

This is the first time I've seen that.

We're starting a new series. Happy New Year, by the way. Everyone had a good one. Everyone behaved themselves. Okay, very good, very good.

Someone shot off a confetti cannon into my front yard. So there's little pink and blue and yellow and orange and red, little pits, pieces of paper all over my front lawn. So yesterday morning I tracked down the culprit and I got him out of bed and I said, you need to get down there and rake up all that mess. And so we got some stuff done yesterday. Started off the new year, right?

Hope you guys are getting that same sense of accomplishment. We're glad you're here. All that to say Happy New Year. Happy New Year. I was talking to Tina just out there in the, in the four year before church started, we're talking about the men's warming shelter challenge of providing food for these guys.

She has some great ideas about ways to help do that. And we'll get some more information to you about that at some point in time. But for those of you who help with the men's warming shelter, whether you make a whole meal or whether you contribute a casserole or green beans or mashed potatoes or something, listen, that makes a big difference in those guys lives. It sends the message that there are people in this community that care about them, that they're more than just another other, but they're a real person with value. And that matters to me.

It matters to me that they know that. Because I've got an experience personally with not just the warming shelter here, but one in Reno, Nevada. Now, I wasn't ever homeless, but because of the ministry that we had out there, we got connected with, with the Reno Sparks Gospel Mission. You can look it up. They're still, still doing great work out there, but I got connected with them.

Now it's easy. When you think about guys in a place like the men's warming shelter or in a gospel mission, it's easy to think of them as like those kind of people, you know what I mean? It's all right. Let's just be honest. Sometimes we get these, these attitudes or these thought processes and to think, okay, yeah, that's not me.

Those are those kind of people, people that life had done a number on. People who had made some bad decisions, people who struggle to make good choices, people who just can't seem to get it together for some reason. People who just don't have what life seems to require that they have. And maybe that was rolling around in my Head when we first went down a church to the Reno Sparks Gospel Mission. But the more you engage with them, the more you learn about them, the more you find out that they're really not that different from me after all.

You don't have to know me very long to realize that I struggle with

good choices, too. Anyone in the room with me on that? We all struggle with good choices. One of the guys I met down there was a guy named Nick. Nick was a lot like me.

He was from the Midwest like me. He came from a farming family like me. But through a series of really traumatic. Like, when I heard his story, I'm like, oh, my word. Like one of those things would throw me off.

But he had several of these things, and they left Nick without a healthy support network. And to cope with the lack of all the things that life is supposed to give you in a best case scenario, Nick turned to something that seemed to answer that need that he had. He started. He started drinking at a really young age. If I told you how young he was, you'd go, yeah.

And it got so bad that his mom finally convinced him to go someplace to get help. Somewhere far, far, far from his influences at home. And so from the middle of the continental US he flies to Reno, Nevada, and he signs himself in at the gospel mission there in that town. And what he found there was pretty powerful. He found routine and structure.

He found functioning adult leaders who could pour into his life. And he found himself surrounded by guys who shared very similar struggles, but who wanted life to be different in some way. Most importantly, he heard the gospel and he accepted Christ and he was baptized. I have permission from Nick to tell this story. In fact, we were getting in the car this morning, and I was telling Mason a little bit about what the sermon was about.

And I said, I've not actually heard from Nick yet, so I may have to change the name to protect the innocent sort of thing, because I don't like to tell other people's stories without their permission to tell the story. So I sent. I said, so what do you think I should do? And Mason's like, I think you need to reach out to him again. So I just heard back from Nick about an hour ago.

He said, absolutely, use my name. Anyway, back to Nick. He accepted Christ and he was baptized. He got baptized in the Truckee River. I wish I had videos of this, because the Truckee river comes down from Lake Tahoe.

It moves at a pretty good clip, but it's. And it's cold. It's cold water. So he. We walk out there and it's about knee high and walk out there and duck him under and the current catches him and hurls him down the river.

And he's like trying to capture his foot against those smooth, mossy rocks. And he just keeps going and going. People are on the bridge looking out over him, and he goes under the bridge, comes out to the

side. Now that baptism experience is sort of a metaphor for his. For his faith story.

Ongoing. It's. He struggled to capture footing for a while, but I love that story. We talked about that not. Not too long ago.

Anyway. Anyway, that's about the time I met Nick. He and a couple of his buddies showed up at the church where I was serving and soon after started attending my. My home Bible study. And Nick was doing great.

Doing great. And then he graduated and he left the program. And he quickly slipped back into some old patterns and some destructive behaviors. And he would run this cycle again, doing better and then succumbing to the pool of his past and the comfort that that offered him. And I watched it.

I love Nick, but I watched it and I just felt powerless to really help him. Have you ever been in that situation where someone you love is doing something that you know is harmful and you can't. You can't talk him out of it, you can't save them. We'd pray together and he'd renew this commitment to lock in sobriety. And he was just gonna.

He was gonna do it this time, but it just continued to be the seesaw life of up one day and down the other. And then I moved back to Indiana and Nick moved to Texas, and our contact became even more sporadic. And one night at about 11 o', clock, he calls me. And I'm telling you, it was a terrifying phone call because his speech was really hard to understand. His conversations were just all over the map.

You couldn't lock him down into a. Into a. Into a conversational landing spot. And you could just tell by talking to him he is physically, he is mentally, he's emotionally, he's spiritually just sick.

I listened and it was scary. And I prayed with him on the phone and I begged him, put my number, my contact information, Scott, somewhere on your body so that if you get sick, they can call me. At least someone is in your corner, Nick. But when we hung up, I thought, I don't remember that he'll even remember this conversation. And I'll be kind of honest with you.

I really. I really thought that he wouldn't live through the Winter. It was horrible. But then something happened. I'm going to say it was prayer because I was praying for him.

But Nick called a couple months later and his voice was clear and his conversation was understandable. And I could tell that he was in a healthier place than he was before. He says, I'm going back to aa. He said, it's a pain. I just.

I just feel like I'm never going to get beyond being an addict. I'm never going to be. Get beyond being a drunk. But this keeps me focused by going every week, sometimes four times a week, sometimes every night, sometimes in the afternoon, and then the evening. It's the thing that is keeping me alive right now is showing up at aa.

Now, at the time, I didn't know much about aa. I knew enough. I knew that it was. It's an old program most of you know, as much as I knew about was established by a guy named Bill Wilson and a Dr. Bob Smith. And it was really based on.

And we're going to unpack this over the next 12 weeks. It was really based on something that the church had sort of forgotten that real change happens when honest, humble confession, surrender, community, and a complete dependence on God come together. And that's where Nick was showing up at. When I went to visit Nick, he invited me to go to a meeting with him. And I gotta be honest with you, I didn't really feel like.

I felt like I belonged with those people. But what I found there was very interesting one. Everyone there was pretty humble and honest about their struggles. If you know anything about a, you know, every meeting begins with how, hi, my name is Tim and I'm an alcoholic. How many of you guys introduce yourselves to other people with like, your weakest point?

No, no one does that. Hi, I'm Tim, I'm a pastor. That's what I lead with. I don't say, hi, I'm Tim, and I overeat. I'm pretty lazy.

That's not what I begin with. I don't start there. I start with my good stuff. They'll discover the bad stuff soon enough. But we lead with our good stuff.

But not an aa. They start right there, pretty humble. And no one goes, oh, they all go, hi, Carl. Hi, Tim.

So first guy told his story, and then the next guy. And then, and then Nick gets up and he tells his story. Some of it I knew, some of it I was around for. Some of it I didn't know.

But embedded in each of their stories were these truths that they base their everyday life on.

They describe them in different ways, but they were all an iteration of what many of us know as the 12 steps. Anyone here not familiar with 12 steps? You may not know all of them, but you know there is such a thing. Yeah. So they were talking about these, and I was listening.

I thought, man, the way they talk about the steps and the way they

unpack those steps just sounds really familiar to me. And there's a reason why step one is this one. We admit we are powerless over our addictions, our brokenness, our sinful patterns, and that in our own power, our lives are unmanageable. That's a lot. That's a lot.

But it sounds an awful lot like what Paul wrote in Romans when he says this. In Romans, Romans 7, 8, he says, I know that nothing good dwells in me that is in my flesh, for I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. I am in every way unmanageable. And then someone's story included this. Step five, where we admit to God, to ourselves, to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.

Oh, that was a big one. Nick spent a lot of time on step five, where he had to go back to people and fess up to stuff that he didn't really want to fess up to. But here's what John 17:9 says. If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship, real fellowship with one another. And the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It was a good session. I'm glad I went. Afterwards, we stood around, and I got to meet a few of Nick's friends.

We had coffee, and they took up an offering that went towards coffee. But nonetheless, it made it feel like even more like church with an offering. It was good. It was good. We got the car and we're driving home, and I just had a lot of questions.

It prompted some good discussions. And as we talked, Nick said this.

He says, I know you're a pastor, and church is great, don't get me wrong, which is like, oh, here it comes. He says, but when I'm in this room that we just left with all those other guys who know what it's like to struggle the way I struggle, I feel. I feel accepted, I feel heard, I feel Supported. Even as I'm being brutally honest about my struggles. We talked about the steps, those 12 steps.

They're 12 truths, really. They keep me honest with myself and they keep me on track spiritually. And he says it's all Bible based, which I knew, but it was good for him to recognize that too. And he said, those people on Sunday morning, they look really good. They got their lives together, but sometimes they forget that the Bible clearly says that we all struggle with something.

Can we just admit that today out loud, we all struggle with something. Now, you may be more familiar with the Bible way of saying this. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and his plan

for us. So fast forward all the way from four years ago when I went down there with Nick to, to hang out at his AA meeting to last spring when we're sitting around a table and Sherwood Oaks leadership starts talking about the need for our church to really step up and step into the lives of men and women who simply don't find Sunday mornings now listen to me, that helpful for them in the immediacy of their need. And that hurts a little bit for me because I like to think I can be all things to all men, but I can't.

So I was cautiously optimistic. I love how we pour into the lives of the men at the shelter. I love how we see needs and we step into those places of need. I love that we can say we want to be the best church for our community and we really mean that. I love that.

But it's another thing to say you want to help and another to really step into the uncomfortable places that guys like my friend Nick were in. Mostly because we forget what Nick knows better than most of us. We all struggle with something.

So this is an introduction sermon to a 12 week series. Over the next 12 weeks, we're going to walk through those 12 steps, those 12 truths. And you may be thinking, but I don't have those kind of issues. And I'm telling you, you do. You do.

You see, we all have hurts. We have habits. We have hang ups that keep us from exposure, experiencing life that Jesus has for us. That Jesus died so that we could have. He wants us to have life, abundant life.

And oftentimes we live less than abundant lives because of the hurts, hangups and habits that keep us from experiencing what he promised us. At the very least, we all need God's grace through Jesus and we all need to grow in that grace. We all need hope, we all need healing and the pathway to growing is not just for those people. It's not just for addicts. It's not just for the alcoholics.

It's for all of us. All of us require the habits and the disciplines of admitting our powerlessness. We can do nothing apart from Christ who gives us strength. We all require the habit and discipline of confessing our sins. I got a chance to confess some of mine back there over coffee this morning.

I don't love that part of it. We all have the chance. And we all require the habit and discipline of making amends when we hurt others. We all require the habit and discipline of practicing humility. We all require the habit and discipline of depending daily on God for each step we take.

And we all require the habit and discipline of showing up and helping others walk through their path. Yeah, it's for all of us. Now here's the Bible promise. If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation.

The new creation has come.

That is a truth that we stand on. But even though we are new creations, though the sun has risen on our new life in Christ, I tell you, we're all walking around with hangovers from the night before life. We all have residual issues with maybe substances, but maybe pride. Maybe it's trying to control ourselves and others. Maybe it's anger, maybe it's lust.

Maybe it's just fear and anxiety. Maybe those are the things that we need freedom from. Maybe it's this desperate desire to please people and make sure no one is mad about anything at all times. Anyone with me on that one?

Maybe we just need freedom from bitterness or self reliance. See, all these things look a little bit different, but they're all simply an expression of the very same brokenness. Brokenness that Jesus came to heal. He promised he was going to heal this. So how does that happen?

Because if you look around, we all struggle with something and we're all new creations in Christ. Well, all those struggles point to the ongoing need we have for the grace of Jesus. I don't struggle with alcohol. I'm thankful for that. But I'm not going to get too cocky about it because I struggle with other stuff.

And so do you. So this sermon again is for all of us. Who's it for? Who's it for?

So looking ahead for the next 12 weeks, how do we prepare ourselves to receive this? This new life? This is not salvation. This is new and abundant life that following Jesus brings. Well, we start by getting real humble.

That's the essence of step one. You've got to admit that you got a struggle and that on your own, you can't do much of anything to deal with it. Alan's going to unpack this one a lot next week, but just to prep you for that need a week. Because this can be the hardest part of getting that. It's easy to acknowledge on the surface.

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. But I'm telling you, getting below the surface to that is really hard to admit that you've got a struggle and that on your own you cannot manage it. Maybe it's acknowledging that you have a problem with alcohol or anger or overindulgence, maybe it's pornography or painkillers. But admitting that you've got a problem, that your most resolute willpower, that your most ardent New Year's resolutions can't seem to help, can be really, really hard. But it's necessary to heal and grow in Christ.

You got to admit it to yourself, you got to admit it to God, and you need to admit it to someone else. The Bible says, confess your sins

one to another. Confess those things that, that. That you struggle with to someone else.

So that's what you're going to do this week to help prep for Sunday. Are you looking forward to that? Yeah, yeah. It's hard work, but it's good work. And then that's the second part.

You have to show up. Can I just tell you that a key part of how God has worked in my life has been simply because I showed up. I simply showed up and God says, I can work with that. You show up and I can do something in your life. You show up over the next 12 weeks, there's going to be a hundred reasons, good reasons why you can't be here.

You've got something else committed to. You've got to do this. You got. There'll be 400 horrible reasons, but there'll be a hundred really, really good ones. But what I'm going to challenge you to do is show up anyway.

Show up for 12 weeks and commit to walking through these 12 steps with us. Because as my friend Nick said so clearly and succinctly, we all struggle with something. Something we all need hope. We all need something. Healing and walking this journey with others in the room who are walking it with us creates a really healthy support network.

Something my friend Nick didn't have until he committed to showing up. And it ensures that we end this journey well together. We're going to share communion here in just a few moments, and I'm going to encourage you as you take communion this morning to firstly give thanks to Jesus here's, here's the deal. One of my favorite verses over the last couple of years has moved from John 3:16 to the verse right after it. Most of us can say John 3:16 in our sleep.

For God so loved the world, he his only begotten so that whosoever should not perish. But that's beautiful. But I'm telling you, the verse after it has come to mean so much, much to me. And it goes like this. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world.

And that's what I got wrong for so many, many, many, many, many years of my spiritual life, is that I felt like God was always just looking for the reason to say, sorry, that's enough, you're out. And that is not why God sent Jesus. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world. But what to save the world he came to save in every, every aspect and every meaning of that word. Jesus came to save, not condemn.

So if you are in this room right now and you feel like someone's judging you, can I tell you right now, that is of the demonic pit of hell. No one is judging you. Rebuke that if you feel that God did not send His Son into this world to condemn it, he came to save it. I want to be part of that saving. I want to be part of that group he saves.

So we show up and we understand how much God loves us. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul prays they would understand this. He says in Ephesians 3:16 says, I pray that out of his glorious saints riches, he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And get this, if you've got your Bibles, open them up right here to Ephesians 3, because this is so good. I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, in God's love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp it, to understand it, to get a sense of it, and to know it deep in your hearts to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

To know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. This is what God wants for us, by the way, his fullness. He wants his fullness for us.

So this morning, communion is not. Is not a point where we beat ourselves up. Don't do that. Communion reminds us that God is not here to condemn us. Jesus came to Save us.

So one give thanks for that. Say thank you, Lord, that you love me enough to die for me and to bring me into this new life. And then, because we call this communion, communion has at its root this idea of community, togetherness. I'm going to ask you to do something this morning that we don't normally do. I'm going to ask you to pray for the person on your left.

And right now, you may have to get creative, depending on where you're seated, to figure out who your left or right is. But find someone in this room near you to pray for.

Because we all struggle with something, including that perfect person to your left and that person who's got it all together on your right. So take a moment before you and they take the bread and cup and pray that they may know. Pray this that they may know the width, the length, the height and depth of the love of Christ this morning. Heavenly Father, you love us. You loved us enough to offer your life for us so that we might have new life ourselves.

And this new life is the thing that we're always growing into. You want it for us. You died so that we may have it. And yet sometimes we resist it because it's scary to walk into places that we've never been before. It's anxiety inducing to look a new thing in the eyes and go, I'm going to become that, that, and we've never been that before.

That's scary. But I pray that as we go through this series on hope and healing, that it also becomes a series on courage. Courage to walk into a new life that you offer us. For those of us who have struggled all our lives, all our Christian lives, with things. Lord, I pray that

this would be a season where we find hope, healing and new life.

I pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

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