

Part 3: Growing Up In the Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Man, for a second there, I thought I was going to have a whole youth-like choir behind me, just like as I preach. That would be a cool thing. I don't know. Maybe we'll try it out one time. Anyways, my name is Jesse Winharver. How are you doing this morning? Doing good? Good to see you. Good to have you with us. If it's your first time with us, man, so glad you're here. If you're a guest, you've been newer with us, so glad you're sticking with us. Man, it's always good just to visit and get to know a church. It's like great to just come for a few Sundays in a row and really get our DNA and our vibe and understand who we are. You just kind of pick it up along the way, so I encourage you to keep coming back. I trust that you guys have been enjoying this new series that we launched into, Following Jesus and what that looks like. We've covered what it means to follow Jesus when you get the gospel, right? Then we gather around the gospel, what we talked about last week, kind of being all in with the body of Christ together. We're going to continue on. If you have a Bible, we're going to be in 2 Corinthians 3, verse 17. If you have your Bible, you could turn there. If not, don't worry. We're going to have scriptures up here that you could read along with.

I want to start by asking us this question. Why are you the way you are? Why is that? Well, we all seek to answer that question. The world has an answer to that question. Some say it's nature, right? Like Lady Gaga, I was born this way. Some say it is nurture or environment. And usually the world uses that to say, hey, because I was born this way or because this environment imposed itself on me, then the way I am is the way I am and don't change me, right? But the Bible has the same view, right? The Bible says, you know what? It's nature and nurture is why the way we are, the way we are. But the Bible says we're actually born with a sinful nature. Our bias isn't towards goodness.

It's towards unrighteousness. It's towards running from God. It's towards being unsubmitted to God and rebellious against him and who he is. It's basically not wanting God to be God. And it's also the environment we grew up and we grew up in a broken world. We grow up in a world where our sin is normalized in our society. And it's not only, it's celebrated, let's say that. And so our environment is putting pressure on us as well to become the way we are, the way we are. Everyone is in a process of spiritual formation from the time that we are born. That is the point. Every thought, every action, every message that comes at us and we think or do, all those things are shaping who we are. All of these things are constantly acting on us in small incremental ways informing us. We are all becoming something. All of us. Either good or bad. Robert Mulholland Jr. in his book, An Invitation to a Journey, puts it this way. Every thought we hold, every decision we make, every action we take, every emotion we allow to shape our behavior, every response we make to the world around us, every relationship we enter into, every reaction we have toward the things that surround us and impinge upon our lives. All of these things, little by little, are shaping us into some kind of being. We are being shaped into either the wholeness of the image of Christ or a horribly destructive caricature of that image. Destructive not only to ourselves but to others for we inflict our brokenness upon them.

This wholeness or destructiveness radically conditions our relationship with God, ourselves, and others. We become either agents of God's healing and liberating grace or carriers of the sickness of this world. Then he goes on to say this, the Christian journey, therefore, is an intentional and continual commitment to a lifelong process of growth towards wholeness in Christ. See, when it comes to spiritual formation, when it comes to who we are becoming like, there is no static state. There is no plateau we hit and we just stay there. It is either improving or it's deteriorating. And when we first get the gospel, when Jesus comes and he saves us and we wake up to the beauty of his grace and his love, and he calls us into his kingdom and we're a part of all that, when we're awakened to that reality, man, that is the start of something. That is the start of a journey. But our

salvation in Christ isn't just that one-off moment. It's not, I prayed a prayer, now, you know what, God, let me be. Let me go on doing my life how I want. Let me have it my way. Jesus, he saves us and he calls us into a journey to follow him. And this was the pattern that he set from the first disciples that he called. What did he say? Follow me and I will make you into...

And that is the journey of following Jesus that we're going to look into today growing up in the gospel. Okay? And we're going to work...we're in 2 Corinthians 3.17. It starts like this. Okay.

[5 : 07] Now the Lord is the Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image Jesus. We're being transformed into the image of Jesus from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. And so what I want to first present to us today, that growing up in the gospel means we are being changed to be more like Jesus. And this idea is called by other terms such as spiritual formation or sanctification, but all of that means the same thing. It's the process of God making us more like himself. But let's ask what that means. What does it mean to become more like Jesus? And leaning again on Mulholland, he says this, spiritual formation growing up in the gospel is a process of being formed in the image of Christ, which is a journey into becoming persons of compassion, persons who forgive, persons who care deeply for others and the world, persons that offer themselves to God to become agents of divine grace in the lives of others in the world. In brief, persons who love and serve as Jesus did. Now, I don't know about you, but I read that and I want to say, man, Lord, make that happen now in my life, right? And I know Haley's praying that for me right now too. Yes, Lord, please make that happen as soon as possible. But here's the thing, guys, that's the rub with growing up in the gospel. That's the rub with spiritual formation. It isn't you transforming yourself into the image of God. It's you being transformed, right? It is something that is done to you. It's done to me, which means, drum roll, we aren't in control of the process, which is a bummer, right? And so often we get that part wrong because our bias is toward wanting to be in control, right? We want to be in control of what we are being changed into. We want to be in control of the pace that change happens, and we want to be in control of how it happens.

But being transformed, like this passage says, takes that out of our hands, and it puts it in the power and the authority and the wisdom and the goodness of God. It gives it to him, and it trusts him, and it says, no, he does it.

Like it says at the end of verse 18, this comes, all of this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit, the Spirit, all wise, who knows everything about us. He knows more about what's in our hearts than we do. We think we know ourselves. Guess what? Man, the older I grow and mature in Christ, the more I realize there's a lot about myself that I don't know. There is new things I'm discovering all the time, and guess what? They're often not good things, right? I'm learning new things about myself, and so the Spirit knows more about us than we do, which is why he doesn't change us all at once, which is why he doesn't show us all our sins at the same time, because if we did that, we'd be like, oh my goodness, there is no hope for me, right? What does he do? Man, it says he changes us from one degree of glory to another. Oh, God is changing us at his speed, not ours. Man, the foolishness of Jesse, my lack of wisdom would not do this right. It wouldn't do it at a pace I can handle. It wouldn't do it at a rate I can handle. Gospel growth is more like a crock pot than a microwave. Think about that.

Okay? I love crock pots, right? When they finally finish. They're great. They just take a long time, but, and you walk by it, and you see it, and you're just looking at it, and you're just like, man, it doesn't look like anything is happening. It's the second hour. Is this thing broken? You're getting a little nervous, but then eventually, what starts to happen? You start to pick up this faint fragrance in the air, this wonderful smell, and it just grows stronger and stronger until it's finished, and then you start to, at that point, when you first start smelling it, then you start to feel confidence that something is happening. Thank goodness. And this is the normal of what it looks like of growing up in the gospel.

It is slow and steady change. And this is hard for us because our culture has disciplined us into this ingrained desire for instant gratification. When we want something, we want it fast, and we want it easy, right? Okay? Tinder has made relationships and hooking up fast and easy.

[9 : 41] Credit cards makes buying stuff fast and easy. Gone are the days when you had to save up to actually purchase something. You can get it now. Fast food, it makes satisfying our cravings fast and easy.

Facebook, Instagram has made friendship, the idea of friendship, fast and easy. See, the things that used to take time and investment have been turned into shallow, valueless commodities that are quick and convenient to get.

Our culture disciplines us into that. And we have to realize that we can bring this mindset, we often bring this mindset into following Jesus. We want fast and easy Christianity. We want Christian growth. We want gospel growth to be more like microwave than crockpot. God, fix my problem now. God, make me a better person and make me snappy. Actually, more often, it's like, God, can you change that other person and hurry up about it, right? They're ruining my day. They're ruining my life. But God knows, God knows that it is going to make us less like Jesus, not more like Jesus, if we have this constant fast and easy Christianity and transformation, right? Have you known one pleasant person who always got what they wanted when they wanted?

Exactly. God's slow and steady work, what it does, it does two things in us. One, we grow in grace and mercy and patience for ourselves, but we also grow in grace and mercy and patience for others. We realize, you know, we're all on this journey together and this thing ain't happening overnight. As you grow in the gospel, you learn to trust in God's timing and measure for every new degree of glory that he brings you and others into, right? That is what growing up in the gospel looks like. Now, while God's timing will always be a mystery, the means by which he changes us is not.

That is not a mystery. And this is the part where we actually have to do something. And it says this, what do we do? With unveiled faces, nothing covering us, beholding the glory of God, beholding the glory of the Lord, beholding the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's what we are called to do.

[12:07] We can't force anything else, we just do that. We present ourselves, we bring ourselves to the place where we can behold his glory. To become more like Jesus, we have to seek him with the intent to behold his glory. Now, that's what it is, beholding his glory. It's this call to action.

Growing up in the gospel does require intentional effort of you and me creating space so that we can do this. Like coming on a Sunday right now, you've created space in your calendar. You could probably do a lot of other things with these couple of hours in your day, but you've decided, you know what, it is important for me to come and with God's people and with my community to come together and behold his glory. That's what this is all about. Here's the thing, guys. We think Satan uses different schemes to get us off track. If Satan has a primary scheme to slow God's kingdom advancing, it is to make Christians so busy that they can't engage in what the old church fathers called the means of grace or what we call them today, the spiritual disciplines. See, we often relegate Satan's efforts to being behind our suffering and our problems. And to a degree, that is true. But in our suffering and our pain and our trial, man, God even uses those. In fact, if we allow him, it's some of the best, deepest, lasting work that he does during those times to make us more like Jesus.

And when you study the pillars of your faith, you'll find a lot of those guys, they endured seasons, long seasons of trial while God did deep, amazing stuff in them. But if Satan can tempt a Christian to fill their calendar with all kinds of legitimate distractions that pull them away from ever beholding God's glory, guess what? He's going to take that all day long.

Satan and society and our own sinful nature pull at us to fill our life with the noise of constant busyness. The pressure that is put on us to perform to standards of success in our careers or as parents or as friends or in educating ourselves, whatever it may be, man, it's an impossible pressure where it fills up our calendar. Or there's pressure that, man, there's things that the world says it pulls at us, the vanities of entertainment and hobbies and the various pursuits of pleasure. I mean, we are so busy running in different directions, we can't stop and take a moment to turn down the noise and behold the glory of God. And that is why we want Christianity to be fast and easy because we ain't got time for that. That's unfortunate. So what do we do? We chase after convenience and sensationalism. Man, get me to the worship concert or get me to the deliverance room or like let me call into the television evangelist to grab my healing or whatever it may be. But get me somewhere where I can experience God fast and easy.

Where it can make a difference in my life fast and easy. How can I, this is the question I think we have to avoid in following Jesus, man, we can get into this mindset of how can I get the most of God in the least amount of time? But we've lost the value of pushing pause and slowing down to behold. In fast, easy Christianity, our vision of God is like a photo you take out of the window of your car at

60 miles per hour, right?

[15 : 46] You look at it and you're just like, oh, it's all blurry. You don't quite know what you're looking at there. But when we stop and behold him, when we push pause and we slow down, it allows time for our soul and the eyes of our hearts to focus on him and really see him and behold him and behold his glory for who he is. Now let me get practical here. It says in this passage with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord. Now it is talking about the privilege we have as Christians that we live in.

God's glory isn't hidden from us like it was in the old covenant, in the old Testament. The veil was torn in two when Christ died. The more literal translation of that phrase, beholding the glory of the Lord. And the verse is this, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, which is an interesting thought, right? So we're beholding some reflection of the glory of the Lord. We see God's glory in some kind of reflection. So what are the mirrors reflecting God's glory? Let's ask ourselves that. Well, it is very clear from the context of this passage that actually what he's talking about is the gospel. Seeing Jesus in God's word, seeing Jesus in all of scripture. See, I can behold my wife's beauty in the reflection of a mirror and it doesn't cheapen or lessen her beauty.

And when we see the glory of the Lord, as we look into the mirror called the Bible, and it's the Holy Spirit who enables that, he turns that book into a glory mirror, okay?

Now, let me help you out with this. Just kind of talk about like learning this and what I do. You can take it or leave it, but I go through this little ritual before I open my Bible to read. It helps me to remember who and what I'm looking for in the pages. So I place my Bible in front of me and I open it up and I close my eyes. I typically have my hand over it for whatever reason. I don't know. I just do that. But that's not the important part. But I began with this simple prayer.

Holy Spirit, just like you hovered over the empty void at creation and God began speaking and you took those words and you give them form and shape and you made them alive and you brought forth living things out of that. Do that right now. Do that right now. Let me see the glory of Jesus in these pages. Make the words on these pages come to me. Bring them into my heart and give them form and shape and life. And guess what? He does that. The Holy Spirit does that. When you read the Bible, we don't come all by ourselves. We have to realize, man, we need the Holy Spirit to help it make sense to us. In 1 Corinthians, Paul talks about, man, our minds, our carnal minds, they can't understand, they can't perceive the deep mysteries of the gospel. But he says, guess what? Because of the Holy Spirit, those things have been revealed to us. We now have the mind of Christ. We can look into it and we can see it. And it becomes alive to us and becomes real to us and it becomes amazing.

[18 : 36] So it only makes sense when we approach God at his word. We say, Holy Spirit, man, come. I need your help. Come. Please, please, by your grace and mercy, come and show me Jesus in this passage that I'm reading. Make it alive to me. And this is very different. This is very different to kind of jumping into Bible study. I start out my day with the intention to behold God's glory. Now, I'm not suggesting that Bible study is bad. I studied the Bible all the time. The inductive study method, it was a great tool I learned. Man, it's a great tool to have in your arsenal. But I have to be honest, that was the only tool I had for years when I began following Jesus. And then something started to happen. In Ruth Haley Barton's book, *Sacred Rhythms*, she expresses much better exactly what I was experiencing. She says this, slowly but surely, the scriptures were becoming a place of human striving and intellectual hard work. Somehow I had fallen into a pattern of using the scriptures as a tool to accomplish utilitarian purposes rather than experiencing them primarily as a place of intimacy with God for my own soul's sake. And somewhere along the way, I got tired.

Very tired. She's reading my mail right now. When I was alone with the scriptures, they began to feel lifeless and boring and obligatory. The real surprise was not that this happened, but the fact that the shift was so subtle. After all, the purposes for which I was using the scriptures were not bad in and of themselves. It's just that over time, without my awareness, those purposes had trumped the greater purpose for which the scriptures had been given, to allow my own heart and soul to be penetrated by an intimate word from God. My mind remained engaged, but my heart and soul had drifted far away. I was there for years, and I was a pastor. I thought something was wrong with me. I was like, man, Lord, the joy of being in your word, it is totally gone. It just feels dry. It feels empty. It's what's going on. Then by God's grace, a man named Ted Sin, no joke, all right, came into my life and taught me another way to read the Bible.

Instead of reading for information, you read for relationship and intimacy with God. He introduced me to the age-old method of spiritual reading. Here, we refer to it as community Bible reading. You probably heard us talk about it from time to time, but instead of coming over the Bible to study and dissect it, you come under it and surrender to let it dissect you. Instead of coming over it to shine a wide on it to see what it says, you come under it to let it shine a light in your heart. And in August of 2015, I committed myself to trying this method for three weeks and six days in, while I was reading the song of Solomon, the game changed for me. It hit me, and God did something in my heart. He showed me something, and I've been doing it ever since. I realized God's word was reading me. It was challenging my faulty thought patterns. It was showing me some of the unhealthy trust structures I'd built and had been leaning on instead of God. It exposed my insecurities. And all of this going on while God was showing how much he loved me and how deep his love was for me. What was happening was this reading for relationship wasn't stopping at my head. It was moving into my heart. And here's the difference.

When we read scripture for relationship, we pay attention to our own inner dynamics and allow a response to take place in the deeper levels of our beings. We are open to a whole different set of questions. Questions that help us to risk greater levels of truth-telling with ourselves and with God. Okay? You become more honest with God and with yourself. In addition to asking, what does it say? What does it mean? How do I apply it to my life? All questions that promote primarily cognitive activity and allow us to remain firmly in control of the whole experience.

[22 : 40] We might ask, how do I feel about what is being said? Where do I find myself resonating deeply? Where do I find myself resisting and pulling back and wrestling with what scripture might be saying?

Why do I feel this way? What aspect of my life or my inner being is being touched or spoken to through this scripture? And then what do my reactions tell me about myself, my attitudes, my relating patterns, my perspectives, my behaviors? Am I willing to look at that in God's presence? Here's the thing. Growing up in the gospel isn't about how much you can know about scripture and quote scripture. I'm not saying we shouldn't do that. Man, knowing scripture is good. But, man, we have to realize that we can use the scriptures for the wrong reasons. The Pharisees knew all about the scriptures. They knew it better than anyone else. They had it memorized. And they still rejected him and put him on the cross. Growing up in the gospel is about seeing Jesus as the hero in every story.

It is about seeing ourselves not as the hero but as the failure in every story. When we read about the prodigal son, we read ourselves into that. I'm both the son who left and ran away and the older son who stayed. I'm both the leper who returned to give thanks for being healed and the nine who walked away and didn't. But in all these stories, what stirs my heart is the reality that Jesus saved me and healed me and I'm accepted because of what he did. It stirs me to give more grace to others, more and more and more. And what I love about spiritual reading or CBR is that it always lands you in prayer. It always does. You always respond to what you read in prayer. And when we look at Jesus's life, it is filled with prayer. He lived a life of prayer. Verse 15 of Luke chapter 5, it says, but now even more the report about him went abroad and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed by their infirmities. What does he do? But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray. It didn't matter what was going on, the demands and expectations of the crowds, the apparent needs all around him. What would Jesus do? He'd go away, turn down the noise. He'd go to a quiet, solitary place to be with his father in heaven. What Pete Scazzaro calls cultivating loving union. Jesus was a prayer and followers of Jesus are meant to be as well. If we are being conformed into the image of Christ, we look at him and we say, as Thomas A. Kempis said, man, the imitation of Christ is what we're called into, that life.

[25 : 35] And we need to do that. We need to grow as prayers and people that practice it and love it and enjoy it. And prayer does many things. It disciplines us in various ways. It is an act of surrender and an admission of dependence on God to provide for all our spiritual and natural needs. But we must not miss that the very act of prayer is an act of faith. When you pray, pray out loud. You are praying to a God you can't see. You are stepping into an act of faith and saying, God, in this moment, I believe that you are real, real enough to speak to you, even though there's no one right in front of me.

But even so, Jesus taught us that prayer, even though we can't see God when we pray, Jesus taught that prayer is an intentional way to turn our hearts to look up and behold God's glory.

We walk by faith, not by sight. Jesus always invited people to tell him their needs, and he still does today. But when he taught his disciples to pray, he didn't teach them to start with their needs. First, he tells them to start by praying and asking to behold God's glory. Our Father in heaven, we look up, our Father in heaven. Yes, there you are. Man, you're the Father who redeemed me. I can call you Father because of what you did, because you sent your Son, Jesus Christ.

This is an amazing privilege that I get to do this. And it says, hallowed be your name. That is a request to behold God's glory. That is a request to behold him and to grow in God's glory, and that also his glory would be spilled out over all the earth. We don't start with us, we start with him. Now, I have to confess this. I am not a natural prayer. I am not a natural prayer, like some of you that can pray the pain off the walls, man. So I am super jealous. If that's you, man, we need you praying, and go for it. I love you. But that is definitely not me. But I realized along the way in following Jesus that prayer was just too important to use that as an excuse. I'm just not good at it. I'd rather read the Bible rather than stoning the Bible. I'm all in over here. You cool with that, Jesus? But I realized more and more and more, it's like, no, no, no. Prayer is so important. It's too important. So what I did is I sought out help. And in my research, I discovered, yet again, an age-old prayer practice called the Divine Hours. Weird name, but really helpful, okay? Sounds like way too spiritual. But what that is, it is scripture-fed prayers that lead you to behold God's glory. And these prayers are written down in books. It has prayers for every day of the year. And if you're game, they have prayers for the morning and the noon and the evening, if you want to do that. The one that I use a lot and I really like is, I've been using it now for more than two years, actually. And I just want to present it to you. If you struggle with prayer, this is a great thing to get and just practice using. But it is a book of divine prayers kind of cobbled together and put in a book by another weird name, Phyllis Tickle, okay? No joke. This is the Sermon of Strange Names, right? So that's what those books look like. You can find them on Amazon. What I like to do is I put them on my Kindle cloud reader so that I always have them in my phone or my iPad. So everywhere I go, if I have a chance to pray, I can stop and I can pray. That's what I do, which brings me to a couple of lessons that I've learned along the way as I've followed Jesus in this journey of prayer. The first is that the more I practice prayer, the more comfortable I become sitting in silence and just waiting on and listening to God.

That's an amazing thing. Because when I first started praying, I feel like I have to be verbose and just continually talking, talking, talking. And then when I stop, it's like, oh, I stopped. It must be over. And now I'm just like, you know what? I enjoy just talking a little, sitting in silence, listening to God. I do pray to him, but there is something about that sitting quietly that starts to turn down the noise in my head and in my soul and in my heart. I don't feel the pressure to speak.

[29 : 44] I don't feel the need to speak, which is often a form of control in prayer that we have to learn to let go of. And so I just, learning more and more just to sit in silent surrender, just listening, yielding control of that time to God. The second thing that I've learned is that I need reminders to stop and pray, okay? I have alarms on my phone for 8 a.m., 12 p.m., and 4.15 p.m.

Let's say, Jess, now it's time to stop. Spend some time praying, okay? Now, I have a job that it allows me to stop and do that. It's a lot more convenient. I can stop and I can spend some time. And I realize that, man, many of you live in jobs where it would be really impossible to just pull away at any moment. But, you know what? Man, start your day out with some prayer. And the prayers doesn't have to be long. You can set, man, if you're, you know you're going to be driving in a car somewhere, you can just think about, okay, cool, you know what? I could do just a moment of praying during that time.

And that's what happens. So, and at least in those moments, even if it's short, at least what I do is pray the Lord's Prayer, which is a simple pattern to follow and whatever else God puts in my heart. But the final thing I want to share that I've learned is that lunchtime, that by lunchtime, by lunchtime in my own life, I've usually totally forgotten about God and His presence and active work in and around me. Praying for however long in that moment helps me to stop, turn the noise back down, and get re-centered in His presence, in His will, in His glory, and in His purpose. It doesn't even have to take a long time. It could be five minutes.

And then I'm rejuvenated. I'm like, oh yes, God, man, I'm re-centered back in you and reminded what this is all about. And I'm excited. Let me just say, as a pastor, thinking about, you know, we're a church that, you know, we said, hey, we don't want to be a church that prays, we want to be a praying church. And I'm really excited about what God is doing and how He's stirring us toward

prayer and becoming more of that praying church. And more of you are catching this, and it's really exciting to see. But that is the fruit of growing up in the gospel. We start to desire God's glory above all things for ourselves and for others. See, the more we behold God's glory, the more we want to share it with others. That's what happens. The more we behold Him, the more we're just like, oh my goodness, this is too good to keep to myself. And that is what we're going to tackle next Sunday and our final sermon on the series is going out with the gospel. And it's going to be a good time if I could have the band come up. I want us to, I want to invite us, actually, Jesus is inviting us to respond to His glory in two ways. We're going to come up to the tables right now, and one way we respond is with giving. And we're reminded that, hey, we don't give to people, we don't give to organizations. We give to God. We give to God in response to who He is and to advance His kingdom down here on earth. And if you are a guest, I just want to let you know there is no pressure to give.

[32 : 56] It is an invitation, it is an opportunity, it is a privilege for those of us who call One Harbor Home. And giving buckets are located at each communion table around the room, and also there's opportunities to give through the website and the app. And the second thing that I want to focus in on is, the second invitation is communion, right? That's the second invitation Jesus is inviting us to. We stop and remember that Jesus died for our sins. We get to behold His glory because of that, because He made a way through His sacrifice. We come to the table, and we take the cup and the bread, His body that was broken, His blood that was shed, we come with thankful hearts. And if you're here, and you're not a Christian, we are so glad you're here. And we want to let you know, this, like, this is a sermon where, like, man, you grow in Christ, but your first step is to get the gospel.

Your first step is surrender. And it's not even coming to communion. It's actually surrendering to Jesus as Lord and Savior. Maybe you've seen His today. Maybe you've seen that. And there is a response required of you. It says, repent and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. And if that's you, I want to encourage you to pray this simple prayer. Jesus, I'm a sinner, but you're a great Savior. Have mercy on me and save me from my sins. Man, and if you end up praying that prayer, by faith, we believe that Jesus saves you. And then we invite you to come and take your first communion, your first real communion. Man, we would love that. We would celebrate that with you. And we would love to let you, we would love for you to let us know that that happened to you, right? Okay, let's pray.

Lord, we thank you. We thank you for what you do in our lives. We thank you that you come, you save us, you pursue us, and you call us out of darkness into your marvelous light. You cleanse us from our sins and they're remembered no more. And then you call us into this amazing journey. You take off the old self and you made us a new creation. And this, this new self, who we are, you call us to become that more and more and more. And I thank you, Lord God, that we're not becoming anything else but like you, Jesus Christ. I, I, I'm so thankful for that. And I pray that by your grace and by your power that, man, you would grow in us a desire to do some of these things, that putting ourselves in a place where we can really behold your glory. And I pray that we would, man, I pray that you would challenge us to look at our calendars. And if there's no space right now, we would consider what we need to cut so that we could put in space to turn down the noise and to behold you. Amen.