

Good morning. Susan told me as I was coming up, that's when I groove my way up. So that was unrehearsed. That's how good of a dancer I am on the spot. I can pull that off now, you know, let me open with what we need after that, which is a word of prayer.

All right, let's pray. Dear Lord, it's so good to be in your house this morning, Lord, I just ask for your presence right now as we turn to your word, Lord, and we consider what you have for each of us this morning. I would ask that your holy spirit would move in our hearts, Lord, so that we would hear the word that you have for each one of us. It's in Jesus name that I pray. Amen.

Well, just a quick introduction. I appreciate Tim inviting me here this morning. My name is Andy Fish. I grew up in Bedford, lived in Lawrence county all my life. Went to BNL and then to IU Go Hoosiers after my family and I went to Sherwood Oaks, Bloomington for several years.

I'll never forget being at work one day and hearing a rumor that Sherwood Oaks was going to have a campus in Bedford. And we were just over the moon, excited about about that. Well, we were blessed to be here as the campus got started, got to know and love the people here, and for the next six years, this was our church home. In 2022, the Lord called me to Popcorn Christian Church, to pastor there. But coming back today feels like coming back to my home away from home.

So good to see so many friends here that I've got to catch up with a little bit. And it is so good to see so many new folks here. It is evident that the Lord is growing his church here at Sherwood Oaks. So can we give the Lord a round of applause for that?

Well, we are just really excited to be here today, and I appreciate you all welcoming us so much. Couple things that you all are probably wondering that we need to address right off the top before we get started. First of all, yes, there really is a church called Popcorn Christian Church. All right? Now, the second thing that you're wondering, yes, we do give out bags of popcorn to all of our visitors.

All right? You have to. You got to lean into a name like Popcorn. All right. Popcorn is in Springville.

It's just a few miles away from here. It's a little bit more rural than around here, as you might imagine, a little bit smaller than Bedford. And in fact, the very first time that I went there to preach, I got lost. I had no cell service. I had no GPS signal whatsoever.

And I thought, well, this will be my first and my last time preaching at Popcorn. Well, I got there late, but the people there were so gracious. They said, don't worry about it. We're on popcorn time here. So, you know, we have our own time zone out at Popcorn.

It might sound like that we're a lot different, and at first glance, but let me tell you, we're real, all very similar. Once you get past the surface level at Popcorn, we all have our favorite seats to sit in. You have your favorite seat here. And like you all, it's not the front row. We don't sit on the front row.

We don't believe in that either. We all have our favorite songs to sing. Now, some might like contemporary, some might like hymns, but we all have our favorite songs. We're all imperfect people following a perfect savior together on the front lines of everyday life. And I know that you all can relate to that.

I thought it was funny as we were looking at Sherwood Oaks, you know, I still get the emails from you all. I still stay in the know what's going on. And I saw that your VBS theme is Armor of God. Well, guess what? Ours is Armor of God, too.

As soon as I heard about that theme, it reminded me of a song that we used to sing in VBS many, many years ago. I'm in the Lord's Army. Does anybody remember that one? Remember how it goes? I may never march in the infantry, Ride in the cavalry, shoot the artillery.

I may never fly over the enemy But I'm in the Lord's army. Yes, sir. Some of you remembered that.

You know, when I sang that at 9, 10 years old, however old I was when I learned that song, I had no idea how life would feel like actually being in a war zone. I think I watched too much television as a kid. You know, I thought every issue in life would just get resolved in 22 minutes, like an episode of Full House. We put a bow on it, and it would be done. But it turns out life is a lot more like mash, isn't it?

It's a battle zone out there. But I know that, you know, that we're not really that different. You're dealing with a lot of the things that we deal with, right? Health problems. You get a diagnosis from the doctor that you weren't expecting, and you think, are we going to get through this?

You have financial struggles, struggling to pay the bills with the rising cost of seemingly everything, and you think, are we going to be able to make ends meet. Maybe it's parenting challenges, trying to make sure that you're disciplining your kids. Sometimes it's like trying to keep them alive. And you think, are we getting anywhere? Is any of this getting through to them?

All of the trials of daily life on the front lines. And here's what I've experienced, and maybe you have, too. And that is when we're going through war out there, outside these four walls, it's easy to go

to war in here. This is where it ends up, right in our hearts. And so often, we feel inadequate, we feel anxious, we feel overwhelmed.

But you know what the hardest part of fighting these battles often is? It's feeling like you're fighting them alone. You know, today we have more ways than ever before to stay connected, don't we? But as a society, we have never felt more disconnected than we do now. We might have a lot of friends on Facebook, but we have few meaningful connections, real relationships with people that we walk through life with.

Loneliness has become so widespread that the surgeon general actually called it an epidemic. Studies have shown that loneliness affects people of all ages, backgrounds, and demographics. And ironically enough, even though everyone around us might be experiencing loneliness, we feel like we're the only ones who are alone. We think we're alone. Even in feeling alone, I'm the only one going through this.

We think no one really sees me. No one really understands what I'm going through. And maybe we come here on a Sunday morning, we go to church on a Sunday morning, and we're picked up a little bit. But by Tuesday, we feel like we're back in the same boat. And all those feelings of loneliness just start to rush back over us again.

Maybe this is how you're feeling this morning. Maybe you're dealing with the struggles of living on the front lines of life, and you feel like you're doing it alone. You feel like you're the only one on the battlefield. You're looking around and you're thinking, I need some comrades in this war. If that's you this morning, first of all, I want you to know that you are not alone in feeling alone.

Everyone goes through difficult seasons. Everyone experiences loneliness, myself included. Now, many of you won't believe this, but I'm an introvert by nature, all right? Sometimes people laugh when I tell them that, but it's true. It's easy for me to withdraw to myself.

It's easy for me to isolate myself and experience loneliness. So if this is you, too, let me just say I can relate to that. Feeling. But the good news is it does not have to be this way. God has given us a band of brothers and sisters to go through the battles of life with, united as one army to love and to care for each other.

You might be thinking, where are these people? Well, guess what? Look around. They're right here with you this morning. It's called the church.

God gave us the church so we wouldn't have to do life alone. If you look back to when the church was first established, in Acts chapter two, it says the first believers devoted themselves to the apostles

teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. I want you to key in on that word fellowship. They got to know each other, each other's struggles, the heartaches, the challenges, the victories. They walk through life together, leaning on each other.

Acts goes on to say that they shared with each other in need, that they met together every day, they ate together in each other's homes, and they had glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Let me tell you, times were tough when the early church was established and they knew they needed each other. That's not just a group of people, but that's a community like God has designed for his church. Let me give you another example from Scripture. Think about Paul.

Think about Paul, one of the great evangelists of the faith, right? And he was. But Paul didn't do it alone. Paul had friends. He had people who knew him personally, who traveled with him, who walked alongside him.

Barnabas encouraged him, Silas suffered alongside him. Luke cared for him. Once A4 refreshed him. There were others too. There was Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila, Epaphroditus, Titus, just to name a few.

Paul was susceptible to loneliness just like we are. He was on the front lines of life and he had his share of hardships. But he had fellow believers that helped him weather life's storms. Paul knew that we would need the same thing, and so he gave us instructions. I like to think of them like marching orders, you might say, as we live on the front lines of life.

Here's what Paul wrote From Romans, chapter 12, verses 9 through 16.

He said, Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil, cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord.

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality, Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

Mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do you see the community that Paul is talking about here?

He's talking about people that are devoted to one another, who help each other, support each other, who celebrate with each other, even grieve with each other, who do life together. This is what God intends

for his church, for us to have meaningful connections, deep relationships with each other. Now, if you're like me, the thought of letting other people in to be vulnerable enough to connect with them at a deeper level can be scary.

I think, what if I open myself up to someone and they realize I don't have it all together? What if they think less of me? What if they see my weaknesses? What if they see my failings?

You know what the number one fear is? It's not spiders. It's not heights. It's not even death. It's public speaking.

Now, why is that? Because we're afraid, right? We're afraid to let people in. We're afraid they're going to see I'm not perfect. I made a mistake, right?

We'd rather be embalmed by an undertaker than to be embarrassed in front of a stranger, wouldn't we? That's how we look at it. Give me death before you give me embarrassment. I think Paul was right. We have a lot of pride, don't we?

I struggle with that, too. But let me tell you that I have learned how important that it is to let people in, to open up and to trust them. Let me give you just one example from my life illustrates that a couple years after Kelsey and I got married, we struggled with infertility, but we kept that private just to our immediate family members, and we tried to fight that battle alone.

Kelsey had to take dozens of shots. I think, all told, it was somewhere in the neighborhood of 120. We went to, I don't know how many doctor appointments it was. I know, one month. We had nine up in Indianapolis.

And let me tell you, it was a heavy burden to carry.

Eventually, Kelsey did get pregnant, and we got to go in and see the baby's heartbeat. And we were so excited. We were so excited. We said, okay, we can announce this now. We can let the world know.

And so, of course, we went to Facebook, where you announce anything that you need to announce, right? And. And we announced our pregnancy to the world.

Fast forward a week later, we went in for one more ultrasound before we would be released by the fertility doctor. And I'll never forget as the nurse struggled to find the heartbeat of that baby. And we realized that we had had a miscarriage. And I know many of you here, I'm sure, have gone through that. And the pain that you experience in those moments is more than can even be put into words.

God carried us through that. That's the only way you get through something like that is to be carried. And as Kelsey and I tried to recover from that and think about what was next, here is what we realized. We couldn't do it alone.

We shared the news with our church family, both of our loss and also what we had been going through for all those months. And we finally let people in. And you know what happened? The first thing that happened right here at Sherwood Oaks is the church mourned with us. And that's what we needed.

We needed people to just mourn, and that's what they did.

The other thing that we needed was prayer. And that's what they did for us. They prayed. In fact, we stood at the back of this very church as folks gathered around us and laid hands on us and wept with us and prayed for us. It was one of those moments that you never forget.

One of the most joyful, heart wrenching moments that I've ever experienced in my life. And as time went on and we spoke to more people about this, more and more people opened up to us about their own fertility struggles, about their own miscarriages, about the walk that they had already gone through, that they were now willing to help us through.

And as we started back up the treatments again for another round of attempting to be pregnant. This church was there for us. And almost exactly a year later, the church rejoiced with us as we welcomed Clara and Lucy into the world.

It was through that situation and many others since that I learned a few firsthand lessons about God's church and the importance of following God's design in being a part of this community. One thing I learned is we are more similar and we have more things in common than we realize. We are not that different. We are fighting the same battles. If you're here this morning and you're going through something right now, when you walk through those doors, you are carrying a heavy burden.

Can I just tell you, there are going to be other people as part of this church family that are either going through that or they have gone through it. I had no idea how many people had dealt with infertility and miscarriages until we shared our story. And there were so many people who said, hey, we've gone through that too. And they were able to relate to us and empathize with us. And we felt cared about.

We felt seen. Whatever it is that's weighing on your heart this morning, whatever you're worried about, unsure about, nervous about, there are other folks here who can walk with you, who are going

through that or have been through that, through that. We're more alike than we realize. Our battles are not that different. That's one thing I learned.

I also learned it's worth letting people into your world, as scary as that might be. You need people to walk through life with you. You need people to lean on, just like the early church had, just like Paul had. God uses the people of his church to encourage, to support, to strengthen. We can help each other.

We need each other. While I was working on this very sermon about the church, one of the guys from Popcorn called me and he said, hey, I'm just glad that I've got folks in the church I can call who I can talk to. He said, if I didn't, I know that the devil would try to consume me. Let me tell you, the devil is always prowling around like a roaring lion. He is always looking for someone to attack with.

There are people there around you who you can let into your world, who can walk through whatever you're going through with you. The third thing that I learned is this. People can surprise you, but in a good way. All right? You might expect judgment, you might expect condemnation, but give folks credit.

I've had so many people who are willing to see me and my failings and love me anyway. There are folks that I can call on, that my wife Kelsey, can call on, that we can call on together, including people right here at Sherwood Oaks, even to this very day. Brandon Swango, Tim Thompson, Nate Flynn are three of the people that are closest to me that have seen what happens on the inside of my life. And you know what? Despite seeing that, they still love me and they still encourage me and they walk with me.

Who are the folks in the church who you can call on, who just listen, who will pray for you, who will walk with you? I promise you, there are folks here who want to do that for you. You have to be willing to reach out. You have to be willing to start the conversation. It might feel scary, but let me tell you, it's worth it.

If you do have people that you call on, you feel like, yes, I do have Those folks in my life. Make a new connection with someone here. Get to know them. Ask how you can. Pray for them.

Let them know that you're a shoulder to lean on. Like Paul said, devote yourself to those around you. Celebrate. Grieve with God's people. You'll be blessed by it, they'll be blessed by it.

And most importantly, God will be glorified by it. Don't do life alone. God designed his church so you wouldn't have to. It might seem like we're different, but we're not. We're all imperfect people following a perfect Savior together.

So let's do it together.

The church is a special body of people. We're united through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Did you know that? We're all blood related here. He's our connection point.

He's the model. He's the source for our love for one another. Because while we were still sinners, while Christ knew every blemish and every imperfection in our lives, he died for us.

It's from that place that we can know and love each other. Only the Gospel creates a place where you can be fully known and fully loved. And that place is right here. I'm going to ask Alan if he'd come up now. And we're going to enter a time of communion where we can reflect on the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for each and every one of us.

Thank you for listening to this message from Sherwood Oaks Christian Church. Did you know you can watch all of our video content, both current and past, on our YouTube channel. Visit [YouTube.com sherwoodoaks](https://www.youtube.com/sherwoodoaks) to watch messages, series and complete worship services. Sam.