

We're thinking about how Jesus looked for the needs of others and how we can be moved to compassion for other people. I'd love to hear from you. Who or what have you noticed that you might have otherwise looked past if it wasn't for being a Christ follower? In high school, I wasn't a follower of Jesus until later on in my high school journey, and I think growing up kind of in that environment where everything was like success-driven, I was always looking towards the next goal, the next outcome, the next thing that was coming up. And then coming here to IU, really just seeing all the people around me that are falling into that same thing.

I really wanted to help other people see that their worth or their identity is not tied up in, in what they do. Knowing that about myself and that being part of my story allows me to have compassion for people that, that are in that place right now. And I can have a conversation with them and be like, hey, I'm not understanding of your exact situation, but I understand where you are because I've been there before. And Jesus is there with you in that. What would you kind of say to someone who maybe is seeing there's a need to serve, or they're seeing that there are people to disciple, but maybe they don't feel equipped to do that?

It's not a matter of whether you're equipped or not, or whether you feel prepared or not, because God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called. And like, a lot of people are asking deep questions about the meaning of life and faith and what all this means and what's our purpose here. And that opportunity isn't something that we should shy away from as the church. We should really step up and try to, try to create a welcoming place for those, for those students and for those young adults.

Gentlemen, can I have you bring those stools just up to the front. We're going to use those in just a hot second. Thank you very much, Brad. Uh, welcome to Sherwood Oaks Bedford. We're glad you're here this morning.

We are completing today the 3rd week of a series we've been in called Influence. We all have influence. As we've worked through this series over the past weeks, we've been reminded of that. We're all being influenced by someone or something, and we all have influence something or someone through our words, our priorities, our presence, just showing up. We are shaping and being shaped by the people and places around us.

The first week we looked at how before we try to influence others for Jesus, we ourselves need to be influenced by Jesus. And that's just a look at how, how strongly the influence of Jesus is being formed in us and forming our thoughts, our attitudes, our actions, behaviors. His influence shapes us, and as his influence shapes us, the way we think about, the way we care about the people and places around us, his

influence through us begins to flow out into our homes, our workplaces, schools, our friendships, all over. Last week we described it this way: loved people become lovely people. Loved places become lovely places.

That's what we mean when we say we want to be the best church for Bedford, the best church for Mitchell, the best church for Fayetteville or Heltonville. We want to be the, the best church for the community that God has put us, but that doesn't mean that we're the, the richest, the largest, or the shiniest, the edgiest. It doesn't mean any of that. It simply means that we want to be showing up in the places and for the people that need a reminder that God loves them. It's not about being the biggest or the best church in Bedford.

It's about being the best church for Bedford. I think there's many, many churches, many, many pastor friends who pray the very same thing for their church. But it's an important distinction because Jesus wasn't about drawing crowds or making money. Jesus was about people. He saw people, he saw their needs, he saw suffering.

And when he calls us to use our spiritual influence, it isn't measured by the number of followers that we may have, or all the good things that we know. It's measured by hearts that increasingly reflect the heart of Jesus and are moved by compassion to the people and the places around them. So this brings us to our scripture for the morning. Comes from Matthew chapter 9, verse 35 and 38. And I'm just going to have you guys, if you've got your Bibles, open them.

If you don't have your Bibles, read along with me as we read through this. Jesus went through all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

This morning we have some very special guests here who are working among the harassed and helpless people we might call here at Sherwood Oaks people who are at risk in some way, shape, or form. You know some of these people. Our church does, I feel like, an amazing job working with homeless men and women, those who are experiencing food insecurity, those who need weekly connections just to stay healthy, and kids who need to know about Jesus. I love how we serve, and I thought it might be great to introduce you to a few people in our community who have been helpful to me and to this church and to others, as together we care for those that Jesus cares for. I'm going to have you guys come up and join me here on the platform.

When they get up here, I'll introduce them to you.

So the lady walking towards me closest, this is Jada Royer, and Jada is with Child Evangelism Fellowship. And we'll hear more from Jada in just a moment, but can you just say good morning, Jada?

This lady beside her is a dear friend of mine. Her name is Brianna Gassione, and we'll hear more from Brianna, but for the moment, just say good morning, Brianna.

And then we have the fine-looking gentleman dressed exceptionally sharp this morning, and I like his shoes. Look at his, not mine, this morning. In fact, just— I wish I hadn't even said anything about it. This is, this is Nick Perkins, and Nick Perkins is is— well, we'll hear more from Nick Perkins in just a little bit, but in the meantime, just say good morning, Nick. We are very happy to have you guys joining us this morning because you're on the front lines of ministry.

You're doing some stuff in our community that's making a big difference in your each particular field. So I'm just going to ask you, first of all, to— you can pass the mic down. We're going to start with Jada. I'm just going to ask you the first question, and the first question is this: What is your ministry organization that you represent and what is its primary focus? So, Jada.

All right. Hello. Okay. Child Evangelism Fellowship. That's a mouthful, right?

CEF. And the focus is on children to evangelize boys and girls in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And one of the programs that people are most familiar with is the After School Good News Club. Very good. Thank you, Jada.

Brianna, what is your organization and what is its focus? So I work for the Department of Child Services and we serve local families and children. Do you want to expand just a little bit on that? Because that— you do do that and you have done specific things within that. Yes.

Can you talk about that? So when I first started off, I was a permanency worker. Which is essentially when a case is open, I'm— I was the case manager who followed that child and case until case closure, whatever that looked like, whether it be reunification or adoption or sometimes aging out. Now my role is a foster care specialist, so I work with foster families in the community ensuring that they have all of the training and different qualifications to maintain their license ongoing. Very good.

Thank you, Brianna.

Good morning. My name is Nick, and I work with a great team with Indiana University Health. I'm an outpatient chaplain for them, and in the South Region, we manage a great program called the IU Health Congregational Care Network, which is about providing support, care, and presence and encouragement to IU Health patients who experience loneliness and social isolation, as well as many other realities going on in their lives. So, Nick, we'll keep the microphone because we have several in our congregation who are engaged with the Community Care Network, many who have done it. And what does that look like just on the ground, like day to day?

What— unpack that a little bit. So on a, on a ground level, it looks like this. I go into various outpatient clinics who are— that are aligned with IU Health. And when I see a patient who's receiving care at one of those clinics, after assessing them, and I sense that they are experiencing loneliness, broken relationship, isolation, long-term illness, onset of a new medical diagnosis, long-term grief, we enroll them in this great program called the IU Health Congregational Care Network, where they will receive a phone call one day a week from a wonderful volunteer, many of whom are located in your congregation today, thanks to Andrea Conrad. And those phone calls will last for 3 months.

So one phone call a week for 3 months. And those phone calls are about support, encouragement, hope, letting those folks know that they are not alone, that someone in the community cares. And if I may remind them of a lyric that was posted in one of the songs that we sang, let us become more aware of your presence. And that is what we try to accomplish in those phone calls once a week. Thank you, Nick.

I really appreciate your heart and how you've introduced us to this opportunity. I'm going to go back to Jada. I love hearing actually what all of you do because I know, I know what you do, and these folks are going to get a little— hear a little bit more about that as well. Jada, this is a sort of a reintroduction, I think. Explain to me a little bit of the journey that you've taken to get to this point, and then what have you seen so far, how, how Child Evangelism Fellowship has impacted this community?

Okay, so Child Evangelism Fellowship, I am actually a local missionary, even though I am hired by the ministry itself. And so as local director, I have come on board to be able to serve South Central Indiana. So the journey with that is each person who serves with CEF who is not just considered a volunteer. There are things that they need to do to be able to maintain the ministry and keep things going. However, people, you know, they come and go, and I've actually been with the ministry for 20, 23 years, and I was a teacher, then working with the ministry, back to teaching, and then this is now my 3rd year with the ministry.

So what that means is that it is people through the churches and individuals who support the local director or ministry coordinators. And let's see here, ministry organization impact, is that what you want me to get to? Yeah, how's it impacted the community? Okay, so here's the thing. There is, even though there are Good News Clubs, there were many more in Lawrence County, but there wasn't local director to keep, you know, the leadership going, things of that sort.

And so my husband and I, we prayed, and it was just time for me to come back to the ministry. So what have we seen? We've seen an increase. We now have Parkview is back again with their Good News Club. Shawswick is back.

LCIS will be starting in the spring, which used to be Fayetteville. And we have Burrus, which is continued on. But, um, yeah, we're excited about that. Okay, so this is at a lot of our elementary schools. We're seeing it happen.

That's fantastic. Yeah, fantastic. Okay, Brianna, I'm going to ask you sort of the same thing. I know there are rules about how much you can share, but give us some idea of the need in this community and how people have stepped into that role, what you have seen, maybe some some personal, without naming names, personal impact that you've seen DCS be able to step in, foster families be able to step in and help a situation? I think first and foremost, the biggest need is foster families.

There's not a ton in Lawrence County, so a lot of our kids end up getting placed elsewhere outside of their, like, home of origin or community of origin. So the biggest need would be foster parents, and if it's not fostering, even potentially volunteering at— there's something called the Agape House, which is when a child is removed and we don't have placement for them, we're able to take them to the Agape House. So it's not sitting in the office, it's more of like a home setting, if you will. There's beds, toys.

And then as far as impact, I mean, I think there's a lot of cases that have happy endings. You're one of them.

So obviously you all know that Tim has adopted Robert and Mason. So they were one of the happy endings, and I don't think they could have found a better family. Listen, this is why I like Brianna. She's one of my favorite people. Yeah, Brianna was the boys' caseworker, and so I met her within a few weeks of them coming to live with me, and we just fell in love with her.

And then her role has changed. So you're now— you talked about that— your role is now foster care specialist. So she's actually now my caseworker. She checks in with me. She sees how I'm doing.

She makes sure that I'm good and that I'm doing all the things I need to do. And I've never got them all done. I'm always behind, but we're, we're on track, I think. At this point in time to hit our deadline. So we love, we love Brianna.

I want to, I want to talk about some, some opportunities then. You alluded to it, you all have alluded to it. 100% of what we do around here depends so much on volunteer leaders, volunteer workers, people who see the needs around them and whose hearts are moved with compassion and that sense of need and want to reach out. And do something. How do volunteers impact your various ways?

You've alluded to it, Nick, but maybe we can talk just a little bit more about that. And, and maybe talk about what kind of people are great for your particular organization or ministry, what you're looking for in a volunteer.

Nick's ready. He's got his hand up. Thank you. So yes, our program depends a lot upon the engagement and the involvement of volunteers. Okay.

And again, thanks to Andrea Conrad. She is what's called the lead connector of the Congregational Care Network that's affiliated with Sherwood Oaks Bedford. She does an absolutely fantastic job. And the volunteers at your congregation, they are the individuals who make those phone calls. So to a degree, their involvement, their engagement, their participation is a critical piece to the success of this program.

And when a person decides to be a volunteer, my organization, our organization, the IU Health Congregational Care Network, we provide great training. It's really, really solid. A lot of it is based upon what it means to be an effective listener and meeting a person whom you would call right where they are, just in their space. It's very fulfilling. It's very engaging.

It's a chance for the person who is volunteering to stay connected, to maybe learn new skills, to take a risk, and also again to be, to be the voice and the presence of God for a person who truly, truly needs it. It's very fulfilling. It impacts the community, and the effects that it has on those individuals who are receiving these phone calls—I won't get into specifics, but some of the stories are absolutely amazing, and it's a very, very fulfilling process. So if you're interested, Andrea's here, I'm here, one of my bosses is here, my supervisor, Sean Gerber, with whom I work at IU Health Bloomington Hospital. He and about 4 other people laid the groundwork for this program 5 years ago, and it has, it has gained traction in the South Region in large part because of the engagement, the participation, and the involvement of the volunteers who participated, who participate in it, and for whom we are greatly appreciative.

Brianna, tell us a little bit about if we wanted to get involved, with the process of fostering, what would we do? Where would we begin with that process? So I think there's— it's indianafostercare.org, and you would submit an inquiry, and then it goes to the local office wherever you live. And then typically not me, but one of my coworkers then reaches out kind of explain the process further, what it entails, and then determine whether or not the individual wants to proceed. And if they wish to proceed, then they would just have ongoing communication.

Typically, the process from start to finish for licensing is— there's 120 days. Typically, they like to get it done within the first 90 days, and then once you become licensed, you will start receiving calls probably every day to take children, even if it's not within your specified age range, just because— and this is, this is a key thing too. Like, you can, you can clarify what kind of children you feel best able to take care of, whether it's infants or, or those who can shower and bathe themselves and take care of their own personal hygiene and fix food out of the pantry for themselves, take care of their own laundry? I mean, really. Yes.

Um, so I mean, it could— age, gender, um, level of need or care, whether it's medical, behavioral. So typically, if you put in your preference that you only want teens, they're not going to call you for a baby. But if you put a younger age range, they're going to call you from 0 to 18— well, 17. But very good. Okay, Jada, you mentioned supporting your team.

Are there other things we can do as volunteers? Oh yes, absolutely. So, um, just even maybe meeting with me, um, through— we could do a phone call, we could also just meet over a cup of coffee or ice cream at Culver's, and I can hear where your passion is for, for the children in the community. So we would talk about volunteering at a school, and there's lots of different areas of volunteering. Some people just want to— I'll just provide the snacks and I'll be a grade helper and kid corral.

Others want to be able to teach the lessons. But then what if you do want to maybe teach but you just don't quite adequate. Well, that's what I also do. I do training. So even for all the team, there is training provided to make you feel equipped and ready to be able to use the curriculum, to be able to feel like, wow, I really did present God's Word well.

And so those are the things that I do. But I also want you to know that— so there's the part of Good News Club, there's also the part of the administrative. I'm just me, myself, and I, and so I'm always looking for people who can help with any kind of administrative work and also serving on the committee. So there's lots of opportunities. My husband, he's awesome, and he helped for a short time at Good News

Club, and then he's like, I'm just going to serve on the board.

I cannot be there. You know, he just had his limit. He loves kids and he's all for it, but there's just, there's just a difference. Yeah. So I love that even the administrative portion, people who are really gifted with numbers and paperwork, they're like, yeah, I'm probably not going to be the person you want in the room with a bunch of kids.

Or people who make some great peanut butter brownies that can make some snacks and contribute that way. But always remember, with God, anything is possible. Because it's not like I really thought that I wanted to be a local director. I just liked being the team leader. So, but let God, let God change your hearts.

Be open to what he has to say. I love, I love all of that. We've sort of covered all our questions, but I want to just do one pass-through. Is there something that, that has— that you've not got a chance to share that you really think is important? Maybe a life impact story that you can't— maybe change the names to protect the innocent, but something that would give us a little picture of the impact that your organization is having in children's lives, in families' lives, in older Americans' lives?

So I don't get the opportunity to stay with the Good News Club week after week, and so I hear back from the team leaders. And so they are giving me the insight to what they have seen. And this little girl would come to club, she's about a 3rd grader, and she was— she would always just be very sleepy, just not very interested. But because the club continued to be there, her 4th grade year she had a little bit of a change. She was more alert, she was more interested, and because the lady who was teaching, she was equipped, she knew how to give a good lesson, and she also knew how to give a good gospel presentation and invitation.

And this little girl, they said that she had raised her hand, she went and spoke with the teacher, and she prayed to God and said, God, you know, I'm a sinner and I need Jesus. And they said it was just— they were so impacted because of the way that she prayed, just like made such an— it just impacted them. She was truly having a conversation with the Lord. And so it's those opportunities of being able to give children— because I say, you know, there's always 2 types of children, and it's not necessarily the well-behaved and the little rascals. We have to look at children also, they're saved or they're not saved, and we have to trust God that he is the one who is drawing them.

And if we have the opportunity to be able to draw them to God while they're young to be able to then live a life for the Lord. That's just, that's just amazing. So there we go. With, uh, Brianna, I want to set you up a little bit because I want to pull off of what, um— well, go ahead, tell us if there— is there anything you want to say

before I say for you?

You want me to do it? So here's what I, here's what I want to encourage you guys. I'm— people come up to me all the time and said, oh, that's just amazing what you're doing with fostering. And, and that's— it is affirming. That's lovely to hear people say that.

But I also, I also would want to encourage you not to, not to put that in your head as something harder than it really is, because these are just kids, and they're kids like every other kid, and they need a place to lay their head at night. They need some food every once in a while. You got to make sure they get to school. That's a big one. And then at the end of the day, you're just— you're an adult in their life that cares about them and wants to see good things happen in them.

You don't have to be an angel from heaven. You can be ordinary and lose your temper and make mistakes and say things you have to apologize to later. You can go whine to Brianna about how challenging last week was. And she goes, she nodded her head. I go, okay, so are you still in?

Of course I'm still in. Of course. No, we're not giving up on this. We love this. Um, but don't— here's what I'm saying.

Don't say this is not for you before you pray about whether this is an opportunity for you. Old people, young people, little babies, teenagers, all everything between. Everyone's life is impacted through fostering and showing up for people. If this is something that you feel like you might possibly be, be being called to or being prompted towards, you can talk to me, but Brianna would be a great person to talk to. I just want to encourage you, I, this is a, this is a need in our community.

Community, um, that we— you don't have to be super Christian, but it's an opportunity to share your faith and your life with other people and in a very normal way, you know what I mean? In a very normal way. Oh, that's all I'm going to say about that. Kind of piggyback off of that, even if it's not— you don't want to take a child in long term, um, there's something called like you could be licensed for like respite care, and that's essentially you're taking in a child for a week, sometimes a weekend, when their foster family has prior arrangements or aren't able to take the child with them, and so that child would go to respite care. So then it's still helpful, and it's not— you're not committing to the long haul necessarily.

So yeah, respite is big. Just knowing, just knowing you've got a community around you who can who can take, take kids when you can't take them. Yes, and sometimes that's what makes or breaks a foster family staying, not necessarily licensed, but maintaining that particular child placement if they have that ability to call on

someone to take them from time to time to give them a break. Yeah. Nick, is there anything else you would add?

2 stories real quick? Absolutely. That— okay, absolutely, absolutely. Thank you very much. A year ago, at a location, outpatient clinic affiliated with IU Health, I met a woman.

She wore her loneliness.

She wore her pain. I could sense it, feel it.

And I knew it was there. And as I engaged her in conversation, I learned in one year that this woman, 2 of her sons had died, her husband had died, and her grandson had died.

Fast forward months ago, I am in my primary care provider's office waiting for my appointment, and there's a knock on the door, and I think, wow, this is going to be a fast appointment today.

It was the woman who enrolled in the IU Health Congregational Care Network over a year ago. And she wanted to share with me, because of the phone calls that she received on a weekly basis, how much better her life was today. Sadness was still present, but she was experiencing healing because of the outreach that she received from one of the volunteers in the South Region. That's the first story.

Story number 2 is about a man who, as I speak, is actively dying.

He is on hospice care.

I have called this gentleman 27 times, once a week.

We would talk about God, how one finds God, experiences God, feels God, knows God, senses God.

And for him, his relationship with God came through nature and art and music.

He was touched by God through those different avenues and vehicles.

However, a significant shift happened last week. As he began to share with me, Nick, I know that I'm dying now, and I had a significant event happen today, but the people in my life whom I call my angels showed up for me and just gave me so much love. Nick, what do you think about that? And my response was this.

I think those people showing up for you and surrounding you in their circle of love clearly demonstrates the love on earth that God has for you and the love that awaits you when God calls you and receives you home.

And he wept on the phone. And it was after that weeping ended, through the silence, that he said to me, Nick, I believe in God.

God is my Savior.

And I know that the love that I'm experiencing now in this moment is the love that I'll receive when God calls me home. That's the impact of these phone calls. Thank you. Thank you all to our guests. Can you give them just a warm- I appreciate all of them.

I appreciate you for the way that you have stepped in and, and played your part in these life-transforming stories. As a church, we want to be aware of both the needs and opportunities that exist around us to care for those who are harassed and helpless. Some of those needs are spiritual, but they can also be physical, they can be material, they can be emotional needs. And so I want to thank these fine folks for the ways that they're helping address them, and I want to say thank you for the way you help them address them. One of the things we talked about in the last couple of weeks is is that original commission God gave Adam to care for and tend the place that he put them.

And he put them in a garden. Sometimes our picture of that is that it was just a place of absolute perfection, but I don't know. I think it was a place that needed tending, it needed maintaining, it needed work to make it be what God intended it to be. And, and his commission to Adam is the same commission he gives to us, that salt and light. We're to care for and tend and maintain and improve the place that God has put us.

This morning, I don't want you to leave here with just more information. I want you to leave with a next step in mind. What do I need to do with the information I have been given? We have barely touched the surface with the ministries that these amazing people do. I've asked them to stick around after the service.

We have some tables in the front. They're going to be there. I'm going to encourage you guys to just take a moment, and if it's only to say thank you for being with us this morning, do that. But, but if there's another question that's in the back of your mind, I want you to muster the courage to ask it. And say, what if?

What could I? How hard would it be? Do you think I could? Ask the question and just see what the response is. We want to be the best church for Bedford, and again, that means we are aware of and we are stepping into the situations that God has laid out right in front of us.

Don't say no, say yes. Be a part of the good things that's going on

all over this community. We're going to move into a time of communion, and communion is not a switch, a change. It's not a pause from the conversation that we've just had. It's sort of the whole point of the conversation we've just had, because at the table we remember that Jesus didn't step away from the helpless and the hopeless and the harassed, but he moved into those lives in that situation.

Jesus didn't love the hurting from a distance. He entered into brokenness. He carried our sin. He suffered in our suffering, and he gave his body and blood for the hopeless and the helpless and the harassed.

He laid down his life for the weary and the wounded, and that's all of us. So as you receive communion this morning, I wanted to remind you of Jesus who saw the crowds with compassion. And as you take the bread and the cup, pray that Jesus would allow you to see with those same eyes, with compassion Bedford and its surrounding communities.

As we take the cup and the bread, we want to be the kind of people that would respond when Jesus prays for workers to the harvest. Heavenly Father, we are thankful this morning for a harvest that is waiting.

You tell us that It's ripe, but the workers are few, and you ask us to pray for workers. So this morning we are, we are showing how the harvest is ripe.

Here in our community, there are people and situations and places that are ready for salt and light to be applied to them.

We thank you for your grace to us. We thank you for the way your grace moves in us and now through us to the places and people around us.

We give thanks for your love. In Jesus' name, amen. 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.