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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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The Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18

Prayer: *Father God, we do thank you and praise you for the privilege that we have of coming before you corporately. And Lord, there's a special privilege this day, this is the first Sunday of the month and so we are focusing on you and your cross. And again, Lord, as we pray each week, without your Holy Spirit's power, we have very little ability to do that. And so I pray right now, Lord, for your Spirit, I pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us as we open up your book, as we look into your word, give us the ability to understand and to perceive truth and to make it again a permanent part of our lives. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, like I said, it is the first Sunday of the month and this is the day that we remember Christ and his cross. And Jesus on the night before he died, he met with his disciples for one last Passover supper, and he celebrated that supper with them. It's described in Matthew 26. It says this: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the*

disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus took the bread and the wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and of his blood and then he asked his disciples to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. He then asked them to repeat this remembrance of his sacrifice regularly and this is what we do, this is what we call "the Lord's table." We celebrate it once a month by meditating on what it is Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross, we do it by examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, by confessing our sins; and then by participating in the elements. John 6:53 says: "So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

We've been following the life of Jesus and we've worked our way up to the tenth chapter of the gospel of John, and if you remember where we were the last time, Jesus is engaged in a bitter dialogue with the religious leaders. And these leaders are very resentful, they're upset over the healing of the blind man that Jesus had

recently done because it exposed them for the vicious bigots that they were. And Jesus is engaged in a discussion with them about sheep and shepherding, most of which goes right over their heads. It's in John 10. Let me just read it to you. It says this:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus then tells them directly, he says in verse 7: "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Now as I said, we've had about 2,000 years to digest those words

and they make perfect sense to us. They made almost no sense whatsoever to Jesus' hearers. And I said last time that the fact that Jesus said many things that were nearly impossible to understand was almost immaterial for one reason, and the reason is that he knew that God was going to give ears to hear to his sheep. This is what Jesus told his disciples in *Matthew 13*, he said: *"For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them. But blessed are yours eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."*

As I pointed out, the good news is that we're not here by chance, we're not here by intelligence, we're not here by our native ability. We're here by the sovereign hand of a God who chose us before the foundations of the world were even laid. And did Jesus say many things that were confounding, many things that were confusing and completely beyond the disciples' ability to understand? Well, the answer is absolutely yes, he did. But there's a reason why that didn't matter, and it goes back to the Shepherd and the sheep. Again, verse 2 he says: *"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."* So like I said, if you're one

of his sheep, it's not because you're clever or intelligent or even natively wise; it's because by the sheer grace of God you've been given the ability to hear the voice of the shepherd. Again verse 4, he said: *"When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."*

And so we asked last time why did the words of the gospel for some reason at some point in your life again begin to make sense? Why did the dots suddenly start to connect? Well, it all comes down to not who you are but whose you are. Again, Jesus tells us in verse 27: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them all of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* So if you are one of God's children, you are the recipient of the greatest privilege a human being could ever receive. You've been given the gift of salvation, and this morning what I want to focus on is what it cost Jesus to provide us with this gift.

Jesus said this in verse 11, he said: *"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* He then goes

on to explain why he is a different type of shepherd altogether than all of the shepherds that people were so familiar with. This what he said in *John 10:12-15*. He said: *"He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."* See what Jesus is saying here is that a hired shepherd has a completely different set of priorities than the Good Shepherd. Number one on his list is obviously himself. Jesus is saying that when push comes to shove, well, a hired shepherd is going to look out for number one. I mean, he still may care a great deal more than nothing about the sheep, but he's still a hireling compared to Jesus. Let me explain why by speaking a little bit about David. David was perhaps the greatest hired shepherd there ever was, I mean, even though it was a family business, he was a shepherd, not like Jesus at all. He was a great shepherd and he demonstrated that in his pleading with Saul to let him go up against the giant Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. This is what David said describing himself as the shepherd: *But David said to Saul, "Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of*

his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has struck down both lions and bears and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God." We see from this that David obviously threw himself into the task of protecting the sheep and that he took extreme risks, even to the point of protecting them against lions and bears. Now, his ultimate goal was to save the sheep and his own life by defeating the sheep's attackers. The Good Shepherd's goal was very, very different than that. Jesus said in verse 14: *"I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."* Here's the difference between David and the Good Shepherd. See, the Good Shepherd knew that in order to protect the sheep, he had to die for them. See, Jesus didn't come to this planet to be our instructor, our example, or our political leader. He came to this planet to be offered up as a sacrifice for his sheep. He came to this planet on a rescue mission because every human being on this planet is born doomed already. We are, all of us, sons of Adam. And when Adam fell, every one of us inherited his fallenness. We may not consciously realize it, but we come from the womb shaking our fists at the Creator who brought us forth. As author Greg Foster puts it: "Millions of people -- inside the church as well as outside -- think they love God when in fact they

hate him. What they love is the tame "god" they've made up in their heads based on what they want God to be like. They keep the real God out of their consciousness. If they did become conscious of him, in all his holiness and power, they would hate him." Jesus acknowledged that hatred as normative. He once said to his disciples when they were starting to get this push back of a fallen people toward a holy God, he said this in *John 15:18*, he said: *"If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you."*

You see, this holy God's answer to his sinful creation's rebellion was to take on flesh, to become a flawless part of his own creation, to live out his life perfectly, and then to offer that life as a substitute for ours. God's perfect justice demanded a death penalty for sin, and his perfect mercy provided his own son to bear that penalty for us. This is what changes and this is what marks the difference between the Good Shepherd and any other shepherd. Because in order to save the sheep, Jesus had to decide ahead of time that his own life was going to have to be forfeited. In fact, we know that he told the disciples way ahead of time as they were heading into Jerusalem in *Matthew 20:18*, he said this, he said: *"See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the*

*third day." See, this was not an accident. The Good Shepherd knew that in order to protect his sheep, he had to lay down his life for them. So the Good Shepherd went out to face his own lions and his own bulls and his own dogs not like David did, charging into the battle determined to protect both the sheep and himself, but willingly giving up the fight, choosing to die in order that his sheep may live. Psalm 22 takes us into Jesus' mind as he lays down his life for the sheep. This is Jesus' thoughts through the mind of the psalmist. He says this: *Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help. Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evil doers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet.**

You see, the Good Shepherd, he could only rescue the sheep by taking their place. He faced bulls and he faced lions and he faced dogs who ravaged him instead of the sheep. He's the God who stepped out of the splendor of heaven right into the sinkhole of human sin. I recently met a dear woman who's not a believer who went through the agony of losing her son at the age of 12. He

developed a very rapidly growing tumor in his brain stem and within a month or so of his diagnosis, he was dead. She described to others what it was like being in the room with her son for his last eight hours while he gasped for air. Of course my heart went out to her for the horror of that experience, I just I cannot imagine how evil that would have been. And I understand how difficult it is for this woman to think or believe that there is a loving God. But I also know that there is no other faith or system of belief like Christianity. You see, we believe in a God who loved us enough to experience the very worst of what existence on this earth is like. *Hebrews 4:15* says: *We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* And you know, in order for that statement to ring true, that means that Jesus had to have suffered more, had to have experienced the very worst of any human being who's ever existed, because if that was not the case, then any other human who went through something worse would have the complete right to say to Jesus, you don't know what I've been through, you don't know what I've suffered, you don't know what I've experienced. But he does. You see, he lived, he sweated, he hungered, he grew tired and frustrated, he was betrayed and abandoned and butchered in front of the crowd that he had served for his entire life while they howled for his blood. I wish I had had the opportunity and the right circumstance to be able to

point out to this dear woman who had suffered so much, that unlike any other faith, we believe in a Christ who knows exactly what it feels like to gasp for air. We know he did that on the cross. We know physiologically that as the blood was draining out of his body that his organs were craving oxygen, so we know he knows exactly what it feels like to gasp. *Psalm 22 says: I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast.*

As the elders begin to distribute the bread, just take a few moments and focus on just what the Good Shepherd had to do to lay down his life for the sheep. And as they are distributing the elements, I just want to give us the warning that God gives about communion itself. This is from *1 Corinthians 11:28*. It says this: *But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* Now I say this each time. I say communion is extremely serious business, and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to court disaster. I say if you are not absolutely confident that you are a child of the King, if you first

need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring your sacrifice to the altar, then just pass the elements on. It's nothing to be embarrassed about, no one's going to look at you, no one's going to think something's wrong. In fact, they may think you wise. But on the other hand, the other extreme we want to say you can make the mistake also of thinking that unless I'm spotlessly perfect I'm unworthy to receive communion, and that too is the devil's lie. You see, being a child of the King doesn't mean that we don't sin, it doesn't mean that we never fail, but what it does mean is that we recognize that our salvation is a gift that no one is ever capable of earning simply by being good. I love how Dane Ortland puts it, he says: "In the kingdom of God, the one thing that qualifies you is knowing that you don't qualify, and the one things that disqualifies you is thinking that you do." Understanding who we are means that when we do fail, we are aware that we have sinned because we have God's Holy Spirit living within us and he is convicting us, and so we grieve as children who know we have a Father who longs to forgive us and cleanse us. God says in *1 John 1:9*: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Well, being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are without sin. It means that when we sin, we understand we have an advocate with the Father, someone who is speaking in heaven on our behalf. *1 John 2:1* says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you*

will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. So because we have Jesus' own righteousness and not ours, we're now free to eat from his table. So if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus has purchased for you by laying his life down for the sheep. He lived the life we were supposed to live, then he died the death we all deserve to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven. On the basis of his righteousness, not ours we are able to take this communion. So just take a moment to ponder, to reflect, on the Good Shepherd's sacrifice.

1 Corinthians the 11th chapter says: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* So take, and eat.

There's another aspect to Jesus' death that I want to make crystally clear because I think Jesus wanted to make crystally clear. This is what he says in *John 10:17*, he says: *"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."*

I can see why Jesus was so insistent on stating the terms of his own death, how he would lay down his life for the sheep, because there's a lot of different misunderstandings about how that happened. There's a lot of folks today who still believe that Jesus died of a broken heart. There's no doubt that his heart was broken, but I have very little doubt that that is what killed him. There are others that say that Jesus died as the victim of Roman injustice, and there's no doubt whatsoever that there was grievous injustice all about Jesus' execution, but I also have no doubt that he was not the victim in that sense. And there are many who prefer to describe Jesus' death in medical terms. Let me just read to you, this is condensed from *The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ* by C. Truman Davis. He says this, describing Jesus, he says: "He can feel the chill of death creeping through his tissues. With one last surge of strength, He once again presses his torn feet against the nail, straightens His legs, takes a deeper breath, and utters His seventh and last cry, 'Father, into thy hands I commit My Spirit.' Apparently to make doubly sure of death, the legionnaire drove his lance between the fifth interspace between the ribs, upward through the pericardium and into the heart. Immediately there came out blood and water. We, therefore, have rather conclusive postmortem evidence that Our Lord died, not the usual crucifixion death by suffocation, but of heart failure due to shock and constriction of the heart by fluid in the pericardium."

I appreciate understanding the physical facts surrounding Jesus' death, but I think I have what is a far more accurate postmortem description of the end of Jesus' life, because it comes from Jesus himself. Once again he said in *John 10:17 and 18*: "*I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.*" So Jesus didn't die from any physiological intervention, he didn't die from any human intervention. Human beings could no more kill Jesus than they could snuff out the sun, because He is the author of life itself.

As the elders begin to distribute the cup, I draw your attention to the gospel of John, the first chapter. It says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.* You see, life itself is what emanates from Jesus. Jesus once spoke to the rotting corpse of Lazarus, and it was his words alone that caused a heart that had been stopped for four days to start beating. Those words caused lungs to begin expanding and blood to flow once again through veins and arteries that were literally rotting. I mean, Lazarus was not only dead, he was in a state of rapid decay, so much so that his own sister said in *John 11:39*: "*Lord, by this time there is a*

stench, for he has been dead for four days." But that was no problem at all to the Lord of life itself. See, the idea that any human being could wrest the life from Jesus is ludicrous on its surface. Make no mistake about it, Jesus did die on the cross, but he only died because he voluntarily surrendered the power of life itself that he alone possesses. This is how he put it. This is *John 10:14*. He says: *"I am the Good Shepherd; and I know My sheep, and I am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."*

I just want to point out also that sandwiched in between these two statements about Jesus laying down his life is a statement that probably infuriated the Jews more than anything else that he had said previously. Jesus is actually telling the Jews that he has other sheep who are not of this fold. Other sheep who will also hear his voice and will also be part of one great flock with Jesus as their shepherd. You and I are the people that Jesus was speaking of. You and I are the sheep of another fold. See, Jesus

was telling these leaders of Israel that the gospel was soon going to break out of the Jewish fold to Judea and Samaria and to the rest of the world, and we are part of that legacy. I mean literally when those words were spoken, we were more or less on the other side of the world. So we are living proof that what God proclaims he accomplishes. Jesus says, I know my sheep, I gather my sheep, and I die for my sheep. And he says: *"And they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."*

Jesus left us over 2,000 years ago, and he left us his legacy. That is we are the ones that are now tasked with gathering the sheep. And the good news for us is that God has already gone ahead of us and God has promised us if we speak the gospel, the sheep will hear it. In *John 10*, he says: *The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.* In *John 8:47*, he says: *"Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."* *Hebrews 3:15* says: *While it is said: "Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."*

So the question that I would like us to ponder this morning is really about the voice. The question I would like us each to ask ourselves is this: Do I let God use my voice to gather his sheep? Do you let God use you to gather all of the sheep that the Good

Shepherd has laid his life down for? I quoted John MacArthur a few months back and I think his words bear repeating. They're a little bit harsh, they do bear repeating. MacArthur says, "Sometimes you hear this phrase: 'Preach the gospel, and if you must, use words.'" And then he said, "I don't know who said that and I don't want to attribute it to the wrong person because it's so stupid." Here's what he said, he said, "You cannot preach the gospel without words. It is a lie to think otherwise. Preach the gospel and always use words." Verse 27: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."* I think sometimes what puts us off is we think, well, you know, I didn't study theology and I don't really know all the details of all of this stuff and it's -- understand, the gospel is not complicated. God is holy; man is fallen; Jesus came to rescue his sheep, and you need to respond. That's the gospel. Anybody can say that. You know, we do the speaking, God gives the hearing. He laid his life down for the sheep and he gives us the privilege and the responsibility of speaking that. So take a moment to ask yourself, have I been the voice that the Good Shepherd is seeking?

1 Corinthians, the 11th chapter, the 25th verse says: *In the same*

manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." So take and drink.

This is the part that I call head, heart, and feet, the part where we try to have some practical application of what it is that we have been speaking of, what it means to remember Jesus Christ, and I want to start out first with a very practical semi-announcement. It's just to remind you all that next month we have a baptism coming up. If you've ever thought about the idea of being baptized, if you haven't been baptized, this is the time to consider it, meet with me, I'd love to discuss it with you, and it's an incredible public declaration of whose side you're on. It's something that we do in obedience to Christ's command. So if you have any thoughts about this idea of baptism, speak to me. We have some folks that are interested, we'd love to see everyone who has not been baptized who knows Jesus Christ to do this in obedience to him. And I just want to have a couple other statements that I want to make about this idea of the voice and sharing the good news. You know, C. S. Lewis, he said one thing that's unique about human beings that has to do with the job that we have, and our job is to spread the gospel. He said we are the only creature whose pleasure in experiencing something is completed by sharing it. You know, what he said is if you rounded a corner

in the Arizona desert and you saw a spectacular sunset, it would be great, it would be wonderful, but how much more would you be able to enjoy that sunset simply by being able to say to somebody next to you, "Check this out! Look at that!" There's no other creature like that. There's no other creature that wants to share good news with somebody else. I often said, you know, if you had a dog and you gave him a steak, do you think he's going to take half of it and say, "Oh, I've going to bring this down to a poodle down the road. He's going to think that's fabulous." It's never going to happen. No creature is like us. So we have innately built into us the desire to share good news. I think one of the things that you can see in that is You Tube and these things that go viral. You know, there was just a little thing about a little girl crying over a little baby brother growing up and it got 8 zillion hits because people love to share good news. They love to share good things. We have the ultimate good news. There is no better news than the news that we have to share. But we also have an enemy who is the ruler of this world, who controls the media of this world and controls the attitudes that pervade the media of this world and controls much of the perception that people have of what that good news is all about. We love to tell people about the secret of eternal life and they say, "Don't lay that stuff on me. I don't want it." They don't want to hear it. And so we are faced with this -- this conundrum, what do we do, how in the world do we work

through the best news you could possibly have, the news that we really want to share, news that nobody wants to hear? And there's two different ways -- two -- there's two thousand different ways to do it, and I appreciate people who are street preachers and just go out and belt it out. That takes a lot of courage. And most of us are not called to be street preachers, I believe. But there's an overused word that I think is very important to understand this idea about giving voice to the gospel, and it's that word "intentionality." Intentionality means that you actually have it in your head that I'm here to share the good news, that I'm looking for opportunities, and if I don't find them, I will patiently by the Holy Spirit's power create circumstances in which those opportunities can happen. I gave the example and I've used it before, but I think it's brilliant. CJ Mahaney describes simply the act of getting a cup of coffee every day. He goes to Starbucks every day and he loves Starbucks coffee. He said I just intentionally in my mind decided I'll go to the same Starbucks, I'll pick the same waitress, I'll start the same conversation over and over and over again, hoping for and leading towards the Holy Spirit giving him an opportunity. And so you know, every time he walks in, the barrister or the waitress or whoever says, "How are you doing?" And he says, "Better than I deserve." You say that over and over and over, you say that 2- or 300 times, and maybe it takes a year, and maybe there's a spare moment where somebody says,

"Why do you say that?" Bingo. Somebody absolutely is sitting there waiting to hear your explanation of why you believe that your life is better than you deserve. What I mean by "intentionality" is that you look at the entire world around you as a mission field. And you look at your place in this world as fitting in uniquely wherever it is you are seeking out opportunities to give voice to the gospel. And that doesn't mean backing somebody into a corner and jamming a tract down his mouth. It means being sensitive to the Holy Spirit and having in your heart a desire to share. I think our problem is not so much technique, our problem is the heart, it's not in there, or it's not in there to the extent that it needs to be there. And if you don't have a heart to see the rest of the world as literally on their way to hell, then you don't have the right heart. If you don't have the right heart, there's a solution to that. You just call on God. David said, create in me a new heart, a clean heart. You can ask God for the desire to have that, and once you have that, the intentionality just -- it goes in a thousand different directions, whatever way you want it to go. Lord, you pray, give me the opportunity to present the good news to whomever, at school, at work, at Wal-Mart, anywhere. And the more sensitive you are, the more desirous you are, the more you have in your heart the desire to share that good news, the more opportunities you're going to suddenly find God giving you. So I would just conclude this morning by praying for

all of us that God gives us a heart that is passionate about sharing the good news, a heart that wants to be able to give voice, to gather the sheep. And so I pray if we don't have that heart, we would have that heart, and having had that heart, that we would be intentional about how we go about sharing that good news. Let's pray.

*Father, I just -- again, there's no better news in the universe than that there is a solution to sin, that there is the secret to eternal life in the blood of Jesus Christ shed for us. And Father, we have this situation where we have the best news there is and we have ears that don't want to hear it at all, and so I pray that you would give us, first of all, hearts that seek to deliver this news. I know that years and years of rejection and feeling the pressure and feeling the culture that is so against this news, can tend to dull our hearts, can tend to make us content, to be silenced. I think of what Nik Ripken said in his book *The Insanity of God*, he said persecution is completely optional, and no matter where you are in the world, you don't need to be persecuted if you simply keep your mouth shut. If you say nothing about Jesus, nothing will happen to you. But that's not what God has called us to. God has called us to open our mouths, to share the good news, and yes, maybe to experience some kind of persecution. Now in this country, Lord, we know that persecution is nothing compared to what it's*

like in the rest of the world, but yet often times we recoil at that, and so I pray for each and every one of us that you would give us a heart of boldness, a heart that wants to share the good news, and that you give to each of us your Holy Spirit's wisdom and the intentionality of seeking out opportunities, venues, circumstances, where we can deliver the news. Give us the heart, give us the wisdom, give us the ability to share, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.