

Asking for a Friend | Messy Grace

Caleb Kaltenbach | John 8:2-11

Aaron:

What's up, Traders Point family? How are you doing? It is good to see you. All the daylight savings people, I know you guys are all awake. Don't you just love daylight savings?

We'll move on.

I want to welcome all our guests and first time visitors across all of our campuses. My name is Aaron and I get to be one of the pastors around here. I'm so glad you are here today. Our mission as a church is to remove unnecessary barriers that keep people from Jesus. And the reason why we say it that way is we believe Jesus is the only one who can change anyone, and we want to get everyone to him.

Once we get you to Jesus, we want to help facilitate, encourage, and cheer you on in your spiritual growth, as you grow in that relationship. That's largely what Growth Track is all about, which is why we keep talking about it so much.

I'd love for you to check out Growth Track because my ultimate desire for you is that you would begin to see church not as just something that you watch on a screen or attend occasionally and just take it in, but that you would eventually see yourself as a part of this, that you're in on something much, much bigger than yourself as you seek to follow Jesus and represent him to the world.

I'm really glad you are here. We are in week four of a series of messages called *Asking for a Friend*. And we've been taking some of the most common questions we hear from you all on a regular basis and addressing as many of them as we can, not because we believe we have the answers but because we believe we follow and serve the one who does. We think there is something transformational about having good conversations around really good questions.

And so last week, if you weren't here, it was a challenging subject to address but so much good has come out of it. I knew weeks and months ago as I was just praying and planning for that particular message that I wanted to have my friend come and follow that message up. He has a powerful story and a unique thing to say, especially as it relates to issues like this.

We have Caleb Kaltenbach here today. He is a good friend of mine. Caleb and I met in college, and he has a powerful story. He is an author of a couple of books, one getting ready to come out. His books are called *Messy Grace* and *God of Tomorrow*. Caleb is a pastor and the founder

of the Messy Grace Group, and just a really good friend. He is one of the most authentic, real human beings I know. I count it a real privilege to call him friend.

He knows way too much about Star Wars and Marvel characters than is healthy. You're going to love Caleb.

I told him that this is the friendliest, warmest church on the planet, so please don't let me down even though you've had a lack of sleep. Would you please put your hands together at all of our campuses, and give a warm Traders Point welcome to our friend Caleb Kaltenbach.

Caleb:

Thank you so much for having me. I love this guy. Do you love this guy, Pastor Aaron? He is great. He invited me to come and I said, "I don't want to threaten you because they're not used to seeing this kind of eye candy on stage. Are you going to be okay with that?"

He said, "I'll make it somehow."

I love this guy. I've known him for 23 years. We went to college together, he was on the first floor and I was on the third floor. I've got stories about him I will not share because he's got more stories about me, and he will share. He is preaching next weekend, so I'm not going to do that.

I just want to let you know that... If you've come here for any amount of time, you know he is a good leader and communicator. But in a day and age when character and integrity are sorely needed, I want to let you know that you have a pastor who has the utmost character and integrity. He is the same person on stage as he is off stage. I just want you to know that he is someone you can trust in.

If you are visiting today, and you've never been here before, I'm glad you're here. Know that he is a great communicator so I hope you come back next week and hear him. If I lived in this area, I would be attending Traders Point because God is doing some incredible things here. I hope you keep on coming here and checking it out. If you do attend here, I hope you will invite your friends and you'll say, "This is a place where it is okay to not be okay, and we all journey through life together."

I'll tell you a little bit about me. My wife, Amy, is a marriage and family therapist. She is a Christian counselor. We live in the Los Angeles area. I have a twelve-year-old son and a ten-year-old daughter, Joel and Rachel. I love them both, but I've got to tell you about Joel's birth. He was the firstborn.

When my wife and I first got married, we couldn't wait to have kids because obviously we were insane. We were excited to have kids. We wanted to have kids quickly. And I knew what to expect once we got to the hospital, because I've seen the movies. I knew when the baby came

out he would come out pristine clean and there would be a light from heaven and an underscoring of John Williams' Star Wars music, as if that's a bad thing, Aaron.

And then I knew he would come out and be happy, make sweet, cooing baby noises, grab my finger, and in that moment with perfect pronunciation, he would say the word, "Father".

That is not what happened. Everything was going great until we got to the hospital, then the pain hit my wife and she became somebody that I had not exchanged vows with. I put my hand on her shoulder to try to comfort her, and she looked at me and she said, "Don't touch me right now."

I said, "Okay, Emily Rose, Linda Blair—whatever your name is. We need an old priest and a young priest in here."

The doctor came in and gave her drugs, and she went back to loving God and others at that point. And then the doctor and the nurses came in in what looked like a hazmat getup and a welding mask, and I'm thinking, "Is something going to explode?" I'm the only one who isn't covered.

When my son came into the world, my expression went from this to whoa. Can I put him back? He needs to cook some more. He was a color Crayola had never invented a crayon for. He had gunk on him I had never seen. He didn't make cute baby noises, he sounded like a gremlin when he came out. Did you know the human head can be circular, triangular, and square at the same time?

If you get to know me you'll find out I don't have much of a filter. They wrapped him up in a blanket and gave him to me and said, "What do you think?" My first words about my son were, "He looks like a turtle."

And my daughter looked like this big, red, juicy ladybug. And if you had been there, and some of you have been there in your own circumstances, you know that it is messy.

But something happened in that moment. I don't know where it came from, but I loved my son. And I loved my daughter when she was born. I knew there was nothing they could ever do, no matter how messy they are, to get me to love them less. And trust me, my children have. They've gotten me sick. They have taken money away from me already. I used to look like Zach Efron, and then I had children. I could have been in *The Greatest Showman*.

I'm convinced I'm going to die five years earlier because I have children, but at the same time it's worth it because I love my kids. It doesn't matter what they do, I will never stop loving them. I want to let you know something. That's how God feels about you, and that's how God feels about everybody else you see.

Here's what we do to each other. We end up labeling each other by our messiness, giving each other false definitions that lie. We define other people by their mess, and categorize or marginalize people and push them to the fray.

But when you decide to follow Jesus and come into a relationship with the Father through Jesus, here's what happens, okay? God rips off the labels, looks past the false definitions, he takes us out of the categories and the margins, puts us in his family, and he says: That's my child. You are my child and there is nothing that will ever change that, even your own messiness.

Now, I love that. Right? I love that God loves messy people like me. I just don't understand how God can love people who are messy in ways that I'm not. Right? Have you ever noticed that sometimes you feel like God votes just like you and if you have a problem with someone, God obviously has a problem with them too?

Here is something that is kind of a sobering thought. Some of you already know this, but maybe you don't believe it in your heart. But you know it logically. God loves the people that you don't like. And God loves the people who don't like you. I know that's pushing it, but it's true.

God loves the people who voted for the other candidate. God loves people who are in different relationships than you will ever be. God loves people who have different theological convictions.

Even last week... I thought Pastor Aaron preached a phenomenal message last week. If you missed it, you need to listen to it or watch it on the website. Or you can download the podcast. I'm telling you, you have got to see it.

Here's the deal. No matter where we are on the spectrum, and I just want to acknowledge with the number of people who are watching and listening right now, there are some of you, you are on this side of the conversation when it comes to LGBTQ. Others of you, you are on this other polar opposite side. Some of you are in the middle, and some of you are just confused. We all have different opinions on it. We may not agree with each other's opinion.

But here is the question I want us to tackle today. It's a question that we ask all the time, maybe not in the exact way I'm going to put it, but we think it, maybe we talk to other people about it. Here is the question:

How do we love people well with whom we disagree?

The people we disagree with on matters of politics, relationships, matters of theology, matters of world religion, people who have a different moral compass or operate from a different system of ethics, people who have hurt us, or people who we don't like, how do we love people? They are difficult and messy. They are just messy in different ways. How do we love them?

God loves messy people like us, and messy people who are not like us, both. If we're going to follow Jesus—if you're going to follow Jesus ... This might be a good reason not to follow Jesus because we have got to learn to love people well, no matter what.

So how do we do that? What we're going to do today is turn to the 4th book of the New Testament. We're going to join Jesus in a very pivotal circumstance that he is experiencing in the middle of his ministry. You're going to find it in this 4th book of the New Testament called John.

Now John was a disciple, or a student of Jesus. He followed Jesus around for three years and he saw all the things Jesus did, and heard all the things Jesus said. So near the end of his life, and he was in his 90s at the end of the first century, John ended up writing this account of Jesus' life with the things he heard Jesus say and the things he saw Jesus do so that we would have a first-hand account, an eye witness testimony to what Jesus was up to.

Here is the deal. As we look at this passage, story, narrative, we're going to find hidden within the words of this passages, a principle that's going to help us love other people who are messy in different ways than we are. They may have different theological convictions, vote differently, have jobs we would never want to have and we don't understand why they would work for that company. We're going to learn to love people well with whom we disagree.

So if you have your Bibles or mobile devices, you can turn to John 8. If not, we're going to have the words on the screen behind me in just a moment and I'm going to read them to you.

But in John, chapter 8, beginning in verse 2, here's what it says. "Early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

"'Teacher,' they said to Jesus, 'this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?'"

We're going to stop right here in the beginning of verse 6, but I want to read it because it kind of drives you nuts. "They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him..."

Now, let me just set the scene for you. Jesus is teaching in the Temple courts, which is kind of like a church lobby, and he has his students with him and the ordinary people around him like you and me, who are listening to him.

Then we're introduced to the Pharisees and the teachers of the religious laws. These are like the celebrity pastors of the day. They have the entire Old Testament memorized word-for-word. There were some 6,000 Pharisees and teachers of religious law.

Most of them, not all, but most of them did not like Jesus because Jesus came full of compassion and conviction. They controlled people through legalism and fear. Their following was decreasing, and Jesus' following was increasing.

So they find this woman, don't miss this, they find this woman caught in the act, in the act, of adultery. It's like, "How did they find her?" They are creepers. They take her and drag her through town. They put her in front of Jesus and they say: Hey, in Deuteronomy 22 Moses says, and God speaking through him, that we can stone this woman. What do you say? They are trying to trap him, just like the beginning of verse 6 says.

By the way, Deuteronomy does say that. It's under the Old Testament Law. We're not under the Old Testament Law anymore. It's for a different season when Israel was leaving Egypt. It's a different time, different context.

And they are right. God does say that if you find a man or a woman in an affair, you can take them outside the city gates and stone them. Did you hear what I said? A man and a woman. I'm like, "Where is the dude?" Yeah, he's still not there.

I guess what really makes me mad is that they don't care about her healing. They don't care about her redemption. They don't care about helping her. They don't care about what she's been through. They are using her as much as the man who was having the affair with her was using her in that moment.

I don't know where you are on the spectrum of spirituality but, no matter what, you've got to admit: That is messed up. I don't know what you would do, but Jesus does something awkward. Some of you are like, "Caleb, don't call what Jesus does awkward." I didn't say it was creepy-bad-strange. I'm just saying I bet you've never done it.

Look at the end of verse 6. "Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger." That's awkward. Some of you are laughing because you've read this story for a long time. You've read it a lot because you've been a Christian since God was a boy. That's how long you've been a Christian. You're used to it.

When is the last time you've had an argument with someone and you said, "Hold on," [and stooped down to write in the dust]. Yeah? Probably never, right? Jesus always had intentionality with whatever he did. So people were like, "What is he writing in the dust? What is he writing on the ground?"

Some people think maybe it was verses of Scripture or the sentence of the Pharisees and teachers of the religious laws. But I found this interesting verse all the way back in the Old Testament. This Old Testament prophet or preacher named Jeremiah said something. God was speaking through him, and I think this could maybe clue us in on what Jesus was saying. See if you can make the connection.

In verse 13 it says this, “O LORD, you are the hope of Israel, all who turn away from you will be disgraced. They will be buried in the dust of the earth...” Literally, in the original language that is better read, “They will be written in the dust. They will be written in the ground, in the dirt, in the mud, in the sand.” Why? “...for they have abandoned the LORD, the fountain of living water.

If I was a betting person, I would bet Jesus was writing down the names of the people, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees in the dirt. I think he was making a statement because they thought this woman was too far away from God to receive God’s love because of her affair. Yet Jesus is saying: No, you are further away than she is. You have abandoned God. Even though you have the Old Testament memorized word-for-word, you don’t love people. You have no compassion.

Here me out on this. God doesn’t care how much you know, if you have no compassion to show. God couldn’t give a rip how much of this book you have memorized. You might as well be memorizing Shakespeare or John Grisham, or a Nickelback song. It doesn’t matter to God.

God’s like: No, that’s annoying. Because if you don’t have love to back up what you believe and hear, you don’t believe anything. It is worthless. But they don’t get it. You can kind of tell that they don’t get it, because going back to John, chapter 8, verse 7 it says this. “They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, ‘All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!’ Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.”

Now this is brilliant, because Jesus knows they’re not going to throw a stone. They believed back then, just like I believe and Pastor Aaron believes, and the leadership of this church believes that God is the only sinless being in existence. Every other being has sinned. So if they picked up a rock and threw it, claiming to be sinless and they knew they had sinned, they would be lying. Everybody else would know they were lying. And out of the 613 commands in the Old Testament, God thought lying was a big enough deal to put that one in the top ten. That’s like big time.

But Jesus also knew if they picked up a rock and if they threw it, claiming to be sinless, that was tantamount to claiming to be God. That’s blasphemy. If God is the only sinless being and you’re saying, “I’m sinless too,” you’re claiming to be God. And the very rock that you threw would be thrown right back at you because blasphemy had a death penalty immediately—check mate.

I tell people all the time, “Listen, you may not believe in Jesus yet, but you’ve got to admit he’s got mad skills.” You do not want to get into an argument with Jesus. You can see the result of this, and this is my favorite part of the whole passage. This is great.

Look at verse 9. “When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one,” I love that slipped away—silently walked away, “...beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in

the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, ‘Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?’”

“No, Lord,” she said.

And the last part of verse 11, this is the whole reason we went through this passage, this is the principle of how we can love people who are messy in different ways than we are, people who are in relationships we just would never be in or don’t understand, people who disagree with us on issues that are important—what Jesus says here is going to help us. It is one long sentence in the original language, and here’s what he says in verse 11. “And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I. Go and sin no more.’”

Jesus says, “Neither do I,” grace, “Go and sin no more,” truth. Jesus was full of grace and truth. As a matter of fact John chapter 1, verses 14 and 17 say that Jesus Christ came full of both grace and truth. Now you might think, “Okay, that’s easy for him because he is God. He’s got a corner market on the deal.” Yeah, but Jesus is 100 percent God *and* 100 percent human at the same time. So it’s not any easier for him than it is for us.

I’m willing to bet that you and everybody else you know and everybody else you see, and just all of us, we could all be divided into two groups. There are some of us we are more on the grace side, and some are more on the truth side. Some of us are more about the compassion, others are more about the conviction.

Some of us, our version of God is a cross between Olaf and Buddy the Elf. That’s our view of God. Others of us, our view of God is that strict principal from elementary school and we were just shivering if we went into that principal’s office.

Or, maybe think about it like this. Some of you are like my kids. You pull out Monopoly and you don’t care about the rules. Rules are merely suggestions. You just want to have fun and play the game. Or, you’re like my wife. My wife says, “No, no, no, we’ve got to follow the rules. Rules control the fun. Rules make fun more fun.” I’m like, “Like this conversation we are having right now is fun. Can we please talk more about the rules? I love rules. I love conversations about the rules.”

And I want to make this statement here and use an illustration and a visible prop you can all see. It’s something that, if you’ve been attending for a while, you’ve all seen Pastor Aaron do. Here is a statement, and I’m dead serious on this, if you take sides between grace and truth, you’re safe. You’re going to heaven. See ya there.

Do the rest of us a favor. Don’t ever call yourself a mature Christian, because you’re not. You’re weak. You’re saved, you’re weak though. Because mature Christians don’t take sides. If Jesus Christ came full of grace and truth, what gives you the right to be all about the grace or all about the truth? You don’t get that right, okay?

If you do take sides, it's like holding a rubber band by one end—weak and flimsy and there is no power there. That's what it's like if you say, "I'm all about the grace and no truth," or you say, "It's all about the truth and no grace." It doesn't matter how much you know. You're weak and you're flimsy. You have no power.

So where does the power lie? Well look at this. If I stand for both grace and truth, where does the power lie? The power lies in the tension of the two. And it's this tension that gives us the power. And we run away from it because it is tension and it's uncomfortable.

It takes absolutely no effort on our part to be all about the grace or all about the truth, if that's just what it is, if that's just who we are. It's spiritual laziness. We feel this tension and run away from it. We are like, "Okay, Jesus says this, but my friend is doing this," or "the Bible says this, but I'm struggling over here," or, "Paul says this, my family member is doing this." We feel this tension and we run and we're lazy.

Here's the deal. When you run, you're running away from love because there is a name for this tension, it's love. You see, I believe love is the tension of grace and truth, this uncomfortable tension you feel between grace and truth when you're like, "I love God, but I love this person. I don't know what they think." And, "This person rejected me and just everything and I don't want to stop loving them." You don't have to. You don't have to.

Listen, it takes all the effort in the world, if you're on the grace side, to depend on God and stretch over to the truth. If you're on the truth side, to depend on God to strengthen your faith in him and to stretch over to the grace side so you can love people. You do it by loving God well, no matter where you are.

Love is the tension that you feel between grace and truth, and when you take sides you are compromising your greatest power, because God is found in the uncomfortable. He is not found in your comfort.

By the way, if you don't like what I am saying (just a little footnote) you might want to rethink being a Christian. Seriously. Because you've got tension, if you're a Christian you've got tension all over your theology you just may not know it.

Some of you are like, "No way, Caleb."

So let's do Caleb's rubber band test. How about that. Ready? Here we go. You believe in one God, but the Trinity. Hello? Have you ever tried to explain the Trinity to someone who doesn't understand it? That's fun. Right?

You believe we should love God and love people. You believe God inspired the Bible, but used people to write it. You believe that Jesus is 100 percent God and 100 percent human. You believe that God is in control, but he allows us to make our own decisions and holds us accountable. You believe that death and evil were defeated at the cross and resurrection. It

sure doesn't look like it's destroyed yet. You believe you can be a good preacher and have hair. Come on. Right?

So why do we run away from the tension of grace and truth and not the concept of the Trinity or what we think about Scripture? It's because grace and truth always have to do with our relationships. And any relationship you're in, even the negative ones, even with the people in your neighborhood, even the people who you work with—there is emotional attachment. And when an emotional attachment gets hard, we don't handle it well and a lot of us run, or we avoid, or we overreact, and we go to one side or the other. And we end up not being loving.

So, who is the person you need to live with in grace and truth in your life? Let me tell you about the messy people in my life, who are messy in different ways that I am. It's my mom and my dad. When I was two (they were both professors at the University of Missouri Columbia and some other colleges) they got a divorce and my parents both went into same-sex relationships.

My dad was in several different relationships, and my mom went into a 22 year monogamous, same-sex relationship with a woman named Vera. They moved to Kansas City, they joined the local board of directors for GLAD. I was raised my whole childhood in the LGBTQ community. That's what I grew up in. That was my reality. I was like, "Doesn't everybody have three gay parents?"

My parents took me with them to clubs and bars when I was young, and to campouts and house parties and pride parades. I remember this one pride parade I was marching in. At the end of it there were all of these quote unquote Christians holding up signs saying, "God hates you. Turn or burn."

If that wasn't offensive enough, when people from my mom's parade would try to talk to them, they would get doused with water and urine saying, "This is what Jesus thinks of you." And I was just like, "That can't be right." And even as a kid I looked at my mom and said, "Mom, why are they doing that?"

I'll never forget what my mom said. My mom looked right at me and she said, "Caleb, they are Christians. Christians hate gay people. If you are not like them, they will not like you."

At first I didn't believe it but then after a while I did because I saw this happen again and again. I saw people making fun of my mom and her friends. I saw some of my mom's friends being bashed and beaten up for their relationships. I saw young men in my mom's community—their Christian families wouldn't even come see them when they were dying of aids. Their Christian families would be there but not talk to them.

And they're taking a stand for God.

No, you're being a moron. And you're pushing people away from God, that's what you're doing. And one day you'll answer for that, by the way.

So by the time I got to be 16 years old, when I was a sophomore in high school, I couldn't stand Christians. I was sneaking out at night getting drunk, living it up. And I got invited by a high school friend to go to a high school Bible study he led for high schoolers.

I was like, "This is going to be perfect. I'm going to go and be a ninja Christian. I'm going to be a pretend Christian and learn about their faith and dismantle it." Obviously, that worked out real well, right?

And the reason why it didn't work out is Jesus did not align with the actions and words of his followers on the street corners, or dare I say today on social media. He was not like them, thankfully. Jesus had very deep, biblical beliefs and real expectations of how people who follow him should treat others and live their lives—or what we call the pursuit of holiness. But he also had very personal and authentic relationships with people who were marginalized, people with whom the pastors of his day would have very little to do with.

I love how Pastor Andy Stanley puts it. He says that, "People who were nothing like Jesus liked Jesus. He liked them back. They liked even more." He's like, "I can get on board with him."

I was like, "I know I'm going to have to study what the Bible has to say about intimacy and sex and marriage and relationships." I came to two conclusions I still hold today. The first one is this. I believe God designed sexual intimacy to be expressed in marriage between a man and woman, and anything outside of that is not his intended purpose for sexual intimacy. It's what we would call sin, or falling short.

I also believe this. A theological conviction is never a catalyst to treat someone less. You can have correct theology, but be an absolute heretic in the way that you treat people. Your differences with people should drive you to them, not from them.

You and I need to be very committed to God's Word. We need to trust God's Word instead of society's latest trends. But at the same time we need to be people who say, "Our theology, it drives me to love you more, because you are someone who Jesus died for and God created."

A person's value is not wrapped up in their theology, it's not wrapped up in their opinions, relationships, politics, or their sports team and it's not even wrapped up in family. You have intrinsic value, and so does everybody else because everyone you see is someone God created and Jesus died for. So when we mistreat people we are spitting on the image of God and misappropriating the blood of Jesus.

And I was nervous to tell my parents I was a Christian who wanted to be a pastor who changed his view on what I thought about sexual intimacy. And I had to come out to my three LGBTQ activist parents as a Christian. And they kicked me out of the house.

So when I speak at student conferences I'll have LGBTQ students come up to me and say, "You have no idea. My parents rejected me." And I'm like, "Actually, I know exactly how that feels." And yet the pain and oppression you feel from people never gives you permission to mistreat other people. Because when you do this thing to them, you are just like them and you are adding pain into their lives. And they already have pain that is driving them to act like that.

When I graduated from high school they let me back in, eventually, but I went down to a Bible College in Southern Missouri. That's where I met Aaron. I started preaching at churches. I remember this one church when I was in college I preached at for like 18 months. It was in a town of 50 people. There were 25 of those people in our church. We had half the town won for Christ. We had the largest church per-capita at the time, I think.

So after 18 months I was able to get my mom to come to church with me. She had never heard me preach. I was like, "Come, hear me preach." So she came. I was so excited. People were kind of standoffish, a little bit.

The next Sunday I showed up and my mom wasn't with me, but two elders were standing to meet me on the doorstep. They said, "Caleb, we'd like to talk to you. If you want to continue preaching here, don't you ever bring somebody like your mother here again. We don't like those people."

I said, "I don't like you, so I quit, like now. I quit now."

They were like, "No, we need you to preach."

I was like, "Oh, you don't want that. Not after this conversation." I'm thinking in my head, "If I'm preaching, I'm going out in a blaze of glory and I'm taking everyone down with me." Trust me; you do not want Caleb to preach right now.

They were like, "No, we need a sermon."

I said, "You're going to get one."

And so, I took my sermon I had written on fasting and ripped it up. Who cares about that, right? And I got up there and I'm preaching this sermon on grace, truth, love, mercy, compassion, and conviction.

And I walk out and I'm like, "God, if you give me the chance to be a part of a church, I want to be in a church that is filled with messy, broken people who are questioning their sexuality, who think they have everything together, who have been in five different marriages, who are depressed, people who are in gangs, homeless, addicts, and alcoholics, and people who have been Christians since God was a boy."

Because that is what the church is, people. The church is a beautiful mosaic of messy, broken lives that God unites together to glorify himself. That is what the church is. God is the most glorified when we are broken and realize the need for daily dependence on him no matter what.

Jesus Christ did not die on the cross for a place masquerading as a church but that is really a member only country club where you have to agree with us to be with us. That's not biblical. Go read 1 Corinthians 14 and we'll talk later.

Eventually I ended up graduating, went out to Los Angeles. I worked at a sister church out there for 11 years and got married to my wife, Amy. I told you about her, but what I didn't tell you about her is she is beautiful, she is gorgeous. She's tall, she's tanned, she's toned, she's got a six pack. She goes to the gym every day. She is a kinesiology major.

She is a muy caliente Latina. And in her wildest imagination she had no clue that her knight in shining armor would look like a cross between Fester Gru and Doctor Evil. Laugh all you want. This is her eye candy. This is what she wakes up to every morning, and she is a lucky lady.

But after being on staff at this church for 11 years, I moved to Dallas, Texas to be a senior pastor. And my family obviously came with me.

My mom's partner, Vera, she had died of cancer and unless there was a miracle, she died without Christ. It was devastating to my mom that she had died. They were together 22 years. We had a hard relationship, and it was devastating for me.

I ended up saying, "Let's go down there and let's preach," and then my parents moved down there to Dallas to be closer to my family. Then they started attending my church, even though they knew what I believed. In like two or three weeks in the summer of 2013, before we moved back to southern California, my mom and dad at the ages of 69 and 70 gave their lives to Jesus Christ, both of them.

And I'm thinking, "How's that go together?" I asked my mom and dad. And they said, "Caleb, people treated us like people, not projects. People didn't believe what we believed about this, but they treated us well anyway. They treated us like normal human beings."

So how do we live in this tension? How do we live in the tension of grace and truth, messy grace? I mean, God's grace is perfect but when it hits our messy lives it looks like messy grace. And it feels like messy grace. That's what this tension is. So how do we live in it? I've got to go really quick here, because I'm like over.

Love **is** the tension of grace and truth.

Number one is this: Change your posture—be known for what you're **for**, not against.

I want you to trust God's grace more than society's latest trends, but at the same time you can do that while being known for what you're for, rather than what you are against. When Jesus was in contact with society and unbelievers, he was always known for what he was for. He got mad at the religious leaders, aka people like you and me. He didn't get mad at society.

This woman caught in the affair, I mean were the Pharisees right? Did she sin? Yes, but Jesus was for her redemption, for her reconciliation, for giving her more chances. He was not against her. Hear me out, you can have correct doctrine, but be an absolute heretic by how you treat someone. So how do you stop that?

The second thing you do is this: Don't allow the fear of some to determine the value of many. Don't allow the fear of some to determine the value of many.

You see, what the tension of grace and truth does is creates a bridge. Without it, you have a false dichotomy, which is ruling our society. But with the tension, you have a bridge.

And fear keeps us from loving people well. Fear makes us crazy when it leads us. Fear is a constant companion in life. It's not bad, it's a good thing. If you see a rattlesnake, you should be afraid.

But here is the deal. If you let fear lead you you're going to hurt people. We naturally fear what we don't understand or whatever makes us feel out of control, whether it's a person, a people-group, a circumstance, an idea, or an opinion. When we feel out of control and we don't understand, we become afraid. We start to control things. We start to try to maneuver things or maybe we just back away.

One of my favorite authors, Agatha Christie said, "Fear is incomplete knowledge."

I love my favorite theologian, maybe you've heard of him. His name is Yoda. He says, "Fear is a path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering." Fear will unintentionally give you permission to do horrible things to people and you will justify it, thinking that God is okay with it.

And we've got to be careful how we deal with this because more than anything every single thing you and I deal with in our life is an identity issue. We all have identity issues. We are all defined by something else. And identity issues require us to think deeper about the person, not differently about theology.

I'm not asking you to change your theology. I'm asking you to hold strong to what you believe over here, and to love people no matter what. Okay? Because, nobody is shallow—everybody you see is a conglomeration of their hopes, and their dreams, and their achievements, and their failures, and their experiences, and their upbringing. Nobody is shallow. You need to learn to think deeper about people, not just about theology.

You need to learn to sit down and listen to people. Learn how to ask good questions of people. Find out more about their life. Explore who they are. When you're with them, turn off your phone. Be fully present because, think about it, when you're fully present with someone, you make them feel like they are worth being with.

Here is the last thing I've got to say. I've got to go really quick about this: Embrace the difference between acceptance and agreement.

Pastor Aaron already said this, and I want to reiterate it. Acceptance is commanded, agreement is not, approval is not, and affirmation is not. Acceptance is loving people for who they are, where they are, no matter what.

It's what Jesus talked about in Matthew 5, 38 through 48. He was like: Hey, if somebody strikes you on one side of the cheek, turn to them the other one also.

Here's what Jesus says in Matthew 5:46. "If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much." You're no different.

Paul says the same in Romans 12, 9 through 18, especially verse 18 when Paul says, "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone."

In the next chapter, Romans 13, 8 through 10, Paul continues that thought. He says, "Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law."

We're talking about empathy. Brené Brown says, "Empathy is to feel with another person." Reggie Joiner, the director of Orange says, "Empathy is the ability to put your own thoughts and feelings on pause long enough to think and feel with another person." Empathy is not the surrender of your beliefs, it's not the rejection of a person, it's the acknowledgement of their reality.

That's what empathy is. It is feeling with someone, just like God did when he left heaven to come down here and have a human experience, to die for us, rise for us, leave the Holy Spirit with us, and come back one day for us.

Love is the tension of grace and truth.

And when you make these investments in peoples' lives, you will earn influence. And influence gives your words weight. And you will really be able to make a life difference for someone, someone who is messy, just messy in different ways than you, because God loves messy people.

Let me pray.

Lord, thank you so much for today. Thank you for your Son, Jesus. Thank you for this church that we can have these conversations in. I pray that if we've been hurt by the church at all, I pray that we would realize that even though Christians hurt us, you use Christians to help heal us.

I pray you would help us ask more questions about who your Son is, Jesus. I pray for those of us who are following you, that we would look at our own lives. Who have we rejected? Who are we pushing to the side? Who are we not engaging?

May we love people in the tension of grace and truth, and may we have messy grace for messy people like us. It's in your Son's name we pray. Amen.