

What Jesus Wants From Us

Jesus wants a lot from us. The more I dwell in the house of the Lord, in the big sense, the more I'm convinced that there is something we have not focused on enough, and it's this Kindergarten Stuff—care and kindness, that we probably take for granted in the church and don't have to talk about it. Or there's another possibility. I think it was in the 20's, or maybe before that, I don't know, when there was a period in church history, where I think the emphasis was on good works. And then there was an enormous backlash against the emphasis on good works, and it became focused appropriately on grace: by grace are you saved—let's not think you get any credit for that good work. But I think we threw out the baby with the bath.

I'm more convinced you that you can you can take a text like, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes on him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.' You can take it on two levels. The level that we need to take it on is the one we always do: eternal life with God. in this life and in the next life. There's another level that I believe is absolutely wrapped up in it, and that is when you connect with Jesus, you are saved from meaningless life; you are saved from not knowing who you are, what you're about what, what life's about. That is a saving that is so needed, and it means that you become a Jesus person. When you're a Jesus person, you have something to live for, and you have found eternal life in the sense that you no longer ever need to officially wonder who you are, what your life's about, what you've got to do, what you're in this world for. And that's being saved! That's eternal life. and I think we have to focus on that a lot more, and a little bit less on a preoccupation with heaven. Gotta get our bags unpacked. Too many people, too many church people, are sitting there with their bags packed, waiting to go to heaven.

This hit me recently, with the death of this young cheerleader who died. Some of you are local people. We had this 14-year-old cheerleader who suddenly died in the midst of cheerleading practice. She was a vibrant, sparkling, Christian young lady. The strange thing that happened to me was that I found out the night of her death that a relative of mine. She's the granddaughter of my cousin in Wisconsin. My secretary said she is my first cousin twice removed—a blood relative. And so I went there, and I will say that I am, and I will stay, in their family, forever, I guess. There's so much talk about her being radiantly happy in heaven. Now, that's true! But we don't know what it's like, and it's not going to be what we think it's like, and we are getting to the point where I was uncomfortable about all those students there, hearing this, declared, almost in such a graphic form, like it's a trip to Tahiti! That might be attractive to them.

Okay, that's one thing that we need to get focused correctly, but I am on a campaign, and will be for the rest of my life—I'm positive. Probably I am, or will be obsessed with it (I hope it's a good obsession) with this other level of being saved by finding and being found by Jesus; that we are saved; we are really saved from meaninglessness, purposelessness, lostness about what life is about, and we have stuff to do.

In Jesus words, 'you are the light of the world.' You are the light of the world. I never thought of myself as the light growing up, did you? I thought I was kind of a shadow on the wall. To teach our children, our grandchildren, and ourselves; this is so amazing, and so important. We're not just in a survival mode, you know, getting through life, finding something, waiting to go to heaven. We have work to do, and as Jesus said, 'Lord Father in Heaven, your will be done on Earth, as it is in heaven.' That's our job: to make heaven on Earth. Not that we think we can make it heaven on Earth literally, but it means to us that we can build the kingdom, which means making the world better. We can make the world better; every one of us can, and it's needed. That's what it means to me a follower of Jesus—that is life.

This is why we talk about transformation, it isn't just about learning about bipolar, and learning about Alzheimer's, but also we need to be transformed into people who see Alzheimer's as something that

we need to know how to care for, bipolar—how to relate to people who are going through this or have that. All of our topics are material we need, information we need to do our mission, to relate helpfully, brighten the lives, in some powerful or small way, of people who have these issues. That's what compassion is all about: the essence of God. As I've said many times, and I will say forever, the essence, nearly the essence of God, seems to be compassion; God healing with us. The more we can get that into our soul, and into our heart and into our heads, the more likely we are going to be, when tragedy hits, that we're not going to be sitting around wondering, 'why is God doing this, or why is God allowing this.' We'll just see God as feeling with us, experience God, know God is with us, not causing, planning, allowing, just God with us. That's the essence of God. The essence of God is us! It's what we are; that is, we are created in God's image, so compassion is part of us, that we need to allow and encourage and celebrate and live out how to be compassionate people.

'If anyone would come after me, she or he must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me.' I think this is in Matthew 16. 'for whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.' We need to be people who are able and willing to die for others. I will make that a little easier, but it may not even seem that easy, because I believe—I have come to believe—I believe it passionately. If you hear, by the back fence that the person across the street from you is going through a divorce, or got laid off from their job, and you don't know them very well, but you decide to walk over there and ring the doorbell, and you hate every step you take, you are dying for that person. This is a form of participating in what Jesus did for us, to the max; to the max: he literally gave his life for us, but that is the spirit of what we can do and are called to do. Leaving our comfort zone, going out of that place where we'd prefer to be tonight, this afternoon, this morning, sitting at the TV, watching our favorite show, or shopping, or playing golf, or something ;where you're willing, and you actually do, walk across the street, get on the phone, make a phone call. When Shauna Stewe died, that was the cheerleaders name, it was on a Wednesday afternoon, the day after Valentine's Day, and I got an email from another cousin in Wisconsin, telling me about it. I received that email about 8:30 or 9, on Wednesday night of the day she died. Linda was there, and I said to her . . . In the process, this email informed me that apparently her grandparents were in the car on the road from Madison, Wisconsin, to North Carolina. Thank God for cell phones; they were able to catch them you. They were going to drive back to Madison and fly out here, So I thought, okay, they'll probably arrive, at the earliest, maybe Friday night, or Friday afternoon, because they were on their way to North Carolina, and they've gotta go all the way back, and they won't get here until Friday night. So I said to Linda, I think maybe Saturday morning I should go over there. This is Wednesday night. What do you detect is going on inside of me?

Yeah. I don't want to go there. I do not want to go there. I am the Koach of Kare, the King of Kindness, K-O-K, Kok; that's my name. That's why I had that name. I did not want to go! Linda says, "*I think you should go tomorrow morning.*" She was right! I had an absolutely open morning, after breakfast with some of these men. I had nothing I could figure out to get me out of it, but I didn't want to go. But I knew she was right, and I've talked 40 years on this—how we try to avoid painful things. This is normal behavior. You want to avoid walking into a fire, right? This is normal behavior that has to be canceled by supernatural realizations and presence. And Linda said, "*You should go tomorrow morning,*" and I knew she was right, and I did. I go to the house, and I knock on the door; a young lady comes to the door, and I thought she was a mother, but she quickly said, "*Lori's over their*", and pointed me to her sister. And there sits Lori, the mother, just absolutely in shock, forlorn. She says, "*We don't know what to do.*" Her husband had gone to the hospital because his blood pressure was flaring up, so she was there alone with her sister, and the little sister of the girl who died—10-year-old sister. The 14-year-old had died; 10-year-old sister.

Well, that's an extreme example of dying for another person: when you do something, you go somewhere, that absolutely is taking you out of where your human, natural, fleshly comfort zone is, because of a higher goal; because of someone else; something more important. So this is what I think

Jesus is calling us to; to do some of these things that we absolutely would rather not do, go into these hard places.

There are many other hard places, all of which I think are of the species of dying for another person. I mentioned the other day, I think, my project at the post office—this intimidating lady, that is now my best friend. Well, that's a one. Being nice to a clerk, or a person like that—that's a level one, but nevertheless, it is deciding to do something that is easier not to do. It is a minor form of dying for another person. Now, if that became our program as Christians, for all of us, not for once in a while, but for every day—every day you die for somebody. Level ones; every day, a couple level ones, and maybe once a month a level 10, or once every two months, a Shauna—really way beyond your comfort zone. It is absolutely essential that we get away from the noises that we heard in the 60's, which trickled into it us: 'if it doesn't feel good, don't do it.' You know, you don't have to do if you don't like it. The effect of that in our society is disastrous, because there are still millions of people who live by that creed. 'No, I don't go to funerals; they make me uncomfortable.' Christians say that! 'I don't have to go to that funeral; they make me upset.' Duh! So what?

So this is our agenda, everyday: to be transformed. You don't leave the house without thinking, 'okay, I got a level one today, or two, or three; I'm going to do something that isn't natural for me. I mentioned smiling. You haven't smiled since 1966? Start smiling! That's level minus one, but it's good for people. It has a spirit raising effect on human beings; it is a healing power; and we can all do it, but it has to be intentional—far more intentional.

A quote from Saint Paul says this; 'we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.' Now, that next little word; you notice that next little word? 'If.' We co-heirs with Christ **if** we share in his suffering. That is a big, little if! I don't it's a legalistic type of 'if'—that God is keeping score. I think it is what the package is! Followers of Jesus are trying to do Jesus-kind of things. That's part of the spirit of being a Jesus-person; you're watching, looking, taking opportunities to suffer a little bit, become uncomfortable. It is of the spirit of Jesus and that's what part of being an heir, part of being like Jesus.

It may be an insult to people who truly suffer to call this suffering, so I apologize to anybody who is really suffering to call this suffering, but I think any discomfort that we are willing to take on does qualify as of the species of suffering, even if it doesn't qualify as being, you know, bona fide really, suffering.

This is so powerfully important, that when we suffer for another, even if you just give them a smile, intentionally, you lift their Spirit, you are also doing something else—you are raising the dead. I think it is part of God's way; it is of the same species of God's raising the dead when we lift a person's spirit, give them a new surge of life, through a touch, through a smile, through a card, to a phone call, to some form of love that we give them, we are bringing people to life.

Question from audience: We have a test for new members called **Gifts and Calls**. And so we try to identify what we are good at. Then we get into this whole area of: some are teachers, some are preachers, some are evangelists, some are good at serving others. So then we find people saying, "*It's not my gift.*"

Perfect question! It doesn't apply! There are all those gifts and talents; this is for everybody. Nobody can squeeze out of this and say, "*Oh, I took that test, and that isn't my gift.*" Yep, this is for everybody. Now, there are things; there are other ways of building the kingdom. People like Don; he's an electronic engineer. He builds the kingdom by good work. We have Ken Waltz; he was an engineer, but now he's a craftsman of wood; makes beautiful things. People who create beautiful things—that's building the kingdom, heaven on Earth.

But this kind is for everybody; this is for every day life. And some are better at it than others. Some are natural at it. I say in my book . . . I'm reflecting on why I do what I do. My mother died at a very young age. She died at 38, and I was just in high school. So you know, when a mother isn't there, you

don't find out much about your childhood, because mothers remember those things; dad's don't. But one thing my dad remembered about me (he just died three or four years ago at age 98. (You have a trade-off; my mom died young and my dad died old. Maybe that's what God does.) He remembered one thing about me; he said when you woke up in the middle of the night, you'd always give us a big smile. I believe that was my destiny; right there, there it was already. I was destined to be an encourager, and I'm not always that good at it; I'm a pretty cranky person at times; and I don't like everybody. But I have a consciousness of trying to do this every day, somehow, My assistant and secretary—they would not say what a wonderful guy Jim Kok is, I'm positive. He's such an encourager. I'm not! I take them for granted, and all that sort of thing, so I am not consistent. Maybe that's an encouragement to you, but I believe in it. I believe that this is what we are in this world for, as Christians, and in my case, I could get some people who can do it better than I do it. I had a basketball coach in college; he couldn't make a basket if he tried, but he was a good coach. So, coaches can be good at getting other people to do it. I do not think you cop out on the basis of gifts; this is something everybody can do.

It's not a gift. So this is a spirit-lifting, life-giving thing that we can do and you just have to believe that; you can't always see it and people won't say it. They won't tell you, *"Oh, you brought me back to life."* You have to believe it. You have to believe it theologically. But this is life-giving stuff and that you can do this.

The other wonderful thing about all this is, I think, the recipe formula for happiness. This is the direction: we're all wondering about, thinking about, happiness all our life. Well, you can't find happiness. You can't buy it. You can't find it. You can't trade it, but I believe that living according to this formula, is the key to deep and satisfying living because, it is important. You know it is for the most important Boss you could ever imagine. It's for God, for Jesus. You are working for the Lord God, doing the most important thing in life, and you can do it, and you are needed, and people need it. That is the key, I think, to a satisfied and happy life. Happy life doesn't mean that you never get sad or anything, but it means you know you're on God's team in a meaningful way,

Okay. Saint Paul, again, talks about love. That's what this is all about. It's all about love. I just am crazy about John's, 'Let us love one another, for love comes from God.' If you think about what happened to Saint John; you read the Gospel of John; if then you read sequentially, the development of his thought from John 3:16, to 1st John, and so forth, and here you have it. That as he ages and develops in his thought, he sees the essence of God as love and the essence of love as coming from God. This is 1st John 4: 7-12. 'Let us love one another for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. God is love. Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.' That is so powerful. God's love is incomplete without our participation.

Ok, now I'll get a little practical about this. I'll quit preaching.

Feelings and emotions—this is important, I believe. You don't move into helping people, or doing kindness, just because you feel warm and friendly toward them. This is not based on your emotions. The lady in the post office . . . I didn't even like her; but in my brain was information from the scriptures that this woman was someone whose life I, one of the lights of the world, could brighten. And so it became a project, but it started in my brain, not in my heart. To go see Shauna; I didn't start at, *"Oh boy, you must be a wonderful person, that you go see Shauna."* No, I didn't want to go there. I went there because my head told me I. I must have at least a soft enough heart to be willing to do those things, but it starts in your head.

And, you know, pastors will tell you that when you're at the bedside of somebody dying, it's your brain at work. You're probably not feeling a lot of compassion at the time, or feeling sensitive, because your brain is at work thinking, 'uh, okay, the family's there, there is a man in the next room, they prayed for me, they asked me to pray for this.' Your brain is processing everything you're working, you're at work, and you are not likely to be very emotional about it. Maybe the emotions come later when you're driving home or something; so care and kindness—going into hard places—has to more likely override feelings than follow a feeling. Has to override your fears, your apprehensions, your reluctance. If I gave you an assignment to think of somebody in this world who you admire, who you wonder about, who was helpful to you, maybe it's a relative, maybe it's a teacher, maybe it's a friend, maybe it was a neighbor. And I said, "*Okay, tomorrow your assignment is to call them. Or when you get home, you're going to call them. You're going to find their address, their phone number, and you're going to call them.*" Somebody maybe you haven't seen in 10 or 12 or 15 years or less. I think this would be regarded as a hard task. Most people wouldn't do it. Most people don't want to do it. You'd probably . . . maybe some of you would do it because you agreed. You know, you're trying to be this kind of a person. But uh . . . so it was an old high school teacher who admired you, and who encouraged you, and you've been out of high school for 30 years and you really appreciated that teacher, but you never told him then, and you heard this person is sick. So your assignment is to call them. That's hard to do, isn't it? What's hard about it? Why is that hard? It's so easy and yet so hard; people don't want to do it.

My own diagnosis of that is that we don't like to be out of control. It's a matter of control. And when you don't know how they're going to receive it, you don't know if they're going to remember you. You don't know what you're going to say. You don't know what you're going to run into. You're out of control. And people don't like to be out of control. I think that's one of the reasons why we don't do those things. We don't like to do those things. And that's too bad! Just because you don't like the feelings of being out of control, you neglect to do something that would really help somebody—brighten their lives. Think about it.

It's love that would make you do it. Love would make you do it. And love is, Saint Paul said, "If I don't have love, I am nothing." So that's love that we're trying to activate. We're trying to arouse and grow and develop God in us, which is love—to love people. There's nothing more important than love.

A little more about going into hard places. Jesus said, "If you lose your life for my sake, you will find it." I guess I covered that already, but that's the road to gratification. Gratification is different than pleasure. It's not pleasure. It's a pleasure, often, usually, to go to Disneyland. I love Disneyland. It's a pleasure to go there, but it's not gratifying. Just fun. Just nice. So there's a difference between gratification and pleasure; and pleasure is important, but pleasures are over in about 10 seconds. Hot Fudge Sundae is a pleasure, but it's over in a minute. Gratification is a deep and lasting realization that you did something really good; that you used your capacities; you went beyond your comfort level and you did something good. I am gratified about my visit to Shauna—have gratification.

If you did a video of it, I did very, very little, but I was there. I think the language I used in those two or three days, before and after and during the funeral, was hugs. There's nothing, there is no word, there's no words that do anything! When you've lost your vibrant, sparkling, beautiful young child, there's no words. Hugs was about the only thing that felt right. I hugged her father and her mother and her grandmother and her aunt from Wisconsin. Now those Wisconsin Dutch people, they don't hug. No, they do not hug. I don't think my dad ever hugged any of his brothers or sisters or anybody else. They do not hug, but we were hugging each other like long-lost

huggers. It was really something. It was really something. It was the only language that communicated anything, because there's nothing you can say when you lose a child. Nothing! You can cry and you can hug. That's about it, and you can be there.

So that's what gratification is. That's so important to know about that; that it's not pleasure that you're looking for in life. Pleasure is nice. That's good. Get your share of that. But to get gratification means some of this dying for others, for God's sake.

Then a couple of real practical . . . on a whole different level: **Naming the elephant** and **Check your story at the door**. I just wanted to mention those because as people, as, as you endeavor to activate your love, these are a couple of very practical issues. I want to go to 'check your story at the door' first because it is so important. I've been writing about this for at least 15 years. I'll give you an example, and it happens all the time, and every one of us does it, and every one of us has to watch it. When I came back to our pastors meeting on Tuesday, it was Tuesday morning and Tuesday afternoon I was participating in the funeral of Shauna. Maybe it was a week later. Anyway, we go around the table and ask what's going on in each other's lives. And I mentioned the story of Shaun— how she had suddenly died, and what a sparkling young lady it was and how the family was devastated. That's about all I got to say.

Immediately, someone else jumped in, *"Oh, you know, that reminds me of when Dah, Dah, Da happened."* Honest to God, the next 30 minutes we listened to that person. I was totally forgotten, totally forgotten. And I was the one who brought the pain to the table. I'm a big boy and it's no disaster, but I am a student of this. So I was noticing it very clearly, because it happens all the time, and we are all vulnerable to doing it, because we all have sad stories. My sad story evokes other people's sad stories, and they come bubbling out, and pretty soon sad story A is forgotten, and we're listening to sad story B, C and D, and that means, well, that's carelessness. It is something that we all just have to be alert to, and bite our tongues. Check our story at the door and there's a time to tell your story, but find out if it's the time. Are you aware of that as an issue in this world? It needs to be mentioned, don't you think? The very most unlikely people do it.

Naming the elephant is of the same species of something very basic to being a caring person. You have to bring up tough stuff. You have to be willing to take the risk of asking about issues in another person's life that you think might be getting too personal, or might be going beyond where it's your business. I had this the other day, when I went to my dentist for teeth cleaning, and the dental hygienist, a woman about 50, I guess 55, her face was very red. Her face was just, just bright red. Hmm. Do I mention it or not? Do I bring it up? Do I ask her? No, I didn't. I didn't, but I went through the process.

There are some elephants you don't name, but on the other hand, I think it was Bill Waterson who was the original one that really taught me this. Bill Waterson came to a class I was teaching once, (this is probably in the book too) and his face was all beat up—bruises and scabs. And I said to him, *"What happened to you?"* He said, *"Well, I fell on my face at Newport Beach. I fell on my face on the rocks."* And then he told us about, and he said, *"You know, that happened six days ago, and you're the first one that ever asked me about it. You're the first one that asked me."* I guess the other ones said, *"Well, maybe his wife beat him up or something and better, better not go there."* So it's a judgment call. I think the classic, of course, is people who've lost a loved one, and death, or even a divorce.

Most widowed persons are eager and willing and happy to talk about the person they've lost, and most widowed persons report that no one seems to want to talk about Joe or Betty. They avoid the

subject. So that is one classic place where we need to go in, where we need to name the elephant. Where we need to take the risk. There's always a possibility someone will say to not go there. And that naming the elephant includes, then, staying comfortable with the tears that it may evoke. It may evoke tears, but then, the average elephant-namer, who evokes tears, thinks they're hurting that person, and they run. *"Oh, sorry, sorry, I hurt you. I shouldn't have brought it up."* Well, those tears are tears of memories and joy and satisfaction, and even appreciation. They're not tears of hurt that you shouldn't have evoked. So that's a part of this pilgrimage of care—that you push in, a little bit, in places where, well, you're not sure. But you can trust me that in general, on that issue, people want to talk about their loved one lost. And I think the consensus in the panel yesterday was to ask me; ask me how I lost my vision; ask me . . . And people who don't ask aren't mean; They're just caring. They think they're being kinder.

Comment from audience: There's one thing I want to tell you about. One day, he and I went to Costco, and I was standing behind him in the checkout line. We noticed this clerk, and this clerk had some head injuries. It was kinda like, if you took a boiled egg, and you cracked it, you know, he had just spots on his head from this injury. And out of the blue, Jim says to him, *"What happened to your head?"* I guess the guy was probably in his mid thirties. He said, *"Well, I was in an accident when I was nine years old,"* or something like that. And he said, *"But I deal with it."* And we also noticed that his hair was just barely growing out, maybe an eighth of an inch at the most. I don't remember if you said something about it or not, but anyway, he explained the hair. He said, *"Well, you know, my little nine-year-old girl has got leukemia. And of course, she's going through chemotherapy and everything. She's lost her hair. So I cut mine."*

Remember that?

That's my agenda. Thank you, Don. Read Don's story. It's a wonderful story