

## Evergreen | Splintered

*Aaron Brockett | Matthew 1:2*

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Well, I just want to welcome all of our campuses right now wherever you may be joining us from: North, Downtown, West here at our Northwest campus—so good to have all of you today.

It's hard to believe that we're in full swing of the Christmas season, which usually around this time of year I begin to just do some evaluating of the year that we've just come through. I start thinking about the upcoming year and maybe some goals that I want to achieve or some things that I want to do a little bit differently. And I just want to encourage you to maybe take advantage of these next few weeks—I know it's crazy, the holiday season.

But even as a church team we do the same thing. We just kind of re-evaluate, “Hey, where did God lead us this last year? Where are we going in the next year? And what you just saw on church news is really kind of the culmination of that. We just want to be prepared for where God's leading next.

One of the best definitions of ministry was given to me when I was in college. Some of you might recognize the name Rick Warren, a pastor out at Saddleback Church in California. He said, “You know, your job as not only a pastor but as a child of God is very similar to a surfer.” He said, “You're not trying to create the waves, you're just trying to ride them. And so you just anticipate the waves that God sends and you just want to get in on what God is doing.”

As a church, we just try to follow that. Sometimes we get it wrong. Sometimes we get it right. And so our year-end giving—that's the focus of it. We just want to figure out what waves God is sending us and how can we get on them and ride them. And so, really, our year end giving goes to two big initiatives that both involve people.

The first is just vulnerable kids. And we're going to be talking more and more about that in 2019 and just what that means for us to come alongside those who are fostering and adopting and doing what we can to care for vulnerable children. So our year-end giving is going to go toward an organization called Hands of Hope. You know, God describes himself in the Bible as a Father to the fatherless. It's at the heart of the very gospel message. So we're going to lean into that.

The other is just people who are far away from Jesus who are in our city, and they need the hope that can be found in him. And one of the best ways that we've found to reach them is by just continuing to go, continuing to launch campuses and launch new works.

It's amazing—in the last several years we've launched out and started three different campuses. We've always sent about 250 people to seed each campus to get it going. It's

amazing now who is showing up at all of our campuses. Both North and Downtown will have anywhere between 1,600 and 1,800 people today. Our West campus that meets portable in a school will have anywhere around 850 to 900 people. It's just incredible what God has done to multiply that. We feel like God wants to do more. So we've identified a couple of areas in our city where we want to launch campuses in the coming year.

All of our year-in giving is going toward making sure we get in on what God is doing. So I want to thank you for your generosity here at year-end.

If you have a Bible would you meet me in Genesis 32? That's our passage today. And I actually want to read where we're going and then we'll kind of back up and get there together. So I want to read this passage. Keep in mind that we're jumping in about three-fourths of the way into this guy named Jacob, his life. And so, especially if you don't really know a lot about Jacob, you might feel a little bit lost. That's okay. Hang tight because we're going to come back to this.

Let me just read this to start our time together. It says, "During the night **Jacob** got up and took his two wives," anybody have questions? You should, alright? "... his two servant wives," more questions, "... and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River with them. After taking them to the other side, he sent over all his possessions.

"This left Jacob all alone in the camp, and a man came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket. Then the man said, 'Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!' But Jacob said, '**I will not let you go unless you bless me.**'"

"'What is your name?' the man asked. He replied, '**Jacob.**' 'Your name will no longer be Jacob,' the man told him. 'From now on you will be called **Israel**, because you have fought with God and with men and have won.'"

Let's pray together.

Father, we come to you right now and I just ask that in these next few moments together that we would, as much as we are able, to just turn down the volume of everything going on in our lives. For some of us that might require us to shut off our phones so that we're not distracted in these next few minutes. For some of us that means that we're just going to have to force ourselves to really just tune in to the next 25 or 30 minutes to what it is that you might say, because we don't want to miss it. So I pray that your voice would overpower mine and that your Spirit would be present in this room. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody says: Amen.

How many of you have already gotten the Christmas tree, decorated it, it's in your house. How many—a show of those hands, very proud of you. I love the Christmas tree. Christmas trees are a big deal this time of the year.

It didn't always used to be that way for me. I used to be a bit curmudgeon about it and I would be like, "Let's just go to Lowes and buy a fake tree. We'll only have to pay for a tree once and we'll just kind of set that up every year." But in the last few years my inner Clark Griswold has kind of emerged. I'm just like, "We need to pack the kids up." And I wish we had a station wagon but we don't. "Let's go out and find a real tree."

This year, the day after Thanksgiving we packed up our family. We ventured out to a local tree farm and we walked out across this field filled with all kinds of trees of different shapes and sizes, and we found the one, perfect tree in the whole field. And we got it and then we stood in line for over an hour, I brought a picture of it. This is the line we stood in in the cold and I'm actually not complaining. I actually enjoyed every minute of it. The hot chocolate and the warm apple cider donuts, straight from heaven, kind of comforted me.

It was actually a really fun day to just get the tree that we wanted, and then we went home. I love everything about Christmas trees. I like the look of them. I like the decorations on them. And Christmas trees are a big deal, kind of a centerpiece this time of the year.

Did you know that trees actually play a big role in the Bible? They're all over. They are used both literally and metaphorically from Genesis through Revelation. In Genesis we see that God places a tree in the middle of the Garden called the tree of knowledge. And the message of that tree is that you can choose to trust God or you can sort of choose to do your own thing. God will let you decide.

Revelation, the last book of the Bible, is describing the city of heaven and God places another tree in the middle of that city. It's called the tree of life. And the message of that tree is that God has promised to bring healing to the nations. Isn't that an incredible thought?

David one time said that if you listen to the voice of God you'd be like a tree planted by streams of living water, you're leaves will always be green. Jeremiah would say something similar. He would say that those who put their hope and their confidence in God are like tree whose roots go down so deep that even though there is a drought going on above the surface, their life still produces fruit.

Jesus would one time say in a description of our relationship with him—he described it this way. He said: I am the vine and you are the branches and the only thing that you need to do is just stay connected to me.

Trees are used all over the Bible. They are a big, big deal. And when you come to the very first chapter of the very first book in the New Testament we find another kind of tree. It's actually Jesus' family tree.

I don't know how many of you ever have done a Bible reading plan or maybe you decided, "You know what? I'm going to read my Bible this year." So you are all excited. You get a cup of coffee and you turn to the New Testament and then you start reading and 30 seconds into it you're

about ready to give up, because Matthew, chapter 1 is just a bunch of names. It's like, this person begat that person who begat that person who begat that person. I don't even know what begat means but there was a whole bunch of begetting going on in Matthew, chapter 1.

We look at this here in the first two verses of the first chapter and it says, "This is a record of the **ancestors of Jesus** the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of **Jacob**," the man that we just read about a little bit earlier. So we see here that this is the family tree of Jesus.

Now, I don't know if any of you have ever done a study of your genealogy before. Maybe you've done the Ancestry.com thing. But chances are that, if you have, you're just doing it as a hobby or you were just kind of interested in who you're related to. It's kind of a fun thing to do.

Now, in the first century, nobody did this as a hobby. Nobody researched their family line just because they were trying to pass the time. It was a big, big deal in the first century, Jewish world because your family tree was your sense of identity. It told you who you were. In fact, it gave you a sense of credibility for better or for worse.

In the first century, Jewish world your family tree was your birth certificate, your social security card, your driver's license, and your background check all wrapped into one. That's like who you were.

So Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience. He's the only gospel writer who begins his introduction of Jesus the Messiah with a family tree. And the reason why is because he's writing to a Jewish audience. It's a big deal to them. And it's not surprising that he would do so. What is surprising is who Matthew includes in the list. You see, blood lines—they matter. And that's the message of Matthew, chapter 1.

I was reminded of this a couple of years ago. Our family has never really been big pet people, not because we don't like pets but because we had kids and we didn't want to clean up any additional messes than what our kids were creating. But we, foolishly, made the promise several years ago to our kids that once they got old enough to help—yeah, right—that we could get a pet.

So we decided on a dog. Once we did we said, "Okay, what kind of a dog?" We decided on a particular breed and then we went out to find that dog. We found a breeder about an hour away.

We wanted to get a lab. So we go to the breeder several months prior to us getting a dog.

And because blood lines matter I said I want to meet the mom and the dad because I want to know what kind of a dog we're going to get. I want to know its temperament. I want to know what it will look like. So he showed me the dad. His dad's name was Bear. That's awesome. That's all you need to know. He was a huge dog. Big, mean bark. And then we met his mom and

his mom had this really sweet disposition and a good temperament and I'm like, "Okay, I want a puppy from those two," because blood lines matter.

So this is our puppy. His name is Winston—that's right buddy. He'll be a year old here in a couple of weeks. And he's a good looking dog. He's got this big forehead, he's got this fierce bark but yet he's really, really good with the kids because blood lines matter. I know, you're not even listening to me anymore, right? All right, take that down.

So it's not surprising that Matthew would start his introduction of Jesus the Messiah with a family tree—blood lines matter. What is surprising is who he chooses to include on the list. Matthew doesn't edit out any of the embarrassing family members. Any of you want to do that sometimes? The holidays kind of remind us of that. Any of you want to prune your family tree if you could?

How about this? How many of you, whenever you talk about *that* family member, you whisper their name when you talk about them? Have you ever noticed this? It's like, "Hey, is Uncle [whisper] Steve coming to Christmas this year? Why are we whispering his name? It's because we all just know it's like, "I can't believe that I'm related to that person."

Jesus had plenty of them in his family tree. Matthew includes men, which is not surprising because this was a patriarchal society. But, because of that it is surprising that Matthew includes women in the genealogy. He lists several of them and we'll talk about a couple of them in this series.

He includes liars and cheats and manipulators and adulterers—Jesus was related to some embarrassing people. Here's what that says to us: Jesus came through imperfect people for imperfect people. He didn't clean any of it up. Matthew says: this is Jesus' family line.

In fact, if his family tree could be symbolized with a Christmas tree, it's not the one in Rockefeller Center—the big, beautiful one that just looks so picturesque and great. Jesus' family tree looks more like that [barren twigs on a crooked trunk with a few straggly ornaments on it]. Some of you were wondering what that nasty looking tree was doing up here. That's why. See, our family lines, most of us can relate to that more than the one in Rockefeller Center, because Jesus' family tree was pretty messed up. And Matthew is trying to communicate something to us from that.

So in this series we're going to look at a few of these limbs of his tree. The first one that I want to look at is the limb of Jacob. We've already looked at a little bit of his story. Let me just kind of tell you a little bit about Jacob. His story is found in Genesis, chapters 25 to 49 if you want to do any reading of your own. From his birth to his death those chapters just record his life.

The Bible gives a lot more information about Jacob than it does a lot of other people in the Bible. And as I was studying his life over the last couple of weeks, the term that just kept coming to the surface of my mind was this phrase right here: Jacob was an unqualified hero.

That he was a hero: no doubt. God uses Jacob in a tremendous way as part of his redemptive plan but for the life of me I as study through his life, I don't know why.

Jacob is far from perfect. And I'm sitting there going, "I don't understand why God choose Jacob over Esau because he doesn't seem to be any better. Jacob just seems to keep making a mess of things. Jacob emerges through the Scriptures simultaneously as one of the most important figures in God's redemptive plan and one of the most messed up. And there is something about that that brings me a strange amount of comfort because if God can use somebody like Jacob, then maybe God can use somebody like me and you.

See, here was Jacob's deal. Not so different from us, Jacob was born into a dysfunctional family. And all of us are to some degree. Even those of us whose families are really healthy and really good, there is still some kind of dysfunction that is there because we're all people, we're all broken. Jacob's mom, Rebecca, his dad, Isaac, they had their baggage that they brought in from their families of origin and so they kind of bring that into their family life, into their marriage.

Here's how Jacob chose to cope with the dysfunction in his family. He chose to be a manipulative person. And I don't think it was because he was trying to be a bad guy, I just think that is how he dealt with it. You look at his whole life, at least most of it, about three-fourths of the way through his life and Jacob was always trying to control his circumstances and he was always trying to control people. In fact, he was born into this world trying to control things.

In Genesis, chapter 25:26 when are told about his birth—his mom had twins and his older brother, Esau, was born first. It says, "Then the other twin was born with his hand grasping Esau's heel. So they named him Jacob."

So Jacob was born into this world trying to control his situation. He's like reaching out of the womb, grabbing a hold of his twin brother's heel like: Get back in here. I'm going to be born first. And Isaac and Rebecca see this tendency in him so they go: Oh, we'll call him Jacob.

The reason why is because the name Jacob means deceiver. It means manipulator. It means control freak (I actually added that third one there. It's actually, technically, not the definition but deceiver and manipulator are, yeah). Jacob is always trying to control people and circumstances in his life. We see this pattern where he cuts corners, he tells half truths, he manipulates the situation—in fact, he wanted that first born blessing thing so badly that maybe the most well-known story attached to him is this.

His brother, Esau, comes in from a hunting trip and he's really, really hungry and Jacob is preparing dinner and Jacob cons his brother into trading his future for his appetite. And it splits the family apart. And Esau is so furious with Jacob that Jacob packs up his things and he goes on the run for most of the rest of his life.

And, unfortunately, Jacob never learned his lesson. Here's the thing that we see from him: the more out of control his life got, the more he tried to control things and he just made a bigger

mess. And I'm just wondering if anybody listening to this right is a lot like me and you can relate to that.

Any professed control freaks in the room? You know you are if you're sitting there and you're actually annoyed right now because you're not controlling anything. You're just like, "I wish I could control what you're saying right now. I wish I could control the length of this service right now. Let me get out of here so that way I can control some stuff.

And not all of that is bad—some of us, just because we work hard we get things done. But oftentimes it makes things worse. If you're unhappy at work maybe you just try all the harder to position and posture and it just makes matters worse. Maybe you're in a relationship right now that's not going very well so you hover and you suffocate and it just pushes the person farther from you. Maybe your discontent with your finances and what you do is you just cling to money and possessions all the more and it just makes matters worse.

So Jacob would say to us: The more we try to control what feels out of control the more things spin out of control!

And later when it was time for him to get married, he tries to control that whole deal. He sees this young lady that he would really like to marry and so he meets her father, Laban, and he says, "I really want to marry your daughter. And Laban doesn't want Jacob to marry that daughter. He wants Jacob to marry his other daughter. And so he says: Well the only way that you're going to marry the daughter that you want to marry is if you work for me for seven years.

See, Jacob's father-in-law was just as big of a manipulator as Jacob was. And Jacob was like: Alright, I'll control this situation. I'll do it. I'll work for you. And he worked for seven years for the hand of Rachel. When he finally does it, his father-in-law didn't actually think he would do it, so now he's like: I don't want you to marry her; I want you to marry this other daughter.

So here's what his father-in-law does. On Jacob's wedding day, he throws a big party, gets him drunk and Jacob sleeps with the wrong woman on his wedding day. That will put a damper on the honeymoon. Like the whole family ends up on the Maury Povich show—it's just a bad, bad deal.

And Jacob is like: man forget that. If you're going to betray me like that then I'll betray you. So he tries to control that whole situation. His father-in-law gets furious with him and Jacob goes on the run, not only from his father-in-law, Laban, but he's simultaneously on the run from his older brother, Esau, who is still mad at him for stealing the family blessing.

Jacob is a mess.

And the more out-of-control things got in his life, the more complicated the circumstances, Jacob would just come in and try to manage and manipulate, coerce and control to the point



that by the time we catch up with him in Genesis 32, what we just read, he's utterly exhausted. Jacob's health isn't doing good, he's not sleeping at night, he is stressed up to his eyeballs. Maybe this time of the year you feel a little bit that way. I mean, for some of us we're not super excited about the month ahead because it's so crazy, it's so busy.

So, I just want to ask you to finish this statement right here. There's no wrong answer. Only honest ones. Just finish this statement right here:

When my life feels out-of-control I \_\_\_\_\_.

How do you handle it? When life feels out-of-control I worry. When life feels out-of-control I'm stressed. I lash out. Maybe for others of you when life feels out-of-control you sort of shut down, "I'm just going to run the other way." See, there's no wrong answer to this, only the right ones because only when you are honest about this can you begin to turn things around and begin to find a place of healing. There's nobody grading you on this. Just be honest.

The next question I want you to ask is: Is it working? Is it working? For so many of us we just never fully learn our lesson. We're just like, "Man, the more out-of-control things get the more I try to hover, the more I try to control." And you end up just making a bigger mess of things.

I think this is what Jesus had in mind when he gives these really compassionate and empathetic words in Matthew, chapter 11. This might sound familiar to many of you. Jesus would say this, "Come to me, **all of you**," not just the good ones, not just the ones who have it all together but all of you "who are weary and carry heavy burdens," which, if we're honest is all of us this time of year and I love this statement, he goes "and I will give you rest." Isn't that an incredible statement?

The next sentence, though, is a little confusing because he just said I'm going to give you rest. He says, "Take my yoke upon you." A yoke is something that you put on an oxen to plow the fields. "Okay, wait a second Jesus, you just told me you wanted me to find some rest. Now you're telling me to go to work." We'll get back to that in a minute. He goes, "Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will **find rest** for your souls."

See here's, I think, the push back that some of us whenever I say that you don't need to control your situation, you don't need to try and lean in and worry about it, you're sitting there going, "Now, wait a second. If I don't worry about it, who will?" Classic control freak line. It's really awkwardly quiet in here, alright? This is the service with all of the control freaks. I get it, alright?

No, you're like, "If I don't work hard, who will? If I don't take responsibility, who will?" Jesus is saying come to me those "who are weary and who carry heavy burdens" and I'm going to give you rest. And then he says, "Take my yoke upon you." So he's not telling you that you shouldn't



go to work, he's just telling you that you should work smarter. He says, "Take my yoke upon you."

Now in the first century world, in an agricultural society, they would place a yoke on an ox to plow the fields and if it wasn't a custom made yoke, then it would rub up against the ox all day long and by the end of the day the ox would just be rubbed raw. And it can't work as long. But a good farmer would actually make a custom yoke for the oxen, he would measure it out to where it actually fit the oxen better and put cushioning on it so that way the oxen could work even harder—but it's working smarter.

This is what Jesus was saying. Jesus is saying: put my yoke upon you. It's a custom made yoke. And then he says: I want you to work smarter not harder. See, we learn this lesson from what Jesus has said: Rest is not inactivity. It's a condition of your soul.

Am I preaching to anybody today? At least at the Northwest campus it is very, very quiet. I trust the other campuses are very lively, alright? Something tells me it's not going to get much better. Rest is not inactivity. Rest is a condition of your soul. It is an inner disposition.

In fact the prophet Isaiah would say this in Isaiah, chapter 40. He says those who find rest in the Lord will find strength and will mount up with wings like eagles. Have you ever stopped to wonder why it says eagles? It doesn't say you'll mount up with wings like birds. And I think the reason why is because you know and I know that not all birds fly the same.

I'd been walking through a field one time and I actually kicked up a covey of quail. You know what quail are? They are tiny little birds—like flying mice. Tiny little birds and their wings flap like a thousand flaps a second, right? So if you've ever kicked up a covey of quail it will scare you to death because they are like pfffffffeeh. And you're just like, ah. In fact, they are just frantically flapping and the ironic thing is that they don't seem to really be getting very far.

Ever seen an eagle fly? Ah, man. I've seen a bald eagle out at my house a couple of times over the last several years and it's amazing. It doesn't matter what I'm doing. I'll just like stop and watch it because it's so majestic. And it doesn't seem as if it's exerting that much effort but it's going much farther and faster than a quail.

Here's what an eagle does. When an eagle takes off it just flaps once. And it actually looks around. You know what it's saying? How do you like me now? Here's another way of saying it. It's flying not flapping. And Isaiah says to us: you'll mount up with wings like eagles if you transfer this over to God. You'll find his strength. You'll do more flying than you'll do flapping. That's what he's saying. Rest is not inactivity. It's a condition of your soul.

So Jacob is trying to learn this lesson. I think if he were here today he would say that. He would say: Man, the more I tried to manipulate the more, ironically, things just spun out of my control—because self-reliance will wear you out.

If your identity is tied too closely to your circumstances, the ones we try to control, then success will go to your head and failure will go to your heart. That's a recipe for exhaustion, either way, because when you achieve success and it goes to your head then you're just like, "Well, I just have to keep going up." And whenever that failure goes to your heart, you don't feel motivated to go any farther.

I don't think that Jacob was trying to be a bad guy when he's trying to manipulate. I think Jacob was really wrestling with his identity and God looks at him with compassion, not disdain. And so Jesus comes to him in chapter 32.

By the time we catch up to him Jacob is on the run. He is running from Laban. He's running from Esau to the point that he takes all of his family and possessions, splits them into two camps, sends one in one direction and the other in the other direction. And here is his reasoning: if one of them catches up to me they'll only destroy half of me. That's where things had gotten to in his life.

And he's utterly exhausted when a man, it's either an angel or Jesus, himself, meets Jacob in his greatest time of need. So we circle back to the passage we started with. It says, "This left Jacob **all alone** in the camp, and a **man** came and wrestled with him until the dawn began to break. When the man saw that he would not win the match, he touched Jacob's hip and wrenched it out of its socket.

"Then the man said, 'Let me go, for the dawn is breaking!' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'" That is how desperate he is. Notice, he's still trying to control things. "'What is your name?' the man asked. He replied, 'Jacob,'" which means deceiver or manipulator, Well the man says: oh no, no, no "'**Your name will no longer be Jacob,**' the man told him. 'From now on you will be called Israel, because you have fought with God and with men and have won.'"

One of the things... The reason why I believe this man is perhaps Jesus, himself, is because every time in the Bible when God changes somebody's life, he changes his name. And Jesus says to Jacob: Oh no, no, no. You're no longer defined by your dysfunctional family. You're no longer defined by your manipulation. I'm changing your name today.

And the name Israel means God will prevail. It's this idea: Hey, Jacob. Why don't you just rest in me? Jacob, why don't you transfer all of those things that you're trying to control on to me? And really, this time of the year this is an invitation to every single one of us who is maxed out and burned out and exhausted and who is just running a million miles an hour, those of us who are doing a whole lot of flapping and very little flying. He comes to us at the end of this year and he says: Would you just find rest from me?

God's not looking at you shaming you. God's looking at you with compassion like: Why are you working that hard? You don't have to. You can take my yoke upon you. It's actually much lighter

than you think. And you'll renew your strength like an eagle and you'll fly. You'll run and you'll not grow weary. And you won't faint.

See, Christmas is a message in which God says to us: I want to give you a gift that you never thought you'd even ask for. I want to give you a gift that you never thought to imagine that you would need. I want to give you a gift that you certainly don't deserve. And through the details of the Christmas story found in Matthew, chapter 1 and all of Jesus' family tree—this is the invitation of Christmas: Would you just come to God as you are?

Here's why: God will not bless who you pretend to be.

And the word blessing does is not like monetary possessions. We need to get rid of that definition. It could, potentially, include that but that's not what it is attached to. You know what blessing is? Blessing is an inner contentment. Blessing is an inner joy. Blessing is an inner strength. Blessing is when all of the stuff is swirling around me that it out-of-control that I'm trusting in somebody who is in control. Blessing is this: my roots go deep to the water. It doesn't matter if I'm in a drought because God has actually provided this from the inside out.

That's what Jesus' family tree communicates to every one of us. Matthew, chapter 1 says: why are you posing? Why are you pretending? Why are you saying it's fine when you're not fine. Why are you being religious? You don't need to be. Just look at Jesus' family tree. Look at the people he came through. Look at the people he came for. They are imperfect people just like you and just like me. Just relax.

See, the message of Christmas, thankfully, is that God does not see you and me as we are, he sees us for who we could be. So he goes: Man, just let your guard down and just come to me as you are.

I know that for many of us the inner argument that you are having with me right now is, "I don't want to do that because that requires vulnerability. And I know from experience what vulnerability gets me. The people in my life who have hurt me and it's because I got vulnerable with them and then they used that against me. They went after that. I got real before and actually those people turned their backs on me." And that's a very, very real pain.

I think that David knew that pain. That's why he writes this promise to us in Psalm 51. He says to God, "You do not want a burnt offering." Now we don't do burnt offerings any more now-a-days, but we do offerings. We offer God our resources and our time and our energy and our worship. We come in here. And David says, actually God's not nearly as interested in all of those things as what he is... Here's what he's interested in. The sacrifice God desires is a broken spirit.

And that's not a bad thing. God doesn't want to see you broken; a broken spirit is another name of vulnerability. It's: Just offer it to me. Just come to me as you are. That's what God

wants. And then he gives us this promise. God, **“You will not reject a broken and repentant heart.”** That’s a promise.

I don’t know how many people I talk to on a regular basis who, in some fashion or another, ask me, “How do I know if God has really saved me? How do I know if God really loves me? How do I know if I’m really in a right relationship with him?” And the answer is, every time, how is your heart? Because if your heart is soft, not perfect; if your heart is broken; if your heart is repentant...

I love that definition that Petie gave last week of repentance. It’s just turn around and head in another direction. It doesn’t mean that you are perfect. It just means that you are striving in a new direction. If your heart is broken before God, if you’re just vulnerable, if you stop pretending, the promise God gives is that he always receive you. Every single time. There are no exceptions to that.

And so people who try to control things are just trying to manage their image. 1Peter, chapter 5 says that God gives grace to the humble. Mark, chapter 8 says that those who try to hold on to their lives will lose them. And if you willingly lose your life, you’ll find it. And here’s why. Here’s why God wants vulnerability from us.

Here’s why. He wants us to give him our weaknesses. It’s because his strength is made perfect in our weakness. What happens is, you bring to him your weaknesses and he begins to say: Hey, those are not your problem; they’re your platform!

And God would actually take Jacob and he would use Jacob in tremendous ways as part of his redemption plan based upon Jacob’s weaknesses not in spite of them. And so here’s the question for all of us. Do you want to be used of God? Do you want to find that inner blessing, that inner peace?

All you’ve got to do is go to your weaknesses—chances are that you probably know what they are. You are all too aware of what they are because some of us are so exhausted trying to hide them, trying to cover them up that maybe we just need to embrace our weaknesses because that’s actually where God shows up most of the time. That’s actually what God wants to use in your life.

You know, every single weekend right before I walk out onto this platform there is this little area right behind that curtain. It’s all dark back there. And there’s a little stool. And there’s some water. And there’s some monitors just kind of watching the service. And I’ll just sit down and I’ll turn on my iPad and I’ll just run through my notes one more time. I’ll begin to pray. And every single time I walk out here I get nervous.

I’ve had a number of people ask me—they say, “Do you still get nervous?” I’m like, “Every single time.” And there are so many people who are surprised by that. Yeah, man. Every time because you don’t understand my weakness. I grew up like never imagining that I would do anything like

this. I was a shy kid. Never wanted to get up in front of people. Wrestled with God over even being used in full time ministry.

By the time I finally said I would do it, I said, “God, I’ll do anything. I’ll move to Africa. I’ll do whatever you want. I just don’t want to talk in front of people. God was like: Alright, we’ll do that. So, thank you. Alright?”

I am keenly aware of my weaknesses. I see them more than maybe anybody else. And every single time I tremble and I’m like, “Hey, God. I don’t know.” So here’s what ends up happening. I’m either not confident enough or there are times whenever God begins to speak and maybe I cling to it. I go, “Oh, man. People will like me whenever I’m good. So let me just sort of cling to that identity.”

You know what my prayer is every time back stage? It’s, “God, I don’t want to need this. I don’t want my identity wrapped up in how well I did today. Because if I did good it would go to my head. If I did bad it would go to my heart. And every single time I pray that, you know what happens on the inside right before I walk out here? Peace. It’s just like the nerves just sort of melt away every single time.

Now God may not be calling you into full time ministry. God may not be calling you to hold a microphone, but what is it that you are weak in, what is it that you are scared to let go of? For some of you it’s your marriage. For of you it’s your finances. For some of you it’s a relationship. What are you afraid of? What are you holding on to with a death grip?

Some of us, we’re doing a whole lot of flapping and very little flying. And God says: Man, would you just come to me. I’m not actually shaming you. I’m actually really empathetic and compassionate with the fact that you’re exerting all of this energy and you don’t really need to. You want to find that since of peace. You want to soar with wings like eagles? Then just bring to me your weaknesses. Just get real. You don’t need to pretend. I already know. Watch what only I can do.

These next few moments together are just an opportunity for us to invite God in and to just get real, maybe for the first time. Somebody listening to this, you’re just going to take off the mask for the very first time and just get real before God. Stop managing your image. Just show him who you really are. That’s all he really wants. And his promise is: I will never reject a soft heart.

Father, we come to you right now and I just pray that you would fill the room in every one of our campuses. And you would just help us to be real because Jesus’ family tree teaches us that everyone else who existed behind us; they were flawed, imperfect, broken people. And Jesus came into this world through them and he came into this world for them.

And we are all unqualified heroes. God wants to use us in our weakness because whenever we give him our weaknesses that’s only when we give in to become strong. So, God, I pray today that maybe for the first time some would get vulnerable enough to just make you Lord and

Savior of their life, right there where they are seated, they would just invite you in and trust that you will keep your promises because you always do. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.