

November 2/3,2019

The Message and Ministry of Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:14-20

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and
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(Josh Luse):

So good to be together this morning. If you're a guest joining us this morning, we can't tell you enough how grateful we are that you're here, and we would love to get to know you more. No matter where you're sitting, we would invite you to join Section 4 for the Section Potluck in D203 right after the service. There's *Raising Cane's*, so I mean, that'll get you there. And then you're going to meet some incredible people as well. So, don't forget about your potluck—can't wait for that! Also, this weekend's a little bit different for us because we're actually getting into what we're talking about for *Global Outreach* weekends. Last week Ryan Harmon spoken an incredible message from Matthew chapter 8 and challenged us with the way we view and the way we live out the gospel and making disciples in this world. If you missed that, go back and listen to it. But today, we're going to continue on with that, and I want to take you back just a little bit.

Remember those days when you were in your room, and the next day you had this “big thing”? And so you're sitting there, and you're looking, and you're trying to decide and pick out what you're going to take for *Show and Tell*. Remember that? Some of you in retirement, that might be a few years back; sixth graders way back too. But back in those days, when you would take something that was so important to you, and when you got to class, you couldn't wait to bring it out and show the rest of the class what you had—and tell them about it. Today, we want to talk a little bit about God's *Show and Tell*. So, if you have a Bible, you want to turn to 2 Corinthians, Chapter 5. We're going to start there. Paul is speaking and he says this in verse 14:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that One has died for all, therefore all have died; (*ESV, 2 Corinthians 5:14)

He says, **For the love of Christ controls us** [or compels us.] There are actually a lot of things that can control us. Think of bitterness or greed or jealousy or anger. When I was younger, I had the nickname *Fireball*, if you can believe it or not. And when I got angry, look out! It was not a pretty thing. The fact is that anger can compel us to do some things we wish we would have never done. But Christ's love can compel us to do things we never thought possible. So, he is talking about this love because it moves us; it motivates us. If ever there was a thing where we could say, “This moved me,” it would be His love, because His love moves in and through us. It moves us into action. It's not just this theoretical love. It's this expressive love that starts to pour in and out of every part of our life.

He says that he has **concluded this**. He's convinced of this; he's believed this. It's rooted so deeply in his life that it's going to affect everything he does. And it goes into what that love has done—the gospel. He shares with us the inclusive and exclusive realities of the gospel—and here's what I mean by that. It says **that One has died for all**. That's the inclusive piece of the gospel. Jesus came to die for the entire world; His heart reaches out to every single person in this world. In fact he says,

...therefore all have died. In essence, He has died all of our deaths for us. But he doesn't stop there. He goes on to say:

And He died for all, that those who live...

Now this is the exclusive part of the gospel. Because even though He died for everyone, not everyone will believe it; not everyone will come to the same conclusion. Not everyone will accept the gift that He has done for them. But those who do, their lives have changed. Those who do, he says...

...that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised. (Vs. 15)

We no longer live for ourselves. It's as though we've come, and we've taken what Jesus has done for us and it's gone inside, and it's taken our life to a point where we say, "God, you have everything. You can have it all. No matter what comes my way, I realize that I am in this with You, and it is ultimately all Yours. It doesn't matter about my title or my position or my stuff; that can come and go. But what I have in You, that is set, and so while others who live for themselves may have a job change, or may have a status change, or may come into something that takes all of their possessions—and they're wrecked by it—it doesn't impact me the same way, because I'm grounded in You!"

What's the point that Paul is trying to make through this letter right now? He's not necessarily trying to just share what the gospel has done for them. He's already laid that out. This is a church that's been struggling. This is a church that had conflict and deviated off course, and he's come and written them a letter, and then he's actually come in person to talk to them. He's poured his life out; he's set aside his status and become poor, to just continue to bring the gospel to them. Why? His point is not only what the gospel does *for* you, but it's what the gospel now does *through* you.

I love the way Dallas Willard spoke about this. He said, "The gospel is less about how to get into the kingdom of heaven after you die, and more about how to live in the kingdom of heaven before you die." Did you get that? Once you trusted in what Jesus did for you, and you became a part of His family, He didn't just take you up to heaven to be with Him. You're still here—and there's a reason why you're here—because He has a job and a purpose and something He wants to do through you, because you are part of His restorative plan for the whole world, and He wants to speak in and through your life. He wants to show others through your life, what He's done for them, and so then he goes on to share a little bit more about what this looks like.

From now on, therefore, [And Ryan last week told us when there's a "*therefore*" it's connecting these pieces; they're tied together. So, because of this reality) **we regard no one according to the flesh.** [We could say according to human standards.] **Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard Him thus no longer.** (Vs. 16)

What's he saying? He's saying that we don't judge like the rest of the world. No longer do we evaluate people on what they have or what they don't have, what they've done or what they haven't done, or the way they look. It's as though He's given us new eyes for the people that we see around us, and it changes the way we treat them. It changes the way that we care about them. In essence, He's taken us, and He's transforming us.

Paul says, "Hey, I know this firsthand." Before Paul was Paul, he was Saul, and he was this guy that had incredible religious status. He was a guy that had prestige, and when he met others that had been

transformed from Jesus, he thought Jesus was the enemy, because their message was a different message than he had. And so, what did he do? He went after Jesus. It seemed like He was a nobody from Nazareth, no status, and He was sharing this different message—this countercultural message. And when Jesus was nailed to a cross and died, he thought that just proved His criminal death; that proved that God was displeased with Him. But in fact, God was transforming Him. He used to view Christ that way, but he no longer does. He used to view just an elite people—the Jews—one way but now he realizes that God has come to rescue the entire world. So what does that do? It continues to change and transform us. In verse 17:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Paul's not saying that we just need to rethink stuff. He's not saying that Christians are just reeducated or are rehabilitated or rebooted or repaired. No, he's saying they are *renewed*. They're *recreated*. He's saying that everyone who was united with Christ gets a fresh start, and he's saying that this life that we now have in Christ is followed by a new way of life. And then he really starts to dig in what this new way of life looks like. Verse 18:

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (Vs. 18-19)

Now, there's some big words that we often only use in church in this section. So let's unpack a few of them. First of all: **reconciliation**. What in the world is he talking about through this? Romans 5, verse 10 tells us: *...while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.*

He's literally giving us the definition within this verse. Essentially reconciliation is to *renew a right relationship*. It's to make an enemy, a friend. And get this. It's not that God was an enemy with us; it's that we were an enemy with God. It's that there was brokenness—and we've seen this all around us in the world. We see death and decay; we see injustice; we see sickness. We see all of these people walking around that are estranged from God, all of these people that are enemies of God, and yet, *while we were enemies, He came, and He paid the price for the debt that we owed*. When he says, **...not counting their trespasses**, it's this accounting term of calculating a debt. He speaks about that debt in verse 21. We had sin that we couldn't pay for, and yet He came, lived a sinless life, and took that sin on for us, to make us right with Him.

This reconciliation begins to change everything. Reconciliation is the process through which we have peace with God through Christ. And so what that does in us, then works its way out of us into the lives of others. He's given us a mission to do something with this reconciled relationship with God. We don't just keep it to ourselves. We don't just hold on to it as though it's ours and ours alone.

So, he gives us two specific things here. He says He gives us **the ministry of reconciliation**, and He entrusts to us **the message of reconciliation**. Now, **ministry** seems like it is one more of those terms that we often just use in the church. We think of it as maybe ministry is a certain age demographic — the kid's ministry or the youth ministry or the adult ministry. Or maybe we think of it as something

that we do just in the confines of this building that, “I have a ministry. I serve in this ministry at 70th and Highway 2,” right?

The Old Testament ministry was often around an office in a particular location. For instance in Exodus chapter 28, you see Aaron and his sons in verse 43 where it says, “*They went to the tent of meeting, and they approached the altar to minister.*” So, throughout the Old Testament there was a specific way that they would minister. But when we get into the New Testament, there's a different form of ministry that takes place. It's more holistic. We're now all priests with Jesus. So, what does that take on? What's that look like? The Greek word for this is *Diakonos*. That's a servant, and comes in the form of *Diakono* or *Diakona*, and so what that sounds a lot like is a *deacon*, right? That's where we get this word.

So, as the church was continuing to grow throughout Acts, and they started seeing all the needs that were around them, they were worried that they were going to actually miss the tangible needs of the people that were around them—the people that were hungry, the needs of the widows. So they instituted deacons that would help oversee the distribution or the ministry of giving food out, or helping the poor. And so, in one sense that was a form of ministry that we saw in the New Testament. But it goes beyond that. In some ways it's specific; in some ways it's very general, and the term actually during this day and age, ministry is referred to as a waiter, somebody that would come and serve food. It was actually a quote from one of the Greeks at the time. It said, “How can a man be happy when he has to serve someone?” Serving somebody was not something that gave you honor. A waiter for the table—somebody that was bringing in food—that was the lowest possible position you could get. Yet Jesus takes this and He flips it, and He starts to say meeting the needs of others and serving in ministry—this ministry of reconciliation—actually helped with tangible things that people need, in what I'm actually giving you as a task. Mark 10:45 says: *For even the Son of Man came not to be served (diakonao), but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*

And then 1 Peter 4:10 gives us some specific ways that this plays out. *Each of us has received a gift, [You're wired some way; the Spirit has given you a way that you have a gift.] use it to serve [diakonao] one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.*

Ephesians 4:11-12 says: *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of (diakonao) ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*

Now, the ministry of reconciliation plays out in all sorts of different forms. In general ways that the church has, for example the ministry of distribution—of helping with food—or the ministry of the Word—of teaching—or ministry of care—of taking care of tangible needs that are around us. But also it's the ministry of giving. It's the ministry of prayer. It's the ministry of encouragement. It's a lot of general terms, but as we're in 2 Corinthians and we're reading, you see he's given us the ministry of *reconciliation*. If we continue to read on in chapters 8 and 9, we see that this ministry is always tied to express itself in a commitment to meet the material needs of others.

Bruce Larson says it this way. “If any kind of personal relationship with Christ does not involve us with a suffering world for which Christ died, it is certainly an affront to the very Lord who is, in His world, suffering with all of His people.” I found that the more we understand that, we can meet the needs of others, and that that's a part of the reconciliation that God calls us into. So the ultimate reconciliation that He will do in someone's life—the thing that they can't do for themselves—He has

done through His death and resurrection, often meeting their needs, which opens up their heart to the greater needs.

Just a few months ago, my wife and I took a trip for our anniversary. We were able to actually go to this island. We had it all mapped out; we had a few different stops along the way, and we had a limited budget, but we decided we're going to go to each of these places. We got to one spot, and we're trying to get in line for a ferry to get to the place we needed to go, and there's this guy right behind us. And as he's standing there, he realizes that you can only pay in cash, and he doesn't have that. And so I can hear the conversation going on and, as I get up, I realize that I can take care of his ticket and the person with him as well—and so we do. And all of a sudden, this conversation strikes up. He asks us if we want to go to this restaurant afterwards. So we go to this restaurant; we're continuing to talk, and then he asks us to come the next day. And all throughout this, I'm starting to realize that God's doing something. The Spirit is whispering to continue in this. So my wife and I go home that night, and they had invited us for lunch the next day at their place. Well, we had plans; we had this limited time and stuff we wanted to do, but it felt like God was doing something in this. We thought, “Boy, we could show up and feel like idiots. Maybe they didn't really mean it. We're just going to show up at their place?” But we felt like God said, “Do it,” so we did. We showed up and they were ready. They had some food there, and we started talking after that. This guy had been blessed with an incredible mind and had an ability to create these businesses and do all this stuff, and he said, “I want to show you around.” So, we got in his car and started driving from place to place to place, and we would stop and look at it and talk.

We sat down at one point, and we're looking at each other across the table. I just kept hearing the Spirit saying, “Now, share the message.” And so I told him, “Hey, you've been so kind to us. There's no way that we can ever repay you, but I want to share something with you that is far better than anything money could ever buy.” I started to tell him about the way that Jesus had changed and transformed my life, and I shared the gospel with him. He started to tear up. When I was done sharing, he said, “I am an empty box. I have all of this and yet I have nothing.” And then he kind of shook it off, and he said, “Let's go to the next place.” So we went to the next place. We ended up at the end of the day—it's nighttime—we're back at his place, and we're talking again. He's telling me about some of the things he had done for God, “I've given this money or given this.” And I said, “It seems like you're saying, ‘God, you can have this, but I'm going to keep this,’ and God is saying, ‘I want you to say you can have it all.’” He said, “Oh, I need a cigarette,” and he went off and got a cigarette. Before we left that night, I said, “Can I pray with you?” And he looked at my wife and he said, “It's like he just kept looking into my heart and seeing inside.”

What I realized is: often the way that we can tangibly meet needs and this thing—the thing that started the whole bit off—was offering to cover a ticket. That was it, and yet it opened the door for a message, because he tells us that we are to share a message, no doubt about that. In verse 11 of chapter 5 he says, “*Speak it persuasively.*” In verse 20, he reminds us that it's God making his appeal through us, so *speak it powerfully*. In verse 20, he also says that: ***we implore you, be reconciled to God; speak it passionately.*** But oftentimes, the thing that will open the door for that message—and it's always tied to the gospel—is the ministry, the way we serve and tangibly take on the needs of others and care for them. And he tells us: **Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.** It's not something we do on our own but through the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

Verse 1 of chapter 6 says: **Working together with Him.** The God that has saved us and reconciled us, wants to come and work with us, and through us, into the lives of others, to change and impact the world, not just here in Lincoln, but all around the world. We actually have an ability now to impact the world in ways that other generations have never seen, and the access to be connected and know and impact the world, is incredible. And God will take anyone who's ready to join Him in that ministry of reconciliation, to open the door for the message of reconciliation, and use them.

I'm reminded of that, because back when my son was five years old, he's sitting at the dinner table, and as he's sitting there, everybody else is done eating but he's still going; he's lingering. It's taking forever. So I pulled out a classic parenting move that I learned never to do again. I was trying to encourage him so I was like, "Hey, we've got dessert after; finish it up." That wasn't working so finally I just said, "There are starving kids in Africa that would love to have that food," right? (*laughter*) He kind of stops and he looks up. He said, "Really, we should send them *this* food?" (*laughter*) I thought, "Yeah, that doesn't work. That's one plate. It'll be rotten by the time it gets there." And so he continues to eat, and then he goes, "Well, what's their life like?" I said, "Well... So I started just thinking through the different things that we had realized were a part of this life around the world. "Maybe they all live in this small area. Maybe it's this tin shack or maybe it's this bamboo hut, oftentimes with a dirt floor. There's no running water; you've got to go out and get water. There's no bathroom. There's no stove, or refrigerator. You're cooking over an open fire." And I continue to unpack this, and as I did, something starts to work because instantly he's chowing down his food. He's done. He goes back to his room, and I hear him call out, "Dad!" I go in there and he's gotten this bag. It was essentially his piggy bank—all the money that he had, he had filled with coins and pennies, and nickels and a couple dollar bills that he'd been saving. He said, "Dad, how much would it cost so that that kid could eat?" "As a boy, a meal would probably be this much, and we started counting it out. And so I helped him—he wanted to count it out—so then we went and got an envelope—and he put that in.

And then as he was thinking through all the other things that he had, he said, "How many shirts do I have?" So he counted all the shirts in his closet. He said, "I want them to have shirts. I want him to have that many shirts." And so he put some more money in the envelope. He realized he still had more, and this lit him up. He thought he could be generous so he's like, "I want him to have 2,000 shoes!" And I'm like, "Well, that might be a little overboard." But he grabs a couple more handfuls of coins and puts it in there. And then he continued on. "I want to do this; I want to do that." He's like, "Dad, does he have a ceiling fan?" (*laughter*) I'm like, "No, I don't know that he needs a ceiling fan. Let's go to bed now." By the end, he had dumped the entire baggie into this envelope, and so I'm walking out of his room now with this envelope and I said, "Julie, we've got to do something now." So we got online that night, and we started to work through an organization to find somebody that fit the kind of story that we just painted—and we started sponsoring them. And all of that came through the heart of a five-year-old that realized he had things that God could use through his life.

Imagine what God could do through each one of us if we realize that we are a part of the ministry of reconciliation, and the message of reconciliation. Now I could continue to talk about this, and what it means for each one of us, but imagine if we did it completely as an entire church! I think it would be way better to have Jason Harms, who's our pastor of our global engagement, come up and do that. So I'm just going to have him come up at this point.

(Jason Harms):

Alright, in *Global Outreach* we've been working to give you guys opportunities to engage in the work that God is doing around the world. We've tried to focus that in three specific areas. One would be through *going*, another one is through *prayer*, and the last one is through *sponsorship*.

If you were here last week, Ryan talked a bit about *going*; you got those little bookmarks, told you a lot of different trips. We've tried to ramp that up, to give you a lot of opportunities. It's been cool to see people getting engaged in that. If you guys haven't ever gone on one, I would encourage you to start the conversation. Also, we've got *prayer*; a big piece of this is just letting you guys know what to pray for. I think there are sometimes just so many different things out there, you're like, "Where do I start?" So, whether that would be in the back of the bulletin—letting you know different areas to pray for—whether that would be up here before we send teams out—giving you specifics—talking about our missionaries, different things like that. The last thing is *sponsorship*. This has been something that has taken almost two years for me to land the plane on, and I'll explain why, because that's a long time. A piece of this is, as Josh was just saying, one of our goals, it's not just sponsorship. It would be: What if we could get every single person in this church united for a common cause, a common vision, and something that we're going to be doing for years to come? Wow! Wouldn't that be cool, because in the moments where historically our churches come together on things, we've been able to make a pretty large impact in different areas.

So, I want to talk with you guys a little bit about that. And in some of my research, trying to find an organization that could possibly help us with this, I ran upon *Compassion*. This is a place that I had seen as a child, but I didn't really know anything about them. So I thought, "All right, I want to learn more about this place. What would be the best way to do this?"

So, I went on a vision trip with them. I went to Peru. There were a couple of other pastors from Kansas City that went with us as well. And this is just an opportunity to kind of see a little bit of everything they're doing. One of the first things they did, they brought us out to an area where *Compassion* had never been, brought us to a place where they've been for just a year. And then a place where, on another trip, where they've been there longer. And I can stand here today before you guys and give testimony to the fact that an area where *Compassion* has been for just a year is radically different than a place where they had never been. And in one of the biggest ways that I've seen this is, I don't know if you guys remember one of the last prayer requests that I asked for before we went to Mumbai. I said, "Hey, could you pray that we would actually be able to feel the presence of God, like that we would be able to see the footprints of God in the places that we're going to be, like, my "Dad's" already been here, and we're walking in that path." Those same feelings, that presence of God was very, very much there in these places where I've been, and I love that piece of it.

So, I was like, "Well, that's really good. This is good stuff that I'm seeing." But, if I'm going to be presenting this to you guys, I need to really vet this place and start asking some of the more difficult questions to really make sure this is a good place to sponsor or to work with. So, I was asking a lot of the tougher questions and these guys kept just nailing them. I was like, "Okay, well, here we go." I've got to keep asking deeper. How am I going to do this?" Well, I can look at a vision statement; I can look at a mission statement. But that doesn't necessarily mean that an organization is doing those things. Those are just good things that they say they want to do. I could talk with the employees that

work there, but you never know. But if you really want to know what an organization is like, you ask those that they're serving. So, who would that be for Compassion? Well, that would be a sponsored child. So, I thought, "Well, how in the world am I going to get to a sponsored child and go about asking them these questions?"

Well, we're on this trip and we're having lunch, and these college-age students come in. Who are they? Oh, well, those are actually students who had been sponsored at a very young age and now they're volunteering. They want to give back. That alone to me was like, that's a pretty good testament that they're wanting to continue to do this. But this was also the moment where I'm like, "Oh, man, this is the moment where I could have a conversation with these guys and ask some of these tougher questions."

Well, there was another pastor there from Kansas City. I'm just going to call him Pastor Jim. Pastor Jim and I were sitting there talking about this, and he kind of shared the same sentiment. He's like, "Man, we need to be able to ask these tough questions." And we were talking about this and one thing led to another, and it almost turned into this interrogation process that we like, planned. Well, when the girl that was across from us got up, she went to the other side of the table and then went back to the back of the room to throw a plate away. Jim looked over at me; he's like, "Dude, this is the moment. Let's do this!" And I'm like, "Okay, here we go." And then he looks over at me, and he's like, "You're the good cop; I'm the bad cop. Let's go." Jim kind of kicks his chair back and he walks over to this girl; he pulls out his phone, turns on the light on the phone and shines in her eyes, and he's like, "I need to know everything. I need to know what you guys are doing. I need to know where all the money's going. I need to know, like, what are you being taught?" And I was like, "Jim, we can't do this!" He goes, "You play your role. You're the good cop; I'm the bad." Guys, you can't be laughing; that's a complete joke. We didn't do that. That's not at all what happened.

What actually happened was the complete opposite. We walked over to that girl to have a conversation with her. And if she had a light, she would have shined it on old Jimbo's face. This was so good. So, we walked over there, and she looked at Jim and she goes, "Hey, Jim. So how many kids do you sponsor?" Well, okay, she switched it around, but I don't know if you heard the intonation of my voice there. It was more of like a, "Hey, Jim, how many kids do *you* get to sponsor?"

Well, Jim was in pastor-research mode, and he's like, "Well, we're, you know, checking out *Compassionate*. We want to make sure they're doing what they actually say they're doing. We want to make sure these kids are getting their meals, and we're going to make sure that this is more of like, you know, what's the plan for the kids, what's going to be happening?" And I could just see it in her eyes. It's like, "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," and she interrupts him. And this is very countercultural, like, you would not interrupt somebody who's older than you—a pastor or different things like that. She interrupts and said, "Sorry, Pastor Jim, I've got to ask *you* something. My life has been transformed because somebody sponsored me. Why wouldn't you sponsor somebody if you know that you could change their life?"

But here's the thing. It wasn't a rhetorical question; she was genuinely interested. So she sat there and just looked at him. Jim was like, "Well, yeah, I guess you're right. I think I'm going to do this, like I've nothing that I could say otherwise." She continued, and she pushed one more question that, when you're in a place like this, in Peru, in this very specific area that we're in, she goes, "Hey, I've got to ask another question. I've never been to America, but from everything I see, it seems like you guys

are so blessed. Like, why doesn't everybody sponsor? Why doesn't everybody sponsor children?" Wow, that was a sobering question. Jim kind of looked at me. I looked at him and I was like, "Well, what am I going to say? "Oh, because my PlayStation view account costs about \$40." Or, "I don't know, like, I'm too lazy to set my coffee timer to make coffee the night before." And so I'm going, "You know, go pick it up, and eventually that'll end up being the same." I could give a million reasons, right? But none of them seem to hold any water in that moment. I was like, "Wow?" From that moment forward, I was like, "Man, she was a testimony to me. She was like, this is the real deal, like I love what they're doing."

And we're like, "Let's move forward with this." So, I talked with *Compassion*. I said, "Here's what we're doing as a church. Here's what I am wanting to be able to offer to our people, to get them engaged. How are the different ways we can do it? What's the structure like?" I said, "What can we do that would be helpful? Could we do a partnership here?"

So, they took it back to their team and they came up with this. They said, "Hey, okay, we've got this place that we think would be perfect for you guys. It's in Nicaragua. It's an area called Rivas, R-i-v-a-s. If you want to say it a little bit, it's kind of fun. That'll get it in your mind." So why Rivas? Rivas is a beautiful area. It's an area that's, because it's growing in tourism and where there is also extreme poverty, and where tourism and wealth come together, oftentimes one of the very first areas that gets exploited are the children.

On many of the mission trips that I've gone on, and different ones that we have, most of the time we're working with people who are older, who are adults, who have kind of been exploited as a child—and it breaks my heart in these areas. Yes, we believe in the power of prayer, and when we're doing that, yes, we believe that if we go on these trips, it's really helpful and effective. But I'll tell you what. In many of the situations, especially if you go on any of these other trips, I would die for an opportunity to have gone 10 years, 20 years earlier into these individuals' lives and say, "I wish I could have done something then, so that you had hope." And, now this is the opportunity that's getting presented before us.

So I asked them, "Well, how many kids are we talking about in this Rivas area—because this would be a partnership we're going to have for the foreseeable future?" "Well, there are 800 kids in this area." I thought, "Wow. First off, it breaks my heart to know there's 800 kids just in this area that are in a situation where they're at a pretty critical need." But then I thought, "Wow, what opportunity that is!" I have a lot of people who talk with me from here who say, "Man, Jason, I just wish I knew of a place that was a trusted place where I could invest my money in things that have eternal value." "Well, here's 800 of those for you." This is where I come to the church. One of the most beautiful things about the church is the unity. Josh mentioned this too. This is one of the things I've been looking for. If we can come together for a united, focused vision, this church can move mountains through the blessings that God can do through us. So, on a weekend like this, it's possible. It's absolutely possible! It's a God-sized ask. What if we could eradicate that issue this weekend for these 800 kids? That would be a miracle! What stuck out to me personally, as I thought through this and kind of prayed about it, there was a number that specifically stuck, and it's 600 kids. This is the ask! I'm hoping to get 600 kids sponsored. I've been praying about this for weeks.

Because, if we could get 600 kids, we would double our children's ministry in one weekend. Doesn't that kind of give you a little chill? Come on; wake up a little. If we could double our children's

ministry in one weekend by doing that, think! If somebody came to church next weekend, they walked in and said, “Hey, I’d love to see your children’s ministry.” And you’re like, “Oh, yeah,” and they’re like, “How many kids go here?” and you say, “Well, 1,200.” And they walk down like, “There are no 1200 kids here.” And you’re like, “Oh my bad; that’s because 600 of them are Nicaragua.” That’s the kind of church that’s, when we say we are a church, we want to engage in, in the work God’s doing around the world. Man, that’s a church that is globally minded in that sense!

We’re going to give you guys an opportunity here to be able to possibly sponsor a kid. But I do want to say something before I go there. I do not, by any means, want this to be a shame kind of thing. “Oh, I feel like I need to sponsor because...” or some kind of a guilt message that I’m giving, or “Wow, Jesus is really trying to sell me...” That is not it, and I want to take the wind out of that. What I want is to present an opportunity. That’s what I’m trying to do. I’m trying to give opportunities across the board for you guys to be able to engage in, and I think this is a great opportunity. And that’s why I’m presenting it to you today.

I know there are those of you who already sponsor kids. I know there are people who sponsor 7, 8, 9, 10 kids. You can’t even see the front of their refrigerator! I know there are people in certain situations where it’s like, “I’m tapped out. I can’t, I can’t give anymore.” But I also know that there are those of us who God has blessed tremendously. And I think very specifically, if we don’t compare ourselves to each other, but we compare ourselves to the other side of the world, we realize how blessed we really are.

So, here’s what I want you guys to do. I’m going to invite the ushers to come, and I’m going to talk through this. Every single person is going to hand this packet back in, okay? So regardless—this is where I don’t want the shame thing—I don’t want any of that. We’re doing this very specifically. Every single person is going to hand this back in, so I need every person to have this. If you didn’t get one of these, go ahead and put your hand up, and the ushers will give you one, so I can at least walk you through it. It doesn’t mean you’re going to sponsor a child. Also, if there’s any of you who are like, “Man, I want to sponsor several children,” go ahead and put your hand up and just let the usher know like, “Hey, I’d like another one of these,” and I’m going to walk you through what this looks like. If you want to see like an usher fall over, be like, “I need 10, and see what happens.” It’ll be kind of funny. We will help them up.

Okay, so some of you are probably looking around when you walked in, you’re like, “Oh man, I got the cutest girl here. This is awesome!” And then you looked over and you’re like, “Oh, they have that one too.” We are doing this for a very specific reason. Everybody has the same face on their packet. Why? What we want is that you guys aren’t motivated to do this by looking how cute a child is. But rather, we’re doing this out of an obedience, in a walk like, “God’s calling me to do this.” So, I’m going to walk by faith and move into this. There’s a number on here that corresponds to a child, and you will get introduced to who that is here in just a little bit. It’s a really neat thing. But at this point, we’d rather it be something of a walk by faith. “This is something I feel like God is calling me to and I want to be a part of this vision and moving forward.”

Also, know that if you do sponsor a child, you will be able to visit them on a trip. If you ever come on one of these trips with us, it’s kind of the icing on the cake; it’s pretty cool. So, here’s how this works. The top part, you just check that sponsorship. Then you go through, and you will write your first name, your last name, address, city, state, zip, telephone, and email. So, you just fill out that front

side. Then on the back, at the top it tells a little bit about what it offers, what the sponsorship provides. But then on the bottom here, there's the payment. So, you just check that little box: credit or debit card, put your first name, your last name, your card number and expiration date. Pretty simple. So that's kind of how that works.

I'm going to invite the band to come on up here. We're going to give you guys just a couple minutes to kind of process through this, to fill this thing out. When I come back up, I will kind of explain what the next steps are. Like I said, every single person, whether you sponsor a child or not, you're going to put these in some boxes that are going to go around—and I'll explain that in a second. That's also the time where you guys will get to meet who this child is. So, we'll give you about three minutes to kind of work through this, and I'll come back up here in a second.

I know a couple of you guys might still be filling those out. Okay, so here's how we're going to do this. I'll invite the ushers to come on down. They have some boxes. Bear with them as we're trying to figure out how to pass around these boxes to help them out. But, if you sponsored a child, again go ahead and take this thing and you're going to rip it apart—just like me, like that. You're going to hold on to this piece that has the girl's face on it, because that has a code on there. And then you're going to go—all right, go ahead and pop it up on the screen, the slide here. This is if you sponsored a child, this is what you're going to do. So, you're going to go ahead and take that code, or that number, and you're going to text to that number the code that's on the bottom here.

So, go ahead and do that real quick. Then look at that next slide here; you can see kind of what this looks like. So, this is what will pop back. So, go ahead and give it a second here. There is that code. It's in the middle here. That 83393 or your number. And then if you go through that, then there'll be a little link and you click on that little link. Here, my kid is Joseph, like the cutest kid ever. It's like that parent thing. I think whether he's the cutest or not, “I” think he is. So that's kind of how that works. So again, as you guys are getting to see who these children are, it's a pretty cool moment. We're going to pass those boxes through again. Take this piece; put it in there. If you guys didn't sponsor, just take that whole thing and put it in there as well. But then go ahead and keep this side for those of you that did. We're just going to take a little bit of time to worship here, as our children's ministry continues to grow. So thanks, guys.

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