

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
Jonathan Pokluda  
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### Q&A With Jonathon Pokluda

JP: Good morning, Harris Creek. It's great to be with you guys. If you're joining us for the first time, this will look a little bit different than normal, we're switching it up, and so we're going to do a little Q&A. And I want to just share with you kind of, 1: Why we're doing that, and 2: How we're doing that. And so, the "why" is once a year we want to do—well we always want to do this—but once a year we'll do it in this format. We want to bring down any curtain, any wall, anything between us and you. Now I try to do that every week, I come up you know to the front of the stage and say, "If anybody wants to talk," right, "please come up." And I know that there's some of you that that's outside your personality. You have questions that you'll just carry with you through the months and through the years, and so we've created this opportunity for you to ask questions this week. We've taken all of those questions and every one of them that was asked is represented. And you're going to have the opportunity to vote those questions up through a software, so you can kind of choose which questions that we answer with the time that is allotted. But the only questions that were asked that aren't on there were just super specific, like "Hey, my cousin's brother's sister, this very specific thing is happening..." But other than that, everything that was asked is represented in what we're using, Slido. So, you'll see that in just a minute. There's going to be a QR code on the screen. You can take your phone. You can point it to that QR code and then it will bring up that. You'll be able to choose three questions and hit submit, and then that will kind of move those three questions to the top to be one that we'll take. We'll take all the questions if time allots. Okay? So, we will answer all of the questions if we can.

Let me say this upfront, I know you guys are moving to doing that and may not hear this. But hopefully someone in your family does. I know that we all have kind of this preconceived idea of what church is. And that's mostly rooted in our experience in the tradition that we grew up in. So, you grew up in a church, or you've had some church experience, you've seen it, it was a particular size and there was something that you guys did. There was a flow of service, an order of service that you did. What I've learned in people is then you measure every experience against that one. It's either better or not, it's either bigger or not, or smaller. And sometimes that experience is kind of extrabiblical. It's not necessarily what happened in the scripture. And truthfully, so this morning you think, "Well this is really different." I would just tell you, this may be more of what it was like in Acts 2 than maybe anything you've experienced. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They gathered around and started saying, "Hey what about...?" "Hey, Peter, let me ask you..." Now they didn't have QR codes, I don't think, but you

know the iPhone technology hadn't evolved into that yet. But they did do something like this where the church would gather, and they were able to ask and answer questions. And so, that's what we're going to do this morning. I'm joined by my friends Scott Kedersha, who is our family pastor over the marriage and family ministry here at Harris Creek, and Kathy Davidson, who pastors and shepherds our college life groups and the ladies in our college ministry. So, thank you guys. For jumping in with us.

Kathy: Thanks for having us. This is fun.

JP: Yeah, let's dive in man, let's go.

Kathy: You ready?

JP: I'm ready.

Scott: JP, ready?

JP: No, I'll say this, I got these last night in Austin as we were driving back, so I have glanced at them. And I'm not saying this so your like "Oh, he's ill-prepared." I'm just, I'm letting you know that what has not happened is we've been spending, you know hours on these questions all week, crafting answers, if you will. And so yeah, let's go.

Scott: What can I call you? Should we call you JP, or...?

JP: Pastor...

Kathy: Pastor Jonathan?

JP: No, JP is great.

Scott: JP. Alright, a lot of questions about life groups. "What," and there's no name attached to this one, thankfully, but "What do I do if I don't connect with my life group, I have friends outside of my life group? Is it important that we have chemistry in our life group?"

JP: Yeah. Here's the deal. Your life group exists to make you happy. And so, if you're not happy, find another life group. (Crowd Laughs) Yeah, it is funny, right? I think so often we actually have that mindset. So let me ask you a question. Is your life group a social club? If you were answering a multiple choice, like which one would you choose? I want my life group to be...is it a social club? A supper club? Or is it the church? And let's say

you get that question right and you say, “Well it’s the church.” It’s a representation of the church that I belong to. Right? Then we would say, well great. Would you leave a church if you looked around and you said, “Man, these people have different interests than me. I really like to cheer for this team, they like to cheer for this team. Or I’m really into this. Or my socio-economic status is this and theirs is this.”

I think so often we think about life groups this way, and it’s okay. I did too. I think for a long time, one of the biggest challenges that Monica and I faced... And I say biggest challenges, our perceived biggest challenge was we had our life group, who were people that we didn’t know and didn’t really connect with. In fact, they all had previous connections and we were kind of the odd people out. And then we had all our other friends, who were also believers and loved Jesus. And what it felt like, to me, we were doing at that time is it felt like we were saying no to the friends that we had deep relationships with to go hang out with these strangers in this odd structure, right? And as I look back on my life, and so, as you fast forward the tape, about every five years I was just like “Hey, I think we’re going to go a different direction.” But by the grace of God, we stayed with that group. And if you fast forward the tape as I look through what God has used in my life more than anything else to grow me into the image and character of his son Jesus Christ, it was those people.

And it’s much like marriage, those of you who are married will get this. It’s a sanctifying work. It’s not your common interests and chemistry that help you grow to the image and character of Jesus. It really is your differences. It really is you learning to love someone not like you. I think in Luke chapter 5, right, they show up to their life group meeting and one of the guys can’t walk. And they realize, “Hey, for me to be in a life group with this guy, It’s going to mean I got to carry him everywhere he wants to go.” And as they sit there and they’re faced with that incredible inconvenience, rather than look for chemistry and people with common bonds, they just pick up the mat and they say we’re going to carry this brother closer to Jesus. We’re going to do whatever it takes, we’ll climb up on the roof if we need to. We’ll dig a hole in the shingles if we need to, lower him down. We’re going to do whatever it takes to carry him closer to Jesus.

Can I tell you something? That is incredibly inconvenient to your life. Like that’s not convenient. It is being the church. It is being the church. So, there’s sovereignty involved in who you’re placed with. It’s not a marriage. Right? You moving life groups is not a divorce. I get that. But you do want to go into that and think, it’s kind of like becoming a member of Harris Creek, you want to think about, what is going to make me not a member anymore? Because in Waco I do think, and in America, but especially in the Bible Belt, I do think we can approach that a little lackadaisically. Like I want to do what I feel like. And don’t let your preferences rob you of paradise. Sometimes what you feel

like is not what's best for you. Sometimes the Lord wants you to do hard things, especially as it pertains to building relationships with others, especially when those others are not like you.

Scott: It's good. So, let's take the curtain down. What does this look like for you and Monica? What does your life group look like? How much time do you spend together? Do you have other friends? Or is it just the three other couples in your group?

JP: Yeah, of course, I mean, I hope we have other friends.

Scott: Am I? Are we?

Kathy: Yeah, do you count us? You have two at least?

JP: We're good. Yes, so we meet every Wednesday night as couples. And then guys meet every Thursday morning. And then girls meet every Thursday, as well. And so, we meet as a life group twice a week, which is a significant commitment. But these are like the board of directors of my life, right? So, what it looks like if you look backwards, for me, again, we've been through seasons now where we had to pay for a sitter every single week to make sure that we prioritize that. I mean those were things and decisions that we made. And I didn't, I mean I'm telling you, I didn't like it most of the time. It's not what, in my flesh, I would have chosen, and yet, as with many things down the road, it has been truly, absolutely truly one of the greatest blessings of my life.

Kathy: That's awesome. Okay, changing things a little bit. Looking at the question you guys most want asked right now. We're just going to dive right in. Get to the spicy questions, and I'm so excited that I get to ask it. Alright, so will Harris Creek address the issues that are plaguing our nation right now. I think people want to know where do we stand on the issues of abortion, same-sex marriage, the LGBTQ community, even the thought of the Bible being hate speech. So, what is Harris Creek's stance on all of that. If you want to address all three of those, or just give an overarching thought. So, we're just...jump in.

JP: Yeah. This is Kathy's question.

Kathy: I don't know how it got there.

JP: Yeah, of course. I hope that's a new person asking that, because I would just say of course we address those issues all the time. There are different mouthpieces here. I mean I do what we're doing right now every single Friday. I imagine some of you know that. So, I do a Q&A every single Friday where I answer fifty questions. And all of these and

so many more, like all of those social issues of today, are addressed. On Sunday, what we do is we teach the Bible. So often we're moving through the Bible. And so, as the Bible addresses the issue of sexual ethics, or the issue of sanctity of life, we're going to address those issues. I assume maybe somebody's like "Well where do we stand on all of that?" Hopefully you've heard. If someone has had an abortion, we love them, we care for them. If someone's considering having an abortion, we put our arms around them, we say you know you don't have to do that. We will extend all of the resources available to take care of your child, to raise your child, and to care for you, both during pregnancy and after pregnancy. We'll give you a home, we will safely place your baby, we will do whatever it takes.

On the issue of LGBTQ, we know that everyone was created in the image of God. They've been given infinite worth and value as a human being, that God made them, right? I know I can look backwards on church history and understand how the church has botched it by marginalizing people who struggle with same-sex attraction. The church has missed this. I don't want to make that same mistake. We want to love them, but love is made up of the truth, grace, and action. If you need a place to stay, we got you. If you need money to pay rent, we got you. We want to care well for you, and we can do anything except for where we disagree on truth. Where if you say, "Hey I don't think me acting out on these desires is wrong." I would say it absolutely is. In the same way if I were to act out on my polyamorous desires, it would be wrong. In the same way I want to be held accountable by the church to pursue God in his design for sex between a husband and a wife, I want you to hold me accountable. We want to hold you accountable in the same way. Why? We love you. Why? We care for you.

The Bible is not hate speech. We believe that as you live according to that which is God-breathed and useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness, you will find life, and that's our desire for you. No one here is trying to control you, to flex authority over you, but to care for you, to protect you, to shepherd you, and to love you.

Kathy: That's good. That's super helpful.

Scott: Good, next one on there, number two. Question on the board: "How do I disciple someone stuck in sin or any kind of destructive pattern?"

JP: Yeah. The Proverbs says, "like a dog to his vomit so we return to our folly." I'll start by saying it's difficult. Especially when your heart is involved, like sometimes the one you're disciplining is a child, a prodigal. Sometimes the addiction that they've given themselves to is incredibly destructive to their life, right? And so, I know that can be really difficult. Let's just say, in like a life group relationship, a metaphor that has been

helpful to me is a Road Sign. You know that sign that says as you come around this curve you need to slow down to forty miles per hour or you're going to flip and die. And that sign is unemotional, it just is like, slow down. This is the way you go. This is the way you go. And so, I want to be that road sign for people, "Hey this is the way you see Jesus. Look, walk toward, just go toward Jesus. This is the way you go. This is the way. You can go that way; you're going to die. You can go that way; you're going to hurt yourself. You can go any other way. I'm not here to control you. You are your own person, you can do as you please, but if you follow your flesh, you're going to die. "There is a way that seems right to a person but in the end, it leads to death." The Proverbs repeats.

Now it also says that you...you know people say, "Does the Bible contradict itself?" It absolutely does. In fact, in the Proverbs it says, "answer the fool according to his folly," and in the next verse it says, "do not answer a fool according to his folly." Now why does it contradict itself in that circumstance? Because there is a time to answer someone according to the foolishness with which they're speaking, and there is a time not to. And to know the difference requires discernment. Now I've heard it said, as an example to put teeth on that, "Never try harder than they do." Right? Never try harder than they do. I've heard that, and that'll preach. You can say that in a conference and people nod their head like "Yeah." That'll give you really practical...you know something to do, something to think through, and then I would just follow that up and say, sometimes you have to.

Do for the one you wish you could do for everyone. I think those two statements have to sit in balance, that sometimes I need to have the discernment that I am enabling them. I'm trying so much harder than they are, I care so much more than they do, and then sometimes somebody's stuck in a pit and they just can't get out and it's going to take you a lot of energy, time, and effort. And to know the difference...will require community. Someone to come around you and help you know and understand how to discern which one of those to do.

Kathy: Man. That was really good. Okay, another question that people have, I relate to it a lot, is "How do we grow in our patience when we're waiting on the Lord to answer a prayer?" That's repeated often in Psalms, wait on the Lord, wait on the Lord, but what does that look like? And how do we grow in our patience in those moments?

JP: Yeah. You said, "As we're waiting on the Lord to answer our prayer," and I don't think it's trite, cliché, or a platitude to say, He may be answering "No,". He may be answering "Not now." I think we have to continue to live this life with an eternal perspective, that as James says, "It is but a vapor." It is short. And no one...the conversation that has never happened is you get to heaven, and you start with all of your list of things that you missed out on because God didn't give them to you. And you're going to be in eternity infinitely

longer than you are here in this “but a vapor.” It truly is like a split-second compared to eternity. Your eighty years on earth is like a split-second compared to eternity. It's even smaller than that. And so, to start with that perspective, Isaiah 40 says, “Those who wait on the Lord, He will renew their strength, He will lift them up, and they will soar on wings like eagles.” So, I think we have to hold fast to that hope. Right? To understand that God does not disappoint us in the grand scheme of things. I believe it's Tim Keller that says we would do what He does if we knew what He does. He says it much more eloquently than that, but I think that's true, and holding to that is hard, and you can't do it alone. You want someone, you want to surround yourself with people who continue to remind you of those realities, so you don't lose sight of them.

Scott: Good, alright, shifting gears a little bit. I like your shoes.

JP: Thank you.

Scott: How many pairs of shoes does JP have?

Kathy: I have the same ones.

JP: Nobody's asking that.

Kathy: Everyone is asking that. Right?

Scott: I promise it just went off the board.

JP: Too many.

Kathy: It was too popular, it flew off...

JP: Too many. Here's why: that's become a thing. So, if I go somewhere and speak, that is often the gift I leave with. Just so, to address that. Thank you.

Scott: Alright.

JP: That's the most awkward question we'll get today. Let's go back to the LGBTQ thing.

Kathy: We could get more awkward, honestly.

Scott: I can get more awkward. Related to that, so every year you challenge our staff to give up something for the year. Why do you do that and what are you giving up this year?

JP: Yeah.

Kathy: Yeah, why are you making us do that? That's so mean.

JP: Yeah, so I don't.

Kathy: Does your boss make you give up something?

JP: And to be clear, yours doesn't either. It is optional, right? I always say, this is something I do, so if you guys want to, we can do it together. And so, I've given up...so last year was sodas, you know, anything like that. And this year is buying anything for myself. So, pray for me.

Kathy: Pray for us.

Scott: Alright, so similar to that, one other thing, why does...this is a great question. Why does purity always seem to be more geared toward girls, toward females?

JP: Purity or modesty?

Scott: I mean it says purity. So, purity, modesty, all of the above.

JP: I don't know that purity is, at least in my world view. I have a lot of...I mean most of my purity conversations are with men.

Scott: Go modesty, let's address...

JP: I do think modesty is, you know, that girls just seem to be the target of that, and I don't really have a great answer for why. It shouldn't be. I mean, if you're wondering, it shouldn't be. I think guys have to be more mindful when you're playing volleyball and you rip your shirt off, you can't wait to show your six pack. Your motive really matters, and that's just what I would say, in modesty motive matters, for men and women. Right? So why you wear what you wear matters most. The heart matters most.

So people say, "Is it a sin to wear a bikini?" And I would just say it depends. And then somebody came after me actually recently on social media and just said "Well when is it not a sin?" And I was just like "Well, it depends. I guess if you're in the Olympic girls' volleyball team...it's kind of the dress code. Right?" And so, it depends on why you're wearing the bikini. You know, if it's like "Well I can't wait to show off my summer



body,” I would check your heart on that. So, it would be fair criticism, “You just did it, you just went after women.” It’s the same for guys. Guys, you should be mindful of when you’re with ladies, what you’re doing and why you’re doing it, in terms of what you’re wearing or not wearing. And so, I don’t think it is just a female issue. I don’t think the church should treat it solely as just a female issue. I do think that...

There’s this line, “Don’t lower your standards. Lengthen your patience.” I think one thing that I see, that maybe the answer to why girls do, is they get tired of waiting and they see the girls who get the guys and then they start doing what they do. And don’t do that. Like, the Lord has you. He has plans for you, and it’s not worth compromising anything to shortcut His plans. Like He is good, and you can trust Him, and my prayer is that He would give you the desires of your heart if that’s a husband. I think so often the desires of our heart are just a boyfriend. And so, He’s not promising you a boyfriend. He’s not promising you a husband either.

Here’s what I would follow up with that and say, no one’s ever gotten to heaven and said “God what are you doing? You kept goodness from me.” Your life here on earth, this perspective is so important, your life here on earth is (snaps). James says this: “but a vapor.” Like, eternity is so much longer than your eighty years on earth. Like, you’re going to be there in eighty years, and then eighty-thousand years, and eighty million years, and eighty billion years, and so this life compared to that is literally less than a nanosecond, relatively speaking. It is impossible for me to show you how short this life is relative to eternity. There’s not a time frame short enough. It’s (snaps) less than that. Right? And so don’t compromise in your (snaps) snap, in your vapor. Hold out for the Lord. He’s going to give you all good things through Jesus.

Kathy: Oh, this is really good. Okay. The Bible says we cannot lose our salvation, but what about people who are just stuck in unrepentant sin? Like, maybe they came to faith young, or even at an earlier point in their life, but are just walking in blatant disregard for God’s way? Are they still saved? What does that look like?

JP: Yeah, I think back to that other question of “What do you do when you’re discipling someone who, like a dog who to their vomit, continues to return to their sin?” James 5 commends the person who turns someone from sin, so we do have a role to play into that, to not just sit idly by, to not keep our mouth shut, to not watch them continue to move toward destruction. But also, the author of Hebrews hints to this reality that there is...I believe that you cannot lose your salvation. Right? That there is nothing, no height nor depth, no ruler or principality, nothing in all the world that can separate us from the love of God. That once we are sealed by His Holy Spirit, that we remain in right relationship with Him because of His works. Not because of our own.

People say, “Can you lose your salvation?” I say, well what did you do to get your salvation? What was the role that you played in your own salvation, because I think it was the finished works of Jesus on the cross. But there is the possibility that if...you know, let’s just say that someone comes to the altar call, they pray the prayer of salvation, they continue, they’re involved in the church, then they leave the church. They join the satanic church. They’re sacrificing goats and drinking blood. That escalated quickly. We might say man, maybe they continue...we don’t know, maybe the Spirit is going to eventually convict them and they’re going to wake up from that nightmare and return to the Lord. Or maybe they were not saved, and it was not a legit conversion, which I think we experience a lot of here.

So, most of the people that you will proselytize, evangelize, share the Gospel with here in the Bible Belt are “Christians.” Like, every day of my life, with few exceptions, and I say that not as a flex but to make this point, I try to share the gospel every day. And most often the person that I’m sharing the gospel with is someone who identifies as a Christian. And it really is...like, evangelism in the Bible Belt a lot of times really is like convincing someone that they’re not a Christian so that they can become one really. Sincerely, if you will. And so, in that person, I don’t know if they’re saved and they will repent and the Holy Spirit will win, or if they have been turned over to their flesh, they were never actually saved, that that was an act. And so, it’s hard to discern, but I think our role is the same: we pray for them, we share the gospel with them, we remind them of God’s goodness. If they’re a believer, we point them to the scriptures. If we perceive that they’re not a believer, we point them to Jesus.

Kathy: That was really helpful.

Scott: Good, next on there: What do you think the church’s role is in battling mental illness?

JP: I think the church has to be central to the war on mental illness. It’s at a height. So, you guys have the privilege of existing on the planet earth when we’re seeing more mental illness than any time in the history of history. You want to start by asking why. I’ve got some hunches. You guys also get to exist in the era of the smart phone. You guys also get to exist in the era of TikTok and Instagram. So, all of these things, I believe, are feeding what is the suicide epidemic, the epidemic of depression and anxiety, panic disorder. So for us to pastor...pastor just means, the word in the Greek, it literally translates “shepherd.” You just care for the flock. So, you have to care for whatever’s happening in the flock. In the same way that if people here were being diagnosed with cancer left and right, then we better become experts, like oncologists, and partner with them and grow to understand, ‘Hey what is this disease and how is it affecting people?’

So when someone has mental illness I always say, you want to have people praying for you, you want to find a great counselor or therapist or a pastor. Because pastors can help you too in that struggle. Some of them are trained, some of us are trained in those ways. Mental illness is a part of my journey, specifically to name it, anxiety and panic disorder is something that I've experienced. I've also experienced incredible healing in and through that. A part of that healing was therapy. I talk openly about it. And so, I think the church has a really strategic role in the battle of mental illness.

Scott: Yeah, so like, how do I know whether I go to my life group, or I go to a counselor, or to a therapist, or to a psychiatrist? How do I make that decision if that's part of my struggle?

JP: You start with your life group. Because mental illness is not like you have nothing, and then you have depression, you know it's depression, and it showed up like COVID. That's just not the way it works. And so, you start with your life group like, "Hey guys, I had a hard time getting out of bed yesterday. I'm really struggling. I'm having some suicide ideation." Those kinds of things, those conversations start there so that they can pray with and for you. James 5:16 says, "The prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective." And so, there's a healing that comes through prayer.

But I know some of you who struggle with mental illness, you might have just heard, 'hey just pray it away'. That's not what I'm saying at all. I'm saying begin there, and then hopefully they can advise you or the church can advise you along the lines of, 'hey you should probably bring in a counselor, you should bring in a therapist, sometimes there's workbooks that help, sometimes there's medications that can help, you need to see a doctor, a psychiatrist, someone who can prescribe something.' It all depends on the level of depression, anxiety, mental illness that you're experiencing. Because sometimes someone can get in such a hole that they can't even begin to climb out of that hole until they're somewhat stabilized, and because it's all so different, right...think about it like COVID. Some people get COVID, they're asymptomatic. Some people get COVID, it's like a cold. Some people get COVID, they're on a ventilator. Some people get COVID, they die. Right? So, we wouldn't treat all of those situations the same and in the same way we can't treat all mental illness the same.

Kathy: That was really good, I hope you guys are paying attention. I just learned a lot. This next question is a little fun. Is birth control a sin? And I'm glad you get to answer that.

JP: Is birth control a sin?

Kathy: Is it a sin? I guess, is using birth control a sin?

JP: Well, sex outside of the context of marriage is a sin, so if you're trying to control birth by any means other than abstinence, that is sinful. You're bringing harm to yourself. But yeah, let me say some things about this. Psalm 1:27 says that "children are a blessing from the Lord, blessed is the person whose quiver is full of them." A quiver is something you put arrows in. The scripture really compares children to arrows so that we would direct them, we would show them the way to go, so that as they grow old, they would not depart from it. And so, you want to think about strategically, how many children can I have and disciple well. That really is the question.

Another question I get asked on Friday, I do this every Friday, by the way, specifically with young adults and college students. Friday Q&A on Instagram if you're not aware. And a question I get asked a lot there is "Is it wrong for me not to want children?" And I would just say, it is wrong for you not to see children as a blessing, because God said they are. So, we want to learn to see children as a blessing. Beyond that, there's...when you say birth control, people can mean different things, like family planning. I can track my period—not my period—but her period.

Kathy: Thanks for clarifying that. We were confused.

JP: And know at what time she's ovulating. That is a form of birth control. Condoms: that is a form of birth control. Most of the time when someone asks this question, they're talking about hormonal birth control. And what I have found is a lot of children...I say children, but I guess it's true. You become sexually active as a teenager. You don't want to become pregnant. You go to planned parenthood. You get the free birth control, or the cheap birth control, and they kind of come in as the rescue. This is a strategic tactic of the enemy. You have got to know that, because now they're the heroes, they're the ones that are keeping you from having that conversation with your parents. And most young women are incredibly naive to how that hormonal birth control affects your body. What it's actually doing is it controls your period, your cycles.

And so, I would just say be really well-informed. Have a believing OB or an OB that shares your worldview and if you are married and thinking about becoming pregnant, or you don't want to become pregnant in that marriage, just make sure you're talking to someone who's really informed, or that you're doing everything you can to inform yourself. Because it is something that...I mean, there's a lot of people that are just really uninformed on the topic. I'm not going to say, 'hey you can't take hormonal birth control', because I'm not a doctor. And the scripture doesn't say that. I will just say be wise. The scripture does say that.

Kathy: Okay, switching gears a little bit: What is the hardest lesson that you've had to unlearn?

JP: To unlearn?

Kathy: Unlearn it. Mmhmm.

JP: Man, I think on the topic we were just...I think things around sexuality. And so, I contaminated my brain and heart so much with pornography. I didn't realize how dangerous it was. And so, I've been married seventeen years now.

(Applause)

JP: Thank you. Thank you.

Kathy: Okay, yes! That is awesome.

JP: I'm glad you're excited, man, that didn't catch on.

Kathy: He's the hype man right there.

JP: Me and you, I feel supported. He's pro-marriage.

Scott: Hey, I've been married twenty years.

(Applause)

Scott: Thank you. Thank you.

Kathy: Almost ten years, okay.

(Applause)

JP: Uh...

Kathy: Do you remember the question? I'm sorry.

JP: Uh...I'm still unlearning. Like, seventeen years into marriage, I'm still unlearning. Like, there are images up here from twenty years ago that I could draw for you. They are that specific and explicit in my head. I had no idea, nobody told me that. They didn't tell me that split, that decision, that moment, you're going to carry with you the rest of your life. In some ways it feels unfair, because I'm a believer now, I'm not looking at porn. I'm

pursuing purity. I'm in a marriage, a committed marriage to my wife. It just seems unfair that this is still with me, but again it's a choice that I made. And so that's a lot of your stories. You're right in the middle of it, both men and women in the room. Get healing. You will only be glad that you get healing.

We have something here every Monday night called Regeneration. We will come alongside you and help you heal from that struggle, but I cannot stress to you enough—I'm not fear mongering right now, this is my story—I cannot stress to you enough what it will cost you. And so please get healing. So, I think that's probably it.

Kathy: Can I just ask a question?

JP: Ask me anything. All you're doing is asking questions.

Kathy: Okay, but like this is my question. Because when I hear the word unlearn, I'm thinking about this popular trend in Christianity right now, it's like deconstruction. Have y'all been hearing? Like our friends deconstructing their faith, unlearning. What would you say is like the right way to unlearn things that we should unlearn? And how do you not deconstruct your entire faith?

JP: Yeah. So, I went through deconstruction before that was even a word, like right now such a buzzword.

Kathy: You made it cool before it was.

JP: No, I did not. I did not make it cool. I made it uncool. I slowed the coolness of it down. And what deconstruction for me looked like was really just erasing the white board. It wasn't unlearning a lot. I grew up Catholic. My dad was Catholic, my mom was Lutheran, I went to Baptist youth group, like hyper-Baptist youth group. I just had a lot of different church experiences. I just walked up to the dry erase board and erased it. I just said alright, I just want to start from scratch, like I want to understand who God is straight from the source. And so, I erased it and then began to build, alright, like what is true? What's it like if I'm reading this on a deserted island, like nobody else has kind of told me who God is and I just start reading this book? Like God, the Holy Spirit chose to preserve sixty-six books over thousands of years and placed it in my hand to teach me everything that I need to know about God illuminated by His Holy Spirit. Like, what do I want to know? And then I started building from there.

So, where I started in my deconstruction journey was really coming to a place of can the Bible be trusted? I had to answer that question because people were saying things like,

“Oh, well it’s been changed. In the dark ages there were words that were wiped out. Books are missing. What about the Book of Enoch? What about the Gospel of Thomas?” And so, I just started to say, alright can the Bible be trusted? And as I pursued the answer to that question to its end, I came to the conclusion that it can be trusted. And with that conclusion in mind, the Bible can be trusted, then I began to relearn. Relearn who God is and what He desires from me. And that has made all the difference.

Scott: So, I hate even asking this question, but I love it at the same time. Yeah, it’s a tough time to be a pastor, we’ve seen many pastors fall morally or for different reasons. What do you do to prevent that from happening? What can we do as the body of Christ to help you so that you’re not another one who falls?

JP: Yeah. Pray for me. Let me start by saying, I am a sinner. Right? To which you guys are like, “no duh”. But I would just say, I am capable of all things. Given to my flesh, if I suppress the Spirit, I am capable of all things. You need to know that. There’s no dog and pony show, there’s no act. This isn’t the clown show, like man, I am capable of all things. I said recently up here, man if you knew everything that went through my head, there’s no way that you would allow me to preach. And if we knew everything that went through your head, we wouldn’t even let you in the room. We’d be afraid of you. And that’s not true, because we do know that we all think all kinds of crazy things, and here we are worshipping a good God who changes our lives.

A part of my protection is just a commitment to absolute transparency and authenticity. I’m also running the same offense that you are. Every Thursday morning, I meet with a group of guys, and we do input-output confession that looks like, “How did you feed your soul?” Hey, here’s the podcasts I listened to, here’s what I am reading in the scriptures. Here’s the book I’m reading, this is what God has done to stir my affections for Him in this season. “How have you fed others?” Here’s conversations that I’ve had that centered around Jesus. People I’ve shared the Gospel with. Discipleship opportunities. And then that last one is “How have you fed your flesh?” Which is, hey here’s this week where I’ve acted in a way that wasn’t honoring to God. It was me operating in my flesh. Doing that is humiliating, which produces humility. Doing that is not fun.

I’ll just be honest, those three questions, like I don’t enjoy those. You guys might think like he’s making us do that cause he loves it. I don’t enjoy those. It is just a way. It is not the way, it’s not the only way. But as we seek to shepherd the body here, it is a way that we’ve seen is effective to help you guys grow in your relationship with God. I have that same structure in place that you do, and that I continue to kind of live my life out loud. If there’s a criticism that’s brought against me, it’s because I let people see most everything. I have forfeited the right to privacy. And I’m committed to that. When I stop confessing

sin and when I stop being transparent with you, assume I'm hiding something. I give you that permission right now. Assume I'm hiding something. If you say, "Man, he seems a lot less transparent than he used to be." You come up afterwards and start asking really pointed questions. That's my commitment to you, and I hope, honestly, a safeguard to those outcomes.

Scott: You and I have a mutual friend who we used to work with who publicly said, "I will never have a moral failure." And fast forward the tape, the guy had a moral failure not too long after that. And I really am grateful, JP, for the way you modeled that for our body and for our staff. And we are committed to praying for you.

JP: Well, let me just say publicly, I am fully capable of having a moral failure. And you guys have...you can ask anything at any time, is what I would say. By the grace of God, His kindness to me truly, I have people asking all of the hard questions. When I got here, honestly, it was a little overwhelming, because I felt like there was so much of that. There was so much accountability. There are different groups of elders, and my life group, and people that you're meeting for the first time that are just almost interviewing you. But I think there's a really healthy balance now, and there are guys in my life who pry. I mean they know what we spend, what we give. Everything. There's really nothing in our lives that they really don't know. And I will offer you that. There's nothing in my past. There's nothing that I would not communicate to any single one of you. And some of you say, "Well that's not safe." And so, I would say I agree. But I've forfeited that safety. I just got to a place where I want to be fully known by anyone.

Kathy: That's good. Okay. We talked about this on the podcast a few weeks ago. I think it's super helpful, the question just scrolled past, but can we talk about forgiveness? Okay? Because you said something that I think is so helpful, and I think the person asking the question wanted more clarity. When do we forgive and still set boundaries that need to be set, just because of unhealth or lack of repentance, and then when in forgiveness can we have full reconciliation? Can you help us understand what that can look like?

JP: Yeah. So, Christians are called to forgive always. So, you never have, you don't have to walk through those doors and wonder, "Do I need to forgive this time, do I not?" Jesus makes it clear repeatedly in the scriptures, especially to Peter. He said, you know, seventy times seven, which it's not like we need to do that math. He's just saying over and over and over, you are called to forgive.

But then in Luke 17 you see different versions. There's a different version of that same command. He says, 'when there's repentance, unless they repent' and you can if you look at that passage in context compared with the others, you could draw the conclusion that



when there's repentance there can be reconciliation. Or to say it a different way, the relationship can be restored. That would be a better way to say that.

So, we should forgive someone at all times. He says that even in the Lord's prayer. "Forgive us as we forgive others their trespasses." But when there is repentance, meaning when someone says, "I acknowledge that what I did was wrong and I'm committed to not doing it again," then you can restore the relationship. Now, they may betray that, and they may repent again, but there are relationships where healthy boundaries need to be put in place. You are no longer asking them to repay you for the damage they've caused you. That's what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is writing off a debt. Forgiveness is this, is what you've done to me, this is the way you've hurt me, and I'm forfeiting my right to revenge. I forgive you.

Restoring the relationship is something altogether different. People say, "Well, do I have to forgive and forget?" I say, it's impossible, humanly impossible, outside of a lobotomy, outside of us removing parts of your brain and memory, you can't forget. You should forgive and stop reliving. Meaning don't drive down the road and continue to relive that action and get worked up, and have your blood pressure all high, and your heart racing again. So, if that's what you mean by forget, yes. But you can't choose to forget something.

Kathy: So how do you forgive someone, especially someone who isn't apologetic? I mean, I think that's a true question. I talk to college girls often, and they are trying to forgive someone, but they don't know how. Or it feels like it's a process rather than just a one-stop shop.

JP: It's really hard. Some hurts run extremely deep. So I think about Jesus in the garden, I think of Him sweating blood. The author of Hebrews says if you haven't resisted to the point of shedding blood. It's really hard. One thing that I've found helpful is listing out everything they've cost you. Like, the hurt that they've caused. Like here's what you cost me. I didn't get to go here, and I didn't get to do this, and I didn't sleep for this long, and I don't have this because of what you did, and all the things that you cost me. Then look at it and say, and you don't have to pay me back. Crumble it up, light it on fire, whatever is helpful to you. And then in that process just continue to look at that cross. The incredible length that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That while we were the ones who put Him on the cross, He did that for us. And renew our minds around the gospel, that God has given us infinitely more than we could ever deserve through His son Jesus Christ. When all we've done to Him is abuse, abandonment, adultery. Those are all the things, those are the sins that we've committed against a Holy God.

Kathy: A bit of a spicy question for you.

JP: Okay.

Kathy: Is cussing a sin? And do you count cuss words that are said in labor?

JP: What did you say?

Kathy: Just asking for a friend.

JP: What was the question?

Kathy: I should not have said that. I said, "and do you count cuss words that are said in labor," and I said asking for a friend.

JP: I didn't say any curse words in labor.

Kathy: Okay, good for you.

JP: You can do it! Listen, guys, again this...we're a simple place. We just believe this is true (points to Bible). And we just want to live according to what the Spirit of God tells us to do through the word of God and the people of God. And so in Ephesians 4:29, he says "Do not let any unwholesome talk come" ...and so do not let...What's the word?

Kathy: Any.

JP: Any. That's a high bar. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths," but then he goes, "but only." So, if we weren't narrowed down enough, right? He says, "but only." So, "Don't let any...but only what is helpful for building others up so that it may benefit those who listen." And so, in our household, in our home, we just say continually, "Hey, were those words, did those words build up?" And so, people will say silly things like, "Well words are just made up, and it's just sounds," and while that's true, God cares about what's happening in your heart. And when I shank the golf ball, and I yell out a four-letter word, the issue is what's happening in my heart. The idol worship that is going on, where I care so much about the direction the golf ball's going, that I would be willing to compromise my witness by shouting that. That is where the issue lies. And so "do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building others up so that it may benefit those who listen."

Scott: That is the number one reason why I do not play golf. So, we went away as a leadership team this week, and all six of us on the team identified this as the biggest challenge that we face. How do we not get discouraged by cultural Christianity all around us?

JP: Galatians 6:9 says, “Do not grow weary in doing good, for in due time you will reap a harvest.” There’s always challenges, you’re always choosing your problems. So, if you’re doing ministry in Afghanistan, there’s no cultural Christianity there. Literally, Afghanistan is void of cultural Christianity. That’s a huge blessing. You legit wake up and wonder who from your family is going to be missing and what’s going to happen to them or you. And that’s a different problem. Both problems are very real. Cultural Christianity is just the problem that we have here.

Now, let me say something a little bit alarming to you: it is just as dangerous. It is just as dangerous. One is not safer than the other. It is extremely dangerous. As we combat it, we should start with we’re a part of the problem. Who’s a cultural Christian? If I was to ask you to point them out, we all, to an extent. It is the air we breathe. We are all cultural Christians. Like, so many of us didn’t wake up this morning, we didn’t spend extended time in prayer, we didn’t get in God’s word, we didn’t renew our minds around the gospel. You probably haven’t even shared the gospel with a lost person yet today. You haven’t bought your tickets for your overseas trip and influence.

In a way, all of us are churchgoers, and there’s some varying spectrum right here. Who’s the most committed, walking in faithfulness wherever they’re at? I don’t know. But I think we cannot grow weary in it. We start by understanding that we’re a part of the problem, and then I would just say the other part of that is: live as an example. What does a real, true, red-hot on fire for Jesus Christian look like? Live that. I’m going to tell you up front: weird. Okay? Like, they look weird. I mean, they stand out, strange. Joy of the Lord just overflowing from their life, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. “You will know a tree by its fruit,” Jesus says.

And so, they’re going to look strange. But they’re going to be incredibly effective, really hard workers, insanely generous, overt with the gospel, courageous in the name of Jesus, so loving, so kind, so humble. And so, you want to fight cultural Christianity? Just be that. And you can leave here, and you can write that list down and say, “I’m going to do it,” and check the box on each of those, and you’ll still miss it, because it really is a surrendering. It’s starting with the posturing of, ‘God, I can’t, but you can. I won’t, but you will. How do I surrender more to your Holy Spirit at work in me so that these things pour out of my life?’

Kathy: So, your advice for us this morning is to be weird?

JP: Yeah.

Kathy: Okay cool.

JP: Yeah, a hundred percent.

Kathy: I just needed some permission.

JP: Yeah, and I mean not in an off-putting kind of way, but in a standout kind of way. I tell my kids all the time, if you're the most popular kid in school it is going to be a sovereign, miracle, act of God, because you're probably going to be the weirdo. Everybody else is going to be doing things and into things that you're not going to be into. You just got to know that.

Kathy: Man, that's awesome. Okay, so obviously this wouldn't happen in Bible Belt America, right? Because we've all heard, or at least in Texas, we've all heard the gospel. But what happens to someone who has just never had the chance to hear the gospel? Do they go to Hell?

JP: Someone who never has the chance to hear the gospel?

Kathy: Never has heard it.

JP: Yeah, I want to address two things here. One is I think a lot of times in this question, because of the nuance of some of our stories, we think babies who die in the womb, children who die before they ever understand, someone with down syndrome, or the intellectual...they lack the intellectual capacity to embrace the gospel. I want to start by telling you, with everyone that sits in that category, based on my understanding of God's word, and my understanding of God's character, and what He says, I want you to know that whatever happens to them is so incredibly just and beautiful and gracious and merciful. And I can't tell you with any specificity exactly what that looks like. I myself have not been to Heaven and come back. But I can tell you that whatever God does in that situation is going to be much better than we could even hope.

To the person overseas, the person that's raised in an Islamic country, and Jesus is the prophet, and they never hear the gospel, they don't know of the cross, you know I would say that I'm not sure. I'll just tell you what God says in Romans 1. He says that He reveals himself through creation, and He tells us that anyone who seeks Him earnestly finds Him. God is not struggling. He tells us the rocks will cry out. He's not struggling

trying to reach that person, and yet we are in our humanness. Like that's our problem, it is not God's problem. It is not a problem for God to save lost people.

Let me tell you two stories, and then we're close out of time on this one. One story: I was in...people talk about the Bushmen in Africa. I was in Africa, I was in the jungle, truly in the jungle. I was in the only building within miles and miles and miles and miles and miles. And I'm standing in this kind of tourist facility, this lady walks in, and says, she's huge, she'd radiating joy, she says "Are you saved?" in this thick African accent. And I said, "Yes, I am saved. What do you mean by that?" She said, "Do you know Jesus?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, I know Jesus." I said, "What about you?" She said, "Oh yes, I'm saved." And I said, "Man, how did that happen?" And she said, "Oh, God has always spoke to me in my dreams. And one day in my dream, he told me that His son died for me and raised from the dead." And I was like, "Oh, so a missionary came here, shared the gospel, you dreamt about it?" She goes, "No missionary came here." I said, "So how did you know His name was Jesus?" And she goes, "That was His name in my dream." And in that moment, I learned that's not a problem for God.

And the second story, if that's not convincing enough, is I was on a TV show that is broadcasted through satellite into Iran, called Iran Alive. And I'm on this show and they wanted me to share my testimony, and I did, and then they had an opportunity, they opened the phone lines, where people could call in from Iran. This twelve-year-old girl called in, and she was just ecstatic on the other end of the call. And they're translating Farsi into my...I have an earpiece, and they're translating English into my earpiece from Farsi, as she's speaking Farsi. And she's just, all I can tell, she's really excited about something, and she's saying, "I dreamt about that man, the man he's talking about. I dreamt about him last night." And so, she's communicating to them that she had heard of Jesus through the dream the previous night, and now she's watching the show, and she wants to give her life to Christ. It is an extremely high cost to that little girl. She's on the streets tomorrow. Like she's not doing this for attention. It is only cost to her to say, "Hey, I want to trust in Jesus now," but that's what happened. So, people who haven't heard the gospel, they're not a problem for God. They are our problem. Like, we do need to, and we will, focus our time and attention to sending people to unreached people groups around the earth. We have made hires, who their sole focus is doing that here at Harris Creek. They wake up every day and think "How are we going to mobilize these people to the ends of the earth, where folks don't have access to the gospel?"

Scott: Alright. Two more. One quick one to end with, probably. This is from Kathy Davidson. Who is your favorite staff person at Harris Creek?

Kathy: I did not write that question, but the answer is right in front of you.

JP: My favorite staff person at Harris Creek...they're not on stage right now.

Scott: Okay, that hurts.

Kathy: That means you too, Scott. Don't ask questions you don't want the answer to.

JP: James 2 actually warns us against favoritism, and so as I seek to abide by the scriptures, I see everyone created in the image of God.

Scott: Alright, so we just announced the end of last year, we're out of debt. And so just really exciting. What's next for Harris Creek? Are we going to plant churches, are we going to build, are we going to build a house? What's next for this body of Christ here at McGregor/Waco?

JP: Yeah. What's next is we're going to continue to be the church. We're going to continue to be the church, we're going to continue to take the resources that God entrusts to us, and to deploy them towards kingdom purposes. It's not like we had money problems and now we don't have money problems. We will always have money problems, and our money problems are never a problem for God, is what I would say. God's going to continue to do His work. He does not need Harris Creek. He certainly does not need me, and yet I hope we are such an expression of local church outside the sea of Waco that if we were gone this city would miss us. They would plead for us, they would say, 'hey we need to build another expression of the local church like that one, because of the way that God uses them.'

Are we going to plant churches? Absolutely. When somebody teaches on stage and when we bring people in, all of that is for the purpose of developing pastors. Like, we are a pastor-training school. The metaphor that I would give you is I want to be a residency hospital. So, I want to be the kind of hospital that sick people come to so that they can get well. But I also want to be the kind of hospital that trains up doctors and sends those doctors to other hospitals all over the world. And so, we're not going to hold onto our resources, we're going to continue to use the resources that God entrusts us like this and send them to impact and represent Him all throughout our country and all throughout the world.

Some of the first countries that we might implant might be in Afghanistan. I don't know, but as we continue to pour into people, raise up pastors, I hope that what God has for us is sending them. Another part of this effort is there's thousands of people right now watching us in their living rooms all over the world. We're trying to figure out what do

we do with that. One of the questions we got I saw is, “Can we be in Harris Creek life group if we’re in another state?” We’re trying to figure that out. That could be a church-planting strategy. The church could already be there. And then we could just say hey, what resources do you need from us so that you could continue to grow and be the church there.

We talked about building this transition home for orphans in our city. That’s not just talk. We’ve now identified the partner; I’m going to unveil it to you if you don’t know. It’s Isaiah 1:17. We are now selecting and finding the land. Harris Creek is involved in that effort. We’ve committed to them \$250,000 of the resources that God has entrusted to us to build that house and potentially more. Really, we’re committed to seeing it happen, but the way that we’re going to do that is we’re going to match up to \$250,000 that are given to them from other churches and other ministries in Waco outside of Harris Creek. As people give that, Harris creek will match up to \$250,000. And I’m just saying, going on record, you can hold me accountable, we’re going to make sure that that gets done. Whatever we need to do to see that this transition house is built, we’re going to do.

And so those are some things off the top of my head, but we want to continue to help everyone follow Jesus by Engaging the Lost; Equipping the Saints; and Empowering Members for Service. One of the questions I saw is, “How big are we going to get?” I don’t know, but never so big that we can’t equip the saints. If it becomes this place that we don’t have opportunities to pour into you and invest in you through your life groups, then we’re too big. We never sought to be big. We want to be biblical. We want to be biblical, and if we need to be 300 to be biblical, we’ll be 300. If we can be 30,000 and be biblical, and that’s what God desires for us, that’s fine. He’s going to direct that.

One of the challenges that we face here again is everybody measures church based on their experience and their tradition, so all of us have in our mind some right size number that is the church. And we would leave Jesus’s church. When the thousands showed up in John 6, we would’ve walked off and said, “Jesus your church is too big.” In Acts chapter 2, when 3,000 were added to their church, some of us would’ve been like I don’t like that. I really want to have a relationship and be friends with Peter, so I’m going to go to a different church. When 5,000 were added in Acts chapter 4, right? You got to erase what you know of church. Another question I saw is—I’m just answering them all, just rapid fire—

Kathy: That’s okay. You just take it away, we’re just here to sit and look at you.

JP: Another question I saw is...and I just lost it. What are the biggest challenges that you face in Waco? Cultural Christianity being one. Cynicism, I think too, and I think

cynicism is born out of our church hurt and out of our church experience. Some of the people with the biggest church hurt that I've come in contact with are people that present as the most mature believers. They're leading ministries, they've been in church their entire life, and so when you say church, they know what you mean, but they don't know what you mean. At least, like, let me say this: they don't know what I mean. Because I don't have that baggage, I've erased the white board and I'm reading this like I'm deserted on an island. Like man, it just seems Jesus wants us to...Like, let's just do that. Let's just do what He says right here. Like let's just be the church. Let's call back the prodigals, let's restore the marriages. Let's share the gospel, let's be the army, push back darkness, the gates of Hades won't overcome it. Let's. Do. That.

Kathy: That's good.

Scott: Okay, two part question. One is, can you be a Christian and drink? Part two is, thoughts on drinking alcohol before you turn twenty-one?

JP: Yeah, so can you be a Christian...? Well let me just take the second one first because it's easier, right? Don't drink alcohol before you're twenty-one. Okay? It's illegal. We're called to obey the laws of the land, like this is plain and simple. You really don't need to wrestle this down; you're not missing out on anything. You don't need to do that. The scripture really talks a lot about delayed gratification. See also the story of Esau who sold his birthright for a cup of stew. You don't need to expedite those things. That's how a lot of people get in trouble. See also all the things we said about sex earlier. I'm not your grandpa talking, I know I might sound like it. Understand, I've seen into the lives of tens of thousands of young adults. Like, I can't tell you...literally hundreds have come into my office crying saying they've ruined their lives around some of these things.

Nobody, none of you, not one of you today is like "Hey, I want to be an alcoholic when I grow up." You need to know there's going to be a lot of alcoholics born out of this room. If I was placing my bet on who that was going to be, I'm going to start with those who began to drink before they're twenty-one. Okay, that's just plain and simple. These stats, these statistics, they add up, they make sense, there's some science here. And so just to say that Romans 13, "Obey the laws of the land." Plain and simple. Is it a sin to drink before you're twenty-one? The answer is yes.

Is it a sin to drink, to consume alcohol, when it's not against the law? If I had to answer yes or no, I would say no. It's not a sin. I believe that Jesus consumed alcohol. I believe that as He gathered with the disciples at the Last Supper, what was in the cup was red wine. If you grew up in a faith that said, "Oh that was grape juice, it wasn't fermented, it was different, the water was bad there," I think these are really bad arguments. And so, I



don't think that any consumption of alcohol is off limits. I do think that we need to drink with other scriptures in mind. 1 Corinthians 8, if someone is...their conscience is so sensitive toward the subject it could cause them to struggle in legalism, right? They would say, "Hey I don't think you can drink," then I might not. Like, I might just care for the weaker brother or sister, the scripture calls. If someone is an alcoholic, and they're going to be tempted to drink, or maybe they're not of age, then I would forfeit my liberty to care for my brother or sister. Don't get drunk. He tells us this, that we are not to be drunk on wine but to be filled with the Spirit.

Then people say, well what does drunk mean? It's probably a lower bar than you think. And so, can you drink? It depends on how you drink. Like, are you getting a beer by yourself? I just say, why would you do that? You know, maybe drink water, get a diet coke or something. Are you sitting there with a glass of wine with people around fellowship reflecting on the goodness of Christ? I think it's possible that God can smile down on that moment. I think He can be glorified in that moment. You get to three glasses of wine; He's probably no longer glorified. He's probably like hey your inhibitions are hindered now. Stop it.

Kathy: That's good, okay, let's talk about dating. Because we all have all the questions about dating. How far is too far? How do you create boundaries? And what are some good boundaries? Maybe you could give some good examples of those.

JP: How far is too far in dating?

Kathy: Yeah, let's just start there.

JP: Yeah. We're almost over time, just to like, say that out loud. That really went by fast. You guys are more fun than the morning. How far is too far? What I always say is, it's like if someone says, "How close to the edge of a building can I get?" And I just start with the question, do you want to jump off? And the answer...if we're in a relationship with someone that we like and we're attracted to, and we want to jump off, meaning we want to go all the way. So, for the person who says, "How close to the edge can I get?" I say, if you want to jump off, I wouldn't even get on the elevator. That's not very practical, so let me get it really practical for you. When your body begins to prepare itself for sex, you've gone too far. God has designed you. Like, sex is His idea, it's brilliant, like it was like Father, Son, and Holy Spirit like, "Oh yeah, on Him we're going to make this part, on her we're going to make that part, and that part will fit in that part," and they're just like high-fiving, like, "oh we're going to make it feel good, and we're going to put nerve-endings there, and it's going to be amazing." Like, truly, Steve Jobs thought of the iPhone, God thought of sex. Like it's not bad, it's not dirty, it was His idea. Like,

He did that. Like it's not embarrassing. I'm not embarrassed that I said that, like that was God's idea! Like He did that! You got to get like (makes mind-blowing noise). Like whoa. Praise Jesus. God did that, right?

And so, He made those parts function a particular way, and when you, being male or female respectively, when your body begins to prepare itself for sex, you've gone too far. It's unloving. Like, it's unkind to sit there and make out, your body's running a hundred miles an hour, and then to break and say, "I got to go." That's unloving. Okay? That's a sleepless night for somebody. Just real talk right now, you don't do that to somebody you care about. Right? Get married. Get married and swing from the chandeliers, like do whatever you want, it can be wheels off.

But can I tell you something about your generation? Because I literally have invested my entire life studying your generation. I don't know if you know that, but I really have. I mean, up close. I've just given my entire life to studying how you think. You're getting married later, you're getting married less, and marriages aren't lasting. That's what's happening in your generation. What are you going to do to change that? People have devalued marriage because this thing that God has made for marriage, they said, "No I'll take it and I'll have it wherever I want." C.S. Lewis said that if you climb the fence to steal the fruit, it doesn't taste as sweet as when you enter through the gate. And I find that to be really true on this topic.

Again, as a man, who has a significant sexual past. You might say, where's the grace in that? Man, the grace is that God has forgiven me, and he's made me an heir to a kingdom forever and ever and ever and ever. Do my sexual choices outside of marriage impact my marriage today? Even though I'm forgiven. They absolutely do. Do they impact every single marriage of people who make that choice? They absolutely do. They absolutely do. And so, listen, God's grace can forgive us. I don't say that to heap any shame on your shoulders. I'm telling you my story. God's grace can forgive us for eternity, and yet there are consequences to all sin, no one ever gets away with sin in the history of history.

No one's ever committed a sin and gotten completely away with it. There are always consequences to it. I would just say, keep that gift that God has given us where it belongs. In the covenant of marriage. In the context of marriage. The only place it's safe. And if you're here, and I imagine many of you hear that and it just got really heavy inside your heart, because you're thinking "Oh no, I messed up a marriage long before I even met my prospect. Before I even met my spouse." I just say man, just know that God's grace is amazing. It's amazing. He forgives you; He says He's no longer counting your sins against you. The way that He does that—the only way that He can do that is through His son Jesus Christ, who literally took all of the punishment for your sin, all the cuss words

you've said, prom night where you went too far, that make out session where y'all went laying down. Jesus took all that on himself. He paid the price. And you know what God cannot charge you for? Like, you know what He can't make you pay for? I'm saying God can't do something so everybody's ears should perk up like, "What's he gonna say?" You know what God can't make you pay for? Anything that's already been paid for.

What happened on the cross is your sins were already paid for. When you trust in Jesus, you don't have to pay for your sins. You know the only thing that anyone can do in Hell? In Hell there's only one agenda item. Only one box to check in Hell. The only thing that you can do in Hell is pay for your sins forever. So, the person who doesn't have to go to Hell is the person whose sins have been paid for through Jesus Christ. That's the gospel. Gospel just means good news. The good news for you: your sins have been paid for.

And so just know, I'm not at all, in any way, naive to the challenges that you face today. Some of them are really big challenges, And we don't want you to go through those challenges alone. We're the kind of church that we're not afraid of your questions. We're not naive to where you're at. We want to put our arms around you and walk with you through those challenges. They're going to be hard. They're going to be difficult. But together, we'll make it through them. As you're committed to authenticity and transparency, and we're committed to praying for you and giving you godly wisdom and counsel, together we're going to make it through that. So, I'm going to pray, unless there's something you guys, you got to say this?

Kathy: I don't know.

JP: Okay. I'm going to pray.

Scott: Yeah, can I confess I thought that question of "What lines do you have in the dating relationship?" I thought they were asking for like, pickup lines that you've used.

Kathy: Oh, my word.

Scott: So, I'm glad that you answered that and not me.

JP: Oh, I did too. I saw that before we came out, I totally thought that was like, pickup lines.

Scott: Yeah, so do you have any?

JP: No. My game was like, freestyle rapping.

Kathy: Okay!

Scott: Prove it!

JP: I'm not going to prove it. I'm not going to prove it. Alright, I am going to pray.

Kathy: Are y'all serious? You read the question that way?

JP: I'm dead serious. I mean, come on guys, what does that mean?

Kathy: My bad. I totally interpreted it boundaries. Right?

JP: What lines did you have in dating relationships?

Scott: Yeah, like is your daddy a thief, like more lines like that.

JP: Yeah. Did it hurt when you fell from Heaven? Yeah. Man.

Scott: Probably should pray.

JP: Yeah. Father, we love you. We love you so much. And we're so thankful for the ways that you love us, that you sent your son Jesus Christ to die for our sins, that you raised him from the dead. You're great and amazing God! You've given us infinitely more than we deserve in your grace. And we're humbled. I feel small in this moment. Would you make us feel small in this moment? As John the Baptist prayed, that we would decrease and that you would increase, that we would become less and that you would become bigger.

These friends, as they enter through those doors and they wake up in occupations tomorrow, and/or on a campus at a university tomorrow, they're going to be surrounded by evil. The enemy is after them. Lord, would you help them to not give him a foothold in their life. Would you remove any strongholds that he has over them? Strongholds like pornography. Strongholds like a sexual relationship. Strongholds like drunkenness. Strongholds like alcoholism. Strongholds like materialism. Strongholds like licentious speech. Gossip. Strongholds like lying. Would you remove those from their lives, set them free, purify their hearts, God?

And help them to live as warriors for you. If they've never seen an example of a real, true follower of Jesus, who stands apart from the world, I pray that they would be the only ones that their friends know. That they would just be different, that they would be

radically sold out. That they would study your word every day, that they would pray and fast. That they would memorize your scriptures, that they would live in community with other believers. That they would avoid sin, repent from it, turn from it, confess it, forsake it. That that would mark the lives of the people at this church, in this church. We love you. We praise you for this time. It's in Jesus's name. Amen.

Hey guys, don't forget your prayer guide, as you leave. We'll be up here if you have any questions that you need to ask or any follow-up. We're happy to have that conversation. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.