

- God is always doing so much that we don't see
- Used to say "one church in multiple locations"—even more true now
- Title: Moving to the Middle
 - This is important & relevant because there have not been many times in American history when we have been more divided
 - We are divided in culture
 - We are divided in church
 - It's hard, because I have friends and family who are all of the above
- These divides are not isolated to our culture; they're reflected in Jesus' time and culture as well
 - **Mark 12:13-17**
 - Context: taxes, Pharisees, supporters of Herod
 - The Pharisees and the supporters of Herod are divided, but they both feel so threatened by Jesus that they're working together to trap him by choosing a side
- We are constantly being pressured to choose a side
 - It's so much easier to choose a side than to move to the middle
 - No one really likes the middle
- Illustration: moving out of frame
 - Every time I choose a side, I also lose a side
 - Last few weeks have illustrated this: review, how this is connected
- We see redemptive potential in every moment: enduring hardship, but living with hope
 - **James 1:2-4** *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*
- We do whatever it takes to pursue our God-given potential: accept people as they are, but invite them into something greater
 - **Romans 15:14-15** *I am fully convinced, my dear brothers and sisters, that you are full of goodness. You know these things so well you can teach each other all about them. Even so, I have been bold enough to write about some of these points, knowing that all you need is this reminder.*
- We do what's right, because it is what love requires: motivated by truth, but moderated by love
 - **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** *If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love*

others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

- How to Love People: we like them, stick with them, encourage them, respect them...
 - ...but sometimes loving people means challenging them, or establishing boundaries (empathetic but not enabling)
 - **Jude 1:22-23** *And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.*
- So what am I supposed to do?
- We want to reduce love to a principle we can follow, or a rule we can apply... but you cannot love without God
 - Love isn't a principle; it's a person
 - **1 John 4:16-17** *God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect...*
 - God is love: love is defined by him, not by you or me
 - **Galatians 5:24-25** *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.*
 - In every situation/relationship, we have to learn to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did
- Sometimes we do need to choose a side: Peter denying Jesus
 - Moving to the middle doesn't mean we let go of truth, it means we hold on to people
 - **Romans 12:9-18**
- Jesus does this: "Show me a Roman coin... whose picture and title are stamped on it?"
 - Ancient coins were believed to actually be the property of whoever's image was inscribed on them
 - Verse 17: "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God."
 - The coins bore Caesar's image, but what has God's image been inscribed upon?
- **Genesis 1:26** *Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us."*
 - You belong to God, and the only way to resolve all of this division—the only way to stop choosing and losing sides—the only way to truly share and experience love—is to give yourself to God
 - Not just you: also give to God the people you disagree with

- Meeting a friend from far away, meet in the middle
 - Feel far from God? He will meet you in the middle
 - Wondering where Jesus is today? He's in the middle
- Good news: Jesus didn't choose sides then, he's not choosing sides now