



# CANYON HILLS

## COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Mark

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### **Meet Me at the Cross**

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As we worship with our giving, I want to encourage you all to get your Bibles close by. We're going to be in the gospel of Mark as we continue our walk through that gospel, verse by verse. Before we even get to that point, I want to release all the children who are getting ready right now to go over to Mr. Alex over at that door. It has been so good for the kids to be worshipping with Mom and Dad for this month. Beginning next Sunday, they'll be back to their normal routines.

As the children make their way there, let me go ahead and just encourage you with some information. A lot of you from the church have been inquiring, either through email or phone calls this week, asking, "Are we supporting or getting involved...? How are we partnering with people to help all the stuff that's going on in Texas right now?" We've been kind of waiting to see who's on the ground, who's there, and what would be the best team or ministry for us to connect to, and we want to share that with you today.

It's a ministry called Hope Force. In fact, you can get to them and donate with them at [hopeforce.org](http://hopeforce.org). We have some people on the ground in Houston right now with this ministry. It is a tremendous ministry. It is designed very specifically to respond to the hardest-hit catastrophes all over the world, and they are there in the worst part of Houston right now as I speak. Like I said, there are some people in our church who are there. We think this is an incredible opportunity to support them and give them some financial help.

This isn't the only ministry. There are many other ministries going on and getting into Houston, but one of the things we like about Hope Force is they really focus on not just bringing the practical needs that are needed but also going into those situations with the gospel and looking for ways to point people toward their greatest hope and need, and that is Jesus Christ. That's what we love about them. If you haven't yet donated, we would encourage you to go to their website and participate right there.

We are still in the gospel of Mark. We are walking through this gospel verse by verse. In case you're new with us today, that's what we do here on Sundays. For the first eight chapters of his

gospel, Mark has gone to great lengths to firmly establish the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God. Almost every chapter, every verse, he is revealing things Jesus said or things Jesus has done to prove he is the Son of God.

Last week, we came to that pivot point in the gospel where, after two years of following Jesus, listening to him teach, and watching him do miraculous signs and wonders, Jesus asked the disciples that eternally important question. He looked at them and said, "Who do you guys say that I am? Who am I to you?"

Of course, we remember Peter spoke up for the Twelve and he correctly answered when he said, "You are the Christ." Even with that correct answer, Jesus knows their expectation of what the long-awaited Messiah, the long-promised Christ, would come to do was still very confused and absolutely very wrong. Jesus knows this about them.

I think that's a point for us to remember. Although you might be able to identify that Jesus is the Son of God, a religious prophet, or a great leader or miracle worker, you may have some things true about who you think he is, but you could still miss the most important part, and that is what he came to do.

Jesus knows seeing miracles and hearing him teach does not create genuine faith in and of itself. The truth is that Christianity, in spite of all of its miracles, all of its martyrs, all of the signs and wonders, and all of the fulfilled prophecies, none of those things can change us. None of those things can make us capable of knowing and loving God by themselves.

Ultimately, it wasn't the miracles or arguments that made any of us in this room believe in Jesus. It was much, much more than that. That's exactly what the second half of the gospel of Mark is going to deal with, and that's where we come today: Mark, chapter 8, verse 31. With your Bibles ready, let's stand for the reading of God's Word.

**"And [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly."** By the way, I just love how Mark threw that in there. He wants us to know when Jesus said what we just read, there was no misunderstanding. There was no confusion about that.

**"And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.' And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them,**

**'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?'**

**For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' And he said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.'"**

Father in heaven, I just pray in the name of your Son Jesus and in the power of your Holy Spirit that you would open our minds, open our hearts to what this means for us today right now. God, I pray that you would bless the reading, hearing, and preaching of your Word and that you would accomplish what you've set forth to accomplish in eternity past in every one of our lives today.

God, we do lift up all of the responders, ministries, churches, and all of the people in Houston and Texas right now trying to help. I pray, God, that you will give them great strength, that you will keep them safe and strong. I pray, God, for wisdom as they look for the needs to meet right away.

We pray, God, that you would do miracles there, both physically and spiritually, and that the result of this horrible tragedy might be that some would realize you're their only hope. You're the only thing worth clinging to. So, God, I pray that you would work mightily in the ministries, Christians, and churches that are down there. In Christ's name, amen.

Church, before we look at this and see what it means to us today, I want to share with you how I'm going to end this sermon. I'm going to give you the end first. I believe this may be the most powerful passage in the whole gospel of Mark when it comes to understanding what it means to surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ, to ask him to come and forgive us, cleanse us, and make us new, to ask him to be our Lord and Savior.

So, at the end of this message, I'm going to give you an opportunity. Those of you who are here who are just still on the fence... Maybe you've just kept Jesus at arm's length. Maybe you're not an atheist, or you don't hate God, but you're just not all the way over the line of true faith yet. I think this passage is going to do something in your heart today that's going to say, "That's the best place to be. That's where I want to be."

It may be that some of you did that a long time ago and you're not just walking with the Lord. You laid down your cross. You got on the throne of your own life. Jesus is there when you need him, but you're just not walking with him. You know it. God knows it. The people who know you know it. I think this passage might be an opportunity for you today, before you leave this room, to say, "I don't want to be there anymore. I want to be close to God like I used to be.

That's where we're going to end today, and I want that to kind of settle in your heart as you listen to how Jesus talks about why he came. You see, the Bible clearly establishes that every human being has an inescapable dilemma. Humanity leaves a very real trail of evidence that we are born with an incurable disease called *sin*.

It's not just a matter of little mess-ups or mistakes. It's a matter of the deepest desire in every one of our natural hearts, that sinful desire that we want to be our own god. That's what we're born

with. Do you want to know something? Not even Sigmund Freud, one of the great enemies of Christianity, denied this fact. He admitted we're all born into the world as selfish little pigs. That's Sigmund Freud, the great atheist philosopher. He admits this. That's his definition of *original sin*. Every person is born into the world wanting what they want.

Now, the major difference between Freud and Jesus is not that fact. They actually agree on that one thing, but for Freud, being born as selfish little pigs is just human nature. To Freud, all we can do about it is live with it, compromise, and cope. In other words, Freud is saying we're all born intensely selfish, and all we need to do is stay out of each other's way. Let's just all get along and figure out how we can all get what we want when we want it and not bother anyone else. That's Freud's answer to this dilemma.

Christianity is different. Christianity is more hopeful. Christianity teaches that sin is our *disease*. It's not our *design*. It must and it can be destroyed. So, when you think about this, Christianity's doctrine of original sin is way more optimistic than secular morality, which basically promotes a plan, as I just said, for the fulfillment of our selfishness.

The secular world will say, "There's nothing we can do about it, so let's just get as much as we can as fast as we can and let's just try to stay out of each other's way." Christianity offers way more hope. Christianity is a plan for the destruction of our selfishness, and this is exactly what Jesus is talking about here. This is what he shockingly reveals to his disciples in what we just read in Mark, chapter 8. Here's what we just read.

1. *Jesus came to suffer and die*. This is the very first time he has told them this. It has been over two years that they've been following him, listening to him, and watching him, and he's just now telling them he didn't come just to teach good things. He didn't come just to do miracles. So far, it's so far from their idea of their Messiah that it doesn't even make sense to them.

Let's pull it apart piece by piece. First of all, he says, in verse 31, "**...the Son of Man must suffer many things...**" That is code for, "Jesus is going to suffer a gruesome, torturous, humiliating, slow death." It is code for Jesus saying, "I'm going to be stripped, blindfolded, punched in the face, and spit in the face. There's going to be a crown of thorns smashed on my head in mockery, and I'm going to be flogged with flesh-tearing leather whips tipped with broken glass, lacerating muscle and bone."

This is code for Jesus saying to them, "There are going to be six-inch rusty, railroad-like spikes driven through the bones and sinews of my wrists and my feet." It's amazing to think about how his suffering wasn't a surprise. It wasn't an obstacle to the plan of redemption. His suffering *is* the plan.

Jesus says, "**...the Son of Man must suffer many things...**" I want you to look in your Bibles, on your tablets or your phones, whatever you're looking at. You ought to highlight that word *must*. You ought to circle it and underline it because in that one word, *must*, in this lone statement in the Bible, I think we see more of the true character of God than maybe any other verse in the entire Scripture.

**"...the Son of Man must suffer..."** That word, *must*, is the *must* of God's sovereignty. It's *his* plan to send *his* Son to suffer and die to provide redemption so all things can become new again. This is a sovereign God who determined before time began that his plan would be to send his Son to suffer for you and me, and nothing can or will stop his plan. When Jesus says, **"...the Son of Man must suffer..."** he is declaring, "God is sovereign. Nobody's going to change this."

That word, *must*, is not only the *must* of God's sovereignty, but it is the *must* of God's holiness and justice. This is a God who is angry with sin, angry that his creation would make our own rules and chart our own course, thinking we would be far better off without him, angry because of the devastation this sin has brought upon all of humanity. Because God is holy, God must hate sin. Because he is just, God must punish sin, and so when Jesus says, **"...the Son of Man must suffer many things..."** he is revealing to us the holiness and justice of God.

But this word *must* is also the *must* of his love. This is a God of awesome love who will not turn his back on the humanity he created. He's driven by redemptive love to wrap his arms around all of us who have been broken by sin and draw us back to himself. This Son of Man must suffer because of who God is. God is sovereign, God is holy, God is just, and God is loving.

You'll remember that scene at the cross. As Jesus is hanging there, suffering, all the doubters were mocking him and daring him to come down off that cross and to save himself. Do you remember that? Remember those people in Scripture yelling at him? We'll see that when we get closer to that point in the gospel.

Jesus, in the ultimate act of sacrificial love, refuses to exercise his power and come down from the cross so the skeptics could believe in him. Only because of that can we believe in him. You see, Jesus had all the power in the world to come down off that cross. They were mocking him. They were killing the Son of God. He could have called a million angels. He could have called lightning from heaven. He could have burned the whole place down in a giant pile of ashes. He could have done anything he wanted.

Listen, church. Don't forget this. It was our sin that called Jesus to the cross, but it was his love that kept him there. Don't miss that. It's because of that that we can believe in him. There's no greater evidence for the seriousness of our sin than the willing suffering of Jesus.

Isn't it sad to know how many people are out there who have considered the cross, who've heard the story, who look at the cross, who know what Jesus has done...? They will look at it and they will still determine that it wasn't enough. It's not enough for them to believe. It's not enough for them to trust Jesus. How sad is that?

Jesus must suffer many things, but he also says here, to the disciples, that he was rejected by the Jewish religious leaders. The very people who should have worshiped him, who should have recognized him, and who should have bowed the knee to him, turned their backs on Jesus. The very people who should have fallen to their knees and welcomed their Messiah.

There are a lot of people today who have every reason to follow, worship, and serve Jesus, but they refuse and they turn their backs on him, just like these people who should have. We know those people. They grew up in church, maybe, or they've seen the miracles of changed lives of the people all around them, whether in their personal family or their circle of friends.

They've seen the difference that faith in Jesus is making in a person's life. There might have even been a time in their life when they did follow Jesus, when they did know Jesus as their Lord, when Jesus was on the throne of their hearts, but today they choose to ignore the obvious. Ignoring Jesus is equal to rejecting Jesus. There's no neutral ground. Jesus warns them, the people you would think would be most likely to say, "I need you, Jesus. I need you," a lot of times they're the very ones who say, "No, thanks. It's not enough."

Jesus tells us the Son of Man must be killed. He must die. In fact, he came to die. The driving force in Jesus' life was his resolve to be obedient to death, even death on a cross. The uniqueness of his death, I think, lies in the fact that he accepted on Calvary the wrath of God that was due to all of us. The cross wasn't a tragic accident. You see, in his substitutionary death, he was taking upon himself the curse of all of the world's sin, and the ultimate curse of sin is death.

Now, you remember in the garden of Eden, God is talking to Adam and Eve. He says to Adam and Eve, "Don't eat of this tree. If you eat of this tree, you will surely die." That tells us something. Before they determined to be their own god, there was no death. Adam and Eve were created to live forever. All humanity was, to live forever in perfect peace in the presence and fellowship of God himself, but they listened to Satan, who told them, "You'll be better off without God," and they sinned, and death came, both physically and spiritually.

In less theological terms, Jesus is basically telling us here that he came to step in front of the bullet for us. He came to die for us. In fact, he goes a little further in verse 31 and he says, "After three days, I will rise again." He not only came to die, but he came to conquer death. He says, "In three days, I will rise."

He must rise to prove he has the authority to take away our sin. That's the spiritual death we died when Adam and Eve sinned. We inherited that DNA. We were born spiritually blind, deaf, and dead to the goodness of God. Then, him rising from the dead in three days, he conquers the physical death, being able to give us eternal life. He said, "I will rise."

I don't want you to miss this. Wrapped up in the cross of Jesus are the two distinct doctrines of Christianity that no other religion holds or has. The first doctrine we see in this picture of the coming cross and Jesus' words here is the doctrine of *original sin*. We've spoken about it. It's the very bad news that no one else dares to tell anyone anymore, but that's what the cross reminds us of. That's what the suffering of Jesus reminds us of, that we have an inescapable, terminal, undeniable sin, and nobody wants to talk about it anymore.

The second doctrine that's distinct to Christianity and the cross of Christ is the doctrine of salvation. Now, this is the very good news that no one else has the authority to tell us. This is

exactly what Jesus is doing. He is telling us we have an incurable condition called *sin*, but there is hope called *salvation*. This is the conversation he's having with his disciples.

Then, we see Peter's response. This is the part of the passage we all remember. Now, you go back to last Sunday, just two verses up in verse 29. Peter correctly answers the ultimate question in the universe when Jesus asks him and the disciples, "Who do you guys say that I am?" He answers, "You are the Christ. You are the Messiah." Right answer! Good job!

Now, we find, just three sentences later, Peter shows that their understanding of what the coming Messiah was to do was way off. So, Peter pulls Jesus aside and rebukes him. Now, this is pretty amazing. Jesus just tells them the Son of Man must suffer, die, and rise again, and Peter says, "Jesus, come here. We need to talk. This isn't the agenda. All this suffering and death stuff... We're here to tell you we're not going to let that happen. We're going to protect you and take care of you all the way to the point when you become our King."

At that moment, we're told in verse 33 that Jesus looks over at the other 11 who are just standing a few feet away, no doubt (I think) hearing what Peter is saying to Jesus. Jesus looks over at them and they're standing there. This is my mind's eye now. This is the fun preachers have when they study all week. I see them flexing their muscles, saying, "We got it, Jesus. We're here for you. Right now, just what he said. We're not going to let that happen," kind of like some weird version of SEAL Team Six in bathrobes.

They're over there, ready to take care of the Son of God, and it says Jesus just looks back at Peter. Now, I'm making all this up in my head as far as how I think the whole scene went. We'll find out when we get to heaven how off I was, but I see Jesus looking at them, shaking his head, and then he walks back to Peter.

Jesus is breaking all of the personal space rules. I see Jesus getting right up to Peter, nose to nose, and saying, "**Get behind me, Satan!**" Now, if I'm Peter, I'm standing in a little puddle right about then. Do you know what I'm talking about? Has Jesus just gotten really mad all of a sudden? Has he lost his temper? I don't think so.

I think this moment is very reminiscent to Jesus. Do you remember when he was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River and the Bible tells us he immediately went off to be alone in the wilderness to pray and fast? As he's getting ready to start his journey, his mission toward the cross, the Bible tells us that for 40 days Satan relentlessly was tempting and testing Jesus to doubt God's love and faithfulness, and tempting Jesus to ultimately abandon the eternal plan of redemption through his sacrificial death.

Matthew, chapter 4, in detail tells us that Satan actually showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth back then and he said, "Jesus, this can all be yours. All these kingdoms, you can have for yourself, and all the glory that goes with it. You can reign and rule over all these people. All you need to do is just give up your allegiance to God's plan. Just spare yourself from suffering. Spare yourself from the cross and just trust me, Jesus. I'll give you all this. You just walk away from this plan and everything will be okay."

In essence, Satan was offering Jesus a crown without a cross, and Jesus said to him, "**Be gone, Satan!**" Back to Peter, Jesus is saying, "Peter, I've heard this before. You're echoing the words of the Enemy."

The truth is that any time we think up our own version of Jesus we're speaking and acting like Satan. I am sad, grieved, and embarrassed to say many pastors are doing this, including those who follow them, making up their own versions of Jesus. Their statements will usually start like this. "My Jesus wouldn't..." "My Jesus wouldn't say that. My Jesus wouldn't do that. My Jesus wouldn't teach that."

Now, in our present-day vernacular, the hot button, of course, is everything to do with human sexuality, so we're reinventing Jesus to accept, condone, and promote anything and everything when it comes to human sexuality. Sometimes those statements are related to the idea of hell. "My Jesus would never allow anyone to go there."

Sometimes that statement is related to a person who's living with someone, sleeping with someone not their wife, and they're saying, "You know what, though? Jesus and I are good. He knows me. I'm the exception. My Jesus doesn't mind." It's happening all around us.

Sometimes it's conveyed through the person who says, "Hey, I know I don't go to church. I know I'm not serving anyone or anything. I know I'm not giving to any of the work of the gospel. I know I'm not reading my Bible all that much, if ever. I know, I know, I know, but you know what? Jesus knows me and I know Jesus and we're okay with that. We worked it out." I think Jesus would respond to all of that stuff by saying, "Get behind me, Satan!" You see, what Jesus is telling them and telling us is...

2. *Without a cross, there's no salvation.* All of our hope starts at the cross of Jesus. It's disheartening how many churches under the banner of being Christian don't ever mention the cross anymore. They say things like, "You can be your best self now! Buy my book and you can be the best you that you want to be." That message has taken the place of the cross.

Here's the problem with that message. The Bible says our best righteousness, our best goodness, is like filthy rags in the presence of a holy God, so we have to be committed to preaching this cross that Jesus is talking about here, because it's our only hope. Is it any wonder Paul wrote, in 1 Corinthians 2, "**...I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified**"? Verses 34 and following really turn up the heat.

**"And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?'"**



Let me translate that. Jesus is saying, "What does it matter if you become the best you, the happiest you, the most successful you, the ultimate version of yourself, and then lose your soul?" Jesus isn't saying if you trust your soul to his saving power accomplished on the cross that you should be lazy and no ambition. He's saying following him requires a radical shift in our hearts.

3. *Following him requires that we meet Jesus at the cross every day.* Not just back sometime in our past when we accept him into our hearts as our Savior and Lord, but every day, because as a sinner, my whole life is always tempted and tended toward an inward focus. Let me confess to you that the battle that rages within is this idea that it's all about me. It's all about my comfort, my yard, my house, and my retirement. It's all about my car, my kids, my career, my time, and my vacation. It's all about my hobby, my money, my sex life, and my weekend...

As a sinner, I will always want and desire, naturally speaking, to push myself to the center of my world, where I set my own agenda and rules and I reduce everything down to what I feel and what I want. This rules every choice in my life. Freud got it right. We are little more than selfish little pigs.

So, when Jesus calls us to deny ourselves here, to deny ourselves daily, take up our cross, and follow him, he's actually calling us to a life of God's grace. He's calling us away from sin that causes me to crave the very position of God himself. Do you know what Jesus is saying? He's saying, "I have come to save you from you. Lay down your crown and take up your cross."

I think Jesus would say, "When you take up your cross every day, you will notice that that cross isn't stained with your blood. That's my blood, shed for you, the blood that saves you and washes away your sin." Then, he warns that the only other option is to forfeit our soul. The only other option is to keep our crown on, stay on our throne, and try to become the ultimate version of ourselves, forfeiting our souls in the process.

You see, Christianity has to have a cross or it makes no sense. If we accept that all of us are sinners, we accept the doctrine of original sin, then apart from the cross of Jesus, we are utterly hopeless. What we feel, see, and hear all the time in our modern world is that many will reject the cross of Jesus.

They will say things like this. You've heard them say it. Maybe you've said it. They will say, "You know what? There's way too much evil in the world. There's way too much tragedy, bad people, and crummy stuff going on." They'll say there's too much injustice, ignorance, and hate in the world, and then they will say, "If there is a God, then how come all of that is still here? I don't want anything to do with him." Have you ever heard that before?

Here's the irony of that statement. Here's what we have to do in order to say that and make that our claim and our reason for rejecting Jesus. We have to take the whole world and put it out there. This big thing called *the world*, where all of that evil, injustice, hatred, and tragedy happens...

Then, we have to back up from that world, separating ourselves from all of that and saying, "God, that mess you've allowed to happen? That mess you've made? You know what? You can have it. I'm going to stay right here." Do you know what the irony is? The person who says this never seems to see himself or herself as part of the problem. They're always back here, innocent and removed. "That's God's problem. I'm not."

You see, until we see ourselves as we truly are, we'll never meet him at the cross, and so in verse 38, Jesus concludes with kind of an out-of-nowhere statement. He says, **"For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."** Jesus says, "If you're ashamed of me and my words..." What words? What words is he referring to there?

He's talking about the words right above it, the words of, "Deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow me." He says, "If you're ashamed of me and those words, when I return, I will be ashamed of you before my Father in heaven." Jesus is saying anything less than denying ourselves, following him, and picking up our cross is equated to being ashamed of him.

The beautiful moment in this passage comes from the thought that he invites us to take our crown off, to get off our throne, and to pick up his cross and follow him, because the only other option is to forfeit our soul. He is the safest, most loving, holy, and just one of the universe, and he says, "Come to me. Take up your cross every day. That is your identity. You are new. You are forgiven. Your sins are removed and wiped clean, and my perfect, sinless blood, as you pick up that cross, covers you every day."

I just know there are several of you sitting in this room today and this is the message your heart desperately needs. This is the gospel. This is your hope, today. Some of you have not yet stepped over the line and said, "I surrender. I give up. I admit I'm a sinner. My only hope is to allow Jesus to forgive me. I put my faith and trust in him and what he did for me on the cross."

You haven't done that yet, and I want to invite you to do that today. There may be a million reasons. It doesn't matter. The only reason that matters right now is you've heard, you understand, and you know this is what you desperately need. For others of you in this room, you did that at some point in the past, and for one reason or another (who knows?), at some place, you laid down the cross of Jesus, you picked your crown back up, and you're trying to live your life with Jesus kind of in the picture.

He's there. It's not that you hate him, you've denied him, or you reject him; you've just kind of moved him aside. You call on him when you need him. You're even here in church! Maybe you come all the time, but you know it, God knows it, and everyone around you knows it. You're not living with Jesus as the Lord of your life.

I think today is that amazing opportunity for you to say, "I don't want to do that anymore. I'm tired of trying to keep Jesus in sight as I do my own thing. I'm just going to pick up my cross

today and I'm going to follow him with all my heart." In just a moment, we're going to continue, really, what started last Sunday at the end of the message last week.

We're going to stand and we're going to worship God, and when we do that, I'm going to invite you to walk down one of these aisles. You're not walking to me. You're not walking to the stage. You're not walking to the people around. You're walking right toward that cross on the wall right there and you're saying, "I'm going to meet him at the cross today, and I'm going to surrender my heart to him." I pray you'll do that. I'm going to ask you to bow your heads first. Just kind of clear your heads.

Thank you that you knew, a million years ago, who would be sitting here today. You knew before you created one ounce of the universe who would be in this room this morning, hearing this invitation. I pray, God, that you will give them the gift of faith to believe they can trust you. I pray, God, that you will give them the gift of courage to overcome any fear, to overcome anything that would allow them to feel nervous about this. God, I pray that you will give them the courage that they are walking right into your arms. God, have your way in this room right now. We love you. In Jesus' name, amen.