

Change Your Thoughts, Change Your World

by Bayless Conley

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Well, I have a word to share with you from Isaiah 55. I would like you to please find that chapter.

All right. I have been loving this series we've been on out of the book of Isaiah, and I sort of landed on this chapter and just felt really strongly impressed that I needed to talk to you about it. In Isaiah 55:1, it says,

¹ "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

That first word, *Ho*, another version says, "Hey there." It's an exclamation to get someone's attention. Like, "Hey, I need your attention because what I'm about to say is really, really important." And the next word he says, "Ho, everyone," what I'm about to say is for everyone. It's for everyone that's thirsty. And then he said, "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters." To me, that actually sounds a lot like Jesus. In fact, He made reference to this verse as He said these words, and I read to you from John 7:37,

³⁷ On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. ³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." ³⁹ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Well, Jesus has been glorified, and the Spirit has been given. So, this verse is actually talking about coming to Jesus to experience the work of the Holy Spirit. And what He gives cannot be purchased. It cannot be earned. It is a gift. "Come, buy wine. Come, buy milk without money and without price." Wine and milk are emblematic of blessing and abundance, but they also have a direct reference to the Word of God.

Consider this, Psalm 104:15, it says, "Wine makes glad the heart of man." Psalm 19:8 says, "The statutes of the Lord make glad the heart of man." Wine is a type of the Word of God, and we certainly know milk is. The Scripture says in 1 Peter 2:2, "Desire or come for the pure milk of the Word of God that you can grow thereby." In 1 Corinthians, as well as the book of Hebrews, *milk* is used as a metaphor for the Word of God.

So this is an invitation to come and have the Holy Spirit reveal the Word to us. And notice the invitation in this one verse is given three times, "Everyone who thirsts, come, you have no money, come, yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Isaiah 55:2,

² Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.

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This is food and drink for the soul. It's talking about spiritual food here, the Holy Spirit making the Word of God real to our hearts. And then the first part of Isaiah 55:3,

³ Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live;

I want you to think about what the Lord has done so far. He said, "Come, come, come, listen carefully, incline your ear, come, hear, and your soul shall live because it has been nourished from the words that the Holy Spirit has spoken." The second part of verse 3,

³ And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.

Now, according to Acts 13:34, that has a direct reference to the victory that Christ won through His resurrection. In fact, that same Scripture is quoted there. So, it's talking about the work of Christ. It's talking about salvation. In fact, the next two verses speak of Christ and the salvation that He brought to the world.

I want you to follow me, this whole chapter deals with coming to Him to receive the initial grace of salvation, but it also applies to every facet of grace contained in salvation, be that forgiveness, healing, peace, strength, guidance, comfort, whatever it might be.

We come to verse 6, it says,

⁶ Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.

Again, consider this. He says, "Come, listen, incline your ear, hear, seek." When we come, we should expect the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts and reveal the word to us, which brings salvation, and then all of its benefits. But, when we come to Him, listening, inclining our ear, when we come thirsty because we want to hear this word, we also must, everybody say, 'must,' if we're going to experience the grace of salvation, all the benefits of salvation, we must, as well as come thirsty and come listening and come willing to hear; we must also leave something outside. It's not negotiable. Verse 7, here it is,

⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. ⁸ "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.

All right. He says, "Look, come." It's an invitation to His presence. The Holy Spirit is going to reveal the truth of salvation. But if you're going to receive it, if you're going to receive what Christ has come to provide, yes, you have to be hungry, you have to be willing to hear, but you've got to be willing to abandon your ways of doing things, and your thoughts, because His thoughts, they're not our thoughts, His ways, they're not our ways.

And notice He said, "Abandon your ways and abandon your thoughts, and the Lord will have mercy."

I'm going to make a statement you need to listen to. One wrong thought that is clung to, one wrong thought that a person refuses to abandon, can keep the mercy of God from touching them. One wrong thought can keep God's mercy from touching us.

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Think about what He said, “Let the wicked forsake his way, the unrighteous man, his thoughts, let him return to the Lord, and then He will have mercy. Then the mercy of God can reach them.”

Consider this, what if a person has this thought, refuses to let go of it, and I’ve heard many people say this, that you have to earn your salvation. It cannot be as easy as just receiving and putting your trust in Christ. That’s just too easy. No. It’s like there’s this giant scale, and on one side are all my good deeds; on the other side, all my bad deeds. And at the end of my life, if my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, then I get into heaven. A lot of people believe something akin to that. But if you hang onto that thought, you can never receive the mercy of salvation. You’ll never experience the grace, the free gift that Jesus comes to offer. That one wrong thought can keep you from it.

In fact, Paul wrote about the Jewish people, his brethren. He said this was their very problem. Romans 10:1–2, he says,

¹ Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

(He said that is not according to God’s knowledge.)

³ For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

You see, they had their own thoughts and their own way of going about it. They thought salvation came by works, by keeping the law, and because they wouldn’t forsake their way and their thoughts, it separated them from the mercy of God’s salvation.

You can even be zealous about a thought, but just because you are zealous, that doesn’t mean you’re right. They were zealous about what they believed. You see, wrong thinking leads to wrong believing that leads to wrong acting.

Paul is basically saying, “Hey, they had their own way, their own thoughts, they wouldn’t abandon it. And my heart’s desire is they be saved, but they’ve got to be willing to let go of that thought first and embrace God’s thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:9, the Lord says,

⁹ “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

So does that just leave us outside in the cold? No. Remember, the whole theme of this chapter is to come and to listen, and the Holy Spirit will speak to you. The Holy Spirit will give you God’s thoughts.

So, He gives us an analogy of what will happen when we come thirsty and willing to listen, and willing to let go of our way of thinking and our way of doing things. The Holy Spirit will give us God’s thoughts and God’s ways. He says, in verse 10, using a metaphor,

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¹⁰ “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, But water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10–11)

“So shall my word be.” It won’t be void of power, but it will accomplish, and it will prosper in bringing salvation, healing, deliverance, and restoration. It’ll prosper in bringing strength and peace and guidance and comfort and favor and abundant supply and prosperity and protection. It will prosper in uprooting the bad and planting the good.

Verse 12,

¹² “For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

All right. Go out with joy from where? Be led out with peace, from where? Well, think about what He said. He said, “Look, leave your thoughts, leave your ways outside and come to Me. I have thoughts that are higher than your thoughts. I have ways that are higher than your ways. And if you will listen to Me and embrace My Word, you will go out from My presence with joy. You’ll be led out of My presence with peace.

So shall My word be.” He says. Do you want to know what God thinks? This is a Book of God’s thoughts.

Do you want to know what I think? Listen to me talk. My words are a revelation of my thoughts. God’s Word is a revelation of His thoughts. And the Holy Spirit will make God’s thoughts real to us. And when we abandon our thoughts and embrace His thoughts, we go out with joy. We go out with peace. And the final verse there, verse 13, this is the result,

¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Another version says it will be a permanent reminder of His goodness and power.

Now, “instead of the thorn,” “instead of the brier.” Thorns and briars are a type of the curse. They are a type of what’s gone wrong. In the book of Genesis, when Adam sinned, God said, “All right. Now, the earth is cursed for your sake, and it’ll bring forth thorns and briars.” The first thing that the curse did, when the devil gained entrance into the scene of humanity, the first sign was thorns and briars. But God says, “Now, you’ve abandoned your way of thinking. You’ve abandoned your ways, and you’ve come listening to Me. You’ve embraced My words. So, instead of the curse, you’re going to have the cypress and the myrtle.” Emblematic for stability and prosperity, and safety and blessing.

I know some of you here; you’re tired of thorns and briars in your life. Can anybody say amen to that? I’m tired of thorns and briars in my marriage. I’m tired of thorns and briars in my business. I’m tired of thorns and briars in my family. I’m tired of thorns and briars in my health. I’m tired of thorns and briars in my relationship. I want blessing. I want what God has instead of that. Is everybody with me so far?

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All right. I said everything to bring us to this point. I want to share with you four thoughts that you must forsake before you can embrace God's thoughts—understanding that when you embrace His thoughts, it will put you on a pathway of fruitfulness, freedom, and breakthrough. All right. These are four thoughts you have to get rid of. Four thoughts you've got to leave outside before you can embrace His thoughts and His ways.

Thought number one: that you are stuck, stuck in your present circumstance, stuck in your present situation with no way out. I know there are some people here; you're just practically on the verge of giving up. "Things are never going to change. I'm stuck. Saved, sanctified, and stuck.

I'm stuck. It's always been this way. It was this way for my family. It's this way for me. It's never going to change. I'm stuck." You've got to be willing to get rid of that thought if you're going to embrace God's thoughts. And when you embrace His thoughts, my friend, His mercy can touch you.

Somebody says, "What's God's thoughts?" Remember, this Book is a revelation of His thoughts. Let me read it to you. First Corinthians 10:13 (NET),

¹³ No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it.

With the trial—everybody say, "With." With the trial, at the same time the trial is going on, God provides a way out.

Turn around, tell your neighbor, just tell your neighbor, "You have a way out." There's a way out. There's a way out. There's a way out. You're not stuck. There's a way out. There's a way out. There is a way out.

I kept an article for many years. A guy that was driving down this road—it goes between Klamath Falls, Oregon, and Ashland, Oregon. I drove the road many, many times back in the '70s when I lived in the area. They've changed the name of it, but it used to be called Dead Indian Road.

And I actually got stuck in the snow on Dead Indian Road one winter and was stuck for several hours. I eventually got out. I know every stretch of that road. Drove every mile of it many, many times. And I was given an article about a guy. He's driving a little camper. There was a snowfall, and he got stuck on Dead Indian Road in his little camper. Couldn't go forward, couldn't go backward, too much snow. So, he crawled into the back of his camper, and he just stayed there.

The road was closed for about a week, and he stayed there. He was a Christian. And he actually kept a diary. And in the article I have, they printed pages from his diary. He stayed in his little camper and said, "I guess the Lord wants me here. I'm stuck. If it's the Lord's will, I will be rescued." He stayed in his little camper, and he starved to death.

When the snow cleared, when there was a let-up in the weather a week later, they found him dead in his camper with his diary. He died. I know the exact spot where his camper was stuck. He could have gotten out, followed the road down, and walked down to where there were

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buildings and people. It would've taken him maybe four hours, but in his mind, he was stuck. He was stuck. So he curled up, and he died because, in his mind, he was stuck.

I'm telling you, you're not stuck. You are not stuck.

Some of you may remember me telling the story. We used to be in a little office building right down on the Boulevard here. And we were so out of space everywhere. And the guy that owned the building next door was a precious brother in the Lord. He let us use one of the offices in his building for kids' church on Sunday morning. And he came to me one day, and he says, "Bayless, I have an underground parking garage, and if you could get it past the city, if they'd sign off on it, I would give you my parking garage, and you could have your church there. I think you could get a few 100 seats." And so I said, "I'll check it out."

And so I go down there, it was pouring rain that day. I'll never forget it. And it was a low ceiling, but I walked it off. I figured it out. We could get 400 chairs in there. I thought, "This is awesome," because the building next door only had 160 seats in it. And so I walk it all out, I think, "Oh, this is great." And I go back to the door that goes up the stairs, and it has locked on me. I'm locked in the underground parking garage. And I tried and tried to get it open, and I couldn't. And so they had this gate with bars, and the people got their little electronic thing. They'd push it, and the gate would open. I went down there, and I fiddled with that thing for about half an hour, and I couldn't get it to open. So I'm stuck in the parking garage. I'm literally hanging onto the bars of this thing. And it's down low. And I can see part of the street up there. And I'm down there for more than an hour. It might have been a couple of hours, and I'm just waiting.

Finally, a postman goes by. He's got his rain gear on, and he's pushing his thing. I go, "Hey." He looks down there. I said, "I'm stuck in the garage. Would you go around and open the door?" He says, "Yes, I'll be there in a while." About 10 minutes later, he opens the door and lets me out.

And so a few days later, I go to visit Jack. He was the owner of the building, the Christian guy. I'm sitting in his office, said, "Jack, I checked it out. It may work." And I said, "A funny thing happened. The door shut behind me, and I got stuck in the parking garage. I was down there like hour-and-a-half, two hours." And he starts cracking up. I said, "It's not that funny." He says, "Bayless, it's hysterical. The gate that goes across; one of the bars is missing. You could have just walked right through it." I said, "You're lying." He said, "No, no, go." And so I left his office and went downstairs, true. I'm holding onto two bars right here. The bar next to me, right where I was hanging on, right there. It's gone. I don't even think I would've needed to turn sideways to get through it, but in my mind, I was stuck. I was stuck. So I couldn't see the way of escape that was right before me.

And as long as you think you are stuck, as long as you say you are stuck, you will never recognize God's way of escape that is right in front of you. He will, with the trial, He will, with the trouble, make a way of escape. He has a pathway for you to walk, but you will never see it as long as you keep thinking wrong and talking wrong. Abandon your ways. Abandon your thoughts. God's ways and thoughts are higher. If you're going to embrace His thoughts and have His mercy touch you and guide you, you've got to be willing to get rid of your thinking.

All right. Thought number two: that the enemy has the upper hand. Whether you're talking about your city, maybe the school board that has told you they don't want you to investigate what your child's being taught, and you don't have a say, or maybe the local council or maybe our state.

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I listen to some people talk about what's going on in our state, and you know there's a mass exodus obviously out of California. People say, "I've got to get out of here. I feel like I'm living in a police state right now." And I vehemently disagree with things that our state government has implemented. Personally, I vehemently disagree with a number of things. But listen, the devil is not in charge of California. The devil does not have the upper hand.

Some people think, "Oh, the world is going to hell in a handbasket. Look, the devil is doing this, and the devil is doing that. And oh man, the world is just on fire." Listen, there are a lot of wrong things going on in the world, but the devil is not in charge. The devil does not have the upper hand. Not in my personal life, not in my marriage, not in this world.

I want to read to you a story from Numbers 13. You can go there if you want. The Israelites have come out of Egypt to the border of the Promised Land. The Scripture tells us that they were the very generation God had prophesied to Abraham hundreds of years before, which generation of his offspring would enter into the Promised Land. It was God's stated will that they were the ones that go in and enjoy the land of milk and honey.

So they get to the border of Canaan's land, and Moses sends 12 spies in to spy out the land, one spy from each tribe. So they go in, check out the land, and they come back. And I want to pick it up in verse 30.

Now, Caleb and Joshua, they were two of the spies. Verse 30, Numbers 13 (NLT),

³⁰ But Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. "Let's go at once to take the land," he said. "We can certainly conquer it!"

³¹ But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. "We can't go up against them! They are stronger than we are!" ³² So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: "The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. ³³ We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that's what they thought, too!"

The Bible, in Basic English, says, "We seem to ourselves no more than insects, so we seemed to them. So we went, people are huge as walled cities, and they looked at us, and they thought, 'Just a bug to be squashed. These Israelites are nothing.' So we felt like insects ourselves. That's exactly what they thought about us when they saw us."

Now, Joshua and Caleb saw things differently, and they spoke in faith and agreed with what God had said because God said, "Every place the sole of your foot treads, I've given it to you. You are well able to take the land." They agreed with God, but the nation sided with the ten spies. They listened to the report of the ten spies. And for the next 40 years, Israel wandered in the wilderness. They did laps around Mount Sinai for 40 years. That generation, from 20 years old and upward, never entered into the Promised Land. They all died without experiencing the promise.

So, we fast forward 40 years into the future. Now, Moses is dead, and Joshua has taken over. They're going to have a second run at it. They're going to go in to the Promised Land 40 years later. And so, Joshua, like Moses, sends spies in. He sends two. Joshua 2:1,

Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho."

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So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there.

Verse 8,

⁸ Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, ⁹ and said to the men: “I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt (40 years ago), and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed (40 years ago). ¹¹ And as soon as we heard these things (40 years past), our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. (Joshua 2:8–11)

Ten spies came back 40 years earlier and said, “Man, we’re grasshoppers. We’re just insects.” And they thought the same thing, but the truth was when the Canaanites and the giants and every one of that generation saw them, they were shaking in their boots. Their hearts had melted. Their courage had fled from them. They were terrified. Listen to me. One wrong thought kept them from their inheritance. One wrong thought, they believed a lie, and it kept them from ever experiencing the God promised inheritance that was laid up for them. They never walked in it, they never tasted it, because of their thinking.

I often hear people talk as if the devil is bigger than God, especially when they look at the state of our nation over the last few years.

Isaiah also prophesied and said this in Isaiah 40:15,

¹⁵ Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales (to God);

Isaiah also said this in Isaiah 60:1–2,

¹ Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

² For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; we see that. But.

Everyone say ‘But.’

Isaiah 60:2–3

² But the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. ³ The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

We will have revival in the church, we will have an awakening in the world, and King Jesus will reign. Our King will prevail.

In Luke 11:20, Jesus said, “I cast out demons by the finger of God. This is just like flicking a piece of lint off my lapel. This is no contest between Titans. This is a contest between our God, who’s a consuming fire, and a moth, a moth that is less than nothing. The devil does not have the upper hand, my friend. We’re on the winning side.

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All right. The third thought, you've got to be willing to abandon this if you're going to embrace God's thoughts: That people do not want to hear the gospel. People don't want to hear, whether you're thinking of your family, your neighbors, your friends, or the world we live in. Jesus said, in John 4:35, "You say there are four months and then the harvest? You always say the harvest is going to be in the future." He said, "But I say, lift up your eyes and look on the fields; they are already white and ready for harvest!" The harvest is now. That is true in every generation. But the tendency of people is well, it's coming. It's coming. People want to hear now.

I remember after I got saved, I went over to a friend's apartment, and there was a bunch of them there. I knew everyone there. And they were doing this thing where you pray to angels, and then you mix these sticks up in a bag. You mix up these special sticks. You throw them down, you ask a question to the angels, and then however the sticks land, the angels tell you what to do because they influence the sticks, and then they would go out and do whatever the sticks show.

So, I was there, and they were doing that thing with the sticks. And one of my friends, in fact, he was a very close friend, and I'm a brand new Christian, says Bayless, you apparently don't like this, do you?" I said, "No, I don't." He says, "Don't you believe that angels influence the sticks?" I said, "Yes, actually, I do. I just think they're bad angels." And then I shared Jesus with them. I shared my testimony with them, and they began to howl with laughter. I literally left the apartment with them shrieking and laughing behind me, making fun of me, throwing taunts my way.

A few weeks later, one of the girls that were there came to me and said, "Bayless, the other day in the apartment, I know that had to be really hard for you, but I couldn't get away from what you said about Jesus, and I want you to know, I've accepted Him as my Lord and Savior. I've been reconnected with my family. I was estranged from them."

You know what? I'm telling you, even in every pack of antagonists, there's someone there with a hungry heart. There always is.

I was preaching in a particular European nation. Preaching from John 4. Let's not just put the harvest off. People are hungry now. I was actually doing a pastors' summit. So it's all pastors in the meeting. And I got done, and one of the local pastors came up, and he rebuked me sharply. He said, "You're an outsider. You just don't know. This is not the time for harvest in our country. That's false. That's wrong. It's a time for us to pray." I agreed with that. We need to talk to God about men, but then I think we need to get out and talk to men about God afterward. But, he rebuked me sharply and told me, basically, I had no business being there, no business saying that. I didn't understand their nation. I didn't know the culture. I didn't know the atmosphere. He said it is not the time for harvest.

Now, a walking distance from there, we had actually rented out a venue, and I was going to hold an evangelistic meeting the following, or actually that night. I said, "Listen, we've got a meeting. You can walk there from here tonight. We've invited people, encouraged them to invite their friends, just come and see if God does anything." He said no and basically dismissed me.

I got to the meeting that night, walking distance from where he and I had the conversation, a very one-sided conversation, and the building was packed. There was standing room only. And when I gave the invitation, people came forward. There was standing room only in the front. It was several deep and all the way across the front. Maybe 20 people across, 2 or 3 people deep all the way, many of them; tears rolling down their cheeks, accepting Christ and being saved for

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the very first time. We're talking within a quarter-mile of where this guy said no one's hungry, no one wants to hear. My friend, people are hungry. People do want to hear.

In fact, not far from there, not far from that spot, there was a guy. He was a well-known tattoo artist in his country. If you wanted to get inked, three months wait to get in and get a tattoo. That's how many people were lined up because this guy's work was so good, but he was also a criminal. The police knew, and they tried and tried to catch him, but he was too clever for them. He turns on the TV, and there's a broadcast from *Cottonwood* on. He watches it, walks out in the snow, kneels down in the snow, and gives his life to Jesus. And then he comes back home, gets all of his weapons, got all this stash of illegal weapons, gets a boat, there's a big lake right by where he lived, went out in the middle of the lake, threw all the weapons overboard down to the bottom of the lake. He calls us and tells us what's happened. He got a hold of the office. I talked to him on the phone. He said, "Would you come hold a meeting in my tattoo parlor?" I said, "I'm in. I'm in."

So, we come. He invited all his friends, the roughest looking bunch of people I've ever preached to. The tattoo parlor is filled with all of his clients and criminal friends. Every one of them got saved, and then we led everyone in a mass baptism of the Holy Spirit, like Acts 2. The Holy Spirit fell, and here are all these guys speaking in other tongues. This is right near where the guy said people are not hungry; people don't want to hear. No, friend. People are hungry, and they do want to hear.

Which brings us to the next thought that you need to abandon, and that is, God will not use you in a dynamic way. You've got to get rid of that thought that God won't use you. Listen. God's thoughts, 1 Corinthians, God has chosen the foolish things, and the weak things and the despised things, the things that the world says are unqualified to bring to nothing, the things that are to confound the wise. God uses the unqualified. God's just looking for the available.

When I was in Bible school, I saw a couple there one day. And I could just tell from looking at them I knew their background because I'd been there and done that. So, I went up, introduced myself to them, and they, listen, they were awkwardly shy. Just awkward. And I said, "Hey, my name is Bayless. I want you guys to come to my little apartment? It's not much. I've got this old Formica table that was dug out of the trash and a couple of old metal chairs, but would you come over to my apartment for lunch? I want to talk to you guys."

So they came. I still remember we had grilled cheese sandwiches. Sitting around the table, I said, "Look, I know something about you." They say, "Well, how do you know?" And I told them. I said, "You guys come out of a drug background. You had a penchant for these kinds of drugs." They say, "Yes, how'd you know that?" I said, "Same as me. I liked the same hallucinogenic drugs that you did."

And so we talked about our past and all the stuff that we've been involved in and became friends. And listen, again, these guys, they are brand new Christians. They're awkwardly shy, and almost with fear and trepidation, are they taking steps forward in this life with Christ.

Upon graduation, they went down on a short mission trip to a country, and God used them to reach the presidential family. They ended up holding Bible studies in the presidential palace, got the president's wife filled with the Holy Spirit, and had this little mini revival going on. When they're leaving the country, suddenly this motorcade comes, all these Jeeps and military vehicles come and stop the people getting on the plane and pull them out. They go, "What's going on? What's going on?" It was a local General there. He said, "I heard what you've been

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doing at the presidential palace. The president's wife talked to me. I need what you have. I stopped you because I want you to pray for me." They laid hands on him on the tarmac and prayed for him; led him in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They were on the tarmac before they got on the plane.

Now, just to give you an idea, when we're sitting around that Formica table eating our grilled cheese sandwiches, they said, "Yes, Bayless, we..." and he was talking about a particular drug. He said, "We used to do that drug. And we would go in the woods and take all of our clothes off and dance naked while we were high." So, here are these guys, they're changing, we're talking about the woodland fairy dancers, they're the ones that God is using to impact a nation.

It was a 12-year-old boy that came up to me in a park and told me about Jesus. The first human being that ever shared the gospel with me. He was 12 years old. He was just a normal kid that loved Jesus.

Kathryn Kuhlman used to say God's not looking for golden vessels. God's not looking for silver vessels. God's just looking for yielded vessels.

He wants to use you in a dynamic way. And you never know the rippling effect that your obedience can have. You never know. If Jesus tarries, it may change generations to come. You never know the dominoes that might fall from one act of obedience from you just opening your mouth and sharing. You never know.

I was golfing one day. There was an old man. At the time, I thought he was old. I was in my 30s, he was probably 65, which is younger than I am now, but I thought this guy was ancient. He doesn't have too long before he kicks the bucket. So, I shared the gospel with him out on the golf course. I still remember it was on the 11th hole, Costa Mesa, playing Mesa Linda, that particular golf course. There are two tracks there. Los Lagos and Mesa Linda. We stopped on the 11th fairway. I said, "Do you want to pray?" He says, "I do." And so, this ancient guy and I held hands on the 11th fairway, and we prayed, and he accepted Jesus. Never heard from him again, never seen him again, but you know what? A simple act of obedience like that, you have no idea. He may have led his kids and his grandkids to Christ. One of them may end up being an evangelist that changes a nation for God. You just never know what might happen.

God wants to use you. Don't think, "Well, my past, that cancels me out. I could never be used by God. I'm divorced." Listen to me. God can use you. In fact, not in my notes didn't think I'd say this. I don't know if you ever thought about it or not. God, Himself is a divorcee. According to some people, He's not qualified for ministry. He called Israel His bride to the point that He put them away and gave them a bill of divorce. You are not disqualified, my friend. Now, I'm not saying that you live and walk any way that you want, but I'm telling you, God will use you. You're not disqualified. God will use you.

I want to extend an invitation to you. If you're here today and you've never made your peace with God, if you're sitting outside on the plaza, or if you're in here, and maybe you came with a friend, maybe by yourself, maybe been coming for a while, checking things out, listen, you wouldn't be here unless there were some sort of spiritual hunger in your heart. You just wouldn't be. There are so many other things you could do. You could sleep, but you're here.

And God knows you, and He loves you. He knows everything about you. He knows your past, He knows everything you've done, everything you haven't done, and He loves you. He sent His Son, Jesus, to rescue you.

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I was looking for God for a long time. People never would've suspected it if they would've examined my lifestyle, but I was. I just looked at all the wrong places. It wasn't until a 12-year-old boy came up to me in a park one day and told me Jesus Christ was alive that I ever really honestly considered Christianity and the claims of Christ. I'd never heard the claims of Christ. I'd never read the Bible. There is one way into a relationship with God; it's through His Son, Jesus Christ. It's not about ritual. It's not about ceremonies. It's not about God siphoning all of the fun out of your life and all the joy out of your life, and now you need to be this cookie-cutter clone of a Christian. No. God has created you unique, and you will really, truly never discover the core of who you are and your potential until you start walking with Jesus.

Everything finds its proper place in Him, first and foremost, us. And He won't turn you away. It doesn't matter what you've done. It just doesn't matter. Jesus died on the cross to take away your sins. Think about it. He was born of a virgin, lives a sinless life, and then at about 30 years of age, enters into ministry. He talks like no one ever talked before. People hung on every word. He didn't talk about God being this angry being in the skies with a big stick, just waiting for you to mess up so He could wallop you one. And He didn't talk of God as being some distant uncaring, aloof being, but He spoke of Him as being a loving Father that was near and concerned for your life, concerned for the affairs of your life. Jesus worked miracles. He healed the sick. He even raised the dead. He said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father. When I say this is the Father talking, the things I do, that's a revelation of the Father's will. That's a revelation of His heart toward people."

I love the fact that in most of the Gospels, most of the records we have of Jesus' earthly life if you read through the Gospels, the majority is taking up either of Jesus' teachings or Him spending time with individuals, stories with individuals. God loves the individual. He loves you.

And then Jesus was taken by jealous hands. He was put through a mock trial. He was savagely beaten. The Jewish leaders struck Him repeatedly on the face. The Roman soldiers hit Him over the head. He was taken, nailed to a rough cross, had a crown of thorns on His head. That cross was lifted high, dropped into a hole in the ground, and it's where it says in Psalm 22, "All my bones were out of joint." When they dropped that cross after nailing Him to it, when it was on the ground, they dropped it down into that hole. It made all of His bones go out of joint. That very detail was even prophesied by Isaiah hundreds of years before it happened.

And there on the cross, the sky suddenly turned dark, and Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" For at that moment, He laid the penalty for your sins and my sins on His own Son. And Jesus became our sin-bearer. He became our substitute. He died in our place. God poured out His wrath and punishment against the sin of the world on His own Son, who was perfect, innocent, and holy. Jesus died. And after three days and three nights, the claims of God's eternal justice were once and forever satisfied. Jesus was raised from the dead. And this is what the Bible says if you believe that and if you're willing to make Him the Lord of your life, that God brings you into a relationship that the Bible calls salvation; literally, the Holy Spirit comes and changes you from the inside out. It's so radical. Jesus called it being born. If you come, He won't turn you away, but you have to be willing to come.

And I want to speak to the prodigals that are in here. You know who you are. You've had a genuine encounter with Jesus. You know He's real. Maybe even as a young person. In fact, I was talking to somebody outside today. We have a mutual friend. The mutual friend is an incredibly wealthy businessman who I've spent time with on a number of occasions. And one day, when I was visiting with him in his office, he broke down and began to sob. And he told me

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how he'd had an encounter with God as a young man. That Jesus visited him when he was a young man, and he sat and put his head down on his desk and sobbed like a baby because he'd had an encounter with Jesus, but he wasn't living like it. It was a turning in his life from that day forward.

Maybe that's you, maybe as a young person, maybe as an adult, you really did give your life to the Lord, but for whatever reason, you're not living like it. Well, God's not mad at you, but it's time for you to come home, prodigal son, time to come home, prodigal daughter. I want to give you a chance to rededicate your life to Him, to catch fire for Him again.

Now, I'm going to ask you; I want you to listen carefully. In just a moment, I'm going to count to three. If you know you need to pray this prayer, if you want to give your life to Jesus, maybe the very first time, or maybe you're that prodigal son or prodigal daughter saying, "I'm away from home, I need to come back." I'm going to ask you to lift a hand. And an act as simple as lifting your hand, just like that, can help your faith move in the right direction. I know that because the book of James says faith without corresponding actions is dead, and sometimes an action is as simple as being willing to lift a hand. All right. My heart is reaching up to God. My hand is an expression of that. Help your faith begin to move toward God.

I'm going to count to three. If you want in on the prayer, prodigal coming home; first time asking Jesus Christ to be the Lord of your life, I'm going to look for that hand to shoot up. I'll acknowledge any hands that come up, and then you can put them down. If it helps you, maybe close your eyes right now, but only if you want to. Sometimes that just helps to block out some of the distractions.

One. I feel so strongly in my heart that we're in a divine moment this morning. I don't say that lightly. I truly believe, in fact, I don't have time to tell you everything, but God brought some interesting confirmation to me about this message today. Really interesting. But I don't have time to tell you the whole story. In fact, I don't know if I ever will, but it was very recognizable to me. Actually, it made me laugh. This is your day.

Two. Do you want to get in on this prayer, ready to make your peace with God? Now, if I can talk you into it, somebody else can talk you out of it, but if you know God's knocking on the door of your heart, no one takes that away from you if you'll respond.

Three. Do you want to pray? Just lift it up, keep your hand up. Outside as well, on the plaza, just put your hand up. Yes, hands all over the house. That's awesome. That's awesome. All right, go ahead and put them down. Outside, put them down as well.

All right. Everybody look up this way. I'm going to ask you to do a second thing. All right? Now, you don't have to do this, obviously, but I'm going to ask you to, and there's a reason. In a moment, I'm going to ask those that lifted a hand to stand to your feet and just remain standing right by your seat. Somebody says, "Why would I do that?" Here's why I'm asking you to do it. The Bible talks about the fear of man. In other words, I've got my peace in your head, and it controls the way I act because I think you're thinking about me or the way I think you're going to interpret what I say, and so I'm restricted, and I'm always thinking about— that's a terrible way to live. The Bible says the fear of man brings a snare; it binds you up. And I've found out that you can truly never serve the Lord Jesus Christ as long as you got your peace in somebody else's head. If you're afraid of what anybody else thinks of you, you'll never fully be able to serve the Lord. And so, standing up is just a way to say, hey, man, if the whole world wants to look right now, let them look, I don't care. I'm not ashamed. I'm giving my all to Jesus Christ.

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All right? So, outside on the plaza or inside here, if that's you, if you lifted that hand, I want you to stand on your feet, just do it without hesitation. Just stand up, come on. All over. Let's give them a hand. All over. Yes. So good. Just remain standing. We are so proud of you.

And listen, I know this. I know that with some of you, this is just a matter of a slight adjustment you are making in your heart. But listen, great miracles come from slight adjustments. Other people, it wasn't that. This is a huge thing for you. You weren't just away from God. You were dangerously away from God. We're proud of you. We want to pray with you. I want everybody else to stand up. Outside and inside, stand with them. Let's all put a hand on our hearts. I'll give you the words. You pray them out loud. Pray them with conviction, and speak these words to God. That's who we're talking to.

Just say,

Oh God, I come to You. With all of my heart, I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe He died upon the cross to take away all my sins. I believe He was raised from the dead. Today, I make a decision. No one else makes this decision for me. This is my decision. I decide to follow Jesus. Jesus, I confess You as my Lord. From this moment forward, wherever or however You lead me, I'm all in. I put my trust in You. Amen. Fantastic.

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