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True Religion: Widows and Orphans

James 1:26-27

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you for Ken and Deb and what an incredibly blessed example they've been and what it means to be an active, vital part of the church, and we are just so blessed with their presence. I pray this morning as we are again going to open up your word, that you would give us the grace that we need to be able to perceive it. We need your Holy Spirit here to guide us, walk us through this. Lord, we pray, give us the ability to make it of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we spent last week actually exploring the tension between faith and works and asking ourselves the most vital question you could ever ask and that's how do I know I am really a believer in Christ? Is it simply a matter of agreeing with a set of biblical principles that God became a man, that he lived a perfect life and he died on a cross, or is it more a matter of attending church, getting baptized and tithing?

Well, we answered that the key to knowing whether or not you are a

genuine believer is not just a matter of faith versus works, but simply how we answer one critical question. The question that we need to ask ourselves over and over again is not am I doing enough works to make the grade or have I checked off enough faith propositions that I believe in order to make the grade, in fact it's much more basic than either of those; and the question you need to ask yourself is: Is the Spirit of God living within me? God says in *Romans 8:9*: *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.*

And so we spoke about the Spirit of Christ that enters into us at salvation, turns our lives around, begins this whole process of sanctification and shapes and molds us into the very image of Christ. And we repeated Paul's challenge which says in 2 *Corinthians 13*: *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.*

So let's say that we're all in agreement that the key tests of whether or not I am a Christian is not just faith, it's not just works, but it's Christ living within me. And that's because God

has given us a heart transplant and has also given us his indwelling Holy Spirit. We remember *Ezekiel 36*, God promises, he says: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

So when that happens, once Christ takes up residence within you, you begin this process of sanctification that lasts a lifetime. And again, from the moment that you become a believer, God is at work within you, shaping and molding you into the very image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So salvation is always because of this God-ordained heart transplant and that new heart and the Spirit of Christ will always produce a change within you. We're all in the process of becoming little christs, and as we said last week, so much so that if you can look backwards and see no change whatsoever in your life, then something is drastically wrong. We repeated that line from that great country preacher who said, "If you is what you was, you isn't."

And understand that every believer in Christ has the Spirit of Christ within him, moving him to think and to act like Christ did. And for some of us, for some of us used to thinking that that means

simply agreeing to a set of biblical principles and next to nothing more, well Jesus' statement in Matthew 25 may come as a shock because what Jesus said there has often been dismissed, it's often been discounted as what folks call the social gospel.

I want to you listen to how Jesus describes what he sees in the lives of those who have the Spirit of Christ within them. This is Jesus' words from Matthew 25. This is *Matthew 25:31*. He says:
"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'"

Now I want you to notice what Jesus did not say here. He didn't say, "Come, you are who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of world, for you confessed me as Lord" or "you believe that I was truly God" or "you

believe that I died for your sins and rose from the dead." He didn't say anything remotely like this, remotely like what a lot of folks think is the basis for believing that I'm a Christian; that is that I agree with a whole set of propositions about the nature of God and the nature of man. Jesus is already assuming that we have confessed with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, and what he's determined to expose here is whether or not we believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, because belief in the heart has to result in some kind of outward expression. And what Jesus is addressing here is whether or not that belief has made that 18-inch journey from your head to your heart.

This is what He goes on to say in verse 37. He says: *"Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"*

And what Jesus is saying there is that if the Holy Spirit, if the Spirit of Christ himself is living within you, then you will have a desire to mirror his desires while he was here on earth. Jesus did precisely what he's speaking of here; he literally spent his life

doing good. But you see what we sinful people do is we bifurcate, that is, we split the care that Jesus had for both body and soul into two very different camps, into those that care for the body and those that care for the soul. Jesus cared for both.

Caring for the body alone has become what's known as the social gospel. And one of the reasons why evangelicals are typically very weak in the social gospel is that many have taken these very words of Jesus to mean that all that mattered to him was addressing the physical needs of hurting people. I mean if you read this section of scripture alone, you might well conclude that God's going to judge us exclusively on whether we fed, clothed, housed and otherwise cared for the least of Jesus' brethren. There are many in the social gospel movement today who see this exclusively as their mandate. They have little or no interest in addressing the need to address issues that pertain to the soul, and I'll give you an example of how we've interacted with that side of it.

A few years back we were approached with by an organization, I believe they were called "Faith at Work" and it was an organization that sought to put feet to the desire to act out your faith. They said they wanted to act as a liaison between churches and various aspects of the community. They have said if we joined the organization, they would put us in touch with people who need to be

taken places who have all kinds of other needs that we could actually meet.

And it sounded good at first but as I was speaking to the woman who was engaging us in the program, she made it very, very clear that Faith in Action was only interested in the action part. That is one of the rules of this organization was that you could not share with the people that you were helping what your faith was grounded in. From their standpoint, they didn't want Jewish folks talking to people about Judaism, they didn't want Muslim folks talking to people about Islam, and they didn't want Christian folks talking to people about Christianity. They simply wanted each group to put their faith into action by doing faith-based things. The deeds themselves, that was all that mattered and instead of promoting faith without works, they were promoting works without faith. And so we declined to join.

You see, it's very easy to get out of balance when examining a relationship between faith and works, and there's whole denominations that I think that have misunderstood this relationship to the extent that one could view their relationship with Christ simply as a very lengthy to-do list. And if you're able to check off enough of those right religious activities, well then you could think of yourself as standing in right relationship

with God.

And again, this is nothing new, this is exactly what devolved out of the law of the Pharisees. And a constant temptation for every believer is to imagine themselves capable of pleasing God through his works, but no one's capable of that. I mean, since God is transcendentally flawless, well then those works also have to be transcendentally flawless; and not just some of them but all of them. *Galatians 3:10* says: *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."*

So we look back at this statement that Jesus made in Matthew 25, we say, well, why is Jesus focusing so much on works, so much so that this is what he says in verse 41. He says: *"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'* Then they also will answer, saying, *'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'* Then he will answer them, saying, *'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do*

it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

So maybe we're just scratching our head, we're saying what is it that Jesus is asking of us? I mean, is Jesus guilty of promoting the social gospel? Can those folks who care only about food pantries and clothing drives, are they correct? All that really matters now is feeding, clothing, housing and caring for physical bodies?

As you can imagine the stakes here are quite high, I mean, it's pretty obvious, it's critical to get this right. Many in the social gospel devote themselves to try to improve the physical lot of souls that are here on earth; that's a good thing. And it's a fact that any evangelical pay very little attention to those physical needs because they see them as a tiny fraction of the greater need of eternal life versus eternal damnation; but you know, eternity itself is a very tough sell. Any time you work with the public in any capacity of dealing with physical needs, you quickly learn that spiritual needs are way down on the priority list of most people. And I get it, it's understandable. I mean, if you're wondering where your next meal is going to be coming from and you don't know if you're going to have a roof on your head, you can certainly see how that would claim all of your energy as it

does with most people in those circumstances. I mean, handing a starving person a tract instead of a meal is not a good look. Telling somebody who's thirsty, cold, naked or homeless to seek first the kingdom of God strikes many as being cruel and thoughtless.

See, on the other hand it's very frustrating to work at a soup kitchen or a food pantry and then to offer to pray with folks who have no interest whatsoever in prayer or perhaps share scripture with folks who have no interest because they're concentrating on their physical needs alone. But you have to understand it's no different than it was in Jesus' day. You have to understand, time and again Jesus had to address the crowds that followed him not because they had any interest whatsoever in the kingdom that he was offering them but because they thought they could get some free food.

This is what Jesus said in *John 6:26*, he said: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal."*

No one knew better than Jesus that eternity and the kingdom of God was way down on the priority list for most of the people that he addressed. You know, food, water, clothing, housing, they were much more important to most; but still he insisted the kingdom, the kingdom is what has to come first.

It was Jesus who said in *Matthew 6*: *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* So we see Jesus clearly

said to seek first the kingdom but he also clearly said that sheep care for the needs of the people; goats, they just can't be bothered.

So again we're scratching our head. We're saying, okay, so which is it? Is it faith or is it works or is it simply having the presence of the Holy Spirit within you? Well, it's literally all of the above. When you have the Holy Spirit within you, you receive that gift of faith; when you receive that gift, you express it through works.

You know, when James says, "*faith without works is dead*," he's simply defining the fact that works is simply the same as breathing to a body. Works act just like breathing does with regard to life: It's an indicator. You know, during World War one, it said medics used to go up to fallen soldiers and they would put a little mirror up to their nostrils to see if their nostrils fogged that mirror up. If their breath fogged up the mirror then there was evidence of life; because if there's no breath, there is no life. And likewise it is for faith; if there's no works, there's no faith. And it doesn't mean that works creates faith in the same way that breath doesn't create life. You can take a corpse and hook it up to a ventilator, it will breathe all day for you but it will still be a corpse because breathing doesn't impart life, it simply

indicates life.

I've often said that faith and works is analogous to life and breath. If you have one, you're always going to have the other. Works are always going to flow from genuine faith not as an obligation to be filled but as a drive put there by God to be satisfied.

And when it comes to faith and works, the analogy of breathing becomes even more apt. I mean, I don't think any of us are going to throw up our hands in despair if I tell you that, hey, you've got no choice, breathing is a must. And do you know that every single day you have to breathe 22,000 times? And if you don't, you're going to die. Well no one treats breathing as a work because it's simply a fact, a natural part of being alive. If you live, you breathe; end of story.

In the very same way works is a natural part that faith produces. They are as much a part of being spiritually alive as breathing is a part of being physically alive. If you have genuine faith, you will have works that accompany that faith. And that's why James says in *James 2:18*: *But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.* If you've got one, you've got the

other.

James goes on to demonstrate that works naturally flow from faith. This is what he says. He says: *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

Now again, I don't blame you if you start to scratch your head again. You say, wait a minute, is this just a checklist of works? I mean, is this what I need to do to keep my religion from becoming worthless? According to James there's these three things I got to do: I got to keep my mouth shut, I got to keep my tongue bridled; number two I got to visit orphans; and number three, I've got to care for widows. That's how I get right with God according to James?

Well, you know why that can't possibly be James' solution for worthwhile religion. For one, he doesn't give you any boundaries. There's no telling here how bridled is my tongue supposed to be. I mean, there's monks who take a vow of silence for their entire life. Is that enough? How about half of my life or a quarter of my life? How many orphans do I have to visit to meet the minimum requirement? If I say two, why not say three or four or ten? How many widows must I care for and what level of care am I responsible for? I think you can see the impossibility of coming at this from a standpoint of works as some kind of justification for my righteousness before God.

You see, in order to understand just what this is that James is getting at, we first have to understand what works are from God's perspective. And again, if we were to put this in the context of breathing, we would just say James is acting here as a spiritual pulmonologist; and he's first insisting that people who are alive, they have to be breathing. And then he starts describing what genuine breathing actually looks like. He says some of our works may look like we're taking these very shallow, empty breaths while others are taking very full and deep breaths. But everyone who is alive is breathing, and everyone who has genuine faith has works that prove it. And the point is every genuine believer in Christ has the Spirit of Christ living within him and Christ demonstrated

over and over again while he was here on earth his desire to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give sight to the blind and new life to those who are genuinely spiritually dead. He didn't bifurcate his works along spiritual and physical lines. He saw them all as meeting desperate needs. And that's the very same spirit that's in every one of us genuine believers because Christ himself in the person of the Holy Spirit now lives inside you.

And the first thing that James is honing in on here is the tongue, and we can spend lots and lots of times looking at that; but this morning we want to look at the second breathing indicator that James is speaking of, and he says: *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

So you might ask, okay, why does God have this special care for widows and orphans? And that's simply because on the power scale they were at the very bottom. You know, life for widows and orphans in Jesus' day was absolutely brutal. They were often without any resource whatsoever, so naturally God saw them as most deserving of his care. *Deuteronomy 10:18* says: *He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Psalm 68* says: *Father of the*

fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. Psalm 146 says: The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

And you know, when God says that true religion is to visit orphans and widows, he doesn't mean dropping in for a cup of coffee. Actually the word that's translated as "visit," it means "to oversee." That means to take special care of.

And so again, we want to ask practically speaking what does that mean? And so this morning we're going to do something a little bit different. I'm going to be asking for Abby and Dan to come up and share with us, because they have extensive experience in doing just that, taking special care of orphans. It's called the foster care program, and they're going to tell us that experience is all about. Would you come on up and share with us? Dan, is that mike right there? Just got to put the button on.

DAN: Hello? It works.

ABBY MORTENSON: So many of you know just our story, many of you may not know our story, but we began doing foster care about seven years ago, maybe eight years ago. I think seven. I should have

looked it up.

In Colorado where we were living, we had begun the process many years before that to try and adopt, and we just kept hitting roadblocks and lots of failed adoptions. And we can tell you that story, you know, if you want to hear it. It's long so I won't do it tonight -- today but we ended up after a while of trying and asking God and wondering what was going on, why he wouldn't answer our prayers?

We decided we were going to go move to Africa, and we were like, there's too many orphans there, let's go just to take care of kids in Uganda because they were offered a job there from some friends of mine who ran a ministry to -- they helped get street children into homes; and so they said, "Why don't you go check it out and let us know if you want to do it."

So we went, like when we flew out there, we were both pretty convinced that we were going to come back and move out there. And while we were there -- do you want to tell about the guy we met and the -- just the guy who was fostering all the children briefly or -- I sprung that on Dan. I sprung it on him.

So we ended up meeting lots of people there and children and it was

an amazing time. We loved it. And when we were flying home, we both were like I don't feel like God's asking us to do this. That we're -- it's a no. And we were both surprised, like what?

And I had been thinking about foster care for a while, I might have mentioned it to Dan a few times, and he was kind of like, "I'm not sure." But on the way home, he said, "I think we're supposed to do foster care. We have children in our state. Let's sign up and see what happens. Let's take care of the children that are in our community where we are. We have a support system, we have a home, we have hearts that want to love." And so we did sign up, went through all the training and we honestly did not -- we didn't sign up to adopt children, we signed up knowing, like, we could be saying good-bye to whoever many -- however many children and we want -- but we felt like God was saying, you want to love kids? There's kids to love, like just go, just do it.

So in that year, that first year we had four children in our home and they all returned to their families in that time span and then God called us here. That's another long story that we'll be happy to share if anyone wants to hear. And we signed up again. We said, let's start fostering here.

And since then -- well, that was five years ago -- well, six years

ago we moved here and five years ago we got the first call. And it's been a different story for us here, you know, we've -- we got four newborns straight from the hospital, three of them are ours forever now, we've adopted three, the fourth one is still in foster care and now we have a fifth baby from the hospital. And it just, it showed us the huge need, number one, that they're even calling us when they know we're full, kind of, and they're desperate for families to step in.

But one thing that I was reflecting on and in regards to just what has this done for our faith and our walk with Christ? I feel like we've learned so much about trust and stepping into the unknown, and that has required a lot of faith and trust that no matter what happens, whether our hearts are going to be broken or not, God wants us to love and God wants us to be, have our hearts open to these children.

And a lot of people, when I say we're foster parents, they're, "Oh, I could never do that. I could never give them back," you know, "Don't get too attached," and I think that that's just not right. As a believer, as a Christian, we are called to be, to get attached and to give that love freely, whether it's to a child or whether it's to our neighbors or whether it's to someone hurting that you're working with. But for me it's just been a great way to

practice leaning into trust. And there's so many opportunities in our walks with Christ to step out of our comfort zone in obedience to the call of love.

So I would encourage you just to think about what steps or decisions you've made in your life that really required to you step out of your comfort zone and trust, because it's easy to be comfortable, and that's what our human nature wants, we want comfort, we want safety, we don't want to get out of our comfort zone because it's vulnerable, and I think just going into a place of needing God's strength, needing to rely on the Holy Spirit, needing to rely on community is -- is a picture of what Jesus wants us to do, to rely on one another, to rely on him.

And -- let's see. I would, you know, I would advocate for anyone who has thought about it. I've talked to a lot of people, like, "oh, I've thought about doing foster care." I just, if you've thought about it, then start taking the steps, don't let the fear get in the way. If you're in a place that you want to serve foster children but you can't open your home for whatever reason, there are lots of ways to help out, to step in and serve.

And I ask, I'm in some foster Facebook groups and I asked a lot of -- I asked the question, like, what would you want -- if a church

came to you and said, "We want to serve you," what would you want, like what would you say?

And first of all, I want to say thank you to you all and to the people here who have stepped in for us over the years and who've prayed for us and our children, who've loved our children, that was one of the things that came up, like people just want people to care about their foster children and invest in them, and I appreciate those of you, all of you who have done that for our kids, even for, you know, the children who are with us for three months, it means so much, and to pray for them.

But I have a -- do you have anything you want to say while I'm looking for that?

DAN: I have a lot of thoughts, and they're all good. No, foster care is, it's a very hard thing but it definitely will stretch you beyond you can ever imagine. Sorry. I didn't think I would cry but these kids, they need love, they need care, and we've done a good job of that. I wish I talked to Abby today or yesterday because I knew this was happening but I was like, I don't know, to come up here and share my heart about foster care, something that could go on for hours, I guess. But it's such a huge need, like Abby said, you know, there's thousands of kids that don't have

homes and they're, you know, from babies all the way up to what, 21, 18? And you know, the older kids are harder because they've been through so much sometimes. We haven't had any yet but maybe we will.

But, yeah, I would just really encourage you, you know, take a step in faith. Foster care is not for everyone without a doubt, and like Abby said, we hear people all the time, "Oh, I couldn't do it, like what you guys do." I work with guys, guys that I work with, they're not believers but they're like, you know, "Bless you, I could never do that." I said, "You can," you know, "it's not about you; it's about these children and giving these kids a home."

I could keep going. Have any -- I'm sure a lot of you have heard of Francis Chan? Anyway, he had a sermon and he's a very big advocate for kids that are orphans. But he was telling a story about a couple who were in their 70's and they just felt a call to love orphans. And they lived in California, you all understand how expensive California is, but this guy, the husband retired, and they were just -- they just felt the call. And they ended up going through foster care and they adopted ten siblings at the age of 70. I don't know if that's what I want to do but, you know, they put their heart out and they did it, and it's a blessing, you know, and their reward will be in heaven and it's an awesome thing. But like

I said, it's hard, it's scary, you don't know if these kids are going to be leaving but it's not about you guys, it's not about anyone, it's about these kids. You know, you just got to be faithful and trust that God, God knows, you know, God put the five kids in our home. You go.

ABBY: Usually I'm the one that's crying, so I'm enjoying this. Thank you, Dan.

Yeah, people just said watching the kids to give parents a break, investing time into building relationships with the kids, help with transportation. All I've ever asked for was love, support and acceptance of the littles, anything more is gravy, especially the hand-me-downs. We get lots of those; thank you. For a church group actively and consistently praying for families, the cases, whatever we ask for, and you guys have done that for us.

Intentional play dates, someone to help with cleaning, some people say. Meal trades, baby-sitting, a lot of baby-sitting requests. I got like fifty or sixty responses, so if anyone wants to see that list, I have a lot.

I just I love this passage and I want to -- I want to end because we could talk forever and we're open books so if you want to come talk to us, please, we'd love to talk about any of our experiences

and share. But I think if we would have said no to risking our hearts in foster care, we would have said no to the thousands of moments of pure joy and connection not only between us and our children, the foster children and adopted, but between strangers who we meet and end up sharing or story, between family and friends who supported us and loved us, we would have said no to deepening our relationship with Christ and deepening our faith because it's -- it's -- when you need God, you don't have any other choice, you don't -- you cannot do it on your own strength and I've been there so many times with, you know, lots of babies to take care of, and I can't do it, I cannot do it, but God has allowed us to do and given us the strength, and given us you guys and a community of people to support us and the children.

But this is my -- one of my just verses that I always go back to; it's from Isaiah. I didn't write down which one. You'll probably know it. I usually remember it but I don't want to say the wrong one.

Is this not the kind of fasting I've chosen to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and provide the poor who wander with shelter? When you see the naked -- and this is cool because I didn't know he was using

these verses but it's the same, like this Isaiah speaking and Jesus fulfilled that. Can you hold this because I'm shaking?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked to clothe them and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear, then your righteousness will go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard, then you will call and the Lord will answer, you will cry for help and he will say "Here am I" if you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing of fingers and malicious talk and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noonday.

Can you finish? We're very emotional today. Sorry. I know, the print is so small, I can't read this. Everything goes wrong when you're like last minute trying to prepare something, for me at least.

The Lord will guide you always, he will satisfy your needs in a sun scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your

people will rebuild the ancient ruins and raise up the age old foundations. You will be called "repairer of broken walls" and "restorer of streets with dwellings."

So I just think, you know, God doesn't promise -- and we talked about this, Tom and I last night -- God doesn't promise that it will be easy and he doesn't promise that things will go the way you want. There was a time with Thomas that we didn't know if he was going to stay with us and he had been with us for two years from birth and I just remember that feeling of he could go either way, he could stay with us, he could go back and I have to be okay with it. I have to trust God, and it may not work out the way you want but God promises to be with you in it and he promises that actually when you spend yourselves on behalf of the needy, that's when your light's going to come, that's when your healing's going to come, that's when you get the benefits of it, not -- maybe not this, the earthly benefit but the benefit of being closer to Christ and to your community and to the people that you're loving. So I hope that makes sense, and we're all over the place; but thank you for listening and supporting our journey so far.

PASTOR TOM: Okay. Again, we had a conversation last night, Abby and I, we were talking about and one of the things that they know, that they have seen in their lives is we all kind of tend to put

God in a box, and we say, "okay, if I do this, God's going to probably do this," and we have these expectations that things are going to work A, B, C, D, and they never do. And literally what they were saying and what they were experiencing is what God is saying is I don't promise you A, B, C and D. What I do promise you is whatever it is, I will walk through it with you. I will give you the grace, I will give you the power, I will give you the strength. So just don't plot out what it's going to be like but just trust that whatever it is like I'm going to be there with you walking you through this.

And the point that Abby and Dan are demonstrating is that what we're trying to make with all of this is that if you're a genuine believer, you have the Spirit of Christ within you. And the Spirit of Christ in you is what moves you to love God and love others. And Christ himself demonstrated that love for us while he walked on the earth and it was a love that cared about feeding the hungry and clothing the naked, but he also cared that the blind would receive sight both physically and spiritually, that folks would know that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and that there's no other way to the Father except through Him. And so in short, the gospel of Jesus, it was both physical and spiritual, and it was never one at the expense of the other.

And so if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, you, too, have that genuine Spirit of Christ living within you and you, too, have this drive to obey, a desire to live like Christ lived, seeking how you can effectively use the gifts that God has given to you to advance his kingdom and to love God with all of your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength. And again, foster care is just a wonderful, practical way of doing just that. Again, I invite to you explore what's involved and exactly what Dan and Abby said, take some time and chat with them and talk about all the different ways that we, as a church, can come alongside them and help them in that journey. And again, as Abby has pointed out, this is not a woman's role. This is an all-hands-on-deck role for the entire church to participate in.

So I'd just love for our church to get more and more involved in this undertaking. And again it starts with asking, "Okay. How can I help?" And again, I just, again, I want us to be involved on a personal level in asking them how we can help to actually accepting the challenge if God is telling you, I want you also to be a foster parent because every one of us has a unique gift; and we all have the same unique calling. It's simply stated by Jesus in *Matthew 5:16*. He says: *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* Basically foster care is the light of

God's glory shining into the darkness of the brokenness of families. And you can help practically, you can help spiritually; you can help body and soul by first and foremost keeping them in prayer, so let's do that right now.

Father, I just want to thank you for Dan and Abby, I thank you for Steve and Vanessa, I thank you for families that are actively committed to foster care as just a measure of caring for widows and orphans. And I pray, Lord, that their testimony would move others in our church to undertake the idea of foster care or if not foster care, to actively participate in being a help, in being a practical help to all those who have undertaken it. I pray for that grace, I pray for that insight, I pray for that blessing in Jesus' name.

Amen.