
Last week we began this new series of messages we are calling *Rumble Strip*. If you missed it or if you've slept since last weekend, we said rumble strips are a road safety feature to alert inattentive drivers of potential danger, by causing a tactile vibration and audible rumbling transmitted through the wheels into the vehicle interior. Or you could just say bumps on the side of the road.

All of us have probably experienced these. I'm just kind of curious. How many of you, since last week, have just kind of noticed the rumble strips a whole lot more? You're welcome. I noticed them too. And we've all probably had that experience.

Maybe we've been on a long road trip driving through the night and gotten a little drowsy. Maybe we've taken our eyes off the road just for a second when we got distracted. And we've felt the vibration and heard the sound of a rumble strip.

If I'm being honest, at times it can be a little annoying, especially if you are at a high speed and you don't expect it. It can be a little startling. They are not quite fingers-on-the-chalkboard, but getting close. I'm learning to be grateful for rumble strips because there are three primary things they do.

1. They wake you up, alerting you to danger
2. They are still inside the safety zone. A rumble strip wouldn't do us much good if it were all the way to the edge of the pavement or off in ditch somewhere. If that was where the rumble strip was, at that time it is too late. The damage has been done.
3. They assist you to your destination. They are not just there so we avoid a crash, but they help us arrive at the place we need to be.

God has placed these rumble strips in all our lives. They can be found in the principles found in his word, as well as the promptings of his Spirit. I want you to remember that rumble strips are the principles and the promptings.

God has placed these rumble strips in our lives not because he is an ego-maniac, not because he is trying to control you and me or trying to take away our fun. It's the exact opposite. God has placed these rumble strips in our lives for our benefit, to maximize the life we have been given.

At one time Jesus would say this.

"I have come to _____."

Imagine how he might finish that statement. Jesus didn't say this:

"I have come to teach you good morals."

"I have come to make you religious."

"I have come to tell you to go to church."

He didn't say any of that. Jesus said this:

"I have come to GIVE YOU LIFE TO THE FULLEST!"

And I know, especially if you've attended church for any time at all, you've probably heard that. It comes right out of John 10:10. Some of you didn't know that was there. Regardless, can you just let that statement land on you for a minute. That is Jesus saying the reason he came was to give you life to the fullest.

That means he wants you to maximize the life you have been given. God has created you and you are the only you, both past, present, and future. God has gifted you with some things. He has given you the personality he has given you. God says: I've given you this incredible life and I want you to maximize it. I want you to live it to the fullest.

He is for you. But he's laid down these rumble strips so that you can maximize the life you have been given.

This last summer I spent a few days in Germany visiting one of the churches we support. My German friends took me out on the Autobahn, which is like a bucket-list kind of thing for me. If you don't know what the Autobahn is, first of all shame on you. Second of all, it is this stretch of highway that runs through most of Europe. For significant stretches of it there is no speed limit—as God intended.

It is a glorious, glorious thing. We go out on the Autobahn. And I didn't know if I'd ever get the chance to go on the Autobahn. I was hoping that when I did it would be in something exotic like a Porsche 911 or a Lamborghini. But it was a VW Golf. That's what we were in. It wasn't the souped-up one either, just kind of a regular one.

I was actually pretty impressed. We were doing 130 miles per hour. It was awesome. That's one of the first times I can actually stand on this stage and tell you, without guilt, how fast we were going. We were well within the law; it's just that you can go as fast as you want. Stop judging me.

We were driving, going 130 and I'm just having the time of my life. It was so smooth. I turned to my friends and I said, "So are there very many accidents on the Autobahn?" According to the two of them they said, "Not as many as you would think. But when there are, they are pretty bad."

Can I say it this way? God has given you a V12 engine. He wants you to maximize the life you've been given, yet there are hazards on the road. When there is an accident it can be pretty bad. God has laid down these rumble strips, not to take away from your life, but to allow the life you've been given to be fully maximized.

Can I say it like this? God doesn't want you to trade cheap happiness for lasting joy. Many of us are doing that right now. God doesn't want you to experience the pain of damaged relationships. So that's why he gave you some principles for relationships. God doesn't want you to experience the strain of financial stress. That's why he gave you some principles to deal with money. God doesn't want you to trade graceless religion for a gracious relationship that comes in and through Jesus.

You see, the rumble strips are dad looking out for us because he wants us to maximize the life we have been given. And some of us today, maybe we are playing it so safe. We are driving down the road 10 and 2, grandma style. We are creeping along the road like, "Don't crash. Don't crash. Don't crash."

Some of us have pulled off the road altogether. What I want you to hear in this series are the promptings of God to say, "Would you get back out on the road and live the life I died to give you?"

Here is the thing. Regardless of whether you believe anything I'm saying right now or not, regardless of whether you believe in God or you don't, regardless of whether you trust the Bible or you don't that doesn't change the fact that these principles are at work right now in your life and mine.

And nobody plans on wrecking their life. Nobody plans on filing bankruptcy, nobody plans on ruining their health. Nobody plans ever on walking down the aisle and saying, "I love you now, but maybe one day this will end in a really messy divorce." Nobody plans on doing that. The problem is that we don't plan not to.

Establishing rumble strips is how *not* to ruin our lives. They keep us on the path from where we are, to where we want to be.

So last week I just simply laid out this challenge for you, and I'm accepting it for me. When I hear the rumble strip I'm not going to ignore it. I'm going to make the necessary course corrections.

Today I want to talk about the people who are in your car. I want you to think about the people who are in your life right now. I think all of us would agree that what makes a road trip so great isn't just the scenery, the windows rolled down, or the playlist blaring through your speakers. What makes a road trip really great are the people who are in your car.

I want to show you some pictures. This is a 1986 Chrysler LeBaron. This is the very first car I owned as a 16-year-old. I can sense the envy in the room. This is actually way nicer than the one I had. This is a convertible. I had a hardtop and it was kind of like this puke brown color.

It did have a sunroof in it. It wasn't an automatic thing, but a manual. I don't know if they make those anymore. It popped up manually and you could actually take the whole thing out. It weighed like 50 pounds. I would often take it out, put it in the trunk, and then have to put it back in. It was a very strange time.

The person who was riding shotgun with me most of the time when I had this car was a friend of mine named Kyle. Kyle and I had known each other since we were really young. We went to high school together and were college room mates for our freshman year.

Kyle and I had a lot of fun in this car. I remember one day in particular we were on this two-lane country road. There was nobody around for miles. I had my sunroof out. Kyle jumped up on top of my car and sat on the roof with his feet dangling down through the sunroof. I didn't want to miss out on the fun. So, I set the cruise control and jumped up on the roof with him and steered with my feet.

You can go ahead and judge me for that one. I probably deserve it. The frontal lobe hadn't been developed yet, but it was a good time. I'm so thankful that God dropped Kyle into my life. He is still a friend today. We don't get to spend as much time together as we did in those formative years, but God knew I needed him.

I would say one of the things God taught me through my friendship with Kyle is that I need to be the same person up here as I am at home. I don't need to pretend to be someone I am not. Kyle really challenged me to be a man of integrity and character, still does today. And I am so grateful for his influence on my life.

I want to show you another car. This is the second car I drove. This was a 1991 Pontiac Grand Am. This actually is identical to the one I drove, even the color and everything. I was in college at the time I drove this car. Riding shotgun with me most of the time when I had this car was a friend of mine named John. John was hands-down the most intelligent guy I've ever met in my life. John could speak intelligently to any subject.

He wanted to go to school to become a medical doctor. That was his plan all the way up 'til the summer after he graduated high school and God got ahold of his heart and called him into ministry. So, we met at Bible College. John knew more about the Bible than anybody I've ever met. John and I had a lot of fun in this car as well. There were a few Friday nights where we would drag Main Street together.

There would often be a group of fundamentalist Christians on the street corner with signs telling people they were going to hell. It would make John so mad that he would say, "Brockett, pull the car over." And I'm like, "What?"

So, I pulled the car over right in front of them. He rolled down the window and started engaging with them. He got out of the car and went toe-to-toe with them. He would dismantle them and their misuse of Scripture. I would get out of the car eventually too and just kind of walk over there.

I don't know if you know this but there is not a lot going on up here. So, I was just standing there like this. At one point, John would be like, "Aaron, what do you think?" I'm like, "Sounds pretty good, John. I think you've got it covered. Do you want to go get some tacos?" That's about all I could contribute to the interaction.

But I'm really grateful for John's friendship. Here is how God used John's friendship with me. God taught me through John that I need to be a better student of God's Word but I should never let my knowledge of God's Word outpace my love for people.

I know the example I gave makes John seem a little bit abrasive, but he was actually very loving with them. He just would slice their throat, and they didn't know it. John loves people better than anyone I've ever met. And God reinforced that message through my friendship with John.

The next car I drove was a 1995 Honda Civic, the same one they had in the first scene of the *Fast and the Furious*. Mine was nowhere near that nice. I loved this little car. It was probably one of my favorite cars—five speeds, spoiler on the back, and a lot of fun. The person who was riding shotgun with me most of the time I had this car was this beautiful girl by the name of Lindsay.

And Lindsay is my wife. This is when we first met and started dating. We got engaged, and when we got married this was the car we drove. It's very clear she married me for my money. Lindsay and I had a lot of fun in this car. We got to know each other going on dates. We just celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary this past summer. Thank you.

I would say hands down God has used her, her influence and her voice, more than any other human being on the face of the earth. Her voice sounds a whole lot like the Holy Spirit. She has helped me see blind spots. She has made me a better husband, friend, and leader.

I'll say she is the most underrated leader in our church. She's not on staff, she has no official role. In fact, she loves to be behind the scenes. She doesn't want any recognition. I'm probably going to get in trouble for even using this part of the message today, so I'd better move on really quick. I just want you to know there were many times when I could have taken this church past the rumble strips off the cliff. She's the one who kept it on the road. You can thank her.

Here is the last car I'll show you. The next car I had was a 1998 Dodge Intrepid. The person who was riding shotgun with me most of the time when I had this car was a guy

named Ron. I drove this car during my first fulltime ministry. I was 24 years old. I was the lead pastor of a church of about 180 people in a small southern Illinois town. I was in way over my head, I had too much vision for my own good, and I was moving way too fast and was really immature.

Ron just kind of brought me under his wing. He was about twice my age, maybe a little more than that. I remember we would go out and hit golf balls, go to lunch, and then come back and just sit in the driveway in this car for hours and talk. And Ron believed in me. Ron knew how to confront me on some things that left me feeling built up, not torn down.

And God used Ron at a significant time in my life to say, "Hey, Aaron, you need to mature. You need to grow. You need to allow the Holy Spirit to do some work in your heart." I'm so grateful for the work God did through Ron.

So here is what I want you to see today. God will bring people into our lives in various stages and places for specific reasons. Here's what I want you to take with you today. God always uses people to grow people. Like, always. Like, without exception. Like, when God wants to teach me something, he'll bring a person into my life.

It's not that God can't teach me that thing when I'm reading his word or praying or alone. But what he'll do is reinforce it through a person. If he wants to challenge me, he'll bring a person into my life. When he wants to encourage me, he'll bring someone into my life. When he wants me to see a blind spot I can't see on my own, God will bring a person into my life.

And God brings people into our lives sometimes just for a moment, but it's a significant moment. God brings people into our lives for a season. Maybe there is a stretch or a chapter when God has brought a person into your life. God always brings people into our lives for a reason. And then there is a very small group of people outside of family God will bring into your life for a lifetime. He just always will.

FOR A MOMENT

FOR A SEASON

FOR A REASON

FOR A LIFETIME

So, the question that I want you to reflect upon today is simply this one here:

Whom has God placed in my life at the right time for something I needed to GIVE or RECEIVE?

And what makes a great relationship isn't just receiving. And what makes a great relationship isn't just giving. But there are equal amounts of both. Look how Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 puts it.

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken."

Now this is the kind of thing you can read and the lens by which you read it determines its power over your life. What I mean by that is that it's very, very easy to read something like this and to read it through the lens of logic—read it through the lens of information, and say, "I understand what it is saying. Two is better than one, three is better than two. Got it."

It's a different thing to read it through the lens of personal reflection and to say, "Well, am I applying that logic to my life? Am I taking that information and am I allowing it to change the way I live?" That's a totally different question. So, who is it for me? If I fell, who is going to pick me up? Who am I investing in? Who am I standing back-to-back with.

For the sake of memorability could I say it this way?

Who is my "ride-or-die?"

It's a term that means anyone you would ride out any problems with or die trying.

And I mean it in a positive way, not in an abusive, negative way. I mean like somebody who you would say, "I've got your back no matter what. I'll be with you through thick and thin, through the highs and through the lows." Who is that for you?

Maybe right now you can rattle off the names of two or three, maybe it would be five or six. Jesus had 12. And, by the way, they were all pretty flawed, imperfect, messy people who would hurt him. Jesus is the sinless, perfect Son of God, and yet he felt the need to be in relationship with other people. I don't want you to miss that. It's not just what Jesus was trying to give to the disciples, it's also what he needed from them.

The only time we knew Jesus was ever tempted was when he spent 40 days alone. The night before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion he is in the garden and he is in anguish over what's about ready to happen to him. He says to the guys, "Hey, listen, could you just stay awake and keep me company and pray? I don't need your advice. I don't need you to fix it. I certainly don't need you to bail me out—Peter. I just need you to be with me."

And so here is the thing. If Jesus needed a few ride-or-dies in his life, what makes you think you don't? And what makes me think I can handle this all on my own? And yet so many of us have and are right now.

I would say loneliness and that feeling of being alone is just rampant right now in our society and culture. There may be a number of reasons for that I just don't have time to go into. But it's true.

One of the things sin affected first is our relationship connection with God and our relational connection with others. When Adam and Eve sinned, it severed their relational connection. They covered themselves up and they ran off and hid. And it damaged their relational connection to God because God couldn't find them. He said, "Where are you?"

And we've been in that space ever since. Have you noticed? Are you dealing with some relational tension now with people you love and like? It's totally different to have relational tension with someone you don't really care for. But I don't care if it's your very best friend and you're so compatible you would ride a tandem bike on the weekends together, you just complete each other—like Jenny and Forest you're just like peas and carrots, eventually, if you do enough time together, if you live long enough in relationship together you're going to get on each other's nerves.

There's a reason for it. You feel emotionally disconnected from God. Some of you walked in today and you didn't sing a word of what we were singing because you just feel so disconnected.

What will happen is the enemy gets us in this space right here where you are isolated. It's a lonely space to be in. He won't get you to commit some big, bad sin. He's way craftier than that. What he'll do is little by little he will just get you alone. He'll just knock your support system out from underneath you.

It's like playing chess. He'll just single the pieces out until they're alone, and then eventually its checkmate.

You see, I don't think you need to be convinced that you don't have to be physically alone to feel alone. Some of you are sitting here in a crowded room with people. You have a person you are shoulder-to-shoulder with, yet you still feel alone.

You know what it feels like to walk down a crowded hallway at school and feel like you're the only one facing issues. You're the only one dealing with this problem.

Maybe you're lying in bed at night and you're two feet from your spouse, two feet, but it might as well be 1,500 miles away emotionally.

There was a study done at Yale University by a guy by the name of David Levingston. He found six out of ten women say they have a close peer relationship that's marked by

openness and mutual commitment with other ladies. Six out of ten say that. Only one out of ten men claim to have that.

There was a study done at Harvard several years ago involving 7,000 people over nine years. They were looking for the indicators of human flourishing. They took that research and put it into a book by Robert Putnam. It's called *Bullying Alone*. And Robert Putnam makes this statement in that book:

"If you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying over the next year in half."

That's sort of like a startling statement. I took that to our discipleship department and said, "I think we need to change our whole slogan around our Life Groups to: Get in a Group or Die." But it got voted down. It's probably a wise call.

But Putnam did go on to say social isolation is as big of a risk factor for premature death as smoking.

We flourish as human beings when we are rightly connected to God, and rightly connected to other people. You know this to be true. There is power in connection. Is there anyone in your life right now, and all it takes is one simple five-minute interaction? And you walk away from them and you feel like a dried up, squeezed out lemon. They just squeeze the life out of you. You walk away totally dried up, exhausted.

Is there anybody in your life right now where one five minute interaction fills you up, clears your head, puts a spring in your step. And you're like, "I feel so encourage and ready." Why? Because there is power in connection.

There is also power in isolation, but not the good kind. I know that when isolated we are more likely to give into temptation. In isolation we are more likely to be discouraged, disillusioned, and depressed. In isolation we're more likely to be self-absorbed. We're more likely to create and rehearse negative narratives in our mind. We're more likely to spend money foolishly. We're more likely to relapse into destructive habits and addictions.

I know for me personally it is a big, giant red flag when the only voice I've been listening to lately to comfort and console me sounds a whole lot like my own. And I realize that what I'm saying to myself most likely isn't healthy, helpful, or true. And so, when we get isolated that should be a rumble strip because we're in danger.

It's kind of like those nature shows. Have you ever seen them? Where the water buffalo wanders off from the herd and he is off by himself. As soon as the lion sees the water buffalo off from the herd by himself— the water buffalo is bigger than the lion but the lion is like, "I can take him. He is away from the herd. He is the most vulnerable he is going to be. That's when I'm going to attack."

We have an enemy who has been devouring people for centuries. He has gotten really, really good. He is stronger than you, and he is stronger than me. But he is not stronger than us. And that's what God has done. He brings people together into community.

Always in the Bible he would send people out in twos. Why do you think that is? Because he knows that in isolation we are the most vulnerable and weak. Listen, I don't think I'm telling you anything new. I think most of us listening to this understand this. I think you might even agree with it, even if you don't necessarily like it or if you're in the mood to hear it.

Deep, deep down inside underneath all the hurt, underneath all the reservations you're like, "Yes, I know. I know." But there are still reasons and excuses we give for living in isolation. One may just be our own pride. And by pride I don't mean you think you're better than other people, and therefore you don't need community. That's not what I mean.

Pride can sound like this: I don't want to be a bother. I'll figure it out on my own. I'll be okay. That's a form of pride.

Another excuse we give is, "I'm busy," which is maybe the most common one. And we are. That is true. We are so busy, "I just don't know if I will have the margin to fit this in." so we just don't do it. We have good intentions, but we don't do it.

Another is just proximity to good people we trust. We live in a more transient society than ever before, and so maybe you were in community, maybe you did have really, really good relationships but that couple got transferred to California and this person over here, he moved. And this person over here, his marriage fell apart. All of a sudden you found yourself gradually drifting into isolation and you didn't even realize it.

I think another one is just fear. Fear that if they see the real me, they won't like what they see. Fear that if I get vulnerable with others, they'll use it against me. The reason I feel this way is it's happened before and I did have relationships. I trusted that person and shared some things with him, but he turned on me or she abandoned me or he embarrassed me, or belittled me, or judged me. And it felt awful.

Some of you even right now, maybe this last week, maybe you said this to yourself. "I'm done. I'm done. If that's how those people are going to treat me, then no thank you. I'm not going to put myself out there anymore. I'm not going to get vulnerable anymore. I'm not going to invest anymore."

Some of you said, "Besides, faith is a private thing. I can believe in God and follow Jesus on my own. I don't need anybody else." Maybe you thought that. Maybe you believed that. Maybe you are married to a spouse who uses that as an excuse not to come with

you to church, "Faith is a private thing. I don't need other people. I don't need to talk about it."

It's a very common sentiment, especially in the western world. Statistician Ed Stetzer said this:

"Only 21% of believers say they see the need to connect with others to grow in their relationship with Jesus."

When I read that I about fell out of my chair. That's the vast majority of us. What? Seventy-nine percent of us say that we don't need other people to grow. And then he said this:

"65% say they keep their personal struggles to themselves."

And so, we've got a whole lot of people who are in isolation, a whole lot of people who have wandered off thinking that it's okay, thinking this sounds legitimate.

I know some of you might disagree with me right now. Can I just very lovingly, very pastorally say that your faith is a very personal thing, but it was never meant to be private? God always uses people, even the messy ones who hurt people, to grow people.

Some of you may not believe me. I can say, "Don't just take my word for it." Jesus said this in Matthew 28. This was his mission statement to all of us:

"...go and make disciples of all the nations..."

I've just got a question. How do you do that privately? How do you do that all by yourself, just you and God in your prayer closet?

Proverbs 18 says to us this:

"Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment".

We could go to Hebrews 10:25:

"And let us not neglect our meeting together," as apparently 79 percent of us do, *"as some people do, but encourage one another..."*

We could go 1 Corinthians 12:27:

"All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it."

There is an African Proverb that says this:

“Want to go fast? Go alone. Want to go far? Go together.”

And I know there are times when I just want to go fast, so I get by myself. That’s when I get tripped up. And listen. If you’re here today and you’re like, “Man, I’ve been burned before. I’ve been hurt before. Somebody took advantage of me, somebody hurt me.”

Maybe that’s part of the reason you’re at home watching online by yourself right now. Maybe that’s the reason you found a church that’s a little bigger in its atmosphere. So, you can slip in late, leave early, be anonymous, sit in the back, and just say, “I’ll just come in and take the experience, but I don’t want to know anybody.”

And I just want to say to you I get it. I’ve been there. Some of my deepest wounds have come from people in the church. But I still love the church anyway. I’ve seen how God can take those wounds, heal them, bind them up, and use them to shape and form my character.

For what its worth, can I just say, “I’m so sorry?” That really stinks. And in the same breath, can I say, “Don’t give up? Don’t stay on the ground. Don’t isolate yourself from other people.”

Proverbs 18:24 says this:

“One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin,” meaning there is such a thing as unreliable friends, *“but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”* Namely Jesus Christ, but there are others.

Just because you’ve had unreliable friends doesn’t mean all are unreliable. So, don’t isolate yourself. Because one of the greatest lies the enemy will use for many of us is he will say, “You just need to isolate yourself so you can heal,” when in reality you’re cutting yourself off from one of God’s instruments that will bring healing into your life.

Some of you today, maybe you need to take that wisdom and say, “I need to be more selective with the people who are in my car. Right now, I’ve got the wrong people in my car. I want to surround myself with people who are walking in wisdom so I’ll walk in wisdom.”

“Right now, I’m actually listening to the advice of a friend who is giving me ungodly advice. She is speaking out of her own pain, rather than what’s good for me. I need to discern that. It doesn’t mean I don’t love her. It doesn’t mean I’m being harsh with her. But I need to pull the car over and ask her to get out. She is taking a seat somebody else needs to have.” Because, if you want to be wise, you’ve got to walk with the wise.

Galatians 5:7 says this:

“You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth?”

And could I ask you to personalize that one? Is anybody holding you back from following the truth?

Listen, I need friends in my life who will represent grace and truth. I need friends in my life who, when I’m messing up, will not be afraid to get up in my face and say it. But I also need friends who will forgive me easily. I need friends who will be gracious with me, and give me the benefit of the doubt. I need friends who will believe in the best version of me, so I’ll live up to it. I need friends who will laugh with me and cry with me, and you do too.

And if you don’t have that right now in your life, I’m not saying I can fix that for you. I’m not saying I’ve got a program and we’ll sign you up and you’ll have it. But I do say that one of the backbones of this church is not what happens in these rooms on Sunday morning. The backbone of this church is what happens in living rooms, and coffee houses, and vehicles, and conference rooms when people get together in small groups and just get real.

And basically, when you’re getting together with your life group, here is what I want to ask you to do. I’d love to see more than 90 percent of our church in groups—basically, you get together with other real people and you just say, “What is God teaching you, maybe through the messages, life, study? What is God teaching you?” And then, “How are you going to apply it? What are you going to do about it?”

Can I ask you maybe a third question—when? What is God teaching you? How are you going to use it? And when? Can I just love you through that?

Listen, getting into a life group is kind of like a retirement account. If you wait until you need one, you probably are in trouble. So, get into one before you need it.

Growth Track, today that is what it’s about. I just want to encourage you to go to Growth Track at all our campuses. We would love to just help you try to get into a group to meet other people and do life together.

I want to end with this final passage Jesus gives us in the Gospel of John. Jesus is kind of getting everything ready before he goes back to heaven. And he says this to us:

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other.” Well, how? “Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

It’s fascinating he would say it that way. How do we prove that we are God’s disciples? How do we prove he is real? How do we prove that all this is legit? Love each other. Love each other really well. Set the gold standard for love.

It's not in what you know. It's not in how moral you are. He says: Just love each other really, really well. Because that kind of love will cause the world to sit up and take notice.

Here is a sobering question. Are we doing that? Like, if we were just to walk up to somebody on the street who is not a Christ follower and say, "Hey man, what are Christians known for?"

Would they say, "They are known for a lot of things, but the way they love each other is amazing. They are killing it at loving each other?" It just got awkward in the room. Something tells me we're known for a lot of things, but the way we love each other? I don't know if that's right. And maybe we need to do something about that.

What if we could have a community of Christ followers, just imperfect broken, fallen, people like we are, who could be real and authentic? And at the same time, we would cheer each other on toward obedience. We would cheer each other on toward Jesus. We would point each other back to the grace and the truth that can be found through Jesus Christ. What would that be like? That's the kind of community that would literally change the world, and I want to be a part of it. I hope you do too.

So, when God brings people into our lives there is a certain posture we can have. One posture, when God brings people into our lives, is that we can be a little bit guarded and a little bit like, "I've been hurt before in the past, and I don't know if I trust you."

[Three guys come up on stage and Aaron gives each one an individual hug saying:]

It changes the dynamic completely if your posture toward someone can be like this, just open. It's like, "Hey man, it's really nice to meet you. I want to be in your life. Let's get to know each other. Let's just see what God does."

Or to be able to get together with someone and just say, "I want you to know right now that I know you're wrestling in your marriage. I've been there before, and I'm not going to judge you. I'm going to give you the help you need. We're going to get through this together. I'm going to be ride-or-die and we're going to get through this together."

And then to be able to come up to somebody and be like, "Hey man, I want to actually celebrate this victory with you right now. I know you've actually achieved something you've been hoping and praying for a long time. I want to come up to you and say, 'Way to go.' That's just awesome. I know what it took to get there."

[Now Aaron's shirt has blotches of color stains on it]

When you get open with people, I'm telling you, what ends up happening is you look down and you're like, "You left a part of you with me, and I just got a little bit messy."

And some of you are going, “That’s exactly my point.” And I would say there are a couple of ways you can look at this. You can say, “You just messed up my shirt, or you just added a little color to my life. You just marked me.”

Some of these marks are really positive, good marks. Some of them are painful. But God can still use the pain to grow you. The alternative isn’t better. There is no pain, no spot, no nothing, and you are just safe and isolated.

So maybe for some of you today, you may not be ready to go to Growth Track. Maybe you’re not ready to believe all this, but maybe you’re ready to change your posture. And to say, “God, I’ll be open.”

God always uses people to grow people, and I want to encourage you to get back in there because you are loved.

Father, we come to you today and we’re so grateful that you loved us with a sacrificial kind of love knowing that we would take advantage of it. But you loved us anyway.

God, I pray today that those who are here feeling isolated and alone, that we could just be real about that—that when people ask us how we’re doing, we wouldn’t just give the answer that we are expected to give. But we could give the real one.

God, I pray that every person here knows that there is no such thing as the peanut gallery. There is no such thing as people who just come to church to watch and observe, but that we are all a part of the body of Christ and you want to speak through us. You want to speak through every one of us on Sunday morning just as much as you want to speak through the person teaching on stage. And it comes in our interactions with other people, the way we love them, and the way we interact.

God, I pray that people could see Jesus in us. I pray that we would be part of a church that would literally change the world by the way we love each other. God, change our posture that we may be open to the people you’re bringing into our lives, the people passing through our lives, and the people who are staying in our lives.

We ask this in Jesus’ name. And the church says, “Amen.”