

Asking for a Friend | The LGBT Questions

Aaron Brockett | Matthew 19:4-5

Alright, how's it going everybody? It's good to see you today. I want to welcome all of our guests and first-time visitors across all of our campuses. Man, we're so glad to have you here today.

Our mission as a church is that we want to remove unnecessary barriers that keep people from Jesus. And the reason why we say it that way is because we believe that Jesus is the only one who can save anyone and so we want to get everyone to him.

And once we introduce you to Jesus then we want to come along side of you and help encourage you in your spiritual growth and give you the tools necessary for that.

That's the primary reason behind Growth Track. That's why we keep encouraging you to check that out and I hope that you will because our desire for every single person is that you would eventually come to see that the church is something more than you just watching on the screen or something that you attend occasionally when you can make it or some place that you come just to watch or receive something, but that you would eventually begin to see yourself as a part of this. That you would be on mission with us.

We just got to see a great picture of that on Friday night at all of our campuses where hundreds and hundreds of you came together to write letters and to pack bags and to pray over those bags that are going to go to foster children in our city. It was just an amazing thing to watch and see the church being the church. And I just want to thank all of you for serving in that way.

We are in this series called *Asking for a Friend*. So, if you are just now coming into this what we're doing is we're taking some of the most common questions that we receive from all of you on a regular basis and we're just trying to address as many of them as we can.

And I want to be really clear about this. The reason why we're addressing these questions is not because we believe that we have all of the answers. We don't. I don't. But we trust and follow someone who does. And we know that spiritual growth takes place when we can have good conversations around honest questions.

And many of the questions that come in and have come in, they're complicated. And oftentimes they are emotional. And I would say that that's maybe even more so true of the set of questions that we want to look at today. It's very true of last week. Last week, if you missed it, we talked about some of the questions that you asked around pain and suffering, but it's true today as well.

Right after my sophomore year in Bible college I landed a summer internship at a mid-sized church in Anderson, Indiana. Now, I'm from southwest Missouri so it was my very first time to Indiana and I had no idea that, years later, God would call us here, but I'm really glad that he did.

I pulled into town. I'm 20 years old and I'm going to be there for a few months so I'm looking for some guy friends to hang out with. That's when I met a guy named Dan (not his real name). Dan was several years older than me and he volunteered in the worship ministry at the church. I enjoyed hanging out with Dan. We would go see movies, we would hit golf balls, and grab a bite to eat.

One afternoon, Dan and I were just kind of sharing our stories with each other and that's when Dan shared something with me that didn't surprise me. Dan told me that he had grown up in a Christian family, he had grown up going to church, and that he had made a decision for Jesus at an early age.

But then Dan shared something with me that I wasn't expecting. Dan told me that during his adolescent years he began to realize that he was attracted to the same sex and he really wrestled with that and it was causing a lot of confusion and anxiety.

So eventually he reached out and he began to share that with family and friends and people in his youth group and the response was not good. Dan was shamed and he was shunned, and these are his words. He said that he tragically fled the church in search of love.

But Dan told me that afternoon that just within the past year he had come back and that he was trying to reconcile and offer some forgiveness and receive forgiveness from family and friends and try to mend some of those relationships. And he said, "I'm trying to follow after Jesus." And he said, "I've made the decision, biblical decision, to not act upon those desires." That was Dan's story.

Now I don't know how many of you would relate to me, not all of you but maybe some—I grew up in a small town in southwest Missouri where I didn't know any gay people, or at least I didn't think that I did. Now, looking back I know I did. I just wasn't aware of it. That's more of a commentary on me than anything else. But since that time, I've come to know and love many and consider them to be good friends.

One of the most common questions that we receive around here on a regular basis (and I would say this is probably easily in the top three) could be articulated this way: If I, or someone I love is attracted to the same sex or identifies as LGBT, will we/they be accepted here?

Questions around this topic, as you might imagine, are politically and emotionally and relationally charged. And I would imagine that a number of us already have an opinion on this and a perspective.

And maybe depending upon your personality—maybe you have a personality where your wired up to where you just see things as black and white, right and wrong, this and that.

So, from your perspective, regardless of where you land of this, you kind of think, “Well, there’s clearly an answer and we should just say so bluntly.” Either, yes, sexuality has boundaries and we should say so.

Or maybe you’re of the opinion that, no, it doesn’t. Everyone should be free and encouraged to follow their desires.

And I guess that I would just simply say today that this isn’t easy. In fact, this is only easy if you have figured out how to perfectly balance grace and truth in your life. And few of us have. This is only easy if you don’t know anyone who is gay or lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

This is only easy if you’ve never had a grown son or daughter come home on college break and say two little words to you around the kitchen table that changed everything for you: Mom and Dad, I’m gay.

This is only easy for you if you’ve never wrestled with same-sex attraction and you wonder what other people are going to say and think if they find out.

This is only easy for you if you’ve never had someone you love and care for who has contemplated taking his or her own life due to the shame that this issue has caused.

Therefore, as a church, we will never give careless or flippant responses to such important and potentially divisive questions. And while there is a place for stating very clearly our perspective or our understanding of this (and I plan to today) man, we have to be extremely thoughtful and compassionate and intentional as we do because there is so much at stake within this conversation.

I want all of us to remember this phrase right here: Truth should never be used or even perceived as a weapon to devalue or dehumanize anyone.

And often the questions around this topic, nine times out of 10, come to us via email, which makes it very difficult to develop any sort of relational connection. They oftentimes come phrased this way: Where does the church stand?

And I can understand why somebody might ask that, but I have to say that I don’t really care for the *where do you stand* questions because they oftentimes don’t respect the complexity of certain issues, nor do they take the time and the energy to really listen to somebody and hear his or her story.

When you look at the life of Jesus in the four biographies of his life: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; one of the things that you notice is that Jesus very rarely stands. Jesus was always

walking. His feet were carrying him toward where the people were. And once he got to the people, he would sit down with them.

Jesus never once addressed the crowd this way: Hey listen up all of you liars, cheats, adulterers, tax collectors, and children who disobey your parents this is where you stand with me.

No, he always got down with them and looked them in the eye and showed compassion and tenderness. He would ask questions. He would ask for something to drink or maybe invite himself over to their home.

And Jesus would always speak truth into somebody's life without ever once devaluing him or her as a person. And that's why Jesus sat with people. And that's why our desire is that we sit with people too; that we would sit with people long enough to be able for them to know that they have been heard.

See, loving people well means listening more than talking. It means caring more about understanding where they come from rather than trying to get them to understand where you come from.

So, if we just reduce this to where do we stand on certain issues, I'm afraid that we will eventually find ourselves standing with self-righteous Pharisees rather than sitting with Jesus and with people. And I would rather sit where Jesus sat than stand where Pharisees stood.

It is possible to be truthful and loving at the same time. Jesus was. So, as a church, we're going to be extremely thoughtful about this. And, like Jesus, we're going to sit with people in love in order to earn the trust required to share any sort of truth. And figuring out how to do both, man, it's really, really hard work and it means that we need to rely upon the Holy Spirit to do so.

Now to be perfectly honest, this would not be a topic that I would necessarily pick to preach on for the obvious reasons. It's part of the reason why many of you haven't taken a breath in the last five minutes. So, you probably should, alright? Let's just all breathe. That would be good.

I had a number of you come up to me this last week—because last week we talked about pain and suffering, if this is your first time to be with us. And a number of you came up to me and were like, "Aaron, you were so courageous just tackling that." And I was like, "Ah, just wait. That's just kind of a warm up, alright?"

And I want to be clear that the reason why I wouldn't necessarily pick to preach on this isn't because I'm afraid of it. I've addressed this before in the past. But I just know that it's a minefield. I know that I'm not getting out of this message without having some of my blood drawn. I know that I'm throwing myself out into oncoming traffic. And I know that I'm not going to be able to please everyone with this message. And yet it's still important.

I want you to hear me. I'm not addressing this because we're trying to single this issue out or make it something that is bigger than any other issue that we all struggle with. We're all in the same boat. The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

I also know that not every person who is same-sex attracted has the same story, perspective, or opinion. And to assume that they do is called stereotyping, and we will not do that.

I want to be really, really clear as to why I'm addressing this. There are a couple of reasons. One reason is because you've asked me to. So, it's your fault. This question just comes in way too often for me to just turn the other way and not say anything about it.

But another reason that I think is more important is that, as a church, we need to model the tone and the tenor for how to have conversations like this one from a teachable and humble place, because where else is this being modeled? It's certainly not being modeled on the news channels. It's not being modeled on social media.

Lines are drawn in the sand and people say you are either for us or you're against us. And there are these emotional hand grenades that are thrown across the lines. And for far too long Satan has been having a field day with this issue, creating so much pain and confusion and division.

And, in the name of Jesus, we just need to stand up and say: enough. We want to hold on to our convictions and we want to hold on to Jesus. More importantly, we want to hold onto Jesus more than our understanding of our convictions as we reach out to anyone and everyone.

There are two primary perspectives that I want to make sure that I speak very clearly to today. Number one: if you are same-sex attracted or you identify as LGBT I'm so glad that you're here—so glad that you decided to come and I'm so glad that you are watching or listening, I'm so glad that you had the courage to maybe continue to sit where you are sitting even though you know this is what we're talking about.

And I want to be very clear that I do not plan to have all of the answers on this. I may very well say some things that maybe you don't like or maybe you don't agree with or understand, and I just want you to know that's okay.

I think, so much of the time, we think, "How in the world am I supposed to love you if we disagree with each other on really important issues." I am just saying that I've been married to somebody for 20 years and she disagrees with me all of the time. And I would say that it actually enhances our love for each other.

See, love is required. Agreement is optional.

And so if I say something that unintentionally offends you—and I realize that this is such tricky ground that the odds of that may be very high—or if I get something wrong, which is very

possible because I get things wrong all of the time regardless of the topic, I'm just asking you to give me some grace as well as the benefit of the doubt as I wade into these waters.

I'm still learning and growing too. And I want to approach this from a teachable spirit. And ultimately, responding to these questions as directly as I am, it is my intent to pastor this church well. That's my heart.

The other perspective is that if you're here and you're a Christ follower and you're just really wrestling with this because maybe you've got a child or a friend or a family member or a co-worker who is gay and you are like, "How do I hold on to truth and how do I reach out in love, because honestly, Aaron, it doesn't feel like I ever do either very well, it feels like I'm flunking both," and I would just say I know how you feel. I'm right there with you. And, hopefully, today's message will help everyone.

So, let me just start here: God wants us to sit with people and love them with the truth.

I received an email a little while back from a same-sex couple who has been attending our church and they said, "Hey, we've been attending for a while. We love the church and we believe that God approves of our relationship." Then they said this, "Honestly, we just want to know the truth and we trust you." I so appreciated the humble posture of their question.

See, delivering truth in any form is one of the most loving things that you can do. And truth is usually never found in public opinion. Yet the way in which we convey that truth is so critical. You shouldn't have to ask to be loved. You are worthy of it. The cross of Jesus proves it regardless of who you're attracted to.

However, every single one of us—we do have to decide if we are interested in more and more truth. We all have some of it. We're all learning more of it. And God's word, on a continual basis, continues to confront every single one of us. It confronts me almost every day with what I might call inconvenient truths.

What I mean by that is I oftentimes want God's word to sort of conform to my decisions rather than allowing my decisions to be conformed to God's word. And I suspect that I'm not the only one who wrestles with that.

So, what does God's word say? Well, God designed sexual intimacy to be taken place between a man and a woman within the promise of a committed marriage and any other activity—straight or otherwise—is outside of God's best, like God's intention and plan for our lives: Hebrews 13.

And while that may not be what many LGBT people want to hear, believe me it's not what very many straight people want to hear either. See, most people—Christians included—are willing to give their souls to God but they want him to stay out of their bedroom and their thought-life.

And none of us, regardless of our sexual orientation, are off of the hook on this one. In fact, Jesus would take it a giant step farther and he would say: If you've ever had one lustful thought then you are guilty of adultery. Paul would take it another step farther and he would just include all of this with gossip and with disobedience to parents.

Some would say, "Well, Jesus never mentioned homosexuality." Jesus never mentioned a lot of things, but it doesn't mean that he approved of them. An argument from silence is never a very good one.

Jesus did talk a lot about sexual purity, and he did say this in Matthew 19. He says, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."

The Bible never takes this and places it into its own category, this is just placed right alongside of every other sin struggle that every other single person listening to this has. We're all in the same boat.

Here's the deal. Jesus knew all of this. Jesus has the truth on every single sin struggle that you and I wrestle with and yet we find him consistently sitting with people, rather than standing on issues. So rather than asking where our church stands on this, I think that we should ask where does Jesus sit with this? And I think that we can make a couple of observations.

I think that Jesus is grieved over the pain and mistreatment of LGBT people (especially by Christians).

Something that I am not proud of is during my teenage and young adult years I was largely very insensitive to this issue and would oftentimes laugh at jokes that I shouldn't have and maybe I might have said something or done something that really hurt somebody who was struggling with same-sex attraction. And I deeply regret that.

When LGBT people reap some of the vitriol on social media or they see signs that are hateful from people who claim to be Christians—we just have to admit in humility that there is much about this, historically, that the church has just gotten wrong and we need to repent of it, and we need to own it.

I'm afraid that the church, as well as many Christians, has oftentimes played, perhaps an unintended yet active role in pushing gay people away from Jesus. You know, most people in same-sex relationships or who are same-sex attracted—they don't leave the church because they were told that this is wrong. They leave because they were dehumanized and ridiculed and excluded.

That's not just my opinion. Actually, research backs that up. Scholars from both Northwestern and Regent Universities, who actually disagree with each other on this issue, came together to

work together (imagine that) and they surveyed 1,700 LGBT people—21 from every state. This is some of the things that they found:

83% of LGBT people said that they were raised in the church. That's a majority.

51% of LGBT people left their faith community after the age of 18.

Now get this. Notice this stark contrast:

Only 3% left **primarily** because of the church's belief that same-sex marriage was wrong.

The other reasons that they gave were:

18% said that they didn't feel safe. That's tragic.

14% said that there was a relational disconnect with the leaders;

13% said that there was an incongruence between teaching and practice; meaning that it seems as if they elevated this issue over other issues that we all wrestle with.

12% said an unwillingness to dialogue;

9% said they were kicked out.

People will always gravitate to where they are loved. And if they can't find it in the church, they will go elsewhere. And way too many times the world has out-loved the church and that needs to change, because God is the author of love.

Jesus would say it this way in Matthew 19, "Love your neighbor as yourself." You've probably heard that, and it seems like such a simple phrase. But notice that there is no pre-requisite for that. Notice he never says: Hey, you need to love your Christian neighbors; or your white neighbors; or your black neighbors; or your Hispanic neighbors; or your conservative or liberal neighbors; or your straight neighbors. No, he says that whoever your neighbor may be, man, love them.

In John 3:17, it says, "God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."

So, if the gospel isn't good news for gay people, then it isn't good news for anyone. See, Jesus' love is unconditional and it still holds us accountable. It desires and empowers our obedience, but thankfully it doesn't rely upon it. That means that none of us can lecture, look down upon, or throw the Bible at anybody because we are all sinners in need of the exact same grace made available in and through Jesus.

I really like how the late Billy Graham put this. He said, “The Holy Spirit’s job to convict, God’s job to judge, my job is to love.”

Now the Holy Spirit can use you and me, but, man, I’ve learned that there is a fine line between the Spirit of God working through me and me trying to play the role of the Holy Spirit. Those are very different things. And when you and I get them confused, then we cause an incredible amount of hurt.

See, when I try to convict someone it almost always comes across as condemnation, whether I meant it to or not. And remember it’s God’s kindness that leads us to repentance, not repentance that leads to God’s kindness, Romans 2:4.

Number three: Sexual attraction (and I’m not just talking about same-sex, I’m talking about opposite sex attraction) is complex.

Now I want you to imagine with me the pain and the fear—some of you don’t have to imagine it, this is your story. But imagine the fear of those who in their adolescent years could begin to hear their friends talk about members of the opposite sex and they kept wondering when they were going to feel that way, because they were more interested in members of the same sex.

And as they get older, they wonder when this will go away and they even begin to pray, asking God to take this from them or to change them but it never happens. And they go to church and maybe they hear messages that sound condemning or they hear cruel jokes or they hear side comments and they begin to ask themselves this question as they lay away at night: How am I going to live my life? That’s the story that many people grappling with same-sex attraction have and we need to have an incredible amount of kindness and empathy and compassion.

Regardless of whether you are same-sex or opposite-sex attracted, who we are attracted to and why is largely mysterious and complex. We can’t fully understand it.

So, you might get together with your girlfriends to watch *The Bachelor* and they all just think that the bachelor is just so dreamy, but you don’t see it. Or maybe you get together with the guys and the guys are interested in blonds and brunets but you’re more interested in redheads. Well, why?

I doubt that very few of us at that junior high dance looked across the room the first time and said, “I think I’ll be attracted to that person over there.” No, you just sort of were. How do you explain it?

The American Psychological Association puts it this way:

There is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social and cultural influences on sexual orientation,

no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.

So, a very common question that I hear then is this: When it comes to same-sex attraction, are people born with it, do they choose it, or has it been the result of something they've experienced?

And I think that some have tried to explain it away rather insensitively by saying, "Well, then you must have had a disapproving father or a distant mother," or, "You must have experienced some sort of abuse or trauma in your past." And I just think that is insensitive and silly, because I know people who have grown up with all of those things but they grew up and they were heterosexual and they got married and had kids.

And I know some gay friends who have had wonderful upbringings and healthy households, so that can't explain it.

Due to the pain and social stigma often associated with this, especially 10 or 15 or more years ago... I really don't think that the vast majority choose this. I've actually met several who have confessed to me that if they could turn off the switch and be attracted to the opposite sex that they would.

So, my opinion is that many people have been attracted to the same sex for as long as they can remember and maybe will be for the rest of their earthly lives. And for many, not all, but for many this is an unwanted reality.

The logic then goes something like this: If someone is born gay, then God must have made them that way, and if he made them that way, isn't it okay?

Man, that's a really, really great question. I guess I would just respond this way, by just saying that just because... We're all born with natural biological desires. We talked about this last week. We're born into a broken world and so just because I have a biological desire—let's just take me for example—even a fixed one, it doesn't automatically mean that I should always act upon it.

John Corvino, who is actually affirming of same-sex relationships makes this exact point when he says this:

The fact is that there are plenty of genetically influenced traits that are nevertheless undesirable. Alcoholism may have a genetic basis, but it doesn't follow that alcoholics ought to drink excessively. Some people may have a genetic predisposition to violence, but they have no more right to attack their neighbors than anyone else. Persons with such tendencies cannot say "God made me this way" as an excuse for acting on their dispositions.

I want to be careful here, because I don't want you to hear him equate same-sex attraction with alcoholism or violence—I want you to see the logic behind the examples.

Just because we have a physical desire doesn't always mean that we should act upon it. I know if I followed after every one of my fixed biological desires showing no constraint whatsoever that it would deeply hurt the people I love the most.

In the book of James it actually separates the two. It says that there is a desire that gives birth to sin. So, the desire isn't necessarily sin. Having feelings toward something doesn't necessarily mean it's a sin. Sexual orientation isn't a sin, feelings and attractions aren't sin, it's the decision to engage that crosses that line. As we said in the last series, the word for sin is just an archery term. It means to miss the mark of God's best for your life.

Regardless of orientation, while you may not be able to control who you're attracted to, you can control the decisions that you make about your relationships and how you express your sexuality. And this is required for all of us. I would even go as far as to say there is more heterosexual sin that God needs to confront in our church than anything else. That's actually the bigger issue, if we're being honest.

And we must all choose to surrender our desires to Jesus and let him be in charge of what we do with our bodies. We're all just as sexually broken in the same way. My sexual sin separates me from God just as much as anyone else's. Therefore, we cannot leave this out of things that we submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In fact, the sexual sins that should bother you the most are the ones that you are struggling with right now. We're all in need of God's grace.

Can I just say this while I'm on it? Can I just officially make the motion that we ban this phrase from our church? *Love the sinner, hate the sin*. For many of you that may sound like good logic. Some of you are like, "Well, I've got a coffee cup that has that on it."

Maybe you've used that phrase before. I know I've used that phrase before. But as I've really thought through that, that's just really bad theology. It's condescending. It implies that I don't wrestle with any sin, or at least the ones that you do.

Jesus never taught that. Jesus never taught: Love the sinner, hate the sin. Only God can do that perfectly. Here's what Jesus taught: Love the sinner, hate your own sin.

See, labels are easy. Relationships are hard work. And our theology should increase our empathy. You can be orthodox in your theology and yet become a heretic by the way that you treat people.

Jesus was always drawn toward people who were very different than him. One of the marks that you and I are following Jesus is that we will be too.

This is probably an appropriate time in the message to say: Well, Aaron what if we disagree with you? Are we still welcome here?

And I would say of course you are. And many are. Our church should be a safe place for everyone to be loved right where they are regardless of their story, allowing God to be at work in their life, just as God is at work in all of our lives. We all have issues. We all have things that we struggle with. And we are as dependent upon God's grace as the air that we breathe.

When I was in the baptistry a few weeks ago I baptized 52 people. I was in the tank 'til nearly one o'clock in the afternoon. I just decided to slow down and to ask people their stories. I looked every single person in the eye and I asked two questions.

I said, "Do you believe that Jesus has accomplished everything that is sufficient for your salvation?" And all 52 said, "Yes." There is nothing we can do. It's all what Jesus has done.

Then I followed it up with this question, "Therefore will you go where Jesus tells you to go and will you do what Jesus asks you to do?" I got a lot of hesitations on that one. In fact, one lady was like, "That's really hard." And I was like, "I know."

And then I just said, "Here's what I mean by those two questions. You're calling Jesus your Savior, but he's also your Lord. And that means that if you can trust Jesus to be your Savior then you can also trust him to be the Lord of your life. Jesus wants what is best for you even if it doesn't make sense, even if it doesn't line up with what you necessarily want in the moment.

Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 15 describes Jesus this way, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been," let these words land on you, "**tempted in every way**," in every way that we are, "...yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Therefore, you and I are chasing after the Lordship of Jesus Christ, placing our trust in him. It's not just life insurance for your eternal life. It's trusting that what he says about the way that you live your life now is really what is best for you.

And regardless of sexual orientation or the way that we identify ourselves, here's what we're all after: surrendered sexuality. We're all in this together fighting the same battle to honor Jesus with our entire lives.

Some of you may be grappling with the reality of same-sex attraction for the rest of your life, and if so, then we are in this fight together because we are brothers and sisters, shoulder to shoulder. We're fighting the behaviors of opposite sex attraction for the rest of our lives, because we all submit those desires to Jesus.

The last thing that I will say here—and I realize that I have not answered every question and I realize that I probably stirred up a whole bunch of other questions, that's fine. We can continue to have the conversation trusting that those conversations will lead us to become more and more like Jesus.

Here's the last thing that I will say: It's never a good idea to base your identity (I'm saying this to everybody) it's never a good idea to base your identity upon anything other than Jesus. And every single one of us are often tempted to find our identity in one of three things: in what we do, what we own, or what we desire.

Whenever I anybody talk about their sexual desires as part of their identity, I get concerned for the same reasons that I would if somebody talked about their career as part of their identity, or their money as part of their identity.

Now with that said, there is much I can understand about it. For many LGBT people, the appeal has been that they have found a place where they are loved and accepted and valued.

And for many, it's not even about the physical act of sex. I've spoken with some who have said, "When you tell me this is a sin, it feels like a threat because you're telling me to turn my back on my community." And that's not what I'm saying, and I don't think that that's what God would want for you.

I would just lovingly urge all of us to think about reframing our identity around something more durable and eternal.

You see, anytime I place my identity in something that isn't strong enough to support it, I'm setting myself up for deep disappointment and hurt. Believe me, I've done it.

Aaron Brockett wears several different labels. I'm a husband, I'm a father, a son, a brother, I'm a friend, I'm a boss, I'm a pastor, I'm a snow skier, and I'm a mediocre Cross Fitter (although this week I got my first muscle up, so that's awesome). Some of you don't know what that is—totally fine, alright?

Hey, these are all lenses which I look through to describe the way that I experience the world. But the minute that I begin to base my identity or worth as a human being on any one of them, I'm setting myself up for deep disappointment and pain.

So, instead what I need to do is take each of those labels and I need to make them subordinate to my primary identity: I am in Christ. In John, chapter 3, verse 30 John the Baptist—I love this—said, Jesus "must increase, but I must decrease until it is Christ alone."

2 Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17 says, "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"

Now, I don't know about you, but I've been following after Jesus for nearly 30 years and I keep having the tendency to drag the corpse of the old Aaron Brocket out of the watery grave. I just drag him along kind of like that lame movie *Weekend at Bernie's*. I've just always got him there. I always want to resurrect him.

And Jesus says: Would you leave him in the grave? You died to yourself. You're a new person. And he says, "And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. **And God has given us this task,**" not of judging or condemning people but, "**reconciling people to him.**" As followers of Jesus, that's the only response to grace that's been given to us.

I love how Andy Stanley puts this. He says:

When we attempt to balance grace and truth, we get the worst of both, never the best of either. Jesus was not the balance of grace and truth. Jesus represented a full dose of both. He was full on grace and full on truth. He never dumbed down truth and he never turned down grace. He called sin 'sin' and sinners 'sinners', and then he laid down his life to pay for their sin.

May we never forget that.

See, in 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, verses 9 through 11, it actually lists the description of people who won't inherit the kingdom of God and I just want you to know that I'm all over this list, multiple times. And I wonder if you are too.

It says, "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral," which under Jesus' definition is all of us, "nor idolaters," which would be all of us because our hearts are idol factories, "nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers," so apparently they had women's Bible studies back then. I just needed something else to get emails for, alright?

Hey, I'm just kidding.

"...nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you," say it with me, "**were.**" That's what we were. You see yourself on that list anywhere? You should, because I'm on that list multiple times and I don't deserve to be included in the kingdom of God. And I don't deserve God's grace. And I don't deserve to sit on this stage. I don't deserve to be your pastor.

But then he says in verse 11, "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified," not because of your behavior, not because you made it right, but "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Then verse 19 says, "Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself," I don't belong to myself, "for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body."

Could I just ask you today, and this is for every single person listening to this, would you be willing to give your life, your soul, and your identity to Jesus trusting that he has what is best for you in mind?

I just wonder if anyone here, you've said the prayer and you've said the words in the baptistry because you wanted to go to heaven and you do believe in God, but you've not yet done the Lordship thing. You're still holding on to some things.

You're like, "God, you can have my heart, but stay out of my bedroom. God, you can have my heart, just stay out of my checkbook. God you can have my heart, just stay out of my thought life." And Jesus just keeps simply knocking at the door: Would you just let me into all of it because I have what is best for you in mind.

And I want you to know that we're with you shoulder to shoulder as we seek to become more like Jesus together. And when you fail, and you will, his undeserved grace is right there to pick you right back up.

Father, we come to you now and this is a hard message to preach. And yet I pray that your Spirit would be welcome in this place. That you would do a work on hearts and minds. That we could trust you more and more.

And I pray that, as a church, we extend this attitude to others that would say, "Hey, listen. This is a safe place to ask questions. This is a safe place to come and to be welcome just as you are," because we're all seeking the same grace that only Jesus can offer.

God, I pray that you would do a transformational work in the hearts and minds of every single person here today, because we need it. So many of us have more questions. And I pray that your Spirit would meet us right in the midst of those as we seek to know you more.

Satan has had a field day with this for far too long and so Jesus, we invite you in. Help us to sit with you on this rather than standing in such a way that creates division. We ask this in Jesus' name. And the church says: Amen.