

No More Fatherless

Petie Kinder | Ephesians 1:3-7

Alright, grab a Bible and get to Ephesians, chapter 1. We'll be in Ephesians 1 today. We're in a one-week, stand alone message, alright?

This is not a series we're walking into. We'll start our new series next weekend called *Asking For a Friend*. We're going to answer all kinds of questions that maybe you've had in your mind, but you've been too embarrassed to ask so your asking for a friend instead. You don't want to miss next week and this next teaching series we roll into.

But today we're in a stand-alone message called *No More Fatherless*. No more fatherless and we're going to be in Ephesians 1.

A shout out to all of our campuses tuning in with us: Downtown, North, West, here at Northwest, if you're watching online, our Wild Wild West campus out in Oregon that we heard about. Give it up man, throw our hands together and welcome everybody in the house today. Awesome. My name is Petie. I'm happy to be here with you guys today.

If you have been coming for a while and you just want to know what your next step is, don't forget about Growth Track. Growth Track is the way for you to get connected and start growing. Growth Track happens after service at every campus. Just go out to the lobby look for the signs that say Growth Track and you can jump right in. That will help you get connected and start growing here.

Enough with all of the introduction stuff. We've got to jump in. Ephesians 1, we're going to start in verse 3. We're going to read five verses—five little verses but it's a deep dive into the goodness of God. You all just get this, you all got to know how great God is. You ready for this? I don't think you are. That's alright.

Ephesians 1:3-7, it says this: "All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.

"God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. So, we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins."

Unbelievable. By a show of hands at every campus, how many grandparents have we got in the house? How many grandparents are in the room? Grandparents represent—church can we give it up for all of the grandparents who are with us? The sages of our faith. That's right.

Hey if you're here and you're a grandparent or you look around and you feel like you're one of the older people in the room, don't be discouraged by that. Man, be so encouraged by that. I love that we have a multi-generational church. And when you look around and you see people who are younger than you, that's proof that the church is going to keep going and keep going. God is not giving up and generations after you are going to love and worship Jesus.

But also, when you look around and see people who are younger than you, know that you are desperately needed, that the young people of our church need you and we need your experience, we need your spirits, we need your wisdom, we need you in so many ways. So, we're glad to have you with us.

I know that grandparents serve one primary purpose in their role as a grandparent. I've been told this for a long time—the primary role is to spoil grandkids, right? You buy them a bunch of stuff, you sugar them up and send them back home for mom and dad to deal with. I've heard that said.

I didn't know if was true or not until I had kids of my own. I've been a dad for seven years and I've found that that is 100 percent true. My mom is the chief of all spoilers, okay? She is like the... Christmas at our house when my mom and dad come into town is bananas—it is crazy.

Like this past year they show up and in their little Prius and it's just loaded. You can see presents just pouring out of the car. And they pull in. This year got so bad that my seven-year-old son, he's opening all of his gifts, and he's about mid-way through them—his gifts from Nana and Papaw, that's what they call my mom and dad, Nana and Papaw—and in the middle of opening up all of these gifts my son looks up at his Nana and he says, "Nana, you really bought us too much this year."

I was dying laughing in the corner. I was just dying laughing. Like when a seven-year-old is calling you out, you know that you're in too deep—you're in too deep. But that feeling Emmet had, my seven-year-old son, about the gifts that he'd received from his Nana is very similar to the feeling that we should have when we read Ephesians 1:3-7. It's almost embarrassing how much God has given us.

Now I know it probably didn't hit you like that when we read it because we read it the same way that we read most Bible verses. We read as much as we can, as fast as we can. It's a bunch of spiritual mumbo jumbo, words we never use but we get, as fast as we can, through one chapter so we can stop and say, "Hey, I read a chapter of the Bible today. I'm doing good—doing good." And then come back the next day.

But that's not how the Bible is meant to be read. You've got to slow your roll and take it verse by verse and really understand—because in these five verses God is just lavishly pouring gifts on us. He's lavishly loving. It's insane. So, let's just back up and go gift by gift through this embarrassment of riches.

Look at Ephesians 1:3. It says this. “All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.” Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. We could stop right there and go home and right there we have more that we could ever need in this life.

Now I know, I know that some of you are like, “Well, I work with someone,” or, “I’ve got a family member or a friend or a neighbor who just posted a picture on Instagram of his feet propped up in Cozumel and #blessed,” and you just want to punch him. As soon as you saw it you were like, “I know I’m supposed to love you, but I don’t love you.”

We spend so much of our lives looking at things to compare to. Some of you all are thinking about things you don’t have, things we wished we had more of. But this verse, I’m telling you if you truly understand and grasp it, you have everything that you’ll ever possibly need and more. You have every spiritual blessing that is available to you—all of heaven is given to you because of Jesus!

You’ve got peace in a world that has no peace, a world that is ridden with anxiety. You’ve got peace that surpasses all understanding. You’ve got hope in a world that is hopeless. You’ve got joy in a world that is depressed. You’ve got purpose in a world where everybody hates their jobs. You’ve got everything that you could possibly need and more and that’s not even counting what God has for you in the future. That’s just what you’ve got right now.

God’s word tells us that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind can comprehend, no heart can fully know what God has in store for those who love him. Your best days, it’s a guarantee from God, are yet to come.

Just in that verse alone, just what we read in Ephesians 1:3—we could stop right there and we would have enough. But God is like: No, no, no. you’ve got to keep going. I’ve got more for you. I’ve got more presents out in the Prius that I’m about to bring in.

Verse 4 says it like this, “Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.” Even before he made the world... He was thinking of you in advance. Oh my gosh. Are you kidding me? You know we love to be thought of in advance, don’t we?

My wife and I just celebrated our 12-year wedding anniversary. We’ve been together for 16 total years. We dated for about 4 years. I know some of you are like, “Wait a minute. You’ve been together 16 years. Did you start dating when you were eight?” I’m from Kentucky but not like that. No, that’s not true. That’s not true.

But what we started doing with our anniversaries is that we started taking turns as to who was going to plan the anniversary date. So, this year was my turn to plan the anniversary date. It was so cool. I got to think way in advance of how to show my wife I love her, how thankful I am for her, how thankful I am for our marriage.

I'm not going to lie. I like it way better when she plans it. Like it way better when it's her year because we all love to be thought of in advance. We all love it when someone puts special effort into showing us just how much we are appreciated and loved.

Let me tell you. God did not just think about you a couple of weeks ago. God did not just think about you a couple of months ago, couple of years ago—God didn't just wait until you made a mess of your life and think: Ew, I think he's in a bad mood. I should probably show him how much I love him.

No, no, no—before he made the world! He had you on the brain before he erected Mount Kilimanjaro, he was thinking about you. That was an after thought for him. Before he turned on the faucet and filled up the bath tub of the Pacific Ocean, he was thinking about **you** and how much he loves **you**.

Before he made the elephant, the giraffe, and the dopest animal ever—the great white shark... They were an afterthought. It's like: Eh, the great white shark is okay but you, oh man, I'm going to think about you in advance and I'm going to choose to love you. And, oh, it's such a beautiful love. It's unconditional, it's premeditated. There is nothing you can do to take it away.

I mean, this idea, this idea you all, of a loving God—you know it's original to Christianity. I think we take that for granted. In our culture today we always hear, "God is love." You hear it from everybody, "God is love," which usually just means, "He'll never disagree with me. Everything is fine. He's exactly who I picture him to be." God is love. Our culture has abused it.

But you know that idea originated with Christianity. Go back and study ancient cultures. Nobody believed that the gods were loving. People believed that gods were vindictive. People believed that the gods were self-absorbed.

Then Jesus comes on board and says: Hey, no, no, no. There aren't gods there is one God. Let me tell you about him. He thought about you even before he made the world. He loves you. God is love. God sees value and worth and dignity in every single person no matter what you look like, where you came from, what you've done—he loves you and there is nothing you can do to make him stop loving you.

And right there, oh man, if we just stop at verse 4, "God, you've done too much." It's unbelievable. It's amazing. God's like: Yeah. We actually need to keep going. I've got a few more presents for you. We've got to keep going. I know this is crazy, but I've got more for you.

In verse 5 he takes it further. It says, “God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.” He doesn’t just want to be your master, he doesn’t just want to be your Lord, he doesn’t just want you to believe in him—he wants you to call him Dad! He wants a dear relationship with you like a child, like a dad to a daughter, a dad to a son. He wants to intimately know you.

I love how J. I. Packard puts it. He says, “Adoption is the highest privilege of the gospel. The traitor is forgiven, brought in for supper, and given the family name.” I’ll take that all day. He didn’t just leave you stranded, he didn’t leave you without a family. No, he says: Come on in. Come on in. I’ve got a spiritual family for you. I just want to be your heavenly Father.

I love how our Downtown campus pastor, Ryan Bramlett put it in a sermon last time he was here. He said, “Right next to your freedom papers are your adoption papers.” God not only wants to set you free from the penalty of your sin and free from your old life so you can be free to live for him and free from the consequences of all of that, free for all eternity—not only does he want to free you, he wants to sign your adoption papers. He wants to be your heavenly Father. He wants you to be an heir to the throne. That’s amazing.

Again, right there we could stop. But he keeps going. Look at the next verse. It says, “This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.” Are you kidding me? I do acts of sacrificial love for my family because I love them, but it does not bring me great pleasure. Come on. I took the trash out in the middle of the Polar Vortex, it did not give me great pleasure and I muttered many words under my breath as I was doing it.

God gave up way more than that. He sacrificed way more than that. And he didn’t do it begrudgingly, he did with a smile on his face. It brought joy to his heart. It gave him great pleasure to lay down everything for us, to sacrifice his one and only Son.

And as if that weren’t enough, verses 6 and 7 wrap it up like this. It says, “So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.”

He said: I’m going to give you my Son, Jesus. He’s going to die on the cross for you so that you can be forgiven and free. And that phrase Paul uses when he writes this is that he is so rich in kindness, so rich in grace—it’s like, that’s the understatement of all eternity. Rich in kindness! Rich in grace! He’s loaded with them. He’s a kajillionaire when it comes to grace and kindness.

So, yeah. Of course we praise him. It says, “So we praise God,” of course we praise him. Can you see how good he is? I mean come on, right now. Forget who’s around you. Forget the people looking at you. Take a moment with you and God right now and just tell him how thankful you are for his grace. Tell him how thankful you are for his goodness. No, I mean it. Seriously, right now. Applaud, clap—I’m talking like show him the kind of honor that he deserves. I’m talking like give it up!

Keep going. This ain't the State of the Union address. You don't need a cue to clap. You don't need to look around and see if everyone else is clapping—just go! Thank you, Jesus.

Alright, now for real though. We can't let this go on as long as the State of the Union goes on. We have some things to get to today.

Unbelievable. And he deserves that kind of response from us. That's not a showy, that's not a, "Hey, look at me. I'm so spiritual," response. His goodness deserves that kind of response from us.

But now, here's the deal. There is still a disconnect between what we just read, the goodness of God, there is still a disconnect between that and our hearts. You know this. I can feel it. You know how I know that there is a disconnect? It's because when I said just a second ago, "Hey, take a moment and tell God how thankful you are. Get up." And then I dropped the microphone and started clapping—I felt very, very awkward in that moment.

And I know that you probably felt awkward too. I know you were probably like, "Oh, this is weird." There's a disconnect. Because, let me tell you, if the Colts won the Super Bowl, I wouldn't have to tell you to get up and do a thing. There's a connection between Colts winning the Super Bowl and your heart.

There's a disconnect between the goodness of God in hearts that prevents us from responding properly. And I believe that that disconnect happens in one specific word that we actually read in this passage. It's a little, tiny word that gets in there that trips us up a little bit. Like a little rock in our shoes. Like, "Wait a minute. Huh, what?"

If you back up to verse 5, it says it like this. It says, "God decided in advance to **adopt** us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ." Adopt. God decided in advance to adopt us... Whoa, whoa, whoa—hold on. Adopt! For God to adopt you would mean that you need to be adopted, which would mean that you have a problem, I have a problem. And it's bad.

I know that at first glance you're like, "Problem? I don't have a problem. I don't have a problem. I'm good." You ever had someone tell you you've got a problem and you're like, "I disagree, wholeheartedly, with your assessment of that."

For instance, my wife recently cracked a joke in front of our friends about me. And this joke was illegitimate, unfounded, and completely false. This joke... She had this joke and she said that, apparently, I don't know what a clothes hamper is. Apparently, I don't know how to put my clothes in the hamper when I'm done wearing them. And I said, "Right now you are sitting on a throne of lies. This is not true. I don't have a problem. I don't have a problem!"

Well the next day she sent me this text message. She sent me a text message that said, "Not hamper." [picture of bedside night stand on screen] Now let me clarify for you a few things,

okay? This is my bedside table. That is our vacuum. Our vacuum is right there. We didn't text each other thinking it would be used in a sermon, okay. Sorry. It doesn't look like Pottery Barn. My bad.

But you see a pair of jeans there and some gym clothes there down at the bottom. Not hamper. Not hamper. Yeah, I get it. Not hamper. Not the hamper. Then she sends me this next one. Let me introduce you to our hamper. [picture of open hamper on screen]

Now back it up for a second. Back it up. I've got an explanation for this though, okay? Those clothes on the floor? Those are my gym clothes that I set out because I was going to do a workout that morning and then I got lazy and I didn't. So, I left them out because I was going to do a workout later when the kids go to bed. So, there's a reason behind that.

And the jeans? I'd only worn them twice, okay? You don't have to wash a pair of jeans after two wears. You can get at least three wears after a wash. I'm trying to decrease the laundry load. I'm mean, come on. If I've got a problem, it's that I'm too considerate—far too considerate. Sorry for thinking about you.

Take my hamper down—my not hamper.

Problem? I don't have a problem. So many times, when it comes to God and his goodness, and we read a word like adopt we're like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa." I think so many times we puff up our chest a little bit, "I don't have a problem." And God says: actually, you do.

He uses this word adopted very specifically here to get through to the severity of our problem. Not every kid who needs to be adopted goes through the kind of circumstances we're about to talk about, but when kids need to be adopted, most often it's because they are in desperate, dire circumstances. Their current reality and their future are at risk. I mean, if things don't change for them, they are in a bad spot and their future is not looking good. So, they need to be adopted. They need to be cared for.

I asked our foster and adoption team ministry director for some examples, some examples of what a lot of these kids who are going into the foster system are dealing with. I'm not talking about kids in a third world country, but here. What are the situations that these kids who are fatherless, who need to be adopted, who need to be cared for—what are they going through?

I want to read you just a few of the examples she sent me. These are case studies that they use to train and prepare foster families and adoptive families for what they may be experiencing. This is to show you how serious God sees our spiritual condition.

The first one is about a girl named Sara. She's 13 months old, a little baby girl. She was severely neglected by her mother and is believed to have been physically abused. She was diagnosed as failure to thrive at two months old but went home under protective supervision. She was placed in foster care at 11 months when her mother was hospitalized for heroin addiction.

Sara is very quiet most of the time. She does not coo or babble. She seems to prefer being left alone. When she does cry, she is very difficult to comfort. When placed in her crib she'll often rock herself to sleep. She bangs her head on the mattress.

Sara cannot stand even if supported. Her legs are not strong enough to bear her weight. Sara does not look into people's eyes. She's 13 months old—does not look into people's eyes. She appears uninterested in her surroundings. She doesn't hold toys in her hands, she appears uninterested in play.

The next case study is a set of twins: Larry and Jonathan. Larry and Jonathan are four-year-old twins. They have both been severely abused by their step-father. Larry has burn marks on his feet and on his legs that look like socks. He requires special medical care for these burns, and he may need skin grafts in the future. He was dunked in a bath tub of scalding hot water.

Jonathan is toilet trained during the day but still wears diapers at night. Larry is not toilet trained and at times will smear feces on himself and his surroundings. The four-year-old boys speak in two-word phrases. Larry withdraws from his surroundings and prefers to play by himself. Jonathan likes to play with others, but he hits and bites other children, including his brother.

Jonathan sleeps well but he only eats hot dogs and crackers. Larry eats just about everything, but he gorges and throws up after meals. Larry also wakes up frequently, up to five times per night, and wanders the house.

Every kid who needs to be fostered or adopted is not going through exactly those circumstances. Not all situations are equal. But you need to know that these stories are not uncommon. There are kids out there who are vulnerable, and they are suffering, and they have **no one** to care for them. They have **no one** guiding them. They have **no one** helping them. Their circumstances are so dire, they are so desperate, and their future is at risk.

And no doubt we hear these stories and we're like, "My gosh, this is awful." And the crazy thing is... Again, this is not third world country, this is our own back yard. This is Indiana. I mean we're in the midst of a crisis right now—15,000 kids are currently in the foster care system, and there are not that many families to care for them—15,000 kids in Indiana.

We've had an increase of 15 percent in the last year of the number of kids who are entering the system—up 67 percent since 2012. It's the third worst crisis in our country right now. This is our own back yard.

And so we hear stories like this, we hear about this crisis and we're like, "Man, we need to do everything we can to lean into this problem." This is why we have a foster and adoption ministry. This is why we're going to do something called Fan Night. You're going to hear about that at the end of the service today.

This is why we're praying for more families to step up and become foster families and adoptive families. This is why we are praying for more people to get involved in care communities. So, if you can't foster or adopt a kid, you can be a part of a care community that supports the foster family. Fostering is hard, and you need a support system.

And even if you can't do that, will you give financially? We're trying to partner with people and support organizations that are caring for vulnerable children in our city and all around the world. We're trying to lean into it. We're trying to make a difference in this. Not just because we hear these stories and we feel compassion, but because God's word actually commands us to.

Just a few quick verses to help you see—I could rattle off verse after verse but just three verses to help you understand God's command for us to lean into this problem.

Psalm 82, verse 3 says, "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed."

Isaiah 1:17 says, "Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."

Exodus 22 says, "You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn..."

See, God's word is clear about this commandment to care for the fatherless. Why? You know that's not the only problem in the world. Why is God so uniquely concerned with the fatherless? And yes, it's because he is a God of compassion, and justice, and mercy and any suffering he hates to see. We're going to talk about that here in just a couple of weeks. Any suffering he hates to see.

But the fatherless, the vulnerable child—that problem is unique in the eyes of God. God knows that when the people of God get up close and personal to the physically fatherless, the vulnerable child, he knows that it's going to put us in a front-row seat of a visible, physical representation of our true spiritual condition.

When you care for a vulnerable child, when you care for a kid who has **no one** who has **nothing** you are front row, front and center, seeing how God sees everyone's spiritual condition.

You see, the goodness of God will not break through in your life. The goodness of God will not connect to your heart, the goodness of God will not do what it is supposed to do in your life until you understand that the vulnerable child is actually you. The foster child is actually me. The fatherless out there who have no one to guide them or care for them—it's actually us apart from God.

How we see them and how much compassion we have for them—that's how God sees us. And until we can connect with that, the goodness of God will fall on cold hearts and ears.

And I know, man. I know because I feel the same thing. Just cut through the crap for a second. Most of the time, we don't feel desperate for God. You know we don't. I don't. I mean, come on. You talk about having a problem, I don't have a problem.

Yeah, God is good. Yeah, Jesus is incredible. Yeah, I love all of the stuff he does for me, that's awesome. But for most of us we treat God like he's an add-on to our already pretty good lives. Like he's the next good life-coach. He'll give you some peace and some wisdom, like a good twitter follower or a good Instagram follower. But like, desperate for him? Most of us don't live in a place of desperation for God, needing to be adopted by God.

This past Wednesday I was driving home from work and I was praying through this and I was like, "God, what can I say that will break through? What can I say that will get through to their hearts so they understand their desperate need for you? God, what can I say to the person in the room who has actually said out loud, 'That's great for Christians if that's what they need, but I just don't need that.' What can I say to break through, God?"

And in that moment God said: Well, hold on for a second. What are you going to say to get this through to your heart? How are you going to take this message and apply it to you? Because you know that you are in that same spot, how are you going to get to that place where you are the spiritually fatherless without me? You are desperate without me?

How's this going to break through so that you don't wake up feeling so confident? How's it going to break through so you don't walk through the day so independent and capable apart from me? How are you going to get this through to your heart first and foremost?

"Uh, back up God."

So, I started praying through that. And God immediately drew my heart to my own kids. I've got three kids. I love them to death. I have a seven-year-old boy named Emmet. I've got a four-year-old boy named Solomon and a two-year-old girl named Tatum. I love them to death. I love them to death.

I consider being their dad one of the greatest privileges of my life. We're doing everything we can to parent them in the best way possible, to be there for them. My wife and I are trying to take Psalm 127 to heart. It says that children are like arrows in the hands of a warrior. You've got to pull them back and get them ready and then send them out because they can make a great difference in the world.

Now, I'm convinced that the biggest difference that I will make with my life is not what I do, but what my kids do. So man, I'm just praying for them all of the time. We're trying to read the

Bible to them. We're trying to take advantage of every teachable moment to show them grace and show them compassion, show them discipline.

We're trying to do everything that we can to be the best parents we possibly can be and we screw up all of the time, all of the time. I mean, Wednesday when I had this conversation with God and then I got home that night, it was like one of the worst nights of parenting all week long, alright? The kids were all crying by 7:30. I'm looking at my watch, like, "God, in your infinite wisdom can you speed time up and get them to sleep."

We're not perfect in this but we're doing everything we can to guide them and to be the best mom and dad that we can possibly be to them. And I started personalizing this. What if my own son, Emmet, my own son, Solomon, my own daughter, Tatum, what if the next day they woke up and they were in the position of one of these vulnerable children? What if they were fatherless? What if they had nobody to care for them and watch out for them? Man, I started thinking through my kids.

I started thinking about my seven-year-old. He's so tender and sweet. But he's also a perfectionist and he never wants to do anything unless he can nail it perfectly. And I started thinking to myself, what would he do without someone to guide him, without someone to encourage him when he has no courage, without someone to hold him and hug him when he comes home from school and his feelings have been hurt by a friend who betrayed him?

Who would be there for him to tell him, "You don't have to be perfect in everything? You can try stuff. You can live your life. You don't have to be perfect." Who would be there to guide him, to correct him, to discipline him, to comfort him, to tell him it's going to be okay?

And then I started thinking about the physical elements. Like, what if my seven-year-old son didn't know if dinner was going to be on the table? What if my seven-year-old son went to school and thought that, very likely, lunch could be the last meal of the day?

Then I started thinking about my four-year-old who's courageous and brave and fearless and rough, but so sweet. I see him oftentimes bottling up his emotions and he doesn't like to show emotion in front of anybody and then he just explodes.

I'm thinking, "God, who would be there? Who would be there to channel that courage and that bravery in the right direction? Who would be there to say that as a man it's okay to cry? It's okay to show emotion. To show him what a true, godly man looks like? Who would be there for him to guide him and love him and protect him and to celebrate with him and to mourn with him?

Then I started thinking, "Man, if he were in the foster care system or if he were a vulnerable child and he suffered abuse at the hands of anyone, but if he suffered abuse at the hands of someone who was supposed to protect him, and he doesn't even know him..."

And then I started thinking about my girl, my baby girl. I love her so much. And I started thinking what it would be like for her to not have anyone showing her what a godly man is supposed to look like, without anyone to show her how a man should truly treat her and what it is like to be loved by a man, without anyone to show her what true beauty and true strength looked like?

What would it be like for her to not have her mother and father—if that's her thing what would it be like for my baby girl to be left in her crib more than she's ever out of her crib? Like so many kids who suffer neglect.

I just started personalizing it and I just got to this place—ruined. I could never imagine my kids suffering that. I can't even fathom it. It would break my heart. It would kill me to know that that ever happened to them.

And in that moment, God said: right there—that emotion. That's an ounce of what God feels for all of humanity every day, right there. He sees us in our desperate state, we've got nobody, we've got nothing—who's going to be there to comfort us?

I'm telling you, having an earthly father and an earthly mother is fantastic. I have an incredible father. I have an incredible mother. I love them dearly. They have done so much for me. But there are things that they can not give me that only my heavenly Father can give me.

I can be as intentional with my kids as I want, but there are things I can not give my kids. I've got to give them to their heavenly Father. There are things that, even as we care for these foster kids—these vulnerable kids in our city, we are not their savior. We've got to love them and help them and protect them, but also, we've got to get them to their heavenly Father. The truth is, we all desperately need a heavenly Father.

Who is going to comfort you when you're about to go to sleep at night and you just went through the worst season of your life? Yes, you've got family and friends who can comfort you, but who's going to be there in the still, quiet moments when you are left with only your thoughts? Who's going to be there to guide you, warn you, correct you? Who's going to be there at your death bed to assure your spirit that this is not the end? This is not the end.

You and I, we desperately need a heavenly Father. Oh my gosh, let's get honest. We feel it. We know it. We can act like we don't have a problem, but come on, we all know that behind the strong and confident façade, there is a desperate, desperate need for a heavenly Father who will lead us and comfort us through this life. I feel it all of the time.

I am reminded of the old hymn *Come Thou Fount*. I love that old hymn, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. There's a lyric in it and I've always held onto it: Prone to wander (not wonder but wander). Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.

Oh, man. I feel it every day, because without God as my heavenly Father warning me and course correcting and encouraging me and lifting me up and calming me down—without my heavenly Father I’m prone to wander. Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.

You see, we need a heavenly Father. When you get to that place where you can embrace your vulnerable position and in humility embrace the fact that you are just like the physically fatherless of this world—that they are the visible representation of what you are spiritually. Oh, then God steps in with Psalm 68. He says this, “Father to the fatherless, defender of widows—this is God, whose dwelling is holy. God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy.”

God wants to be your Dad. God’s desire is that there would be no more fatherless, not just physically but spiritually. He wants to be your Dad. And that’s the offer that’s on the table for you today.

In fact, right now at all of our campuses would you stand to your feet with me. I want to give you the opportunity to make that decision. You’ve got your freedom papers on the table, you’ve got your adoption papers on the table.

It’s an opportunity for you to be free from the penalty of your sin, free from your responsibility to your old ways of life and to live for Jesus for the rest of your days, and the opportunity to sign those adoption papers and to be welcomed into the family of God, calling on him as your heavenly Father.

You don’t have to have it all figured out. Your life doesn’t have to be cleaned up. You don’t have to have the Bible memorized. You’ve just got to be in a place where you recognize that the vulnerable child is actually you. That’s your story, my story, and God says that he will willingly, gladly save you and welcome you into the family. And there is nothing you can do to earn it. There is nothing you can do to deserve it. It’s a free offer. All you’ve got to do is accept it.

So, every head bowed, every eye closed at all of our campuses. It’s a moment between you and God. It’s a moment between you and your heavenly Father. If you’re ready right now to make the most important decision of your life, to sign those spiritual adoption papers, to sign those freedom papers, and to walk with him all the days of your life, to accept his salvation, to accept his grace I want you to raise your hand on the count of three if you’re ready to start following Jesus. One, two, three...

You’ve still got time. Keep your heads bowed, eyes closed. If you’re ready to make that decision put your hand in the air to give your life to Jesus if you’ve never made that decision before.

Church let’s pray together.

Father there are new brothers and sisters who have just been welcomed into the family of God and we celebrate that. But God, we know that celebration here pales in comparison to the

celebration that's going on in heaven right now. That all of heaven celebrates and rejoices when one person comes home to you. So we celebrate. We join in that celebration.

God, we pray that the love we're receiving right now, the goodness that we see in you would motivate us to care for the physically fatherless all around us. That we'd be a church that takes action, rooted in your goodness.

God, we love you. We declare that you are good. We sing it with confidence. We sing it from a place of gratitude. Oh, we love you Jesus. And it's in your name that the church prays together across all of our campuses. Amen. Amen.

Let's celebrate and worship God.