

“The God Who Is Present”, Michael Gatlin, John 1:29 – 2:3, December 6, 2015

We are in a season of the church calendar that is known as Advent. Advent is really all about preparing for Christ's arrival. I don't know if you've ever done anything as an individual or as a family to kinda get ready or prepare your heart and your soul to celebrate Christmas, but that's what the messages over the next few weeks are designed for. There is also, if you're interested, a little devotional guide called “The Light That Leads Us Home” that was produced by Vineyard nationally. It's out in the bookstore...I think they're a buck...and I would really recommend it. It has different readings for each weekend of Advent as well as some thoughts for during the week. If you're interested in one of those you can grab that out at the little bookstore. You know, Advent is this kind of time, in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, in the church calendar that is set aside to really just help us dial down a little bit and prepare.

You know, when you're having somebody over to your home, you kind of prepare for them, right...unless you're one of those folks whose home is perfectly clean all the time...you didn't know that was a gift, did you? You thought it was like a curse. But no, it's kind of a gift for some people. I don't have that, in that area at least. And so you prepare. If people are coming for the holiday season, if they're gonna be spending the night, you get a room ready for them. You go out and buy some extra food; you might run the vacuum a few more times; you might mop a couple things. You start noticing cobwebs in the corner; you start cleaning those out. You just kinda get ready, and that's kinda what this is, what we're doing here over the season of Advent even as a community.

We want to get ready and welcome Christ in a new way in our lives. In a personal way we want to welcome him; we want to interact with Emmanuel, the God Who is present. That's what that name means...the God Who is with us. He's with us in our hardship; he's with us when we suffer; he's with us when things are difficult; he's also with us in our joy. Sometimes we forget about that. What we're gonna do is look at some different ways that God is with us. We're gonna look at some ways that that challenges us, and we're gonna look at some ways that that provides immense comfort. And instead of me praying to kind of open up our service today, before we look at the scriptures, I wanna play a prayer that was recorded a few years ago by a man named Doctor Lockridge. He was invited to pray the opening prayer at, I believe, a denominational gathering, and this is quite the prayer. I want us to get something from this today, even just from the way that this is prayed. So let's play Dr. Lockridge.

“The Bible says my king is a 7-way king. He's the king of the Jews...that's a racial king. He's the king of Israel...that's a national king. He's the king of righteousness; he's the king of the ages; he's the king of heaven; he's the king of glory; he's the King of Kings, and he's the Lord of Lords! That's my king...I wonder do you know him? They even said the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmaments show of his handiwork. My king is a sovereign king. No means of measure can define his limitless love. No far-seeing telescope can bring into visibility the coastline of his shoreless supplies. No barrier can hinder him from pouring out his blessing. He's enduringly strong; he's entirely sincere; he's eternally steadfast; he's immortally graceful; he's imperially powerful; he's impartially merciful. Do you know him?

He's the greatest phenomenon that has ever crossed the horizon of this world. He's God's Son; he's a sinner's savior; he's the centerpiece of civilization. He stands in the solitude of Himself. He's unique; he's unparalleled; he's unprecedented. He's the loftiest idea in literature; he's the highest personality in philosophy. He is the supreme problem in our criticism. He's the fundamental doctrine of true theology. He is the core, the necessity for spiritual religion. He's the miracle of the age. Yes he is the superlative of everything good that the Jews could call him. He's the only one qualified to be an all-sufficient savior. I

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wonder if you know him today.

He supplies strength for the weak. He's available for the tempted and the tried. He sympathizes and he saves. He strengthens and sustains. He's God and he died. He heals the sick; he cleansed the lepers; he forgives sinners; he discharges debtors; he delivers the captives; he defends the feeble; he blesses the young; he serves the unfortunate; he regards the age; he rewards the diligent, and he beautifies the meager. I wonder if you know him?

Well, this is my king. He's the key to knowledge; he's the wellspring of wisdom; he's the doorway of deliverance; he's the pathway of peace; he's the roadway of righteousness; he's the highway of holiness; he's the gateway of glory...do you know him? Well, his office is manifold; his promise is sure; his light is matchless; his goodness is limitless; his mercy is everlasting; his love never changes; his word is enough; his grace is sufficient; his reign is righteous; his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

I wish I could describe him to you, but he's indescribable; he's indescribable; he's indescribable. He's incomprehensible! He's invincible! He's irresistible! Well, you can't get him out of your mind. You can't get him off of your hand. You can't outlive him, and you can't live without him. Well, the Pharisees couldn't stand him, but they found out they couldn't stop him. Pilate couldn't find any fault in him. The witnesses couldn't get their testimonies to agree. Herod couldn't kill him. Death couldn't handle him, and the grave couldn't hold him! That's my king! That's my king! Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever and ever and ever...how long is that? And ever and ever...and when you get to live all of the forevers...then Amen! Lord Almighty...AMEN...AMEN!"

That's a prayer! That's a guy who's not distracted by the season. That's a guy who has his focus firmly on Christ. And no matter what comes your way, when your focus is that firmly on Christ, you're pretty strong. You're able to stand in some pretty remarkable kinds of circumstances. What I wanna do during this Advent series of messages is we're going to look at the gospel of John. If you have your Bible you can open it up to John, chapter 1. We're gonna look at some highlights in the gospel of John of how God's presence is enormously comforting, and how it's deeply, deeply challenging to our lives. And my prayer is that at the end of this series, like on Christmas morning as we're sitting around with friends or family or wherever we're at, that we know Christ a little bit better than we do right now...that some of what Dr. Lockridge knows gets into our hearts and minds. You know the thing that is remarkable is that when he went up to deliver that he had no notes with him. That was just like all inside. As you're able to read through that on the screen it kinda seems like reading off a script, but it was us who were reading off of his script. It's pretty sweet. I have a good friend Jenö, who's a Vineyard pastor down in Chicago...we were listening to a black African man preach at Urbana a few years ago, and when we got done I looked over and said 'I wanna preach like that'. Gino said, "That ain't ever gonna happen. He goes 'you haven't been through what they've been through. Just be you'. And I said that's a great word, Jenö. I love that. I don't have to try to be somebody else.

So John, chapter 1...I'm gonna start down in verse 29, and I'm gonna go back and forth in this chapter a little bit. We're talking about the God who is present, Emmanuel, and how we get to know him. Verse 29..."The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said 'look, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I meant when I said 'a man comes after me who has surpassed me, because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.'" Like when we're searching for the presence of God, we are learning to welcome the presence of God in our lives, where do we begin that search for God's presence? Where do we begin that search for real spiritual life? Well I think John the Baptist offers us a great place, the best place to begin, if you want to know Christ...like the way Dr. Lockridge knows Christ...you begin with verse 31...'I myself did not know him'. What a refreshing, honest confession of spiritual shallowness that is. It's like 'I don't really know what's going on here. I don't know what this whole thing means.'

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You see growing up with Christmas songs, going to church and hearing stories of Jesus, listening to national public radio, heard people talking about stuff...we can get to this place in our lives when we feel pretty familiar with the story of Jesus...with what is Christmas really all about? We can hear a few songs about it, and we can press into that a little bit, but oftentimes...I love the way that Dallas Willard in the "Divine Conspiracy" said 'oftentimes this over-familiarity that we have with this story breeds an unfamiliarity.' We think we know what's going on, but in reality it's so much deeper than that. For some of us it doesn't just breed over-familiarity, it breeds contempt; it really does. What can this thing possibly do in my life? How could this possibly relate to my life today? Listen, if you really want to get to know Jesus, one of the things that you have to do is abandon your pre-conceptions that you know all about him already. You have to abandon some of those pre-conceptions. It could be so easy to think we know everything there is to know, cause this happened quite a few years ago, and we've read every single story...or at least we think that we've read every single story...and we know who he is, but there is so much more than we've ever imagined to what God has done and what God continues to do through the living Christ.

So, for instance, many people think of Jesus as just kind of a spiritual version of Mr. Rogers. He's just telling people 'boys and girls, you just need to be nice to your mommies and daddies and everything will be good.' Listen, no government in the world ever existed that crucified Mr. Rogers. It's not gonna happen. There's so much more to this story; this is such a deeper deal. So if you wanna deepen your roots in Christ, if you ever wanna be able to just call forth stuff like Dr. Lockridge just did, if you wanna pray like that, I suggest beginning where John the Baptist begins...be willing to confess what you really don't know. I think if we're willing to confess that and we press into learning, then Christmas morning will be different. It will be different in your life and my life. We'll maybe experience God's presence a little bit better than we do right now.

So where is it we find God in our search? Where do we go looking? Skip back up a little bit in that passage to verse 14. John is making this whole point as you kinda go through the very first chapter, and he's relating Jesus to God. Jesus was there in the very beginning, through him everything has been created, Jesus brings light and life into the world...in fact if you read through that first chapter you'll find that the apostle John is piling up title after title, image after image of who Christ is. And in verse 14 he says this..."the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Literally the Word became flesh and 'tabernacled' among us. And the picture that the apostle John is drawing here is from the Old Testament in the book of Exodus where we read that right in the center, as Israel was in the wilderness leaving Egypt and heading to the promised land...right in the center of their camp every single night a tent was set up that was the tabernacle. It was the tent that Moses used to go to, to meet with God. People would stand back, Moses would walk into the tent, and they would see this pillar of cloud [or fire, depending on the time of day] descend upon the tent. That cloud was God's glory made manifest in that tent visibly. And as Moses went into the tent they would see this thing happen...God's glory coming down to meet with him. If a person wanted to meet with God they went to the tent.

The apostle John is pulling this imagery and saying if you want to meet with Jesus, if you wanna meet with God today, it's in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the tabernacle, the tent, his body, his flesh is the tent that contains the glory of God. For some people they find the idea of connecting with God really allusive and really difficult. Maybe that's you...you've heard the phrase 'a personal relationship with God' and you think what can that mean? How do I have a personal relationship with something I can't see? How does that work? So some people say hey, I find God in nature...when I'm walking through this beautiful woods or when the snow is starting to fall or when I go along the shores of Lake Superior I just feel like I meet God there. Some say I connect with God through art, music, creative endeavors, expression, listening, observing, and just taking in the beauty of it all. I feel a sense of God there. Other people would say I find God in loving, warm relationships...my family...when I hold my child...when Kira leans over and kisses Cole in the midst of making that video. Some would say that they find God through a specific group like going through recovery, like AA, like the 12 Step Recovery Program...now don't get me wrong...you do get a sense of God...there is something of God in nature...there is something of God

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in beauty [he created it]...there is something of God in warm, loving relationships...there is something of God in getting together and being honest and going through recovery together. But if you want to feel the fullness of God's presence...if you want something more than just a vague feeling or a fleeting sense, you have to go to Jesus.

Why? Verse 18...the apostle John writes... "no one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son [the one and only] who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." If you want the experience of getting to know God and his presence and to feel more than just an allusive breeze across your cheek fluttering your luscious beard hair...beards, it's really cool when they come in season again...it happens every few years that they come in season and I'm like 'sweet'! I'm fashionable like for a brief moment of time; it'll go away again. People say beards are like the modern-day mullet...I had one of those too, and it was great. It was glorious in the day, like McGuiver, only better. If you want to experience more than just allusiveness of God's presence...something you can't quite get ahold of...then you need to go to Jesus.

And then when you go to Jesus, what can you expect from him? What are you gonna get from him when you go to him? When you go to God, do you expect that He's gonna open up his hand and be generous with you? Or do you expect his hand to be tight-fisted to you? Look at verse 16...what does the Bible say? "Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given." Literally again in the Greek this says 'from the fullness of his grace we have all received grace instead of grace, or grace upon grace, or grace after grace after grace. The picture is this...have you ever like taken a vacation or been somewhere near the ocean? The picture of this is this...when you sit by the ocean you notice that the waves never stop, right? As one wave comes in and crashes and begins to recede, there's another one right behind it crashing. And if you happen to be able to spend the night near the ocean and you leave the window open it's like it never takes a break! It's going all the time! That's the picture! Wave upon wave upon wave of grace...that's what this verse is talking about...out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of the grace already given. It's wave after wave after wave...an inexhaustible supply of grace from this infinite ocean of God's grace that Christ reveals to you and me and to this whole world... wave after wave of undeserved favor...wave after wave of unmerited kindness...wave after wave of undeserved mercy...wave after wave. And when you hear this, when you read this verse, is that the picture that resonates inside of you? Is that what you say yes to...yes, that's what I want to experience, that's what I expect from Jesus...wave after wave of unmerited favor, wave after wave of undeserved kindness, of unearned blessing.

The truth is for many of us...no...that's not what we expect. And do you know how we know that? It's because our prayers uncover it. Have you ever been in a tough situation...have you ever prayed this common prayer...Lord, if you help me get out of this, I'll never ask you for anything again. We see that in the movies, we hear that in our songs, we pray that ourselves when we get in really tough stuff. God, I'll never ask you for anything again if you can just get me out of this mess that somehow I've gotten myself into, that came down on me. I'll never ask you for anything again. According to verse 16 we never need to pray that stupid little prayer. We're so afraid we're gonna exhaust God's graciousness. You can't exhaust what's infinite...it's wave after wave that never stops coming. Nothing that you could ever dare to ask God could possibly exhaust his endless supply of grace. Do you know Jesus like that? That was my little Dr. Lockridge moment...nobody got it.

Here's another thing...if you want to experience God's presence, if you want to experience the God who is there, Emmanuel...verse 17...will you let God tell you the truth? Even when it stinks, will you let God tell you the truth? Verse 17..."for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Christ, in his person, has this amazingly wonderful balance of grace and truth. Kindness and firmness...mercy and boundaries...Christ is not like the kindly old man that just says hey, run along and play, make sure you have fun, do whatever you want. He's also not the enabler; he's not the accommodator...co-dependent marshmallow who's afraid of hurting your feelings cause you won't like him anymore. And he's not the disciplinarian waiting to whack you on the knuckles cause he caught you

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doing something wrong...even just the slightest, minor infraction. No, he is full of grace and truth. No one in the history of the world has been able to walk that tightrope like he can. No one in the history of the world has been able to stay on that. We all fall off, one way or the other, right? We're either too soft or we're too hard. We either enable and accommodate addiction and self-indulgence or we set such firm boundaries that people don't experience any mercy when they're in our presence.

Listen, the Lord is full of grace, wave after wave, and he's gonna always tell you the truth no matter how much it hurts. He's never gonna lie to you and I. Have you experienced that? God's grace is always comforting and it's always challenging. You know when we think Emmanuel, the God Who is with us... in one sense that is such a comforting thing...that God is with us! That promise resonates throughout scripture. Way back in the book of Joshua...I will never leave you or forsake you...I will be with you. Jesus says the same thing at the end of Matthew. We see the Holy Spirit providing that; there's so much comfort in that. And there is so much challenge in that! Have you ever been challenged by the presence of God, like when he confronts your agenda, how you think life should work? That's one of the ways he speaks the truth to us; he confronts and challenges our agenda. Or he challenges our dreams regarding how our lives should look. Our dreams mostly involve us achieving prominence or fame or comfortable moments here on earth. I want everything just so! I think God's much more interested in...to put it in old school language...getting us ready for heaven than making us comfortable on earth. I think he's much more interested in actually making us look more like Jesus than providing us with sweet, little, sappy lives. And so the Lord will clip our wings, so to speak. He will limit our ambitions, say no to our appetites, confront our behaviors, and pinch us, as it were. And that truth stings; it hurts; it has a little bit of bite to it.

Do you what one of the most common ways is that you're gonna hear the truth of God in your life? One of the most common ways that you're gonna hear it is from others who are following Christ who are close to you...like your spouse...like your kids...like your parents...even like in small group here around the Vineyard. That's one of the most common ways that you're going to hear that. You know other people who know Christ and are closest to me...ouch! And do you know what's happening? You're kind of upset by what's being said, when what's being said stings a little bit, and you have this desire to deflect it... 'well, you're not so great yourself. Or you have this desire to defend yourself against them, but inside there's this ring of truth. Somewhere deep inside you want to acknowledge it, but you don't want to acknowledge it. But it corresponds with your deepest intuitions about yourself and who you are. The book of Proverbs tells us dozens and dozens of times that God reveals his wisdom to us through the correction of other people. And I wonder, is there something that's been kinda pressing in like that for you, just even lately? You know one of the things that we love and we hate about holiday seasons is all the family that's around. We have this love-hate relationship with each other...I don't know if you notice that. We can't wait for them to get there, and then we can't wait for them to leave. It doesn't matter that they were our offspring or that they gave us life...it just doesn't seem to matter...it's like good boundaries, good hotel rooms make great visits with the in-laws...right? Is there some truth lately that's been passed along that you just don't really want to hear? If you wanna know Jesus better, then you welcome his truth coming to you from the correction that others bring, even if it hurts.

As you welcome God's presence into your life, what do you think God has done with your sin? I love this passage cause it speaks right to that, starting in verse 29. "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I meant when I said a man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me. I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.'" Why does John the Baptist call Jesus the Lamb of God? It's not because Jesus is soft and gentle and cuddly like some lamb that children run to in a petting zoo. That's not the reason why. John the Baptist is saying that Jesus is the sacrificial lamb that so many Old Testament scriptures point to. So for instance if Jesus is the God-provided lamb of Genesis 22...Abraham is getting ready to sacrifice his son Isaac just the way that God had asked him to do and God provides a lamb for that. Jesus is the Passover Lamb from the book of Exodus, whose blood protected the Jewish families in Egypt from God's wrath. Jesus is the daily

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temple sacrificial lamb that was offered every morning and every evening at the temple for people's sins, as mentioned in the book of Leviticus. And Jesus is the lamb led to slaughter from Isaiah 53, the lamb who took up our infirmities and carried away our sorrows.

And this phrase 'takes away the sin of the world'...this phrase 'takes away' literally means to be removed or to carry off. And most likely this phrase, the background for this, is found in this fascinating ritual from Leviticus, chapter 16. We read of this ritual in which the Jewish high priest, once a year, would lay his hands on the head of a goat and transfer all the sin from the nation of Israel to that goat. Then they would chase that goat out into the wilderness. Do you know what that goat was called? Scapegoat... exactly...and that goat carried away the sins of the people. It took all the blame and all the punishment that the people deserved on it's own head and carried it away. When Jesus Christ died on the cross he fulfilled that Old Testament picture of the scapegoat. So through faith, when you and I come to Christ, we place our sin on his crucified body and Christ carries away our sin from a place of judgment. Do you feel like God has separated you from your sin in that way...even the ones that you feel the most guilty about? Do you know that when you confess your sins...I John 1:9...that he is faithful and just to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness? Have you experienced that?

Sometimes we don't experience that cause we don't even confess. We just sit around feeling guilty about it. Do you know why it's the faithful and just thing for God to forgive you of your sin, to cleanse you from all unrighteousness? Do you know when he does that it's a faithful and just thing...it's already been paid for...he's not gonna like double charge you...you don't have to be worried about him double charging you for this. Jesus already paid the bill, and so there's no bill left to pay. When you confess your sin and you put your trust in Christ as your Savior, it's like he takes that away. Do you feel like your conscience is clean? Have you confessed those things that make you feel so guilty? Sometimes people say 'well I know God can forgive me; I can't forgive myself.' I can tell you that is the dumbest thing in the world to say, because you are not God. You're not God! What you say when you're saying that is you just make yourself more important than God. That's what you did; you just put yourself the same way that Satan did. He didn't wanna be like a worshipper of God; he wanted to be God. When you say that you just put yourself in God's shoes. It's a humiliating thing to learn to trust God. It will just challenge everything about you. I'm gonna get into that in a second. It challenges everything about who you think you are. You say it doesn't matter if you forgive yourself...the Bible never talks about that. It's just us talking about that. He's the one who forgives, and you learn to accept that and you learn to live in that. You learn to breathe in that. That becomes a thing that you live in. Do you know what it means that Christ is the Lamb of God as your scapegoat?

You know, I'm gonna skip down a little bit...verse 37..."When the two disciples heard John the Baptist say this about Jesus, they followed him. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked 'what do you want'? They said 'Rabbi, [which means teacher] where are you staying?'" I love this little thing. Like how smart do you think Jesus really is? As we're reading through this, how smart do you think he is? What does it mean to call Jesus a teacher or a Rabbi? Listen to this quote from Dallas Willard from a book called 'The Divine Conspiracy'. "Do you think that Jesus is really smart? Do you know Jesus well enough to say 'I believe Jesus is the smartest person that ever lived and I believe that Jesus' proposed way of life is better than anything I could ever come up with or that anyone else has ever come up with.'" Do you think that Jesus knows what he's talking about? You see one of the things that can make it hard to experience God's presence in your life is when you think Jesus is an idiot and he has no idea what he's talking about. It makes it really hard to experience God's presence cause he's the tabernacle; he's the tent; he's the place where we meet with God. And if you think the tent is dumb, like you never go there.

And so think about this for a minute...do you believe Jesus was smart when he said this...'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I tell you do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.' Do you think Christ was smart when he said don't worry about personal vengeance, or do you think that's the dumbest thing you've ever heard? Seriously...if you want to experience God's presence, if you wanna get to know Christ more, at some point you have to decide

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maybe he knew what he was talking about. Maybe the one who created everything and holds it altogether...maybe he's smarter than his creation. Maybe the pot should quit telling the potter how things ought to work. Or regarding our sexuality...do you believe Christ was smart when he said 'I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman [or I could add man in there, lustfully] has already committed adultery in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away, for it's better to lose one part of your body than your whole body being thrown into hell.'" Was Christ smart when he said that? Or was he an idiot? Our answer to that question really does get to determine how we experience Emmanuel, God with us. Would you say that Jesus is your Rabbi, that he's your teacher? Would you say that? Like where do you learn how to live life from? When you have a really honest question about how life works, where is the first place that you go? Think about it for a second. Is it Wikipedia? Is it Google? I wonder if my Teacher has something to say about this? Does my Master have something to say about this? How does life work?

So once we kinda embrace those preconceptions or presuppositions or just the way of looking at the world...then how do we respond to the presence of God? I have three really quick points to kinda wrap this up. How do we respond to the presence of God, to get to know God and really get to experience his presence? The first one is this...no matter how gifted you are, stay humble before God. Verse 19 in this same passage..."Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was." Verse 20..."He did not fail to confess but confessed freely 'I am not the Messiah.' They asked him then 'well who are you. Are you Elijah?' He said 'I'm not.' 'Are you a prophet?' He said 'no.' Finally they said 'well who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet. 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness. Make straight the way for the Lord.' Now the Pharisees who had been sent to question him asked him this question. 'Then why do you baptize if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the prophet?' And he answered this. 'I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'"

John the Baptist is saying this. It doesn't matter who I am; it matters who Christ is. Jesus called John the Baptist the greatest man in the history of the world. He told that to the Jewish leaders. And John the Baptist says 'I am nothing in comparison to Christ. I am not worth of even being a slave, untying this man's sandals.' That is such a contrary way of thinking. No matter how gifted we are, we're gonna stay humble before God. You may have noticed this around Vineyard culture that we don't use titles a lot. When people come up and say I need to talk to Pastor Mike, nobody really knows whom they're talking about. We just don't use that. I just like being on a first-name basis with everybody; we don't need titles. One old theology prof used to say it this way...'Michael, at the foot of the cross all the ground is completely level.' Standing before Jesus no one is better than anyone else. And it's interesting cause in the Christian world as well as in most of the world we love to pile up titles. Title after title...I get like letters and e-mails from people...Apostle so-and-so...can I come speak in your church? And I'm like Apostle so-and-so, what gave you that title? Was that film 'The Apostle'...was that DeNiro...where he like baptizes himself and he becomes an apostle...is that how you got that one? It's like Crackerjacks...it's like where did that come from...prophet so-and-so...listen, you don't need that stuff. That's not how this thing works. One of the founders of the Vineyard...his name was John Wimber...he's kind of a father of this group of churches...people used to ask him 'what do we call you? Are you an apostle? What are you? John Wimber would respond this way; he would say 'I'm just a fat man trying to get to heaven.' It's like no matter how gifted you are, stay humble before God. Stay humble before him and humble before one another and it actually makes relationships and Christmas dinner way easier, I can tell you that. So don't get so enamored with yourself no matter how much has happened through you. Stay humble before God.

Second one...no matter how much you know, stay hot after God. "So the next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by he said 'look, the Lamb of God.' When the two disciples heard this they followed Jesus. Turning around Jesus saw them following him and said 'what do you want?' They said 'Rabbi, [which means teacher] where are you staying?' He said this. Verse

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39...”Come’, he replied, ‘and you will see.’ So they went to and saw where he was staying and they spent the day with him. It was about 4 in the afternoon.” So there were two disciples, according to Jesus, following the greatest man in the history of the world...John the Baptist...and they walk away from him to follow Jesus. No matter how much you know, no matter how long you have followed Jesus, stay hot after God...stay on his trail. Spend the day with him. I love that verse 39...they spent the day with Jesus. You want to increase your knowledge of God? Don’t like rest on your laurels...don’t like think you’ve got it all figured out. And I wonder how many of us would say I know that Christ has invited me to follow him, I know he has, and I started out following him pretty strongly, but it feels like there’s a pretty good distance between us now. Somewhere along the way I got distracted. What do you do if that’s you? What do you do if all of a sudden you go the presence of God feels far away? What do you do? You press back in! Follow! Like tomorrow morning...you know growing as a follower of Jesus is not that hard...it’s left foot, right foot...just keep walking through this thing. And so tomorrow morning you get up, and instead of reading all the news on all the different sites that you might read it on...what if you just went to your Bible for a few minutes? You know John, talking about the Lord’s Prayer for the last few weeks...great series of messages...wanna grow in your relationship with God? Right foot...why don’t you open the Bible tomorrow? Left foot...why don’t you actually pray for about 10 or 15 minutes? Right foot...let’s open the scriptures again. What does God say about this area of my life? Right foot, left foot...you just keep doing it and then you stay hot on his trail and you spend the day with him. What might it look like to spend a day...to not just like leave Jesus sitting there...waiting to have a cup of coffee with you in the morning...bring him along for the whole day! Bring your Jesus to work day! This could be really good. And it’s not just once a year. What if that was like every moment of the day? You get to interact with him all along the way. That’s a great teacher, right?

Okay...last one...no matter how much you are threatened, stay honest with God. Starting in verse 43...”The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee finding Phillip he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ Phillip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Phillip found Nathaniel and told him ‘we found the one Moses wrote about in the law and whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ ‘Nazareth? Did anything good come from there?’ Nathaniel asked. ‘Come and see’, Phillip said. When Jesus saw Nathaniel approaching he said of him ‘here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.’” Nathaniel’s reaction to hearing Phillip say that he found the Messiah and that the Messiah was born in Nazareth was like astounding...seriously, could anything good come from Carlton? Oh I’m sorry...Nazareth? And Kris isn’t even here to defend himself anymore! I went out and visited the Cloquet/Carlton Vineyard on the first Sunday, Nov. 8, when they launched...I gotta tell you guys...I just wanted to cry in the back of the room the whole time. That was like such an amazing experience to see a brand new church launch...very first weekend like 350 people there or more...100 kids in children’s ministry...and they were like whoa! What are we doing? It was awesome! Cole was like bouncing off the walls! He was pretty excited!

Listen, here’s the deal...it is so easy for us to play church with one another. It’s so easy for us to become completely plastic, to never confess doubt...to pretend that you know more than you do...to pretend that you’ve experienced more than you have...to pretend you believe more than you do...to try to look more spiritual than you are. Come to place like Vineyard...whether it’s in Duluth or in the Iron Range...whether it’s over in Cloquet/Carlton...you come around all these other Christian people and they seem to be a step ahead of you. They seem to know more or seem to think that they know more...they all seem so very sure...do you know the person who really gets to know Christ? It is the person who is refreshingly honest. It’s the person who says ‘I don’t know how this really relates to my life!’ It’s the person who’s willing to say ‘I need some serious help!’ Sometimes, for some of us, we look at the folks who come up for prayer and we think oh man, there lives are messed up! Yeah, just like everybody in the room! The person who really gets to know God is the one who’s like really willing to press into that and learn and grow and get some help. The person who’s willing to say ‘I don’t understand this; I have doubts about this thing; I have serious doubts about this; can somebody help talk through those doubts with me?’...you never get to talk through them if you don’t say that you have them! Those are the people who really get to know Jesus. Jesus loves openhearted honesty, and the people who get to know him are the

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refreshingly, honest people.

So my goal, for this whole series of messages that we're doing right up through Christmas, is that we will get to know Christ a little bit better. So let's do this; let's invite his presence...why don't you guys stand up? Lord Jesus, thank you for your presence here. Thank you, that through you, we get to meet Creator God. You introduce us to God in a way that nobody ever could and never will, besides you. So, Lord Jesus, we want you front and center in our lives...the way you were in Dr. Lockridge's prayer...front and center. Holy Spirit, would you come? For some of us today we might say I wanna get to know Jesus, but I don't even feel like I've started the journey. I just wanna invite you to come up and get prayer. Come up and start the journey; come up and say 'I wanna get to know Jesus like that ole dude who prayed.' I wanna get to know him. If you're on the ministry team, why don't you make your way up here? I wanna get to know Jesus like that.

And you think about this...the way I've been going through it today...what particular aspect for you do you feel like God is inviting you to grow in? It might be being willing to be challenged. It might be God is speaking truth into your life. And that truth is coming even through a person that you don't even feel like cares about you, but there's a ring of truth there and you wanna hear God's voice in that truth. I think especially if you've come under criticism lately...I think God wants to meet you and he wants to pour grace upon grace upon grace upon your life, but he wants to highlight a little bit of truth...he wants to change you, and as you submit and surrender to him you'll find that criticism so much easier to handle. It doesn't have to sweep you under the rug. For others it's like you don't extend grace to yourself or to anyone around you and it's because you've never experienced that wave after wave after wave of God's grace. Maybe you've prayed this silly little prayer just recently this week...Lord, if you do this for me, I'll never ask you for anything again. Don't ever pray that thing again. In fact, come up and get some prayer, and say God, I need wave after wave after wave.

It's okay to like selfishly want that...it's a good thing...it's available...maybe for you it's grace. Maybe for some of you it's getting to know him as the Lamb of God...it takes away all the stuff you feel guilty about. You've been living through that guilt and that pressure for quite some time and it's weighing on you. You could have gotten even a little offended when I said you don't need to worry about forgiving yourself...don't put yourself in the place of God. I believe God wants to meet and actually bring some healing, that you would allow him to forgive you. For some of us it might be getting to know him as teacher, the one who really can teach us how life works. Whatever it is for you come up and get some prayer. These folks would love to pray with you. They're well trained and they just wanna participate in what God's doing in your life. The worship team's gonna continue to lead us in some worship. Other than that you are free to hang out in here as long as you want and carry on with your day; God bless you; thanks for coming to the Vineyard today.