermission. After he read for three hours, they confessed their sins for three hours. And they did it every day.

Can you imagine that? We have a hard time with 60 minutes. Can you imagine six hours? In other words, what we discover is the people of God return to God when every day of their life there was this intense session of the reading of the word and the confessing of their sins, and God did a miraculous work in their life. But I'm going to be practical. Ain't none of us got time for that. Now, I know what you're expecting. You're expecting the pastor to get up and say, "Well, if you set your alarm at 3 a.m., you'd have time." Ain't nobody got time for that. How on earth do you and I do what happened in Nehemiah chapter 9? You ready for this? How do you make the word of God utterly on your mind? How do you take it and it's just a part of the fabric of your life? It's real simple, you meditate on it. You memorize it. For those of you, and by the way, I continue to be blessed each and every day, people coming up to me telling me the respective chapters that they're memorizing, as you begin that process of putting the word of God in your heart, you know what happens? You start getting in a lifestyle, you go to bed thinking about it. You wake up thinking about it. There are times in the day you think about it. In other words, when you begin to take the word of God and you meditate on it and it becomes a fabric of who you are, you may not spend three hours a day, but it is consistently, continually, as this verse says, each and every part of your day, it is coming to the heart of your mind.

As I mentioned, my respective chapter is Ezra chapter 2, and I know at times I give it a hard time, 70 verses of names and numbers and locations and such, but you know what I think about when I go to bed at night? Ezra chapter 2. I think, "Am I actually going to be able to memorize all of this?" That's really what I think. I'm going to be honest with you.

You know what I wake up thinking about? Ezra chapter 2. It's just on my heart all the time, but I'm going to give you a little glimpse into my world for just a moment. I tease about a bunch of names and about a bunch of numbers, but there are some people in Ezra chapter 2, their descendants number 2,812. Some of their descendants number 95. Some of them are 1,254 and some of them are 112. You say, well, what's the significance there? Because you know what God told the Israelites to do when they went into captivity? He told them to reproduce. He told them to multiply because they were going to return to the land. You know what keeps coming to my mind as I'm studying, as I'm learning, as I meditate, as I'm memorizing Ezra chapter 2? It's why do some people have 3,000 and other people's have less than 100? We don't hear of any fertility issues during the Babylonian captivity but you know what we do hear of? Obedience issues. And so even Ezra chapter 2, even a genealogy, even a list of names, when it becomes continually a part of your life, you know what God does? He takes it, he uses it, he speaks, he addresses, and he guides the steps of your life.

Again, three hours of reading, three hours of confession. Today in our context, when we put the word of God in our heart, it becomes a continual part of who we are. And then finally, there's the "why." Beginning in verse 45, it says, "And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts. I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes." And the reason this is the "why" of the passage is that when we discover that we're one who recognizes the mercy and the salvation of God, when we realize that it is the word of God that needs to be sharp in our life, and it reveals where we are, and we understand the "how," that if we just make it continually a part of our life he will guide, he will direct, the "why," beginning verse 44, you know what we discover? In those last four verses there are five, quote, "I wills. I will do this. I will do that." Now, I just read them to you. Feel free to look back. Every one of those five "I wills" is not only a righteous endeavor, a godly endeavor, it is spiritually speaking, it is a profitable endeavor and the reason that that is the "why" is because one of the things that I've learned about our existence is this, that the two words that probably come out of our mouths more than anything else is, "I will I will go here. I will go there. I will do this. I will accomplish that." We love the statement "I will." By the way, a synonymous statement in our culture is, "I want." In other words if I say, "I want a new truck," basically that just means I'll go get one. That's what that means.

Now, why is that important? Because in Isaiah chapter 14, verses 12 through 14, there's a character whom you and I know as Lucifer. He didn't stay Lucifer long. You remember what he became? He became Satan, the devil, that old red dragon, the serpent of the ages. You know what happens in Isaiah 14? Listen to what he says. "I will ascend above the clouds. I will place my throne above his. I will ascend above the Most High." Do you know how sin originated in the creative order? It's by a creation of the Lord himself five times saying, "I will, I will, I will, I will, I will." Here's the issue, you're going to will something, the question is, what will it be? You're either going to desire to place your desires above God or you're going to do what we read right here, "I will meditate in your words. I will celebrate your commandments. I will worship your holy name."



See, you and I today, whether we realize it or not, we're going to exit this campus or those of you watching online in just a few moments you'll exit the broadcast, and you will be faced with a host of decisions. You'll be faced with a host of scenarios and situations and aspects of life and there's really only two paths. There's only really two roads that one can take. You can either do the quote, "I will" of Isaiah 14 or the "I will" of Psalm 119 verse 44 through 48. There's an old statement days gone by, you may or may not be familiar with it. In reference to the Bible, "This book will keep me from sin, but sin will keep me from this book." In other words, we are faced with decisions when it comes to life not going as we had hoped or as we had prescribed, in order for it to be what we always hoped it would be, the world is going to tell you to ascend above the clouds. The world's going to tell you, "Do whatever you want to do." The world's going to tell you, say, "I will fill in the blank." But what does Psalm 119 say? "I will walk at liberty. I will speak thy testimonies. I will delight myself in your commandments. I will lift up your commandments. I will meditate in thy statutes."

See, here's what's interesting, both passages have five "I will" statements but their paths, their roads, they could not be any more distinct and different. So the question simply becomes today, if life hasn't gone the way that you'd hoped, maybe it's time to take the old blade out and sharpen it up. Maybe it's time to, quote, come to our senses. Maybe it's time to realize the mercy of God and say, "You know what? I've been trying it my way long enough. I've been trying it the world's way long enough. Maybe I ought to try it God's way." What do we see in scripture? Every time somebody does it the way that God has written it whether we realize it or not, it always works out. Life may not have gone as you'd hoped or desired, but it can end up the way that he has written it out.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Today as we come to this time of response, this time of decision in our service, I know that the majority of the message has been about the Bible in totality but it spoke of in that first verse we read, verse 41, that not only God was a God of mercy, he was a God of salvation. And allow me at this time to clarify what the word of God says that is contrary to the world we live in, that salvation and forgiveness, according to the Bible, does not come with a series of good deeds. It does not come with the ability to perform religious ritual and rites. In fact, according to the word of God, it says in Romans chapter 10, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. In other words, whoever recognizes that they have sinned, whoever recognizes that they have lived a life contrary to God and that Jesus Christ is the only answer, they will be forgiven and they will be saved. And maybe today's the day, whether you're seated here physically, present with us, maybe you're online, maybe you're listening by radio, but maybe today's the day where the Spirit of God took the word of God and made it abundantly clear that your life has been a whole lot like Isaiah chapter 14, you wanted to do whatever you wanted to do in spite of what God ever said or spoke. But maybe today's the day where you see the mercy of God and you understand the salvation of God and it's time to do it his way rather than yours. The Bible says whoever calls out. It doesn't say whoever reads the script, whoever does it out loud, whoever says a certain word in a certain order. No, this is a heart's cry and maybe today's the day where you cry out to the Lord. Maybe your heart's cry today would be something

like this. Again, it's your own words, but maybe your heart's cry would be something like this. "God, today I recognize that I'm a sinner. I've been places I should have never been. I've done things, participated in things I should have never been a part of. God, you know the words that have come out of my mouth, the thoughts that have been between my ears that are so contrary to you. According to your Bible, the wages, the result of my sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. God, today, I recognize, I confess, I have sinned. I deserve what Romans 6:23 says, but it basically says Jesus loves me so much that he's willing to forgive me and he's willing to save me. So God today, I want you to know, I believe. I believe that Jesus loved me so much that he came on my behalf. He lived a sinless life on my behalf. God today, I believe that when he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross, he was bearing the pain and the punishment and the price of my sin. And God today, I believe that as we sang earlier in the service, that when he walked out of the tomb, when it was vacated on the third day, Jesus Christ has the ability, he has the power to forgive me, to make me as I should be, and to save me. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the struggles of life, all the problems of life, the difficulties of life, but one thing I know, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can fix. So the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe today you're that person. Maybe you're at the front, the back, the sides, the bottom, the top. It doesn't matter where you are today and today's the day you cried out for Jesus to save you. In just a moment, I'm going to pray for us. We're going to stand and sing together and I just want to invite you just to step out and step forward wherever you are. We want to celebrate with you. We want to pray with you. We want to pray for you, whoever you are. Maybe today you say, "You know what, Pastor? I've already got that covered. In fact, it's been covered for a while. But I need to talk to somebody about this baptism thing, this obedience thing." We would love to have that conversation. Or maybe you're that person, maybe you're that family today that we meet each and every week who say, "You know, this is our church home. What does that look like to formalize that?" We would love the opportunity to have that conversation. Or maybe today, you're just walking through a tough spot. It's a rough patch. You say, "You know what? I'm at the end of my rope. I'm exhausted. I need somebody to pray with me. I need somebody to pray for me." We would love to be a part of that. in your life.

*Lord Jesus, thank you, thank you that as we come to this time in our service we're not coming playing a guessing game. God, we know what your word has said. Lord, we know throughout time it has been shown to be tried and true and so, God, today I pray help us to take all the voices that speak contrary to and allow them to crumble at the foot of your word. May we simply obey what you have spoken through your word today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*