



Paralysis & Forgiveness – Mark 2

The Gospel Coalition 2019 National Conference

Introduction: Good morning. When I think about the word “intensity,” I think of John Piper. Not David Platt. John Piper is the most intense guy, not just about the Bible. True story. We were talking about the skin on dog’s paws and why they can stay out in the cold. When I think about the word “earnestness,” I think of David. I think he has a seriousness and earnestness about the gospel that is not just admirable, it’s contagious.

I think, brother, your ministry in my life and in so many others’ lives has been bitter-sweet. I say that because I can recall four years ago a talk you gave that some of my best friends in the world who were miles apart streamed and the Lord used you to call both of them into missions. Three years ago, it was bitter, because I had to say goodbyes to some people I loved very dearly. One of the things that makes it sweet is that I know that for every goodbye I’ve said to them, I’ll say hello to countless people in eternity.

So I’m grateful every time I hear this brother preach God’s Word. I’m reminded that when we give God everything that we lose absolutely nothing. So we’re going to pray for him right now and I would say, “Watch your friends closely,” because you may just have to say goodbye to a few of them.

Let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to You and we’re thankful for our brother David. We ask that You would do what You’ve done in and through him countless times. You are a faithful God and what You’ve done in the past is the best indicator of what You’ll do in the future. So I pray that he would rest, not on his preparation, not on his notes, but that he would rest completely and utterly on Your Spirit. Would You speak through him and transfer some of that earnestness for Your glory through him to us? It’s in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

David: If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Mark 2. That was humbling and it made me want to listen to John Piper preach. I also want to thank Dr. Carson for the invitation to stand before you today. Like many of you, I have for decades had a high esteem for him from a distance. He’s ministered to me in countless ways through his preaching and writing, as well

as on a daily basis through his devotionals “For the Love of God.” But over the last year or two, when I was walking through some personal and ministry challenges, he was so kind to reach out to me and pray for me, encouraging me in ways that made all the more clear to me that what he preaches and what he writes is how he lives. He genuinely loves pastors and I praise God for his leadership in this Gospel Coalition Conference. With that said, I know I’m the least deserving pastor and person to be on the stage right now and I need God’s help to honor Jesus and hopefully encourage you.

Before we journey into this remarkable text, I want to invite you to journey with me into the heights of the Himalayas where, Lord willing, I’ll be a month from now. Imagine landing via helicopter at around 12,000 feet and hiking out many miles over the course of the next week. During that week, you come face to face with what I can only describe is a collision of urgent spiritual and physical need.

Regarding urgent physical need, a study was done in these villages about ten years ago that found half the children were dying before their eighth birthday. I have four kids and we’re in the process of adopting number five. Losing one of my kids is one of my greatest fears. I can’t imagine that being an expectation for half of them. One mom had 14 children—only two made it to adulthood. They’re dying of things like diarrhea or simple infections for which you and I can get an antibiotic over the counter.

Poverty is rampant and one of the worst byproducts of that poverty is sex trafficking. Traffickers prey on families in these villages. The trafficker meets with the mom or dad and promises their daughter a better life if she will go with him into the city. With the village conditions they live in, it doesn’t take a lot of convincing before they send her off. These young girls are taken into the city and put into brothels, where they are broken and abused by numerous so-called “customers” each day. Others are taken to other countries. Thousands of girls are taken from these villages.

This urgent physical need is accompanied by urgent spiritual need. These mountains are the birthplace of Buddhism and the hometown of Hinduism. There are about nine million people in the region with maybe a hundred followers of Jesus. Most have never even heard of Him. When you mention Jesus, people have a puzzled look on their faces, as if you’re talking about somebody in a nearby village with a bizarre name.

This collision of need is evident in the individual faces of men, women and children. Just see the face of a man whose eye has fallen out because infection has overtaken his head. He’ll likely die soon but has never heard of Jesus. See the face of an eight-year-old boy with cerebral palsy, physically chained to a barn outside because the village leader said this son was a curse in his home. See the face of a young girl in a brothel, motioning for you to come over to her, because she thinks you want what so many other men want from her. Then see, not the faces, but the bodies of men, women and children burning on funeral pyres, as their ashes fall down into a river that their families hope will transport them to a better life in a new incarnation.

So I ask how do you respond to this collision of urgent spiritual and physical need? Do you only share the gospel? What if they're starving? Do you do anything about that? What if they don't have water or medicine? Do you do anything about the reality that this child is chained to a barn? That this girl is enslaved in that city and raped every day?

It's one thing to ponder questions about evangelism, mercy ministry, justice and the gospel in the halls of our conferences, in the confines of our classrooms, in the comforts of our homes, behind our computer screens, or even behind our pulpits on Sunday mornings. But it's a whole 'nother thing to consider these questions when you're face to face with that starving family, when you're looking into the eyes of that chained child, that trafficked girl, or watching that body burn right in front of you.

The reality is the Himalayas are not the only place where this collision of need exists. In the city where I live or in the city or community where you live, we are surrounded by physical and spiritual need. This makes Mark 2 a particularly applicable text for us. It's an amazing story that I think, because of its familiarity, may have lost its luster for many of us. So I invite you to listen to it and try to imagine this is the first time you've ever heard it. The Bible says:

When [Jesus] entered Capernaum again after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² So many people gathered together that there was no more room, not even in the doorway, and he was speaking the word to them. ³ They came to him bringing a paralytic, carried by four of them. ⁴ Since they were not able to bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after digging through it, they lowered the mat on which the paralytic was lying. ⁵ Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶ But some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts: ⁷ "Why does he speak like this? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

⁸ Right away Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were thinking like this within themselves and said to them, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat, and walk'? ¹⁰ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he told the paralytic— ¹¹ "I tell you: get up, take your mat, and go home."

¹² Immediately he got up, took the mat, and went out in front of everyone. As a result, they were all astounded and gave glory to God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

What an understatement. Get the picture. Capernaum, which was Jesus' base of operations in His Galilean ministry, was situated on the north shore of that famous sea. A crowd is crammed into the house and flowing out the door. Inside Jesus is preaching to eager listeners, including scribes, who are trying to figure out Who this disease-healing, demon-delivering Teacher is. Suddenly, four men show up with a paralyzed man on a mat. They want to get in the house, but no one will let them. Just imagine people at the door, looking back, making eye contact with the man on the mat, his friends around him, and then

turning back without budging. When pushing and prodding don't work, the friends get resourceful, scrappy.

We can only imagine the conversation, as the first friend says, "Why don't we climb up on the roof?" The second responds, "A lot of good that will do, genius. Jesus is inside, not outside." To which the first replies, "Yeah, I know that, Bro. Let's just take the roof off." To which the third says, "You can't remove a roof!" The first says, "Why not?" They look at each other and finally the fourth says, "I don't know a better option. We have to get our friend to Jesus. That's the only way, so let's do it."

They climb up on the roof—a common place in a Palestinian home to relax or sleep on a cool night, almost like you might picture a deck. It's sturdy enough to walk on. So imagine you're inside and you hear footsteps above as you're listening to Jesus in front of you. All of a sudden you hear an odd noise and dirt starts to fall on your head. First, it's a little. Then it's a lot. And it's not just falling on you; it's falling on people all around you. Jesus Himself is dodging it.

Have you ever been distracted in preaching? This is more than a baby crying; this is the roof coming down on your head. You can only imagine the owner of the house screaming, "What are you guys doing to my roof?" We don't know for sure whose house it was. I'm pretty sure that if it was Peter's mother-in-law, she was about to have another headache and would need to be healed again.

Then suddenly the sun starts to peek through. By now, Jesus—despite His authoritative teaching—has lost the crowd's attention. More dirt falls, more tiles are removed, until a massive hole is formed. Mark's description in the original language would suggest a major demolition job here. The text literally says, "They unroofed the roof." Once the hole is established, there's a long pause, as everybody waits for what will happen next.

That's when a mat—likely tied with ropes at each corner—is slowly lowered down and on it lies a paralyzed man, now nestled in front of Jesus' feet. No one speaks a word, inside or outside. Did you notice how Mark doesn't record a single word spoken even by the friends. I can just imagine Jesus looking down at the man, then up at his friends. What expression do you imagine was on their faces? Nervous? Anxious? Smiling? We can safely assume they were sweating, as they catch their breath and wait to see what Jesus will do.

We don't know exactly what Jesus saw on those friends' faces, but we do know that whatever Jesus saw was the face of faith. Jesus said to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Which is a bit odd, when you think about it, because the man didn't even ask for that. This is where we know we don't have all the details. We don't know for sure if anyone else said anything. We do know it was common belief in that day that physical suffering was attributable to personal sin. But we don't know if this man's paralysis was tied to specific sin in his life or if it was something he was born with.

All we know is that Jesus makes a pronouncement that shocks the crowds. This man has sinned, and Jesus has authority to forgive Him. Which leads the scribes to wonder in their hearts, “The penalty for blasphemy is death and this Teacher deserves it.” While the text doesn’t tell us they say anything out loud, Jesus sees that in their hearts they are questioning. So He says, “Which is easier: to forgive sins or to heal paralysis?” After He paused, He says, “I’ll show you that I have authority to forgive sins.” He turns to the paralytic and says, “Rise, pick up your bed and go home.”

Picture it. To the amazement of the crowd crammed into that home, to the disgust of scribes sitting on the floor, and to the delight—the pure delight—of four friends peering down through an unroofed roof, the man stands. He immediately picks up his bed and runs out of the room. The crowds moved for him this time. Can you imagine those friends running down off the roof, jumping up and down with their friend, chest-bumping, shouting, as they race home with a demolished house in their wake—a house full of people, who now speak for the first time in the story, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”

Is this not an awesome story? So what does it teach us specifically about evangelism? I invite you to consider this story with me through the following lenses: one central theme, two urgent needs, three characteristics of Jesus, four faithful friends, all leading to five exhortations in evangelism. I’m not expecting you to have gotten all that. We’ll go one at a time: one, two, three, four, five. We’ll start with one.

One central theme

There’s one central theme in this story, as well as in this section of Mark’s Gospel, and that theme is the primacy and power of Jesus’ Word. We have seen and heard this at numerous points over the last two days and we see it again here in our text today. Even before our text, Mark 1:14 says, “*After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’*” Then in Mark 1:21-22, Mark writes, “*And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.*”

Later, in the second half of Mark 1:27, after healing a man with an unclean spirit, the crowds asked, “*What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.*” In verses 36-37, the crowds were looking for Jesus and verse 38 says, “*And he said to them, ‘Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.’*” Then we have the story we just read and right after that Mark writes, “*Jesus went out again beside the sea, and all the*

crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them” (Mark 2:13). There’s a clear emphasis in Mark on Jesus’ preaching and teaching.

So it’s no surprise that here at the start of our text in Mark 2:2, *“Many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them.”* As the story unfolds, it’s by the word of Jesus that this man’s sins are forgiven. It’s by the word of Jesus that this man’s paralysis is healed.

One central theme in this story: the primacy and power of Jesus’s word.

Two urgent needs

This leads us to two urgent needs. First, the man’s physical need was evident: he was paralyzed. We obviously don’t know how severe his paralysis was. It was bad enough to be confined to a portable bed. We don’t know if he could move any of his muscles, if the motor areas of his brain were not functioning or if his spine at some point had snapped. But his physical need affected all of his life and was evident to all.

Second, and particularly significant, this man’s spiritual need was ultimate. More important than even his physical paralysis was his spiritual malice. Again, we don’t know if his suffering was directly due to any particular sin in his life. It’s biblically possible that it was or was not. But regardless, we know this man was a sinner, which meant that his ultimate need was not healing from God, but holiness before God. This is the ultimate need in all our lives. Our ultimate need is never physical; our ultimate need is always spiritual.

In fact, all of our physical suffering ultimately goes back to a spiritual source. When sin entered the world, so did suffering and pain of all sorts. Every headache we have, every body ache we feel, every form of cancer, every type of tumor testifies to the reality that this world is not as it should be. Our ultimate problem is that we are separated from God by sin in a world that is full of suffering. So our ultimate need is not to be rid of our maladies, but to be reconciled to our Maker. This man’s physical need was evident and this man’s spiritual need was ultimate.

Three characteristics of Jesus

In the first 14 times in the book of Mark, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, a title that will be associated with Jesus’ suffering, humiliation and death, but it’s more than that. Remember the prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14:

Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion

is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

No, the Son of Man was not merely a humble reference to Jesus' humanity; it is a powerful statement of Jesus' authority. His authority is all over this text. The first characteristic of Jesus here is that He has authority to read our hearts. As soon as Jesus pronounces forgiveness of the paralytic's sins, He looks over at the scribes and sees their questioning, accusing hearts. They don't have to say a word for Jesus to know what is in them.

In the same way, He knows what is in every one of our hearts right now. All of our hidden motives, all of our secret thoughts, all of the sin we don't want anybody else to know about all across this room—not one of us escapes His gaze and nothing in our lives is hidden from His eyes. The Son of Man, Jesus, has authority to read our hearts.

The second characteristic of Jesus is that He has authority to heal our sicknesses. We almost take this for granted when we see this in the Gospels and we've seen this in different places. May we never cease to be amazed and awed and absolutely encouraged by the reality that Jesus speaks and paralysis disappears. Jesus speaks and disease is gone. Jesus speaks and demons run. Jesus speaks and death itself obeys. Jesus has authority to heal our sicknesses. None of these things are sovereign. Disease is not sovereign; demons are not sovereign; death is not sovereign. Jesus is sovereign.

Then, as if that isn't good enough news, it gets better. This third characteristic is that Jesus has authority to forgive our sins which is the greatest news of all. Jesus has authority to forgive our sins. I said earlier that our ultimate need is not physical, but spiritual, because all of our physical suffering ultimately goes back to a spiritual source: sin. We said our ultimate problem is that we are separated from God by sin in a world that is full of suffering. So our ultimate need is not to be rid of our maladies, but to be reconcile to our Maker. And this is what Jesus has come to do.

If sin is ultimately the root of all our suffering, then what we need most is someone to solve that problem. We need someone with power, not just over disease and demons; we need someone with power over sin and death. Mark 2 makes it clear that this Someone has come. The scribes were right: only God can forgive sin. Yet what they failed to see was that God in the flesh was standing right in front of their eyes. This is the good news of the Bible, the greatest news in all the world: God has not left sinners alone in a world of sin and suffering. God Himself has come to us.

He has lived the life we could not live, a life of perfect, sinless obedience to the Father. Then, though He had no sin for which to die, He chose to die on a cross for our sins as our Substitute. Jesus died for our sins. And then the good news keeps getting better, because Jesus didn't stay dead for long. He rose from the grave in victory over sin and death, and now He offers reconciliation to God for anyone

anywhere who repents and believes in Him. This is the gospel, yet sadly it is not the gospel that is being preached in many places around the world.

As I travel around the world, there are so many places where a false gospel is being proclaimed that says if you believe in Jesus, you will be healed of all your diseases now. If you trust in Jesus, you'll be free of your sickness today. It is not the gospel, because the gospel is much, much better news than that. The gospel is not going to Africa and saying, "Trust in Jesus and your HIV-AIDS will be gone." The gospel is not going to America and saying, "Trust in Jesus and your cancer will be gone." The gospel is going anywhere and everywhere in the world and saying, "Trust in Jesus and your sins will be gone."

When that happens, then the root of suffering is severed. When our sins are gone, we are reconciled to God with the very righteousness of Christ. This means we can know—no matter what happens in this life with bodies that are all wasting away—that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, nor any height or depth nor anything else in all creation will ever be able to separate you and me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So for all who trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, you can know that cancer will not have the last word. Tumors will not have the last word. Alzheimer's will not have the last word. Parkinson's will not have the last word. Pain will not have the last word. Heart attacks, hospital rooms and hospice care will not have the last word. Death itself will not have the last word, because death has been defeated by the Son of Man. His name is Jesus and He will have the last word.

The good news of the Kingdom is not that Jesus will heal you of all your sicknesses now. The good news of the Kingdom is that Jesus will forgive all your sins forever. And forgiveness is God's greatest gift, because it meets our greatest need. Jesus has authority to forgive our sins.

Four faithful friends

This then leads us to four faithful friends—and by faithful I mean full of faith. This entire story unfolds because Jesus sees their faith. Mark 2:5: "*When he saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.'*" Faith in Jesus unlocks forgiveness from Jesus. Notice, it wasn't just this man's faith on the mat. There's actually question about who "their" is in the text. The only thing we know is it's plural—more than one person's faith that led to this proclamation of forgiveness in this scene. So what was it about their faith? I see at least four characteristics.

One, their faith was confident. These men believed Jesus could help their friend. There's no way they would have gone to this extreme if they didn't. They really believed, "If we can just get him in front of Jesus, something amazing will happen." Their faith was confident and their faith was compassionate. They really loved him, didn't they? You don't go to these measures for someone you don't care for. Imagine this man lying there on his mat, while the crowds are running to the home where Jesus is

teaching. Were it not for the compassion of four faithful friends, he would have stayed there on that mat and only heard stories of what Jesus had said. Because of their compassion, he found himself at Jesus' feet.

Third, their faith was very creative! It was resourceful, scrappy, even a bit reckless. No obstacle could stand in their way—no crowd and no roof. They demolished a house to get their friend to Jesus. And fourth, their faith was contagious. Again, Mark tells us very little about this man lying on the mat, but I try to imagine myself on that mat. I'm lying there when word gets around that Jesus is teaching in the house up the way and everybody starts running—but I'm stuck. Until four friends say, "We're going to take you to Jesus, because we believe He can help you."

I think their faith starts to encourage my own. "Maybe He can help me. Maybe He will." Then when I'm lying on that mat outside the house and the crowds are looking at me but won't let me in, I think I'd start to get discouraged. But then I'd look over at my friends talking, pointing up to the roof, hatching a plan. When they come back and tell me their crazy idea, I think my faith would be encouraged. When I'm lying there on the roof, watching them dig through it, strap ropes to my mat and lower me down, I would look up into their eyes and see their determined faces, and their faith would bolster my own with hopeful anticipation. Until the moment my mat settles on that floor, and I now look up in the face of Jesus, with the expectant, faith-filled faces of my friends in the background, I think my heart would be filled with faith in that moment.

Their faith was contagious. Their faith affected Jesus and their faith affected this man in need.

Five exhortations in evangelism

So based upon this story in God's Word, we come to five exhortations in evangelism that I would offer. One, make the proclamation of Jesus' word primary in a world of spiritual need. See the primacy and power in Jesus' Word and proclaim it. Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, we get to do this. We get to make eye contact specifically with unbelievers in the worship gathering. What a mercy that God brings unbelievers to us. I stand out in the lobby in between our services in Metro Washington and have so many conversations with unbelievers who have come. I think about Jesus' calling, "Fish for men." I don't even have to go out and find fish on Sundays. It's like they're jumping into the boat.

So make eye contact with unbelievers every week and proclaim the gospel of God—not just in the church, but also wherever you go in the world. Look through the Gospels and the book of Acts and see Jesus and the disciples speak the word in synagogues, but most of their word ministry is done on streets and in houses. Is that true of us?

Being in this conference has brought back memories to me of my early years in faith, including the first time I can remember sharing the gospel. When I was in middle school, a student minister invited

a buddy and me to meet him in an arcade one day. We thought it sounded great, so we went. He showed up with a video camera and said, “We’re going to interview people and ask them about their faith.” We said, “Do we still get to play video games?” He said, “Sure.”

So we went up to some other teenagers and our student minister started asking questions from behind the camera as my buddy and I watched and listened. When the questions were finished, the student minister put the camera down and said, “Now David would like to share with you about his faith in Jesus.” All of a sudden I didn’t have a choice but to proclaim the Word. In the days to come, that student minister nurtured a boldness in my buddy and me for evangelism. We would go out to the train station and share the gospel with cab drivers who were waiting to pick up people. We’d share the gospel through Bible studies in our homes, at rallies in our school.

Then I broke my arm playing baseball and had a big black cast on it, all the way up my arm. So I had my older brother write on the cast, “Are you sure?” in big white letters. People would come up to me and say, “Am I sure of what?” I would say, “Are you sure you’ll go to heaven when you die?” Then I’d share the gospel with them. That continued through all kinds of creative opportunities in college, on a state university campus and in seminary.

During my first semester in seminary in New Orleans, I was in a personal evangelism class where we were assigned a local church and required to participate with that church in evangelism over the course of the semester. My team got the last church left on the list: Vieux Carre Baptist Church, right in the heart of the French Quarter. We met with the pastor who took us on a tour of the Quarter. We stopped in Jackson Square and he said, “You’re on your own from here.”

My team looked around at several tables with fortune tellers and tarot card readers, thinking, “Why don’t we get in on the action?” So we went and bought a table, put a cloth on it with candles and made a sign that read, “We’ll tell your future for free.” We set up right next to the voodoo queen of New Orleans and had a couple chairs across the table from us. People would sit down and ask, “You’ll tell my future for free?” We’d say, “Absolutely. Guaranteed.” We were tempted to ask them to put out their hands, but we didn’t. We just asked them some questions to establish the fact that they had sin in their lives. Then we’d tell them, “The future doesn’t look very good,” and we’d tell them how it could change.

I share all this because I’ve been convicted recently that over years of ministry and the busyness of church, I fear I’ve lost that level of boldness, creativity and commitment to the ministry of the Word in the world. I spend hours preparing for the ministry of the Word on Sunday, which is important. But I spend relative minutes doing the ministry of the Word on the streets and in houses all week long. That needs to change in my life. What about you? Let’s make the proclamation of the Word primary in our ministries and in our lives, in a world of urgent spiritual need.

The second exhortation is this: make the power of Jesus' love evident in a world of physical need. I trust it's clear that the proclamation of Jesus' Word is primary in the mission of the church, but doesn't this text compel us to open our eyes to opportunities in this world to show the power of Jesus' love amidst people's physical needs? The mission of the church is to make disciples of the nations; the more we give ourselves to this mission, the more we will realize that the nations are hurting.

Over a billion men, women and children are extremely poor —ultra-poor. Millions of refugees are in need of a home and hope. Millions of children are in need of food and medicine. Untold numbers and names are trafficked and enslaved right now—girls just like my younger daughter. So as we work primarily to keep people from eternal suffering, I exhort us to also work diligently to care for people amidst earthly suffering. Let's see the man, the woman, the child and refuse to turn our eyes away, knowing these physical needs are far from us and near to us.

If you were to listen to a podcast from our church, you would likely hear loud, pretty high-pitched amens during the sermon from a girl named Marissa. Marissa has cerebral palsy and spends her life in a wheelchair. Every Sunday she wheels that motorized chair to the middle aisle, right in front of me. Before she came to our church, she was used being put in a corner by herself—even at churches that had not thought through how to care for children or adults with special needs.

But this time she found a family of brothers and sisters who welcomed her, and as they cared for her special need, they brought her to the One Who could meet her greatest need. She was baptized not long ago and as I studied this text, I couldn't help but think about her. I just want to invite you to watch her baptism with me. Meet Marissa.

Video: Welcome Marissa to the baptism pool. She has asked that I read her testimony for her.

At one point in my life, I hated going to church, because it prevented me from spending quality time with my dad. I was usually shoved into a corner. This changed when my mom and I found MBC. Soon after, we started attending and met Diane Anderson, the Director of Access at the time. She was waiting at the front door for another family, but they came in to me and said, "Can you come back with me?" So I asked my mom if I could go with her to help in Access that day.

Then Diane said, "You really don't need to be in here," and she invited me to go to junior high and participate with the rest of the kids my age. I was 13 years old. When MBC started to offer winter camp at Rockbridge, I went because the church made sure I had someone to go with me to help with my physical needs. That camp was life changing for me. It was the first time I came in to a body of believers and felt accepted—like they actually wanted me there with them, having fun, praying, worshiping and hanging out together.

Will Gaskin, the junior high pastor at the time, gave a talk that first night, asking, "Do you know where you will go if you were to die tonight?" And for some reason, the way he asked it really hit me that night. I'd always believed in a higher power, but this was the

first time I was offered a relationship with Jesus that was deeply personal. That night I officially and knowingly gave my life to Jesus.

Even though I had been born again, coming back from camp did not mean things in my life got easier. Being in a wheelchair had alienated me from my classmates before, but now sharing my love for Jesus with them alienated me even more. They believed I couldn't mentally understand salvation. I really didn't have friends in school, but I had a community of believers at church who loved me and helped me become more like Christ.

I'm being baptized today because I want to obey the commandment Jesus gave to the disciples in Matthew 28:19, "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.*" I know God is with me, even to the end of the age.

Marissa, based on that profession of your faith, it is our privilege to baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, burying you in the likeness of His death, and raising you to the newness of life!

David: Let's make the power of Jesus' love evident in a world of physical need. The third exhortation is to persevere in personal evangelism that is full of faith in all the ways we saw in these four faithful friends. Persevere in personal evangelism that is confident in the power of the gospel to save. We talk about the challenges of evangelism in our age, in our culture, which are indeed many. But based on this text—and particularly the picture of these faithful friends—I want to exhort us to be full of faith that when we bring Jesus and the lost together, He will show His power to save.

We talk about these challenges, yet we will not prove faithful if we talk more about how hard the ground is than we talk about how great the gospel is. We will not prove faithful if we talk more about how hard the ground is than we talk about how great our God is. The gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16) and Jesus will show His power when we share His Word.

So let's persevere in confidence, compassionate love and creative faith. We strategize and plan for so many things. We strategize and plan for the order of worship services in church. We strategize and plan for programming in the church. So how are we strategizing and planning for personal evangelism in our lives? In our families? In our churches?

As we strategize and plan, let's be bold—even a bit reckless. I'm not saying we demolish houses, but the weapons of our warfare do have power to destroy strongholds. So let's persevere in confidence, compassion, creative and contagious faith that believes God can and will save people by this gospel, even when they don't yet believe.

I think about my mother-in-law. I first met her when I started dating Heather 25 years ago. Heather's mom was not a believer and she really had no interest in talking about Jesus. So Heather and I began praying together for her. We shared the gospel with her over and over and over again. We wrote

letters. We tried to be creative, seemingly to no avail. Her heart was just hard. Until one day, we were on vacation with Heather's family and her mom got up in the morning to read the Bible. Heather said, "Mom, what are you doing?" Her mom replied, "I've been waiting to tell you I recently read presentation of the gospel and it made sense. I get it and now I want to read the Bible." She was born again and everything in her life changed. She was in the Word every day, praying, sharing the gospel. She joined the church. The fruit of new birth was evident in new life. I had the privilege of baptizing her and about a month later she unexpectedly died of a brain aneurism. Quite honestly, it was hard to cry at the funeral because there was such joy in our hearts.

I share that because I'm guessing across this room many of you have family members, parents, children, siblings, spouses, close friends, whom you've shared the gospel with, but nothing has happened. I just want to encourage you to keep pressing in full of faith. Keep sowing gospel seeds. Keep praying pleading prayers. Persevere in personal evangelism that is full of faith.

The fourth exhortation: persevere in global missions that is focused on the unreached. Jesus is the Son of Man. To Him belongs all authority in heaven and on earth, that all peoples, nations and languages should worship Him. There are about 6,000 to 7,000 people groups, nations and languages that are still unreached by the gospel. They are not yet reached by the good news of His forgiveness. Over two billion individual men, women and children—just like us, just like our kids—who are being born, living, dying and going to hell without ever even hearing how they can go to heaven. Many of them are born into an earthly hell of physical suffering, only then to move on to an eternal hell of everlasting, never-ending suffering. While many have the privilege of hearing the words of Jesus, we sit here in a land of Bible-saturated resources where we can crowd into conferences and learn about Jesus.

Who is going to turn around and make eye contact with those who cannot hear His name because they do not have His Word? They don't know a Christian. There are no Christians going to them. So what Christian is going to go to them? What church, what community of faithful friends is going to stop listening to more and more and more for ourselves? What church is going to send? What pastor is going to leave his local church for the spread of God's global glory?

Who's going to rise up with confident faith that God has power to save Somalis, that God has power to save Malays, that God has power to save the Hui in China and the Hazara in Afghanistan, the Berber in Morocco, the Baloch in Pakistan, the Pashtun and the Punjabi, the Tibetans and the Turks. There are 80 million people in Turkey and about 6,000 believers. There are more believers at this conference than among 80 million people in Turkey.

So let's go to them with compassionate conviction. Let's grab the four corners of this proverbial mat, then with creativity and contagious faith, let's marshal our resources and commit our resolve to doing whatever it takes to bring them to Jesus. May the nations see in you and me, and in the members of

our churches, life-transforming, death-defying faith in Jesus on their behalf. I've prayed that God will use His Word by His Spirit today, right now, to call out some from this room to go to the unreached. That God will open the eyes of every Christian and every pastor in this room to the part He's calling every one of us to play in the spread of His forgiveness to those who have never even heard His name.

The final exhortation from this text: never stop rejoicing in Jesus' forgiveness of sin and always keep hoping in Jesus' victory over suffering. Never stop rejoicing in Jesus' forgiveness of sin—of your sin, my sin—and praise God every day we have been forgiven of our sin. And praise God every time someone is forgiven of their sin. Heaven rejoices when a sinner repents and God forgives. Just imagine the rejoicing that is happening in heaven right now over sinners all over the world who at this moment are repenting and receiving forgiveness. May it be non-stop rejoicing in heaven through our lives.

Never stop rejoicing in Jesus' forgiveness of sin and always keep hoping in Jesus' victory over suffering. Many of you know Joni Eareckson Tada, our sister in Christ, herself a quadriplegic who has recently been hospitalized. The latest update is they have ruled out radiation, but she's still in pain and having difficulty breathing. When I heard this latest news, I was reminded of one of my favorite quotes from her. I thought it would be appropriate to share it as I close our time in this story of a paralytic who stood to the glory of God. Joni writes:

I hope in some way I can take my wheelchair to heaven. In my new glorified body, I will stand up on resurrected legs and will be next to the Lord Jesus. I will feel those nail prints in His hands and will say, "Thank You, Jesus." He will know I mean it, because He will recognize me from the inner sanctum of sharing in the fellowship of His suffering. He will see that I was one who identified with Him in the sharing of His suffering, so my gratitude will not be hollow.

Then I will say, "Lord Jesus, do you see that wheelchair over there? Well, You were right. When You put me in it, it was a lot of trouble. But the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on You. And the harder I leaned on You, the stronger I discovered You to be. I do not think I would have ever known the glory of Your grace were it not for the weakness of that wheelchair. So thank You, Lord Jesus, for that. And now, if You like, You can send that thing off to hell.

Ah, indeed. One day paralysis will be no more. One day pain will be no more. One day, starvation and trafficking will be no more. And one day suffering and death itself will be no more, for Jesus, the forgiver of our sins, is going to return. He is going to raise our bodies to be like His body, where we will rejoice and rest forever in His presence. So brothers and sisters, may you and I be found faithful in evangelism from this day until that.

Will you pray with me?

O God, we praise You for Your forgiveness of our sin. What words can begin to express our gratitude for Your grace in our lives? Even thinking about some of these circumstances in the Himalayas,

why were we not born there, in a place where the gospel has not yet come and physical suffering looks like some of these pictures? We had nothing to do with where we were born. We praise You for Your grace and mercy in our lives. We don't know how to understand all these pictures of physical and spiritual need we see in the world. God, we pray that Your mercy in us would resound to Your glory through us, that it would resound to the spread of Your mercy among more and more and more people.

We pray right now for those family members and friends whom we've been sharing the gospel with. Would You open their eyes to salvation, we pray? Please, O God, save them. Please. We've asked so many different times, we're asking again and we'll keep on asking. God, please, please save them.

And please, give us Your heart, not just for those who are closest to us, but for others in our cities and communities who are far from us, who we are prone to bypass, to not make eye contact with, and then, O God, for people far from us we are prone to ignore and neglect. God, please, spend our lives, spend our leadership in our churches, for the spread of Your gospel and the glory of Your name, that more and more and more people might know Your mercy and give You glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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