

## Evergreen | Withered

*Petie Kinder | Matthew 1:5*

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Well what's good? How are we today? Good. Good.

Hey, I want to start today with a question. I want to ask you something. With a show of hands across all of our campuses, how many of you are done with your Christmas shopping? You all. I just heard somebody laugh, like haha. Way to be happy about that. But for the rest of us—I'm not with that group. I'm with you who have yet to finish. We've still got time. We've still got time.

I want to start with asking you another question that kind of plays off of that. And I'm going to admit that it's a little bit of a corny question, alright? Just bear with me. The question is this. For those of you who still have shopping left to do, or maybe if you're already done with that, that's fine too—what if you looked down on your list of people who you need to shop for and there was an extra name at the bottom and it said: God? What would you get God for Christmas if you had to give him something?

Now, I know that that's a super corny question so let me ask it in maybe a less corny way. What do you think brings joy to the heart of God? What do you think makes him smile? What do you think makes God light up like a kid on Christmas morning?

Parents, you know that you've got that one gift for your kids. They may not like some of the other stuff that you got them because some of them actually serve a purpose and they actually need to have it. But you know that there is that one gift that you know when they open it they are going to lose their mind over it. It's going to be incredible. And you can't wait for that, right? You can't wait for them to open that one gift.

What does that for God? What is it that makes him light up like a kid on Christmas morning? And the answer to that question, I think, is really important. Because the answer to that question tells you a lot about how you view God and about what you believe about God.

What I've found in my experience is—myself included, and almost all of us—we usually get the answer to that question wrong. We almost always have no idea what to get God for Christmas or any other day of the year. We don't know what really brings joy to his heart. Most of us are flawed and incorrectly believe that what makes God light up like a kid on Christmas morning is perfect attendance and perfect performance.

If you can give him perfect attendance and perfect performance, oh man, he is so happy, he is so excited. And the unfortunate thing is that if that is true, most of us ruined that a long time

ago. Most of us screwed up the perfect attendance thing and we've certainly screwed up the perfect performance thing and we just think that God is probably eternally disappointed in us.

That's why today is so important because, today, what we're going to understand is what really makes God light up like a kid on Christmas morning, what really brings joy to his heart is not what you would expect. But it all starts with us going back and learning from one of Jesus' great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandmas, a woman by the name of Rahab.

We've been in this series called *Evergreen* and we've been talking about the family tree of Jesus and looking at different people who are in the family tree of Jesus that you would not expect to be in there.

So today we come upon Matthew, chapter 1, verse 5 and there is this name that is mentioned in it. It says, "Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab)..." And it's a shocker to most of us that Rahab is in the genealogy of Jesus. If you're unfamiliar with the Bible or maybe new to this, that's okay.

The reason that we're so surprised about this is that Rahab was a prostitute. And so we are like, "Wait a minute. If God is all about perfect attendance and perfect performance, how did a prostitute get listed in such an honorable place? So closely attached to Jesus, how did a prostitute find her way in there?" It just doesn't quite make sense to us.

Now, maybe you've heard a message about Rahab before. I know I've heard several of them in my years of following Jesus and most of the time when we talk about Rahab we talk about Rahab in a very demeaning way. We paint her with a little bit of a better brush to make it sound better, but most of the time when you hear a message about Rahab, the message is: You're never too far gone for God to use you.

Rahab is in the genealogy. This prostitute... That means that no matter how bad you've been God can still love you and use you, which is like a passive aggressive way of saying: You're definitely not as bad as Rahab. She's so bad. You're surely not a prostitute, right?

And that's actually pretty demeaning. That's actually pretty judgmental because, truth be told, we have no idea how Rahab became a prostitute. We have no clue. We have no background. We have no context for that. And if you're familiar with any woman's story who comes out of prostitution or is in prostitution, you know that no little girl ever dreams of becoming a prostitute. It's almost always an occupation that is laden with pain and there's a story in there of... Honestly, most of these women are victims to some degree of something that has happened—something that is horrible.

Forget the fact that we are too quick to judge Rahab. It got super quiet in here, by the way. Forget the fact that we too quickly judge Rahab and we're just like, "Yeah, there's no way that you can be as bad as her—forget that because the morality of her occupation is not the point of

her story. The point of Rahab's story has absolutely nothing to do with the morality of her occupation. That's not why Rahab is in the genealogy of Jesus.

See, God is actually proud to have the name Rahab attached to the name of His Son, Jesus. God is proud to put Rahab in the family tree of Jesus because Rahab had something that God absolutely adores. Rahab had something that God loves. Rahab knew what God would actually want for Christmas and every other day.

So I want to show you that today. If you have a Bible go ahead and turn to Joshua, chapter 2. Joshua 2, it's in the Old Testament. It's where we're going to be camping out today. We're going to unpack a story from ancient times. This is before the people of Israel had a home to call Israel.

This is like the people of God, they are wandering—they are like looking for a place to call home. They're being led by this man named Joshua and God leads Joshua to a city called Jericho. He says: Hey, I want you to take over. I'm going to give you the plan but it's going to take you... In a militaristic way you're going to have to overthrow this city.

Jericho, like most ancient cities, was fortified by a big wall around it. So Joshua and the people are trying to figure out how they were going to do this. So he decides to send two spies into the town of Jericho to get some ground level intel so they can figure out how to do this, alright?

So if you're there, if you're ready, turn to your neighbor and say: All I want for Christmas is you. Single dudes, I'm trying to give you the hookup right now. I'm trying to give you a reason to look at her—don't say I never helped you out man. Trying to help you out.

Joshua, chapter 2 start in verse one. It says this, "Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, 'Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho.' So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night."

Now we've got to stop for a second because this is too funny. The Bible is too funny. Can you just imagine my dudes going back home and talking to their wives? Their wives are like: You're so brave. You did this. Tell me all about it. I want to know every little detail. And they are like: Yeah, we went into the city and the first night, you know, we stayed there.

And they are like: Where did you stay? I want to know. I want to know. Where did you sleep that night? And the spies are hesitant, like: We stayed in the house of a prostitute. And we woke up the next morning...

What was that honey? What did you say?

We stayed at the house of a prostitute.

Why is your mouth so weird? What did you say?

We stayed at the house of a prostitute, okay? We had to do it. God told us to.

This situation just got so weird so quick. But what is amazing is that when you go to the next verse you see that there is more to Rahab than meets the eye. This woman was savvy. She's about to pull one over on some really powerful, really wise people. Look at the very next verse and what we learn about Rahab.

“But someone told the king of Jericho, ‘Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.’ So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: ‘Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land.’ Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, ‘Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn’t know where they were from. They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don’t know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them.’ (Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.) So the king’s men went looking for the spies along the road leading to the shallow crossings of the Jordan River. And as soon as the king’s men had left, the gate of Jericho was shut.”

Alright, this is crazy. You’ve got a powerless woman who is defying a powerful king. And this move looks so risky. Keep in mind these spies are there to overthrow her city, which means that they are there to overthrow her, which means if they are successful, she’s probably either dead or enslaved—one of the two.

So what would motivate her to take such a crazy...? She had this crazy idea to do something that looks insane to everybody else. What would motivate her to hide these men and to lie to the king and to pull the wool over his eyes? What would compel her? What would give her that crazy idea? We actually learn what gave her that idea in the very next verse.

It says, “Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. ‘I know the Lord has given you this land,’ she told them. ‘We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. For we have heard how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed. No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things.’” Here it is, “‘For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below.’”

Rahab... We’re clapping for Rahab man! We’re putting some respect on her name today. I love it. She says... She’s not living in a town where people go to church. She has no idea who God is yet, right? She has just heard stories about God and she’s like: I know all of the gods we worship must be false and I’ve heard stories about that God and he must be the one true God. She had this belief and she is so aware of God. It’s amazing! A prostitute is aware of God.

That shows something to you. She's so aware. She's so perceptive of the things of God. She's like: That must be the one true God right there. And, the belief that she had informed her actions—you all remember that. Her belief informed her actions.

But my girl is not done. She's about to go a step farther. The bravery does not end there. Look at the very next verse. She's now out to use this leverage that she has to protect her and her family.

She says, "Now swear to me by the Lord that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families." Home girl cuts a deal. She's like: I know I just did you all a solid, now you're about to do me a solid, alright? Protect my family. That's so brave. That's so heroic, right?

So they say, "'We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety,' the men agreed. 'If you don't betray us, we will keep our promise and be kind to you when the Lord gives us the land.' Then, since Rahab's house was built into the town wall, she let them down by a rope through the window."

This is amazing! All the savvy, the shrewdness, the wheeling and dealing—she knew what was up. It was amazing. She's the hero of the story. And if you read Joshua 3 through 6, those next four chapters you see that the intel that these spies get, they take it back to Joshua and they form this plan and the walls of Jericho came crumbling down. And they take over the city in epic god-like fashion. Then you see in Joshua, chapter 6, verse 25 that Joshua and the spies make good on their promise to Rahab.

It says this. "So Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute and her relatives who were with her in the house, because she had hidden the spies Joshua sent to Jericho. And she lives among the Israelites to this day."

She is grafted into the family of God. This foreign woman who was a prostitute is now grafted into the family of God. And we don't hear of her again in the entire Bible until you get to Matthew, chapter 1, verse 5 when we're talking about who the family of Jesus is—the lineage of Jesus—and Rahab gets put on that honorable list.

Can't you see why? Oh, man. God is so proud of her. God's not embarrassed of Rahab. He's not ashamed of Rahab. He's proud of her. See we focus so much on her occupation as a prostitute when the morality of her occupation was not the point of her story. This says very little about God's view of morality. It says more about God's view of status.

Think about Rahab for a second. Strike one: she's a woman. In ancient cultures women were not valued. Strike two: she's a prostitute. Strike three: think about that detail that was included there at the end. Her home was cut into the outer wall of the town. It's as if the town was saying: You technically live here, but not really. We want to push you as far out as possible. You

are so low. Your status could not be lower. We have marginalized you as far as we can possibly marginalize you. We want you gone.

And God says: I'll take this woman who lives on the outskirts of the town and I'll use her to change the town. You see, this whole story of Rahab shows you that you may be a nobody in the eyes of the world, but you can still be a somebody in the eyes of God. You may be a nobody. You may think that you don't have any influence. You may think that you don't have the fame or the fortune or the wealth that you thought you should have.

You may have gotten passed by for the promotion at work. You may feel like the world is just happening around you and there's nothing you can do about it. I'm telling you, you're not powerless. You may be a nobody in this world, but you can be a somebody in the eyes of God. The difference you make with your life is not predicated by your worldly status. God does not give a rip about your worldly status. He doesn't care.

He doesn't care about your money. He doesn't care about your fame. He doesn't care about your wealth. He doesn't care about how many followers you have on Instagram. He doesn't care about any of it. Your impact is not predicated by your status in this world. You can be a nobody in the eyes of the world, but you can be a somebody in the eyes of God.

I'm telling you, if you want to be a somebody in the eyes of God, you've got to have what Rahab had. See, Rahab had something that God just loves. He just adores it. See, Rahab had this word:

## COURAGE

Rahab had courage. And I'm telling you, God loves courage. Oh man. Just think of the courage it took for her, a powerless prostitute, to defy a powerful king. Think of the courage it took to do it. Think of the courage it took for her to strike a deal with these spies for the protection of her family. Think of the courage that it took.

Rahab had courage and God loves courage. I mean, come on. Those of you who are familiar with the Bible, maybe you grew up in church, think about the stories that we all know about the Bible. They are stories of courage.

Think about Abraham for a second. Are you familiar with the story of Abraham? He was called to leave the land he always knew to go to a land that he did not know—where it was or what it was called. God just said: Go. And Abraham said: Alright, I'll do it. He had courage.

Think about Noah for a second. Noah was called to build an ark to prepare for a flood in the midst of a drought. And people made fun of him left and right. And Noah said: I'll do it—with courage.

Think about David. All of the Israelites are shaking in their boots about this giant named Goliath and David steps up and says: I'll take him on. It's courage.

Think about Peter. He sees Jesus walking on water and Jesus says: Come on. Step out of the boat. And with courage, Peter steps out of the boat and starts walking on water.

Think about the very founder of our faith: Jesus, himself. Can you find someone more courageous in all of the world? He left heaven to come and be among us. And not just to come and be a big, political, strong ruler. He came in as a vulnerable child and he faced every temptation that you and I have ever faced, yet he was without sin.

He faced a gruesome death on the cross so that you and I could be forgiven and free. He went to the very gates of hell and conquered death so that we would never have to fear death because he resurrected from the grave. Can you find someone more courageous than Jesus, himself?

God loves courage. Courage is at the very heart of God. God loves it.

You know, I thought about using another word as I was prepping. There is another word we need to talk about. And it's the word that the Bible mostly uses when we're talking about courage. I didn't want to drop it on you because I didn't want to dip into preacher's speak too quickly. I didn't want to get into Christian ease and put you all to sleep too quickly.

Courage you all get. Courage you all understand. We've seen movies. We've seen *Braveheart*. We know what courage is. But there is another word that the Bible uses to talk about what we're talking about. It's kind of like the God centered, God rooted version of courage. It's not the word courage, it's the word:

FAITH

Faith: See Rahab had faith.

Let's go back and look at the characters we were talking about just a second ago: Abraham, when he was called to leave the land that he'd always known, it was by faith that he said *yes*.

Think about Noah for a second. Noah was called to build an ark and it was by faith that said *yes* to that. He believed what God told him and that belief informed his actions.

Think about David for a second. He believed that God was all powerful. He believed that God could do anything that he promised he would do, so he stepped out and had some courage but really what that was is that was faith.

It's a belief about something about God and so I'm going to act.

You go to Peter. He believed that Jesus could walk on water and Jesus says: Come on. Step out of the boat. So he's like: I'm going to step out of the boat by faith. I'm going to do it. And when his faith was shaky, he started sinking.

It's faith that we are talking about here. Faith is what God is absolutely crazy about. See, faith is when you put your belief in action. And that's what Rahab was doing. That's what Rahab was doing. Rahab had said: I believe that that God must be the supreme God in the heavens above and the earth below. So, I know that this might look crazy to everybody else, but I believe so I'm going to act. I'm going to do something that, the only way it makes sense, is if I'm right. And she was right.

See, that's what faith is. Hebrews 11:1 puts it like this: "Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see." So things we hope for and things we cannot see, that's like what we believe, right?

We believe these things about God. We believe he's good. We believe he's true. We believe that he's all powerful—all loving. We hope for it and we cannot see it but we believe it. And faith is when you take those beliefs and you make them reality and you give evidence of them, you let your beliefs inform your actions. That's what faith is.

And let me tell you, you want to know what makes God light up like a kid on Christmas morning? It's faith—faith.

Five verses later in Hebrews 11—Hebrews 11, verse 6 would say it like this: "And it is impossible to please God without," what? "faith." This is what brings joy to the heart of God.

When you'll say, "You know what? It may look crazy, it may look risky, it may look insane..." People are going to say, "How courageous you are to do that thing." And really the only way I can explain it to you is that I have these big beliefs about God and so I step out and I take action. I let my beliefs inform my actions. And when you do that God gets so giddy, he's so joyful, he's so excited it brings joy to his heart.

The picture that I would get when I think about this and I read the story of Rahab and I think about how much God loves faith—the visual I get in my head is that of a dad in a swimming pool trying to get his kid to jump in, right? If you've got little kids you know.

I've got a seven-year-old and a four-year-old and a two-year-old and like for the past six years or so in the summertime I always find myself in the pool saying, "Come on. Jump in." And to see your kids for the first time consider this terrifying prospect, it's really not that terrifying, right? They pace back and forth doing some risk analysis [thinking], "I don't know. What could happen to my college prospects if I do this? I just don't know." And then they get up there and like: one, two... [still thinking] "No, I can't do it, dad. Can't do it."

And you're like, "We're in three feet of water. It's alright. You're not going to drown, kids." It looks risky to them but it's really not risky because I'm their father and I'm not going to let them sink to the bottom—but I have thought about it a couple of times. How bad would that be? First time they jump in and I let them fall. Not for long. I'd pick them up. I'm their father and I want the best for them. This is not a risk, but to them it looks risky, it's scary, it's uncomfortable. They have no idea what's going to happen. And I'm like, "Come on in. Trust me."

And that's what God is saying to us. That's why faith brings such joy to God's heart. It's like a father in a pool saying, "Would you just trust me?" And oh, man. That's what faith proves—that you trust God. Faith proves that you don't have a kind of, sort of belief. No. You actually believe that God is who he says he is and that he wants you to do what he says that he wants you to do and that he's got your back. Faith proves that you trust him so it brings joy to his heart.

Not only does it bring joy when you make... When my kids finally take that leap and they jump into my arms in the pool, oh—it's like, "Thank goodness. They know I love them. They know that I want the best for them." And you know what? Not only does it bring joy to me because of what it does in my heart, but then think about what you get to see happen in your kids.

Because you know what happens when they take that first leap? Immediately they come out of the water and you say, "How was that?" And the first thing they say is, "Can we do it again? Can we do it again? Can we do it again? Can we do it again?" And then you find yourself like for four hours, "What have I started?" They are just like over and over jumping into the pool because it's so fun and you see the thrill in their eyes. You see the joy light up.

That's again why God loves faith because he loves to see you and me be fully alive. He loves to see us fully alive and that's what faith does. Man, when you'll take a leap of faith, when you'll do something courageous, when you'll do something that you don't know how it's going to turn out and it's kind of scary and it's uncomfortable but you're doing it because of your big beliefs in God oh, that's where life is to the full is found. That's where the good life is found.

I'm just going to come back to Rahab. I think it comes back to our fixation on her being a prostitute. We're so shocked by that, right? Because we, still in our heart of hearts—no matter how long you've been in church, we still believe that God's primary goal is to turn bad people into good people. We still believe that that was like the reason Jesus came. Like, "Hey, Jesus came. Christmas. Celebrate, yeah."

"Why? Like why did you say that?"

"Well he came because he wants to make us into good people."

No. That's Santa Claus. Jesus did not come to turn bad people into good people. Jesus came to turn dead people into alive people. Jesus came. In John 10: 10 it says, "My purpose is that they

may have life and have it to the full,” to experience the good life. That’s what makes God’s heart beat—when he sees you and me fully alive.

I’m telling you, if you want to experience life to the full it’s on the other side of faith. When you say *yes* to the scary things that God asks you to do, when you say *yes* to the courageous things that you know God is asking you to do—that’s when you get the stories to share with your grandkids one day. That’s when you get to see God do his best work. It’s when you will say *yes*.

These little nudges, these little prompts of faith that God gives you to do something that the world thinks might be crazy, you know that because God is calling you to do it and because of who he is that you can trust him if you take that leap of faith.

Man, as I was prepping that message—this message, this week—I just started thinking to myself, “Okay, if that is true about God...” And as preachers we all try to do the same thing. It’s like, “Okay, I’m going to preach something but I need to make sure that I’m living this out because I never want to preach something that is not impacting me.”

Anytime I’m up here preaching, I’m preaching to me. And if you all benefit from it that would be great. But this is primarily for me. And so I started thinking like, “Okay, have I lost my courage? Have I lost my faith?” And I started thinking like, “Man, am I really pleasing God? Are we really making him proud?”

I’m not saying does God love us. That’s not what I’m talking about. God loves you and that was a definitive statement he made when Jesus went to the cross. There’s nothing you can do to make him love you any less, there’s nothing you can do to make him love you any more. His love for you is set in stone because of what Jesus did—unshakeable.

But, I just wonder like is he proud of what we are doing with this life that he has given us? Does he look at our life and say: Man, that’s what I want? That’s why I died for them, so that they could experience that.

I don’t know for you, but for me—I’m speaking for me—life has a way of draining my courage and draining my faith. Life has a way of making me pretty complacent, pretty boring, pretty lifeless, pretty purposeless. I started thinking like, “Man, do my beliefs about God match up with my actions?”

We believe all of these big things about God. We believe that God left heaven and came to live among people who were nothing like him, but yet when was the last time we spent time with anyone who is nothing like us?

We believe that God went out of his way to show us how he loves us. But when was the last time that we went out of our way to show someone that they are loved?

We believe that God risked rejection. In fact, Jesus was rejected—he was spit on, he was cussed at, he was wrongfully executed—he was rejected. We believe that he was rejected to show us love. When was the last time we risked rejection to show someone the love of God?

When was the last time you stuck your neck out on the line just to invite somebody to church, to share with someone why you love Jesus so much? When was the last time you risked being looked at like a religious wacko? When was the last time that you did something like that?

We believe that Jesus conquered death but when was the last time when we put ourselves in any environment or situation that wasn't 100 percent safe or 100 percent predictable?

I just started asking myself those questions and it was like, "Man, I don't know." I don't know because to be honest, for me, I tend to hang my hat on previous faith. Like there are times I can point you to in my past where I responded to what God was calling me to do and I did something courageous for God. I've got a few of those memories from the past and what I typically do is hang my hat on those and assume that that is all that God wants from me.

Man, God wants this as a lifestyle for us. God is the dad in the pool every day saying, "Come on. Jump in. Come on. Jump in. This is the good life. This is where you find purpose. This is where you find fulfillment. Come on. Jump in."

See, the beautiful thing about it... I know you're probably thinking, "Okay. God wants me to do courageous things for him, but I don't have spies coming up to my door asking me if I can hide out. And I'm not a prostitute, okay?"

So what do you do? Do you get out a pen and paper and just start listing the things that you could do for God? You have to like imagine what you could do with that. That's the beautiful thing about it, man. Your heavenly Father wants this for you so badly. He wants it for you so badly that he is constantly nudging you to do things that are outside of your comfort zone. He's constantly nudging you to do things that you would never do on your own. He's constantly saying: Come on. Jump in. I've got you. I've got you.

See, we don't have to dream up anything fancy or creative. We've just got to notice the nudge. We've just got to notice the nudge. I mean come on. You walk into work. You see Ted down the hallway. Why is it that you think that you should probably go check on Ted and see how he's doing? You heard that his mom was sick, wonder how his mom is doing. And you don't do it because you're not a crazy person. But why was that nudge there? It's God saying: Come on. Jump in.

Why is it that when you pull into your driveway and you look around at your neighbors' homes and you think, "Man, I should do... We should get our kids together and make cookies for all of the neighbors or something, just kind of like invite them to church. Tell them we love them. We should do something kind for our neighbors." And you don't do it because you're not a crazy

person. But where did that nudge come from? You know that you're way more selfish than that. You know you're not that loving. I'm not.

It's your heavenly Father nudging you: Would you take a step of faith? Would you do something that you have no idea how it's going to turn out? Would you just trust me?

I had this happen just a couple of months ago. I will never forget. It was September and my dad... I had a very, very scary call about my dad. I was on the west coast on a trip and I got a call from my mom. She was hysterical at the moment saying that my dad had had a massive heart attack. He was fifty-nine years old—healthy guy and it was completely unexpected.

And I'll never forget the fear and the feelings. If you've ever gotten a call like that, you know how terrifying that is. And you start immediately playing through all of the things that could happen. Like, "Okay, I what was the last conversation I had with my dad? What did I say to him?" Like, "Oh my gosh. Did I tell him how much I love him? Did I do all that I could to make sure that he knows that I love him?" That sort of thing.

Then, "Now my mom's going to be all alone. What's that going to be like?" I mean all of this is happening like rapid fire. I'm thinking like, "Okay, my kids aren't going to have the memories with Papaw anymore and they're not going to grow up..." I was so scared, right?

By the grace of God and with modern medicine and the brilliance of doctors and nurses—he got to the hospital just in time, they put a stint in his heart and he survived. It was great. I was so happy. I was so grateful.

Fast forward a month. We were on a family vacation—all of us together. We were in North Carolina on the beach and I'm sitting there watching my dad in the ocean with my two sons and he's playing and having fun with them and making all kinds of memories. And I just sat there and watched and I was like, "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus." How fragile life is. We're not guaranteed tomorrow. But that memory happened. And I got to see my dad in the ocean with his grandkids and I was so grateful.

I remember that morning I put my headphones in and I went on a run. I was trying to be healthy. So I got three miles into a four mile run, which if you know me that's a whole lot. So I was gasping, it was ugly, it was real ugly.

And that morning on the beach I passed by... I was trying to worship God. I was so grateful for everything that had happened over the past month. And I remember that morning I passed by probably 30 or 40 people on the beach. And it was early so people weren't doing a whole lot. Most of them were just walking on the beach. And I had no thoughts about anyone.

So, on my way back—it was about three miles into this four mile run—I noticed this lady walking on the beach. She was an older lady. And I, for some reason, felt like a nudge in my

heart. It was like God was saying: You need to stop your run, turn around, and go ask that woman if there is anything you that you can pray for her about.

And I'm like. I'm not going to do it. I'm not a crazy person. That would be nice if I did that, but no. Not doing it. So I kept running.

About 10 or 15 yards later, I'm way past her, I felt like God was just nudging me again, but this time a little more sternly. It was like: Hey, you can either do this and be in obedience to me, or you can go on with the rest of your vacation—that's fine—but just know that you will have willfully disobeyed me.

Jeez, okay God. Good grief. If you put it like that—fine. So I turn around. Take my headphones out and I start walking toward her. And she immediately looked at me and her eyes got huge like, "Who is this short, sweaty man? And is he going to kill me?"

I tried to calm her down as quickly as I could. I said, "Hey, ma'm. I know that this is going to sound crazy but I, for some reason, feel like God wants me to stop and just ask you if there is something I can pray for you about."

In that awkward moment when it's like, "What's going to happen? Is she going to laugh at me? What's going to happen?" she looked at me and tears filled her eyes. She said, "Oh, please. My brother just had a massive heart attack last night and I don't know if he's going to make it and I have no clue what I'm going to do. I'm so scared."

How does that happen?

So I was able to look her in the eyes, her name is Juliana, and I said, "Juliana this is so crazy. God sent me here to ask you that question so that I could tell you that I know exactly what you're going through right now because my dad just had a massive heart attack last month and I know the feelings of fear and of pain and just the unknown and the sadness. And I know, I know you're scared right now. I want you to know I've been there. I know God is with you. I want you to know that hope is not lost.

"I can't guarantee that your brother is going to make it. I can tell you that my dad had a massive heart attack and right now he's a mile down the beach playing with his grandkids in the ocean. I can tell you hope is not lost." And we prayed there on the beach together.

I put my headphones in and I ran back—I went sprinting back. I couldn't wait to tell everybody back at the house what God just did. I felt fully alive. I was like, "This is what I want to do with the rest of my life."

I'm not talking about preaching. I'm not talking about being a pastor. I'm talking about saying yes to every opportunity God gives me to step out of my comfort zone and to say yes to him because that's where life abundant is found. That's where the good life is found. I felt fully

alive. And I'm telling you it's because the nudge happened. The nudge happened and I noticed the nudge and I said, "Yes, I'll do it."

I'm telling you, there are some of you out there right now who have been nudged to do something and you've been ignoring it for weeks.

There are some of you who have been nudged every time we mention Growth Track and you're like, "I should probably do that but I've got things to get to. My kids are in Kids' Ministry. I don't know what my spouse will think about that, but I should probably do that." I'm telling you. I'm not guaranteeing you that Growth Track is going to change your life. I'm saying that you saying yes to the nudge of God—that's where life to the fullest is found.

For some of you, you've been nudged for a couple of weeks now to invite that coworker, invite that neighbor to come with you to church and you don't know how you're going to have the conversation. They don't even know that you go to church and now you're convincing yourself that they probably go somewhere else. And you've talked yourself out of it so many times. I'm not guaranteeing you that they're going to say yes. They might reject you. They might laugh in your face. But I'm telling you, life to the fullest is found when you say yes to the nudge of God.

Some of you have been prompted and nudged to give big to this year-end giving so that we can serve kids in the foster care system, so we can launch more campuses. And I'm not talking about big like in the dollar amount. I'm talking like big sacrifice. You've been nudged to do that because your heavenly Father sacrificed everything for you and he's saying: Hey, do you believe this about me? Now put that belief into action.

I'm telling you that life to the fullest is found when on the other side...

Some of you have been nudged to give your life to Jesus, to come forward at the end of the service and to pray with someone on our team. You've never officially made that decision to start following Jesus and get baptized. You've been nudged to, and nudged to, and nudged to and you've talked yourself out of it. I'm telling you, life to the full is found on the other side of that decision.

I don't know what it is for you. I could shoot arrows in the dark for a long time trying to figure out what it is for you. I don't need to figure out what it is for you. All you have to do is go to your heavenly Father and say, "God, what do you want me to do?" Let him nudge you. Let him nudge you.

And then, with the courage of Jesus that is within you, the courage of Jesus that's right there, say yes to the nudge and then watch how he changes a city, watch how he changes an entire town through the power of all of us saying yes to the nudge of God.

So let me pray for you and then just take a couple of minutes and say, "God, what do you want me to do?"

Let's pray.

Jesus, we love you. Many of us right now, Jesus, know exactly what you're nudging us to do. You've been on us for a while about it. So, God, right now we echo the prayers of your earliest followers when they prayed for boldness. God they didn't pray for comfort, they didn't pray for security, they didn't pray that all of their difficult circumstances would go away—they prayed for boldness to say yes to you.

So, God, right now as a church across all of our campuses we pray for boldness to say yes to you. And, God, we pray that through our yes that you would unleash love on this entire city. Meet us in these moments and nudge us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.