

the gospel of

JOHN

all intents and purposes

JOHN: PETER'S PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Date Preached (Avenir Next - ultralight, italic)

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John 18:15-18, 25-26

The death of Christ was seen as a horrific tragedy by his followers, but unknown to them, it was a plan carried out, an intentional act of sacrificial love. Every moment of his perfect life, his death, his resurrection, all of it was done to intentionally display his rule and reign over the world. How do we obey his commands to love others with the same intentional love? Join us for our final installment in our walk through the Gospel of John. We will see that God's love is behind all of his intents and purposes. Go to doxa-church.com to learn more about Doxa, find service times or support the making of disciples in the everyday stuff of life.

John chapter 18, verses 15 through 18 and verses 25 through 26:

Simon Peter followed Jesus and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

Verse 25. Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Thanks, Emily. Good morning, Doxa. How are we today? Did you guys get a chance to get outside the last couple days? I hope so. That sunshine was a real gift. Yeah. Recharges the batteries a bit. Hey, if we don't know each other, my name is Donald and I'm one of the pastors on staff here at Doxa, and I get to preach from time to time.

Those of you that are maybe wondering where Eddie's been the last few weeks, he's had some opportunities to do some sort of big C church, speaking engagements. He spoke, in Pennsylvania last week, and then for the next two weekends, he's participating this week in a counseling intensive, which

I'm really, really excited for him. It's really just part of our commitment to make sure that our leaders are walking in spiritual and emotional health so that we're here for a long time. And so, yeah, be praying for Eddie. It's been a really cool opportunity for him to participate in this. And then I'm honored to be back with you. I know I was back up here two weeks ago and here I am again. So I'm sorry if that's a bummer to you, but here we are. <laugh>. Here we are. All right.

I want to begin our time together with a really simple exercise, and it takes a little bit of trust, but I promise nothing weird's gonna happen. So, would you please close your eyes for a moment? And I want you to imagine something with me. I want you to actually picture this. Don't just listen to my voice. Truly picture this.

This church service ends. You walk out to your car, you get in the car, you start the car, you pull out of our parking lot and you start driving home. You pull into your driveway or your garage and you walk in the front door, and you're actually startled because someone is sitting on your couch. You panic, but you also immediately know who it is, and not so much by their appearance, but something that is deep in your gut. It tells you exactly who it is. It's Jesus. You don't say a word and you're a little freaked out. He motions for you to sit down. You sit down across from him, and it's silent. And my question to you this morning is what do you see on his face? Not his physical features per se, but how is he looking at you? What is the one word that would describe the look that he is giving you?

Go ahead and open your eyes. This morning, we're going to take another longer look at the disciple Peter. We're going to watch the arc of Peter's life. And believe me, Peter did some really incredible things. So, we're going to recount some of that. But this is not a "Peter is the hero" kind of message. This is not a "you should be more like Peter" kind of message. The truth is that you're already probably a little like Peter already, and I want you to be reminded or perhaps hear for the first time how the savior of the world interacts with someone like Peter, and someone like you, and someone like me. Someone who gets ahead of themselves repeatedly, someone who makes a situation worse repeatedly. Someone who has big ambitions and falls short repeatedly. Someone who fails in catastrophic fashion repeatedly. I think this feels a little bit like us, and Jesus's face for Peter tells us a lot about what God really thinks about us.

So let's pray. Jesus, help me to speak clearly, help me to share the things that you would have for the people of Doxa this morning. I need this message as much as anyone, so help us, help us to give you our affection, our attention together as we are gathered. Help us to be mindful that we have perhaps over time believed some things that are untrue about the way that you see us. And help us clear those things up, and help the gospel change our view of those things and change our hearts. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.

All right, open your Bibles or Bible apps to John 18. If you are new to the faith, John is the fourth book in the New Testament, right, sandwiched between the two books that the disciple Luke wrote. That's the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, but we'll be in John chapter 18 starting in verse 15. It says, "Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in."

Over the last two weeks, we've watched the arrest of Jesus and the conversation between Jesus and the authorities. It's revealed that while all the best and brightest in the Jewish elite were playing checkers, Jesus was playing chess.

Jesus requested trial, and he uses their own laws and regulations to make it abundantly clear that despite the fact that they would say they're pursuing justice and righteousness, that they're actually breaking Jewish law and Roman regulations, and that something really dark and evil is brewing. A couple

of disciples follow the authorities escorting Jesus back for illegal interrogation. And this verse tells us of this mystery disciple, one that has connections. The Greek word here is stronger than an acquaintance type relationship. He really knows the high priest, which means he's got some pull. And so he gets inside the courtyard first and then comes back out to fetch his plus one, Peter. So, who is the disciple? The bottom line is we don't know for certain. I think the most compelling theory, and the one that most scholars agree on, is that it's actually John the author of the Gospel of John, which is really interesting for a variety of reasons.

Some scholars suggest that John was actually cousins with Jesus, which answers a whole bunch of questions like why he's the disciple that Jesus loved; why he's in charge of Mary after the crucifixion of Jesus. And in Luke one we see that Mary has priestly connections. So if he is cousins, and as a part of being in that family, he would also have priestly connections. I think it's the strongest possibility, but we don't know for sure. Now, we're going to cover the denials of Peter, but before we get down that road, I want us to remember how much courage it took for him to even follow the officers and priests back into the high priest court. I mean, most of us are hesitant to tell our neighbors or coworkers that we go to church because we might get an eye roll or have an awkward conversation. But Peter knows in this moment that death is definitely on the table, and Jesus's arrest makes that seem all the more likely.

So, for all of his faults, Peter is incredibly brave, and John knows some people, so that helps explain why he follows him in. But Peter is just going because he wants to watch what happens and probably try to help, if he's given the opportunity. He's there because he loves this man Jesus who has turned his life upside down.

Verse 17: "The servant girl at the door said to Peter, 'You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.'" I want us to hear the negative tone in the question. This wasn't an innocent or neutral question. She's probably seen them together so she knows why they're associated, but the tone of the question is suspicious and cynical and condescending. She's saying, oh, not another one. Are you with them?

And Matthew's account records that Peter's accent was actually in part how those in the courtyard knew who he was. Jesus' disciples were from Galilee and the Judeans in Jerusalem looked down on those from Galilee. It's akin to how many Americans who live on the coasts sort of describe--when they describe something blue collar or rural, they'll do so with southern accent. In the same way, the Galilean were looked down upon. In other accounts of this exchange, Peter pretends to not even understand the girl's question.

Those of you who have small kids, do your kids ever do that? You ever say something to your kids and then later they pretend like they didn't understand what you said the first time, even though you were super clear? I read Andy Crouch's book Tech-Wise, it's a really helpful resource if you're trying to figure out how to navigate kids and technology and all that sort of thing. And one of his concepts is taking at least one day a week where you basically tried to avoid technology and stay off screens. And so Mondays we're supposed to stay off screens at our house. And I'm just amazed at how often I can come home on a Monday and everybody's on screens <laugh>, and you're like, wow, I thought we really talked about this. And then they say something like, oh, you mean like every Monday? Oh, you mean these screens, right? Anyway.

Verse 18: "Now the servants and the officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself." Jump down to verse 25: "And now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, 'You also are not one of his disciples are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not'. One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with him?'"

So, it's late in the evening, it's springtime; it's chilly and damp, and legal proceedings aren't supposed to be happening at nighttime. And so the officers on shift, they get a fire going, because normally the courtyard was empty because you're not supposed to be doing this right now. And now both of the things that Peter has been terrified of happening happen at the exact same time. He's forced to interact with the officers, and somebody who saw the incident with the sword in the garden makes the connection to him. This is the worst-case scenario for Peter. And it happens not once but three times. Three times someone confidently connects him to Jesus, and three times Peter denies it.

Now, he's risked his life to be there. He's the same Peter that gave Jesus his boat to preach to the masses. He's the only one to ever walk on water besides Jesus. It's the same Peter that said, "I'll lay my life down for you" in chapter 13. During the transfiguration Peter basically says, can we just stay here together forever? He's a passionate, passionate follower. And now under pressure and threat, he's trying to distance himself from his friend Jesus. And that feels contradictory. That feels inconsistent.

And I have to believe it also for us feels a little familiar. This is the contradictory inconsistency that we often see in our own lives. I mean anybody here stop sinning completely when they became a Christian? Peter's inconsistency is not that much different than ours. His is just recorded for all time. And that's the hardest part of this message. Peter's story shows us how weak we really are. If Jesus' best friend is capable of turning his back on him, then what are we capable of?

Now, Jesus had already predicted that Peter would respond this way. Jesus predicted betrayal. Peter predicted unending allegiance, but Jesus knew that Peter would fall and fail, and still chose to move towards him in relationship, towards him in time, towards him in investment, towards him in relationship and friendship. So, Peter May be surprised by his weakness, but Christ was not.

A recent fascinating study found that different cultures make up different facial expressions that help fill in the gaps of their language. And so they use their facial expressions to communicate some of the things that their words may not be able to contain. And a common denominator across a lot of cultures was empathy, that we often rely on specifically facial expressions to indicate when we feel for other people. The study found that facial expressions made a huge difference in people's decisions about whether to cooperate or team up with others, which is one of the core indicators of trust.

And we've all probably heard a lot about how nonverbal communication trumps verbal communication, right? It dwarfs what you say. You can say a lot through your face. And so Peter is standing in this open courtyard and there's a breezeway with these open arching doors to the major rooms. And so from where he is, he actually has line of sight to the conversation that Pastor Justin preached on last week between Jesus and the officials. And this is why Luke records that, in his moment of denial, it says, "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter." Can you imagine? Jesus turned and he looked at the one that he named rock, solid one, unwavering one--in the very moment he was crumbling. What do you think Peter saw?

What was Jesus' face in this moment? When you've wronged somebody you care about, it's pretty hard to look him in the eyes, particularly if what you've done is a big deal. And the weight of this moment is absolutely monstrous. I mean, think about when Paul establishes communion in 1 Corinthians. He doesn't say on the night that Jesus was arrested, or on the night that Jesus was interrogated, or on the night that Jesus broke bread. He says on the night that Jesus was betrayed. Matthew's account says that after his third denial, the rooster crowed and Peter went out and wept bitterly. He cried hard. When Peter looked over the guard's shoulder to Jesus being interrogated, what did Jesus' face say to Peter? Was it anger? Was it condemnation? Was it Jesus regretting that he'd ever made friends with Peter? Was that why he wept, or was he weeping for a different reason?

Was Peter weeping, not because of the guilt he saw on Jesus's face, but what he felt in his own chest. This was the moment he realized he wasn't as strong as he thought. And that weakness led him to despair. He condemned himself.

You know, two of the toughest conversations you can have in a relationship is convincing someone they've hurt you when they disagree, and convincing someone that you've forgiven them when they are busy condemning themselves. It's really tough to do because the volume in their head is so much louder than what you can reach on the outside. And condemning yourself is dangerous stuff.

Brennan Manning is so, so helpful when talking about the love of God and, really, the reach of it. He says, real freedom is freedom from the opinions of others; above all, freedom from your opinions about yourself. You know, some of us in this room are really hard on ourselves. We've been high achievers for a long, long time and we have high standards. Some of us are harder on ourselves because we don't know how to give mercy and how to receive mercy. And sometimes if we're honest it's a little darker than that. It can be, in a twisted way, a form of pride, because being hard on yourself is one way to make sure that nobody else ever can be.

Spouses, hear me here. If you beat yourself up when you fail in such a way that your partner does not get to name how they feel hurt, that's not you being hard on yourself. That's you protecting yourself from having to hear the disappointment of someone else, the hurt of someone else. Self-condemnation is a powerful, powerful poison. And I'm confident, very confident, that Peter did not see condemnation on the face of Christ. I think the face of compassion that Peter saw through that archway made everything infinitely better and infinitely worse at the same time, because he knew that Jesus wasn't quitting him, but he also knew that Jesus was right about him. That he saw him in his worst moments. That with all of that in view, Jesus still loved Peter and that kind of love pierced right through him.

When I read this account, I think on Peter's life. I realize we are all a lot like Peter. Just three quick ones. Number one, just like Peter, I think we're prone to want the saving of Jesus without the obeying of Jesus. I talked a lot, lot about that two weeks ago. Number two, just like Peter, we tend to put a lot of our confidence in what we can do. Peter is constantly making promises about what he is going to do for Jesus. The best litmus test I know for us is the timing of our prayers. If we pray on the front end of a difficult thing, that's probably a good sign that we see things accurately, that we need God. If we only pray when things go wrong, or when our attempts are exhausted, that just says a whole lot about where our confidence actually lies.

Number three, just like Peter, we fall into despair when we fail. I mean, Peter spent three years with Jesus in person as his best friend, and he still failed in a huge way. And I think that we are just really quick to forget that the spirit is willing and strong, and the flesh is weak. Church, I'm not suggesting that we over-identify with our sin, or that we mope around, or that we forget that our identity in Christ according to the Bible is that we are more than conquerors. Jesus gives us victory. He gives us the power to have victory over sin. Amen? But I am suggesting that we're not so surprised when we fail, that we not waste time feeling sorry for ourselves or acting shocked that it happened again. Instead, let's run to God not away from him, but actually move toward him when we blow it.

I saw something this week that captures this perfectly. "Religion says, I made a mistake, Dad's gonna kill me. Christianity says, I made a mistake. I gotta talk to Dad." That captures it. So let's not despair in our weakness, but instead head back to the Father, full of mercy. Let's repent, let's make amends and then move ahead knowing that his grace covers us. So, these are three of the ways that we're a lot like Peter.

To end, though, I want to fast forward and take a close look at what happens later in Peter's life. So let's jump to chapter 21. Jesus has been hung on the cross. He's been buried. He's resurrected. And now he's beginning to appear to the disciples, and everybody's freaking out because they all saw him die. And

Peter is out fishing with his friends unsuccessfully, and a man he does not recognize from the shore calls out to them and tells them to put their nets down in the water.

And Jesus causes the fishing team to bring in this enormous catch. Peter is the first to realize that the man on shore is Jesus. I want you to note his reaction. He jumps in the water fully clothed, and he swims to the shore, because he's convinced that he can shave a couple of seconds off and get there just a little bit faster. Jesus then sits down with a few of the disciples, they have breakfast together, and then Jesus pulls Peter aside. And it's in this moment that we get to listen in, in what's arguably one of the top five most important moments in the entire New Testament. It is honestly hard to capture how important this one is to the world of Christian history. I'll say this, it is not an overstatement to say you and I are likely not here in this room without this moment.

This conversation with Jesus is the absolute fulcrum of Peter's life. And rather than march straight up to him and rip into him and recount all the denials in the courtyard, and ask him, "What was that about, man, I do not know him? I do not know him?" Right? That's what most of us would've done. Instead, they eat together, they reconnect. And with Peter looking at Jesus's face of compassion, Jesus says this down in verse 15:

"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep'. He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything: you know that I love you.' And Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep'".

So in this beautiful picture of restoration, Jesus calls Peter by the name that he has not used since John 1, when he first called him to ministry, he calls him Simon son of John. Why? Because he's reminding Peter of his call. Jesus asked Peter to profess his faith and devotion the same number of times that he denied him in that courtyard. Three times Peter sins and three times Peter restores. Church, the forgiveness of Christ is so powerful that it redeems Peter's past. And his restoration--it's full, it's complete. It's not partial or lacking or half-hearted, it's three for three. He doesn't say, "Well, we know how this went last time." That's not what Peter gets from Jesus. And importantly, that's not what you get from Jesus. The forgiveness of Christ is so powerful that it redeems Peter's past.

Now, the first time in verse 15, Jesus asked him, he says, "Do you love me more than these?" And this is a little bit of a confusing question, and there's a few possibilities on what Jesus meant here. So, I'll give you three options that scholars have debated for a long time. I think they're the most compelling. And I'll let you know what my favorite one is.

Option one. He's asking, do you love me more than your stuff, your nets and your boat and this fishing business that you have built over a long period of time, your career, the things you do, the ways you earn a living? This is a possibility and it's a fantastic question for us to ask ourselves here at Doxa.

Option number two, do you still think you love me more than everybody else? Peter famously said he would die for Jesus, trying to appear like he was the most dedicated. It's very possible that in this moment Jesus is gently reminding him of his pride and his arrogance, and he's restoring a level playing field for the disciples. It's like Jesus is saying, do you now get it that you don't love me more than everybody else? Do you now understand that comparing your love for me to others, and keeping score, is just not helpful or healthy?

There's a third option, and I like this one the best, and I think it's consistent with the teaching of Christ. He says, really what he's asking is, "Do you love me more now that you've been forgiven more?" Jesus is re-centering Peter's present. He's getting him out of this mode of competition. He's asking the question

not to pit him against the others, but because Jesus knows that the more we grasp what we've been forgiven of, the scope and the sheer size of our sin, and of the grace that meets us, the more that we love the Savior.

Church, the most dangerous Christian is the one who does not get this. The one who believes that their testimony is purely boring. That the one that believes that they were 90% of the way there and then Jesus kindly picked them up for the last 10%. And the reason it's dangerous is because they will forever have a small love for God and a small love for others, because they falsely believe that that is what God needed to have for them. This is absolutely huge. Church, we are by God's design relational creatures. We are relational beings, and this means that we form a lot of our views and conclusions about who God is for better, for worse, by the relationships that we have with other people.

Do you know how hard it is to believe in mercy when you have never experienced it in real life? Do you know how hard it is to believe an unending, steadfast, enduring love when you have not experienced that in real life, even though the father's love is not like your parents' love? No matter how great your parents were, we are absolutely affected by our parents' emotional health or lack thereof. Jesus' friendship is not like your friend's friendship. I don't care how awesome you think your friends are.

We are absolutely affected by what we experience in those friendships. We are masters at taking the brokenness in our horizontal relationships and then painting that onto our vertical relationship with God. And Church, I want you to hear me so clearly. Christ is better than anything we have ever had here from others. Christ is better.

And so if Luke 7 tells us that he who is forgiven little loves little, and I believe the words of Jesus, so I believe that's true, then a Christian who doesn't see that they were born an enemy of God absolutely dead in their sin, regardless of what kind of Christian household you grew up in, that you were unable to help yourself. That kind of Christian who then lives as essentially a graceless Christian, if there even is such a thing, is so incredibly dangerous because others will encounter that hardhearted grudging critical nature and say, "That's what the grace of God looks like?" He who is forgiven little loves little. And all of us have been forgiven a lot.

If you're the kind of person that holds grudges, if you have a hard time giving other people second chances, if you're ruthlessly hard on others and on yourself when you fail, I'm telling you it's just probably been too long since you have experienced the grace of God in a transformative and meaningful way. And I'm not talking about doing a Bible study on it, or hearing somebody else talk about it, or even singing about it. I mean feeling it in your own chest. If that's you, if you feel now in this moment, the Spirit saying that that is you, it is quite possible the very best thing you could do is head home after service and recall the ways that he has carried you and restored you over your life. Because in remembering your great need and remembering your great sin, you will have a more clear picture of our great savior.

This is why I believe Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me more now that you've been forgiven more?" Our love for God is directly tied to what we know we've been forgiven of. And Jesus asked Peter in this light, or in light of his great betrayal, in light of receiving great forgiveness. The love of Jesus is also great. Jesus is helping him see the present, not as a competition, but as an opportunity to be faithful and to care for others. The forgiveness of Christ is so powerful that it re-centers Peter's present.

RC Sproul is really helpful here. He says, "therefore, in being forgiven, restored, and invited back, not only into the fellowship of Christ but into the ministry of Christ rather than being dismissed from ministry for the rest of his life for his scandalous transgression...Peter saw the grace of God more fully than the rest. I believe that was what Jesus was driving at with his question."

All right. We've said the forgiveness of Christ is so powerful that it redeems Peter's past; that it re-centers his present. Lastly, the forgiveness of Christ is so powerful that it redirects Peter's future. In the 1960s, a meteorologist was running computer models on trying to figure out how to predict weather better. And he noticed that very small changes in the initial conditions would produce vastly different outcomes in those predictions. And he coined the term that many of us know, the butterfly effect. Did you know that one act of forgiveness can have absolutely massive impact on the trajectory of your life? Most of us know that one act of abuse or mistreatment can do the same thing, and for good reason. But did you know that one act of forgiveness can do the exact same thing?

I mean, let's zoom out and think about the butterfly effect of forgiveness on Peter's life. What he ends up accomplishing. He's sort of the leader of the group. He replaces Judas and gets the 12th disciple appointed. He preaches the gospel to the Gentiles. He essentially single-handedly convinces the Jews that the Gentiles are a part of God's family. That's kind of a big deal cause I think that's most of us here in this room. He helps establish the church, capital C Church. He writes the epistles that we have in our Bibles in first and second Peter. And all of that is made possible because of this one exchange between the Messiah and one of his far from perfect ragtag followers. It is this moment that the possibility of all that we know of the church is even opened up. It's this one brief conversation of restoration that sets Peter on course to change the world.

The forgiveness of Christ is so powerful that it redeems Peter's past, it re-centers Peter's present and redirects Peter's future. And this is on the table for every single one of us in this room. Maybe as you hear the story of Peter, you feel some conviction about the ways that you have denied knowing him. You hear the Spirit inviting you to have some more courage to tell others about him. That the places you go to school and go to work, the places where you play, the people you interact with through your hobby or your kids' sports, the houses on your street--they all need the small courage of a life changed by Jesus. Maybe as you hear the story of Peter, you realize it's just been a really long time since you have felt honestly anything at all about God. Truth is, you've been numb for a long time. Doxa, the best heat I know to melt a cold heart toward God is to sit in the mercy and grace of the Father, to sit there and stay there until you feel something.

And so this is the question I want us all to think about as we prepare to head to the communion tables. What is the face that Jesus has for you? Across the courtyard, Jesus saw Peter at his worst. And the truth is, and we know this, that Jesus has seen your worst, too. What is the face that Jesus has for you? I'm not asking you to describe his physical features. That's not the point. What do you think God feels when he thinks of you?

I think we're prone to think that God sees us as harshly as we see ourselves and it causes all kinds of problems. Again, Brennan Manning is so helpful. He says, define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion. Doxa, his face towards you is kindness. His face towards you is compassion. His face towards you is gentleness. His face towards you is understanding. His face towards you is mercy. His face towards you is grace. And maybe you've not experienced that in a tangible way from another person, maybe not even in your whole life, but you absolutely can because Jesus offers it to you and to me, and he wants to offer it to others through you.

Let's pray. Jesus, I am quick to assume that you feel things about me that are not true. I am quick to picture your face towards me as disgusted or disappointed or frustrated or impatient. And I can also recognize that it's just not who you are. I believe that your grace fully covers the things we have done. I believe that you love us not despite our weakness, but in the midst of our weakness. That you actually work in particularly powerful ways in our lives, in the moments of our weakness, particularly when we are aware of how much we need you.

I pray for those in our church that it's just been a really, really long time where they have felt your grace. They've been going through the motions. They're here because they feel like they're supposed to be here. Maybe they show up to their Bible study or their Missional Community, and they're there because they're supposed to be there, but they just haven't felt anything in a really long time. Would you this morning, break through that? Would you pierce that? Would you peel back the callus? Would you melt the places that are cold? Would you allow them to sense what you actually feel about them right now in this moment, which is a white-hot love, an incredibly deep compassion. We're reminded that you faced all the temptation that we have ever seen. And so you don't just offer us some kind of distant understanding, but you actually understand the very thing we're facing, the very thing we're up against. Continue to help us see your face, to hear your voice clearly, to recognize that even when we are discouraged and disappointed in ourselves, that is not your posture toward us. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.