

Topical Message
By Faith, Not Works
Pastor Leitu

KAPONO: Your word is the most valuable thing, Lord, that we could possess in these times. So would Your living word strengthen us, Lord? Would we be encouraged, Lord? Would You speak to us through this message, Lord? We thank You for Pastor Leitu

[Applause]

who's back in the pulpit, Lord. Would You help him to stand figuratively, literally, and spiritually and continue to do Your work? We ask this in the mighty name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

[Congregation says, "Amen!"]

[Applause]

PASTOR LEITU: Aloha!

[Congregation says, "Aloha!"]

On behalf of Pastor JD Farag, Merry Christmas.

[Congregation says, "Merry Christmas!"]

Oh, man, You guys sound like — come on. Merry Christmas!

[Congregation says, "Merry Christmas!"]

PASTOR LEITU: Amen! You here in the sanctuary and you online, we welcome you to Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe, and our Thursday night Bible study. Pastor JD is on staycation and spending time with his family. Please keep them in prayer for strength for him and his family as well.

Our next prayer meeting will be January 9th at 7:00 p.m. here in the sanctuary. Pastor JD will be returning and leading us in prayer that night. We hope that you'll be able to join us.

Tonight I'll be teaching in the Book of Galatians. It's a book that the Lord put on my heart to teach. But before we start, why don't we bow our heads in prayer?

Father in heaven, we come before You. We thank You for Your word. We love Your word, Lord. We thank You, Lord, that You teach us all things through Your word. And so we come before You this evening, Lord, to praise You, to thank You. We never forget the cross, Lord.

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We never forget what You did for us. We always ask forgiveness for our sins, that You had to initiate the cross and send Your Son.

And Lord, we're so thankful at the same time, Lord. We regret, Lord Jesus, the pain that we put You through. And we thank You, Holy Spirit, that You're in us, and leading and guiding us, that You sealed us, and that we belong to You. So I come before You to thank You for what You're going to teach us tonight through Your word. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Paul the Apostle is the writer of this amazing epistle. In the New Testament, there's 27 books. Paul wrote 13 of them. He wrote the *Book of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians*, as well as *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. He also wrote the pastoral epistles of *1 and 2 Timothy*, finally, his last two books, *Titus and Philemon*.

As we study Galatians, if you don't know Paul by now, you will. Paul's story is like many of ours. His encounter with Jesus is like many of our stories, a testimony of God's tremendous power to transform a life, how a persecutor of the Christian Church became a follower. On the road to Damascus, he met the risen Lord. His life would never be the same. As we near Christmas, we're reminded of the greatest gift: Jesus and the good news of salvation. We remember the day when we first believed, and we said yes to Him.

I remember the day and the joy of our hearts when we got saved. The Holy Spirit entered our lives. We didn't even know it. Later, we learned that the Holy Spirit came in and He sealed us. We're set apart from the world. He separated us from this world. And we now belong to Jesus. We no longer obey the dictates of the world, but we follow Christ.

We're so grateful for the blessings of our new life as Christians. As we attend church, we're encouraged to read the Bible. Here at Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe, we learn expositional teaching. We learn verse-by-verse chapter-by-chapter, and book-by-book through the entirety of the Scriptures. We learn about the scriptures and their historical settings. We also learn how to apply these truths into our lives.

As we learn and grow, we never forget God's love for us, that He will give His only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ. We never forget His miraculous, incarnate birth, that He is fully God and fully human. We never forget the Lord's sacrifice on the cross.

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And we so appreciate and never forget the ransom that was paid for us. He died so that we can have a life of joy and peace here on earth, that even when chaos and trials come our way, we can rest. We rest because we stand on solid rock, a rock of Jesus Christ.

We also have that assurance, a promise from God of heaven, that one day we'll be with Him. And when our time is done here on Earth, we go home. Whether by death or rapture, Heaven is our destiny.

So we can't wait to go and share the Gospel. And we couldn't wait to tell others about Jesus. So too these Galatian believers had the same experience. The Apostle Paul went to Galatia on his first missionary trip. He would proclaim the Gospel message, the good news that you could be saved, saved from the consequences of your sin.

People were getting saved and set free from the guilt that they carried with them. Like us, they know they are promised heaven by God. They know about hell, so they're so thankful for the Savior. They were set free from the religions that bound them in chains. And the Galatians had so much to be thankful for. While there, Paul and Barnabas also started churches. Jews who practiced Judaism all their lives even converted; even hardcore religious Pharisees believed in Jesus.

Gentiles were being saved from their idolatry and false religions. They became a new person with a new heart and a new attitude. They experienced the joy of a sincere relationship with God. He took up residence and was now their teacher and their guide. The Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth. They're under new ownership, and that of Jesus Christ. Yes, they're in the world, but they no longer belong to the world.

They're new believers, especially these new Gentile believers. They were impressionable though, and they could be easily influenced. So in walks these false teachers with their false teachings. These men followed Paul everywhere he went. They would try to discredit and attack Paul. They would infiltrate the church that Paul started.

As we read on, we'll meet these men who opposed Paul, misguided teachers from the Bible called Judaizers They would attempt to abolish the Gospel message as well. They would spread their false doctrine. Sadly, people would listen. They would only confuse those new believers in Christ.

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Sadly, many Galatian believers stumbled in their walk. They were fooled and believed — they were fooled, and they were believing these Judaizers. Many would believe the propaganda that these men brought. Confused Jewish converts would go back to Judaism. These false teachers would lead them back into bondage. They were free. Now they're going back to bondage.

They taught that faith alone in Jesus Christ was insufficient, insufficient for salvation and sanctification. Gentiles walked away as they were given false information. They were told they had to convert to Judaism to be saved, that they had to be circumcised in order to receive salvation.

You know, things haven't changed much in 2000 years since Christ. The enemy still stumbles believers in their walk with the Lord. Sadly, many believers fall away from faith in Christ and go back to the world and get beat up again. That's why it's so important to know the Scriptures.

When you learn the truth of the Bible, it steadies you. You become rooted like a tree planted by a river. You're growing in soil, and your roots are sunk in deep, deep into the solid rock, the rock who is Jesus. You now understand God's amazing grace. You understand that God chose you before you were even born, that He will never leave you nor forsake you.

You understand that no matter the circumstances of your life, even when a trial comes, it doesn't shake you. God will work everything out for your good and His glory, that He will continue to work mightily in you and through you. Most of all, you know that heaven will be your abode.

2 Timothy Chapter 3:16-17 tells us, **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”**

We know that Jesus is the Word, that He was with God, and that the Word, Jesus, is God. He did many miracles that amazed multitudes. Many wanted to join and be part of His ministry. But Jesus was teaching some tough lessons that were tough to swallow for many of these followers. That's why many left as they thought it too difficult to follow Him.

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So Jesus asked the 12 that were left. As Peter confessed, “Who else would we go to for answers?” And we see that in *John Chapter 6:67-69*. **“Then Jesus said to the 12, 'Do you also want to go away?' But Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' “**

Only Jesus has the words of life. You can only know this when you know His word, the Bible. Then when you see your brother or sister fall, you can help them. Many Galatians had turned away from the Gospel. They would continue to listen to those who misled them.

Yet Paul and Barnabas: they never gave up. They never gave up on those who were leaving. They kept trying to bring them back. Yes, that was the character of these Christian men who cared for their brothers and sisters.

James Chapter 5: 19-20, tells us, **“My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back, you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.”**

Should there ever be an opportunity to bring a soul back, a friend of yours, maybe a family member, maybe a coworker has walked away from the Lord, back to his relationship with the Lord, I pray that you will go forward and speak the truth in love.

These Judaizers would constantly challenge Paul. We know that God knows, and He'll have His way. Whether these were truly saved men or not, only God knows.

But people are in danger of not making it to Heaven. Jews were stuck in their works-type relationship with God by doing good works and especially obeying God's law. Paul knew that no one could ever be saved by the Ten Commandments. Paul knew this was the mindset of the Jews in Judaism. After all, he was a Pharisee himself.

Paul cared for those who were abandoning Jesus. They were in danger, and there was no other way to heaven. All religions in the world follow this same misguided belief.

Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus: They all trust in their works and their deeds for deliverance, whether it be Heaven, Nirvana Valhalla, or Happy Valley.

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Different religions claim they're on the right path. None of these religions can get you to heaven, though.

That's not what I say and preach. But this is what God says in His word. Their philosophies are so opposed to each other. Buddhists say that by doing good deeds and living a faultless life, you can receive Nirvana. The Bible tells us that we're all sinners. None of us have ever lived a faultless life. Only Jesus.

In Hinduism, you're reincarnated and return in a different form. Salvation can be achieved by works, knowledge, and devotion. In Islam and Judaism, salvation is attained by your good deeds and following the moral law. All have one thing in common: It's based on man's efforts.

How can you tell who's telling the truth? I submit to you that only in Christianity is a path to salvation. Different: God, not man, provides the way of salvation by what He did. God so loved the world that He sent His Son who became a man, came down to earth to give His life as a sacrifice. All God wants from us is to, by faith, believe.

Unlike other religions, God doesn't require perfection from us. He knows that it would be an impossible task for us. God gave us the only path to Heaven in His word. And that path goes through His son Jesus Christ.

John 10:9-10 tells us, **"I am the door. [Jesus speaking] If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have life more abundantly."**

God's way eliminates all manmade philosophies that God hates, a philosophy that God considers to be filthy in His eyes. God speaks to Isaiah the prophet of His displeasure, His disapproval of man's efforts to gain salvation.

Isaiah Chapter 64:4-6 tells us, **"For since the world began, no ear has heard, and no eye has seen a God like you who works for those who wait for Him. You welcome those who gladly do good, who follow godly ways. But You have been very angry with us, for we are not godly. We are constant sinners. How can people like us be saved? We are all infected**

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and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind.”

Isaiah says righteous deeds works salvation offends God because it's based on man's achievements for redemption. Isaiah says that man's display of good works is as filthy rags to Him. In Hebrew, these rags are the rags of a woman. That's what God thinks of these false man-made religions.

Isaiah also says in Chapter 57:12, **“Now I will expose your so-called good deeds. None of them will help you.”**

Why isn't salvation based on our good works? Why can't we receive salvation from good works and good deeds? The short answer is our works tend to develop religious pride. What does this religious pride look like? We take the works we did for God and pride can set in. With our smug attitude, we parade our works as a banner.

The tendency is to look at others with an air of superiority. We look at others as lesser because they are not as spiritual as us. They look at you and ask, “What have you done for God lately?” God's Word tells us that He hates pride. So God's way of salvation eliminates the potential for pride.

In *1 John Chapter 2:16*, **“For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh, and the desires of the eyes, and pride of life is not from the Father but is from the world.”**

Proverbs 26:12 tells us, **“Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is no more hope for a fool than for him.”**

Psalms 10:4 tells us, **“In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek Him. All his thoughts are, 'There is no God.' “**

Proverbs 16:18 tells us, “Pride goes before a fall and destruction...” — excuse me — **“Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.”**

In *Luke Chapter 18*, Jesus illustrates this point beautifully. He compares a self-righteous Pharisee to a tax collector. Pride blinds the Pharisee to his true condition. The tax collector recognizes his sinful state. The Pharisee stands tall and proud. The tax collector bows low. This emphasizes God's rejection of man's self-made efforts at salvation.

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Luke 18:9-14 tells us, **“Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: Two men went to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people— cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’**

“But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Paul says to the Judaizers of that day and to us today, salvation is by faith alone, apart from the works of the law. Paul wanted to drive that message home concerning salvation. It is by faith in Jesus Christ and the finished work on the cross.

Besides the hurdles of religion, Paul had to defend his calling. The Judaizers didn't recognize his call as an apostle, so they tried to discredit him as well as the Gospel message. As always, God will have His way and will use Paul. Paul's life story is so inspirational for me because he was like me, unsaved and headed for hell. But God chose him and changed him, and the rest is history.

So let's pick it up in *verse 1, Chapter 1:1. Galatians Chapter 1:1-2*, **“Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead, and all the brethren who are with me: To the churches of Galatia...”**

Paul goes on the offensive and attacks the false narrative. Paul heard all the rampant rumors and speculation. Many within the new Christian church opposed Paul. The Judaizers were those leading this pack.

Some were former Pharisees who now believed in Jesus. They attacked his calling as an apostle. Some were even questioning his Gospel message for Judaizers had difficulty letting go of Judaism. They were raised from childhood in this religion. It had to have been

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challenging as their minds were set, set in the traditions and practices they knew from their birth.

In this letter, Paul starts his defense by going on offense First, it wasn't by man that he was called to be an apostle. His calling came directly from God. He says his appointment as an apostle came from Jesus Christ. His approval also came from God the Father and not man.

In *Acts Chapter 9*, we see a Pharisee named Saul. This is Paul before he was saved. After his conversion, he used his Greek name, Paul. But in Scripture, we see God not only changing heart attitudes, we also see Him making name changes: From Abraham to Abram, excuse me, from Abram to Abraham, from Sarai to Sarah, Yacob to Israel. The name change signified a new relationship with God.

So Saul is headed to Damascus to hunt down Christians. And on the way, he's knocked off his high horse. It's Saul's first encounter with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, says, **“Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”** Terrified and trembling, Saul asked Jesus what should he do. Jesus tells him to go into the city and he'll be instructed.

Meanwhile, the Lord calls Ananias to go to Straight Street. There he will find Saul of Tarsus, who is praying. Jesus tells Ananias to lay his hand on Saul so he can see. And Ananias is hesitant as he knows Saul's reputation, that he's been hunting Christians and putting them to death.

He answers Jesus in *Acts Chapter 9:13-14*. **“But Lord,” exclaimed Ananias, “I’ve heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon Your name.”**

Jesus tells Ananias not to be afraid and answers him. He answers him in *Acts Chapter 9:15-16*. **“But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”**

Paul was born Saul in the city of Tarsus, present-day Turkey. His parents were Jewish and possessed Roman citizenship. Roman citizenship carried with it many coveted benefits in that day. Paul's Roman citizenship greatly benefited him during his life. We know Paul used

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it to enable him to get to Rome. While in Rome, he would boldly share the Gospel. From Rome, the Gospel spread around the world rapidly.

You know the Romans built an expansive highway. A highway was built in the countries that Rome had conquered. At the time, Rome had conquered the whole known world. They used these highways to mobilize the military quickly. If there was a rebellion in the kingdom, the army would quickly mobilize to that country and stop that uprising. It also benefited the financial markets as trade routes.

Rome became powerful and wealthy using these highways. But God used these roads to spread the Gospel to the world. So Paul gets to Rome, preaches the good news. These highways enable the Gospel to spread quickly, and the Gospel spread like wildfire.

Acts Chapter 22:3 tells us, **“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.”**

As a youth, Paul's parents moved to Jerusalem in Israel. Paul was a zealot, meaning he was devoted to Judaism. There he studied under Rabbi Gamaliel.

Gamaliel was one of the most influential rabbis of the time. Paul was one of Gamaliel's brightest students. He was at the top of his class academically as well as religiously. Gamaliel couldn't keep Paul equipped with enough books. Paul was a ferocious reader, and he knew the Torah well. Gamaliel mentored him and was an extremely wise teacher.

Gamaliel is mentioned in the *Book of Acts Chapter 5:34-39*. I want to share this account of Gamaliel and his wisdom. First, here's the back story. Jesus has been crucified and taken to heaven. The Apostles receive the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Everywhere they go, they boldly share the Gospel. The Lord has given them the gift and power to heal. Jewish leaders warned the Apostles not to speak about Jesus. They disobeyed because they feared God more than they feared man. They were imprisoned, but God's angel would free them. He would go back and start preaching in public again.

And this infuriated the High Council. They wanted to put these godly men to death. Then Gamaliel, a wise rabbi and Jewish leader, spoke. They had no religious background or

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schooling, yet they're boldly proclaiming Jesus and performing miracles. Gamaliel and these leaders know that these men had been with Jesus.

And this is what Gamaliel said in *Acts Chapter 5:34-39*. **“But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while.**

Then he said to his colleagues, “Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.

[Verse 38] **“So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!”**

We see the wisdom from above that Gamaliel possessed. These religious leaders were fighting against God. This prophetic statement in *verse 39* was a reality. Today, Jesus still answers lives and people are transformed. Over 2000 years ago, people have proclaiming His name. People all over the world are still getting saved.

Maybe you're listening and watching, and you're not yet saved. You know, this would be a good time to call on Jesus for help. Don't be hard hearted and continue fighting with God. The Jewish leaders were so proud and stiff-necked. They not only heard but saw many miracles that Jesus did. They missed out on a changed life filled with joy. They missed out on a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They missed out on the amazing grace they would've experienced. They let greed, power, and position get in their way. They cherished evil, and in the process, lost their soul.

Matthew Chapter 16:24-26 tells us, **“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For**

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what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

You know, just call on Jesus, and He will hear you and transform your life. You'll never be the same. And you finally get to know God and meet God. You may be empty and have searched all your life for peace. You may not have known it was God that you were searching for. But now you've discovered the purpose for why you exist: To love and worship God who created and sustains you. Don't wait; just call on Jesus, and He will hear, and He will save you.

Paul in *verse 2*, says his brothers were with him. I have friends in the world who I was very close to. I reached out to them so that they might be saved.

You know, it's a challenge to reach friends who knew you from your days in the world. Some of you know my back story and know my history as an alcoholic. I got saved and became a follower of Jesus Christ 23 years ago. And I have been alcohol-free ever since then. But now I have brothers in Christ who are closer friends. We have this in common. We've had an encounter with Jesus. Our whole purpose to worship and serve the Lord, to love, serve, and share the good news with our neighbor.

You know — departing from my notes. I hate to do that because I get in trouble. But I love to see when the brothers and sisters in Christ here who so loved the world. And there's Bible studies. There's guys out here in Kahalu'u by the park. They're reaching out to the homeless there. And I love to see the work that they're doing, but I love to see the love that they have for themselves, the love that they have for brothers, and how they work together and how they have that thing in common, Jesus Christ. Amen.

As a new believer, I was attending Calvary Chapel, Honolulu. I remember the men that God had led me to. They were walking with the Lord and had a strong testimony. We had a small group Bible study every Thursday night because Wednesday was our midweek. Our wives came with us, and we always had food and fellowship, Calorie Chapel, Honolulu.

I was growing in the things of the Lord, and they helped me. I remember one day we were sitting in Eagle Cafe in town. It was a slow day at the restaurant, and we lost all track of time. We talked about Jesus, and we had an awesome time.

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5 hours later, we finally realized what time it was. We made sure that we left that waitress had really good tip. Talking about the things of the Lord goes by so quickly. One day we'll be with Him for eternity. Amen. But until then, it's good to have brothers to encourage you, brothers, and sisters to encourage you in your walk.

Paul the Apostle had such a brother in Timothy. We read in *Philippians Chapter 2:20-22*, Paul speaking, **“I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ. But you know how Timothy has proved himself. Like a son with his father, he has served with me in preaching the Good News.”**

Paul mentioned Timothy, who was a young man who loved God. He was preparing him for what the Lord had called him to do. Like Paul, he also cared very much for people. He also had great respect and love for his mentor, Paul.

I've been serving the Lord with Pastor JD here for 19 years now. Many of you know his story of how God raised him up, that all his life, the Lord was preparing him for ministry. He was an Arab-Egyptian born in Beirut, Lebanon. We know that Lebanon today is a Muslim nation. JD's parents were Christians living in a Muslim world.

His Christian parents legally immigrated to the United States. They also left the religious persecution that they were experiencing. He was a baby, and his parents wanted a better life. The Lord was planning a far-reaching ministry through JD's life. God brought adversity, and the family moved to Spokane, Washington.

We know that Pastor JD never attended college or seminary. He got saved in an unusual way at age 19. He woke up hungover from the party from the night before. Tired of the worldly lifestyle, he called out to Jesus for help. The Lord heard his plea and rescued him. He found a church in Washington called Calvary Chapel, Spokane.

He had a great mentor in Pastor Ken Ortize who is still the pastor of that church. He worked at a car dealership and started serving at church. He also volunteered to serve as an elder on the board. He also served with the Christian Financial Services. He would help church members with their financial needs.

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He taught Bible studies outside the church at his business. Businessmen came from all over the area, and they got saved, people who would have never stepped into a church.

While serving a church, the Lord sent a helpmeet for him. Kellie Lynn was a beautiful redhead from Hawaii. She flew to Washington State to visit her sister in Spokane. Her sister was playing basketball at Gonzaga University. Kellie was a young believer. She had just gotten saved.

And the Lord sent her to Calvary Chapel, Spokane, where she just so happened to meet Pastor JD Farag. They met and married, but for a long time they couldn't have kids. So JD made a promise to God that he'd — that he's kept all these years: That if God would give him a son, he would sell his business, that he would devote himself to the ministry as a pastor. God heard that promise and gave him a son, the first of four children.

And so JD kept his promise to God. JD started his first church in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Like Paul, the apostle JD had a mentor in his pastor, and like Paul, God was teaching, growing, and readying JD.

Like Paul, JD was called by Jesus Christ and God the Father. Man did not call Paul the Apostle nor JD to the ministry. This was God's plan for them before both of them were even born. JD's seminary wasn't a college of divinity. It was from hands-on experience, daily walking with the Lord, daily reading and studying the word of God, serving all day on Sunday and midweek studies at church, serving in Elders' meetings during the week, helping church members with their finances, helping his pastor wherever there was a need, all the time growing in the things of the Lord.

We remember the apostles who were with Jesus. None of them were educated, but God used them mightily. There were all on fire for the Lord, and they had Jesus as their teacher, just as JD has the Holy Spirit as his.

We're blessed that the Lord sent him and his family to Hawaii. Amen. And the first time I met, or I set foot in Calvary Chapel, Kaneohe 19 years ago I knew God was going to do a work in this little church. There was only 15 of us. 20 years later, it's a worldwide ministry. We're now meeting in a large, beautiful church here in Hawaii.

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Being with JD for all these years, I know his heart. Even he is amazed how the Lord has used his life. He's learned to stay out of God's way and let God do the work.

Right now, he's going through a difficult time in his life. He's announced that his wife Kellie has cancer. She's been a great helpmeet for Pastor JD. She's been supportive of him and the demands of ministry. She loves the Lord, and she knows the scriptures as well. He's pleading for us to help him by praying for her healing. She's not asking for anything other than prayer.

On behalf of JD and Kellie Farag, I would like to thank all of you here in the sanctuary and you online for praying for this family, especially for Kellie at this time.

Galatians Chapter 1:3-5 tells us, **“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”**

In *verse 3*, we see Paul's usual greeting in his epistles: grace and peace, “the Siamese twins,” Pastor Chuck would always say. I'm referring to Pastor Chuck Smith, who started the Calvary Chapels in the 1960s. Today, there's Calvary Chapels all over the world.

It's important to understand the word “grace.” God's grace is His favor, given to us who don't deserve it. Grace is the basis for which He saves us. It's His unmerited favor towards us, even while in our sins.

The merit system is something to work, to achieve. The Boy Scouts have a Merit Badge achievement award. His grace is something we can't earn by working for it. It's a gift that's freely given us to by God. His loving kindness is amazing to those of us who know it. His grace allows Him to forgive our many sins when we put our faith and belief in His son Jesus for salvation.

Ephesians Chapter 2:1-5 tells us, **“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.”**

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All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature, we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in His mercy. He loved us so much that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead.

It is only by grace that you have been saved. Grace comes from the Father and the Son Jesus Christ. And knowing that grace is a gift from God, that we don't deserve it, we remember what Jesus did for us on the cross, that He died for us while we were still rebellious towards Him, and that He forgives us of our past, our present, and our future sins. The understanding of His grace will bring us peace. And we can understand His grace now that we have peace with Him.

That's why Paul, in all of his epistles, grace is first, then peace. *Galatians Chapter 1:6-7* tells us, **“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different Gospel, which is not another. But there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ.”**

I love to see new believers and their first moments of salvation. The Holy Spirit has come inside, and they don't know it. They just know that they're saved and they're going to heaven. They might not know about sanctification or change life. Right now they feel different, and their confidence is giddy. And they want to go out and tell family and friends about Jesus. But rejected by family and friends, they press on.

I can remember the day that I got saved. The first thing I did was I went to work as a longshoreman, a stevedore, working with all these (Makes a grimacing face) And we belonged to a gang. And there were 13 of us in a gang. And we were working autos. We were — we were driving automobiles off of huge ships down at the docks.

And the first thing they asked me was, “Leitu, where we going to go drinking tonight?” I was the leader — I was — those were the old days.

And then I shared with them, “You know what? I no longer do that.”

And they go, “What? What's the matter with you?” And they were actually angry at me because I was the one that led them to the bars.

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[Laughter]

And they were really, really very angry. And so I shared Jesus Christ with them, 13 of them. And you should've seen the look on their faces. And then I went to a family get-together, and I shared the Gospel with my family. And one of my family members said, "Leitu, don't bring that stuff around here." And so....

Paul the Apostle experienced God's grace firsthand. He felt the blinding power of the Holy Spirit that had changed him. He knows what it means to be zealous towards a religion, but now he knows the joy and the truth of a relationship with God. Paul knows the blessings that come from salvation in Jesus.

He's taught these new believers the Gospel. He's taught them that Jesus gives them a new life. Many had lifestyles and bad habits that needed changing. That happened when they received the Gospel. Paul would instruct them to let the Holy Spirit change them. He would also mentor many to grow in their walk with God.

In *Ephesians Chapter 4:17-27*, **"Since you heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from Him, throw off your old nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature created to be like God, truly righteous and holy."**

You know, Paul loved and cherished the Galatian churches that he started. So yes, he's astonished that they would willingly abandon God. God's footprints were revealed to them in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, yet they're willing to go back following a godless religion. They were gullible and did not consult Paul after leaving.

The fear of man would turn these believers aside to follow a lie. And the Judaizers followed Paul on his journeys with an agenda. They wanted to destroy Paul's ministry and discredit the Gospel.

You know, I can remember acquaintances who were former Christians. It broke my heart that they shared that they were Mormons. Jeannie and I spent two years in that cult. We were attending a Mormon church here in Kaneohe for two years. We're blessed that the Lord led us away. Amen.

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Jeremiah tells us in Chapter 2:12-13, **“The heavens are shocked at such a thing and shrink back in horror and dismay,”** says the Lord. **“For My people have done two evil things: They have abandoned Me— the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!”**

In Jeremiah's day, the people had abandoned God. They had followed after the idols of the Gentiles. Cisterns were used to capture water and to store it. If there was a crack in the cistern, they would lose the water. So instead of storing water in these cisterns, they would use it for graves. And like the cracked cisterns that can't hold any water, so too was the false theology and teaching of these Judaizers.

Galatians were returning back to a graveyard of dead religion, to a joyless religion based on tradition and rituals. The good news was truly good news, but still people left. The Judaizers were successful in perverting the Gospel.

It broke Paul's heart to see people turn away from God, just as it breaks our hearts to see that. In our day, it's sad to see Christians break away as well. I rest and know — I rest that God knows who belongs to Him.

John Chapter 10:23-30 tells us, **“He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon’s Colonnade. The people surrounded Him and asked, “How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”** Jesus replied, **“I have already told you, and you don’t believe Me. The proof is the work I do in My Father’s name.**

But you don’t believe Me because you are not My sheep. My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from Me, for my Father has given them to Me, and He is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

Jesus tells us that no one can snatch us away from Him. What a great feeling of assurance of God's great love for us. And so Christmas can be such a great time for believers. We remember the reason for the season, the birth of Jesus Christ.

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But for too many Christians, Christmas can be a difficult time. Your circumstances may be such that you have no joy. Maybe your financial situation makes it difficult to buy gifts. Maybe family pressures are getting to you. It's difficult to be around course jokes and the flowing alcohol. Perhaps you agonize that wayward child who is lost. Maybe your breakup with your spouse is eating you up inside.

Maybe you've wandered away from your walk with the Lord. You were once on fire for the things of God. But it's gone. For whatever reason, you feel the Lord is not with you. You feel like He's a million miles away from you.

Isaiah Chapter 41:13 tells us, **“For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you.”**

Isaiah speaks to the Jews of his day, but he also speaks to us today. When we walk a child across the street, we never let a child take hold of our hand, right? Amen. We always take a child's hand into ours so they can't let go.

God, through Isaiah, tells us that He will never let us go because He takes our hand in His so we can't let go. We may think He's abandoned or forgotten about us. Please know there's nothing further from the truth in that.

Like the Galatians whom the false teachers had deceived, don't let the enemy fill your heads with lies this Christmas. Instead pray and recalibrate your focus on Jesus. Show up at your family and friends' functions, love on those in your family who you want to be saved, those friends who you've been trying to reach for years.

So you can't bring a present because you can't afford one. Your presence to your family and friends are more precious than any gift that you can bring. Shine the light of Jesus to your family and friends. Shine by the love and grace that you give. They're watching your life because they need hope. By your actions, share the Gospel. And if you have to, use words.

I pray that if you're experiencing a breakup in your marriage, read and meditate *Ephesians Chapter 5:22-33*. Wives, submit to the authority of your husbands. Husbands, love and treat your wives as Jesus does us. He loved and gave His life for us on a cross as a sacrifice. Husbands, sacrifice for your wife, and she will respect you.

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Both of you should ponder and reflect on your conduct. Forgive each other and make this Christmas a joy. If you have kids, they're anxiously waiting for your healing. Their future hangs on whether grace abounds in you or not.

Maybe you've fallen away from the Lord, and you miss Him. You're not sure if God loves you or wants you back. Jesus said in *John Chapter 6:37*, **“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me, I will never cast out.”**

Philippians Chapter 4:8-9, **“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”**

And finally, if you're not saved and you want to be saved, just call on Jesus. If you want Him to come back in your life, talk to Him. Don't wait. Because He's waiting for you. Like Pastor JD, he just called on the Lord. Nobody led him in a prayer. He just said, “Jesus, I need you.” He'll hear you. And He'll save you. Amen.

[Congregation says, “Amen!”]

Why don't we stand? And let's pray.

Father in heaven we come before Your throne and thank You, Lord. We know that the reason for the season is to remember the birth of Your son Jesus Christ. Lord, we love You. We love Your son.

And we love Your Holy Spirit who is in us and leading us and guide us. Lord, we pray for those who have fallen away from the Lord, who maybe once knew You, and maybe they've heard speech from someone. Now they've left You.

Lord, I come before Your throne, and I know that the Word says that You never leave us nor forsake us. I pray for them that they would come back, that they make this Christmas season a season of restoration, of healing. And so I come before You, Lord, to just thank You, Lord, for Your love, Your mercy, and Your great and awesome grace.

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You are God, and there is no other. We praise You, and we worship You, and lift You on high. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.