

## “A Healthy Church Is Compassionate”, Michael Gatlin, Luke 16: 19 -31, March 20, 2016

Good morning! I'm so glad you guys are here today; this is gonna be fun. We've been asking the question over the course of this year 'how healthy do we want to be?' We've talked about lots of personal things. Lately we've been talking about some church-related health issues like what does a healthy church community look like...what would it look like for the Vineyard community to be more healthy in the way that we live out our faith in Christ? Today what I wanna do is talk about one of our banners...that one right there. We have 2 legs that the Vineyard church stands on. We have a foundation of theology of the kingdom of God, that we stand on the Bible, but we're standing with 2 legs: worship and compassion. So today I wanna take some time and unpack what we mean when we're talking about compassion. What is this thing really all about? And what would it look like for us, as a church community, to live compassionate lives in imitation of Jesus Christ? Then we'll press in a little deeper and say what will it look like for us, as individuals, to live compassionate lives as we imitate the Lord Jesus Christ? What does compassion mean? How does this thing actually work? For me, when I begin to press into this kind of thing, I don't go straight to Wikipedia...I just go straight to the scriptures because I think in the Bible we get to see a really cool, big picture of what compassion looks like.

What's a biblical picture of compassion? You may not realize this but the Bible uses some really graphic words to describe the fact that God is compassionate, that Jesus lived a compassionate life among us. The word compassion is used about 8 dozen times of God in the scriptures. If you include words like pity and longsuffering and mercy you'll find that it's brought up hundreds of times throughout the scriptures. Not only is God compassionate...not only did Jesus live a compassionate life...but he calls us toward this as well. So there are these wonderfully rich, emotionally evocative words throughout the scriptures. One of those words in the old testament is the Hebrew word 'racom' which simply means to have mercy upon of be compassionate. And that word is really related to another Hebrew word 'rahem', which speaks of the womb of God. That's a pretty cool word. Somehow compassion is related to the feelings a mother would have for a baby in her womb.

There's a Greek word that's pronounced 'splatna', which sounds more like a German dessert, but what it refers to is actually our innards, our guts. In first century culture that's where they thought the seat of emotions was. You experienced your deepest love, your deepest passion, your deepest anger in splatna, which was like that seat of emotions. Today we might call that the 'heart' that our emotions come from. It's just like deep inside. So the picture of compassion is this deep feeling, this deep connection, that can only be described in the Hebrew as connected to the womb of God...that feeling that you feel when you see a small, helpless baby. God's compassion to those in need is like a mother's tie to a baby in her womb. Our English word

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compassion is a compound word...com meaning with and patty meaning passion, which really talks about suffering. So from the Latin we get compassion=to suffer with somebody, to be with them, to suffer with them. So there's this deep emotion word, this deep compassion, this deep sympathy for a person and to desire to have personal connection with them. It's a desire to relieve their ministry. In fact compassion doesn't actually permit any distance between you and the other person. If you're gonna actually extend mercy, if you're gonna feel compassion toward somebody, there can't be distance. It can't be done from afar.

We read that Jesus actually lived this out. He was an incredibly compassionate person. So Matthew 9..."Jesus, when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them." Why? It's because he didn't see them as doing pretty good without them. I wonder if Jesus were to walk through our neighborhoods today, would he walk around and go wow, two cars! Oh, lake cabin, you guys are doing great without me! Or would he see the folks all around us...would he look at our house and see that we're harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd? Would he have compassion on us? And he even cared about people's real physical needs. There's this story in Matthew 15 where people have been following Jesus for 3 days and he calls his disciples to him and says 'I have compassion for these people. They have already been with me 3 days and have had nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away hungry, for they may collapse along the way.' This is one of the instances where he fed several thousand people in one sitting from a little lunch that was gathered up amongst them. He had compassion on them about their real needs. In fact if you think about this at Christmas time we celebrate a name given to Jesus in the Old Testament...Emmanuel, which means God with us. See compassion is all about God coming and being with us. That's how he lives this thing out! So compassion is all about being connected to other people; it's all about feeling things; it's all about suffering with them.

So today what I wanna do is look at a super-confrontive story that Jesus tells. He doesn't call it a parable. We don't know if it's a parable; we don't know if it's a real thing. But he tells this really confrontive story in Luke chapter 16. So if you have a Bible, or open it up on your device...Luke 16, starting in verse 19...I wanna read this incredibly, confrontive story, and then I wanna allow the Holy Spirit to really speak to us as a community and as individuals about how we might embody the compassion of God. So the story goes like this...Luke chapter 16, verse 19...Jesus is speaking..."There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died, and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.

In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things while Lazarus received bad things? But now he's comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us

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and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He answered ‘I beg you, Father Abraham, send Lazarus to my family for I have 5 brothers. Let him warn them so they don’t come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, Father Abraham’, he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them they will repent.’ And he said to them ‘if they did not listen to Moses and the prophets; they’ll not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ This is really encouraging, isn’t it?

Why don’t you pray with me? Heavenly Father, this is a really confrontive story that Jesus tells. Holy Spirit I ask that you would give us insight into this. Would you fill me with your Spirit just as I speak right now? And would you speak to every single one of us about how this might apply to our lives individually and personally, as well as to us as a community? Come and let your voice be heard. In Christ’ name I pray, amen.

Well one of the first things I see in this passage is how different God’s perspective is from ours regarding other people. He has a really different perspective regarding other humans than we do. The rich man in the story is unnamed; the poor man has a name Lazarus. Do you understand how completely opposite that is from everything in culture, not only in first century culture, but all the way to our culture today? In just about any society it’s the movers and the shakers! It’s the successful people and the wealthy that are named! We remember the folks with the MBAs and the PHDs. We remember those in upper management who drive the sweet cars. And to all of them Lazarus would be a big fat zero. In fact he would be less than nothing; he would be an eyesore, someone you had to walk around, someone you would have to step over on your way to the theatre, or someone who would be in your way on your way to the dinner party at this guy’s house.

You remember the rich folks, right? We remember those who have made their mark. We remember the important people. Just picture this rich guy for a second. He knows how to dress; he knows how to choose a great bottle of wine; he knows how to pop a cork off of champagne without killing his neighbor; he knows where all the great restaurants are and they all know him. They know where he likes to sit! He’s part of the country club with his wife. He’s probably a scratch golfer; he’s got things down in life. Maybe he has a boat! He likes to cruise around with parties on that in the summer. He always spends a week in Colorado skiing in the winter. And at work he’s a great finder. He’s great at developing new accounts. He’s the ultimate salesperson. This guy’s made his mark on life. Just skip up in your passage just a little bit to verse 15, is you want something just a tiny bit more confrontive. “‘What people highly value,’ Jesus said, ‘is detestable in God’s sight.’” Oh Lord, I think we need some help here!

And by way of contrast...at his gate laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores. He had to be laid at the gate; he couldn’t make it there on his own. The Greek word speaks of not just being dropped off, but being ‘flung’ or ‘dumped’ at the gate. He was apparently unable to walk, maybe crippled, paralyzed...perhaps from an untreated accident...and he cannot take care of

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himself at all. He's covered in sores. And the dogs that are there...these are not like your favorite little pet. These are not like a border collie or the dog with the really cool eyes looking at you going 'oh just scratch my head; I love you.' You know that in ancient, near-eastern culture, as in poor countries today, the dogs were not pets. They were like really bit, scrawny, furry rats, and they were just running around in packs trying to find some food. And so for this pack of dogs to be licking his sores is not like we care about you; it's like would you hurry up and die; we're looking for some meat! He is being harassed by dogs! This is not like a pretty thing. And even his name, Lazarus, means 'God is my helper'. And we might think well, that's comforting. Well listen, in other words here is a man who has no one in the world to assist him or help him. Jesus names him Lazarus. He has no one other than God. He has no human being to look to, no one to whom he can appeal for assistance. He's a man utterly without friends, without loved ones...he's alone in his portion. The rich guy has a big slice of the world; he's taken a big bite out of life. Lazarus doesn't even get the crumbs or scraps; he's got nothing.

Let me pause here for a second. It gets really important at this point to know that the Bible does not say it's intrinsically wrong to be wealthy. Nowhere in the scriptures does the Bible say it's wrong to have a great job and a big house with lots of money. The Bible doesn't say that. What the Bible talks about often is the way we treat other people with the things that he's given to us. And so that's what's coming up here; that's what's being dialed up. The Bible doesn't create class envy; the Bible is not a communist document. The Bible rather speaks of those who are righteous and wealthy. We read about Cornelius in Acts, chapter 10. We read about Job, righteous and wealthy. This man's life was marked by a complete lack of compassion and by stinginess. We'll get to that more. This is why Jesus tells us a few chapters earlier...Luke chapter 6...be compassionate as your Heavenly Father is compassionate. You see compassion is far from easy; this is a very difficult thing.

So, using this story, what I wanna do is I wanna talk about some specific things that reduce our ability to experience compassion and we might, if we want to, grow to be compassionate like our Heavenly Father is compassionate. So let's talk about some things that reduce our compassion. Number 1: Wealth can reduce our ability to be compassionate. Wealth can reduce our ability to be compassionate. Jesus said really clearly in the book of Matthew that you can't serve both God and money. We can't serve our wealth. And wealth can give us the illusion of fullness. It can dull our senses. It can make us feel completely full, like we have everything we need. Wealth can give us a false sense of security, as if wealth covers all of our issues and problems. And you can even have people who meet your needs...you don't even have to worry about meeting those needs...like the rich man probably did. And so even while he's in Hades he begins to order Abraham and Lazarus to come meet his needs. Do you get that? The guy's in Hades...he's suffering...he says hey can you guys do something about that for me, please? And what does Abraham say? Sorry no, you're on your own. You had time to do something about this, and you didn't while you had the time.

You know here's the deal for us. We can go through long stretches of our lives where we are out

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of touch with our needs, where we don't know what it feels to be needy, as individuals and as a church community. We can go through long stretches where we're just out of touch with that. People walk up to us and say hey, I'd love to pray for you. Is there anything you specifically need prayer for? And you just say I'm good! I've got everything I need! I got everything I want! Seriously, if you wanna get in touch with your needs one of the things you can do is just begin to compare yourself to God. Let's talk about someone who has everything he needs and wants...and the way that he expresses himself, the way that he reaches out to you and I in the midst of that. Wealth can create a false sense of security.

Another thing that can distance and rob you of compassion is separation from people with needs. This rich man lived in a safe and secure 'gated community'. He never had to deal with the need that was just outside his gate. We can separate ourselves from anybody with need, because honestly people with need can be so annoying at times. It's like this black hole of need that no matter how much encouragement I give them it's just always there. Do you ever feel that way? There you go. And so what do we do? We separate ourselves from our neighbors. We separate ourselves from people at work. We separate ourselves from the needy folk around us. Distance will rob us of being able to be compassionate.

A big thing that robs us from being able to be compassionate is just simple stinginess. Stinginess can rob us of that, right? I've never met anyone who says I'm just a stingy person. Most people don't say that. But here's one of the ways you know; here's like a dip-stick test to see if there's stinginess in your life...if you're offended by what I'm saying right now. No seriously, when you get offended by somebody teaching from the scripture about this sort of thing...telling the story that Jesus said...when you get offended by that stinginess has taken hold in your life; it's there. And the truth is every single one of us feels that. We do.

For me, this week, I received an email from somebody who was crying out for help. This is someone I've heart cry out for help a bizillion times. And you know what, I just kind of put the email on hold. I just said I'm not gonna deal with this; this is a black hole of need; I don't wanna get involved in it. And then on Wednesday morning I open up and I read this story. And I'm like oh crap! There is no way, if I don't do something here that I can actually read this story to you and teach about it. There's no way! I would just be a bald-faced liar as a pastor; I should just quit. There's no way that you can read this, having gotten a cry of help from somebody, and not do something about it. So not only did I respond by email, but after I responded by email I opened this story back up and I felt like God said 'Michael, that's not enough. He gave you his cell number; call him.' I'm like alright. We had the best 30-minute conversation, and I challenged him on some stuff, and he challenged me on some stuff. It was really good.

Stinginess is this thing where we begin to think that everything that God's given me is just for me. And then all of a sudden there's this fear that creeps in that if I give something away, what am I going to have! Like this is all that God could ever provide for me...what I currently have! And I don't trust his goodness and his provision any more. I begin to look at me as the source of

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provision instead of him. But what if he could provide everything I need all the time? What if he could do that?

I'm gonna share a story that happened quite a few years ago that still speaks to me really closely. Brenda and I were much younger...I think we had 2 kids at the time...and it was my oldest kid who was 3 or 4 at the time. He wasn't very old. I woke him up one morning and he said 'Daddy, I had a dream last night.' And so he started telling me this dream, and I go oh, that's cute; that's cool; that's a nice dream. So we get to church, and it was a smaller Vineyard church...probably a hundred or 120 people. At one point after worship the pastor got up and said 'I feel like some people here have some prophetic words, a word from God, or maybe a dream they had last night.' And during worship I'm sitting there holding him the whole time. So my little kid, 3 years old, hears the pastor say this and says 'Dad, I wanna share my dream.' What would you think? I said oh no; I don't see an outcome for this story that goes well for me. If I say no, I'm squashing my poor 3-year old, and if I say yes I could just picture the pastor's face. What are you doing, right? And he was a nice guy, but I did not think this was gonna go well. My little kid's just tugging on me...'Daddy, I wanna share my dream.'

And so I don't know what happened, but I found myself walking up there. The pastor knew me pretty well...I was like one of the leaders...he goes to hand me the microphone, and I put the microphone over in front of my little guy. The pastor looks at me like what are you doing? My little guy shares this dream in his 3-year old way; I can't say it the way he did...this was like a few years ago...twenty some years ago now. But he said 'in my dream I had a box, and everytime I opened up the box things escaped from the box, and so I closed it cause I didn't want to lose any of it. But then I realized what was escaping was little hearts, and I realized if I just kept the box open it would never run out of hearts. So we're just supposed to keep the boxes open.' And I thought 'way to go kid! That was awesome! You did great!' Everybody's going oh, that's so sweet! That was a good 'Dad' moment. I fell backwards into stumbling, right? But isn't that this deal? It's like stinginess actually robs us of being able to experience so much of God's provision in our lives.

That's not all; busyness can do the same thing. Filling our lives to the brim is gonna reduce our ability to experience compassion. If there's no room, no margin, no time left to interact with the other earthlings...if we're busy with family and work and school and kids and aging parents...that Lazarus person is such a black hole of need! We can't exactly stop everything just to go do this with a needy person, right? So busyness can rob us of that.

Here are 3 more really big things that rob us. First one...reducing the gospel...what some churches do is reduce the message of the gospel to only spiritual issues. So we hear Jesus in the beatitudes saying 'blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And we say that only refers to the spiritually poor. Jesus is only talking about that. We take 80% of the parables where Jesus is talking about money and generosity and compassion and we say that's only referring to spiritual issues. When we do that we rob ourselves of compassion. See here's

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the deal. The gospel is not only talking about spiritual issues. Now listen, at the center of the gospel is a deeply spiritual message. John 3:16...for God so loved, not just all of humanity but you, that he gave his one and only son, on the cross, so that he could pay for our rebellion. If we just have confidence in him, we can actually experience brand new life with God. Jesus called it being born again. And so there is a deeply spiritual message about the gospel; that's at the heart of it; that's at the center. But if you wanna round out the reality of the gospel it is meant to bring change to our lives, not just get a ticket punched so you can go to heaven when you die.

If you wanna fill out the gospel we need to actually care about justice issues in the world today. We need to care about ending slavery and sex trafficking. We need to care about refugees; we need to care about victims of domestic violence; we need to care to bring about racial justice. We need to try to reduce the number of abortions going on in our country of babies being killed. If the gospel is big enough to affect all of life or it doesn't affect much of life...you might say Michael, why is this important? Here's why it's important. There are lots of people in the world today who would call themselves born again, but they're really mean; they're not nice people... like you and I. It never goes too far from home, does it? It's not just the people out there; it's you and I. The gospel is meant to affect the way that we live, the way that we treat our parents, the way that we treat our spouses and our kids, and the way that we treat those who work for us and those we work for. The gospel is meant to change the way that we treat people that are like us and people that are not like us at all. The gospel is meant to have impact in ALL of life! And it starts with a deeply spiritual message. So reducing the gospel robs us of compassion.

Here's another thing...wrong motivation. If your motivation for showing compassion is for them...if your motivation for showing compassion is for them...if your motivation for showing compassion is for yourself...if your motivation for showing compassion is trying to impress leaders in your life...you're gonna be disappointed. We always exercise compassion for God. We want to be a compassionate church, because God is a compassionate God and not for any other reason. Why is this important? It's because often the people we're being compassionate towards will not have a good enough reaction to keep you going. You won't get the emotional response you're looking for. Listen in this room today there are lots of people who used to be involved in ministry...we used to give ourselves away. Perhaps you used to do ministry, but you gave up because you got bruised; you got hurt; you got misunderstood. If you're ever doing it for the response of others, for the people you serve or the leaders that you're serving alongside of, you're gonna quit. But if you do it for Jesus, you keep going, because this is part of who he is. And so the wrong motivation can rob us of compassion.

Here's another thing...focusing on people like us robs us of compassion. There is no way to grow in compassion if you only focus on the people who are like you. See God wants to show mercy to people who are unlike us. We are nothing like God, and he steps into our world to show us mercy. He becomes Emmanuel. Our invitation is to step into the world of other people and show them mercy...the same kind of mercy that he has shown to us. God wants to show mercy to people who aren't like us! He wants to show mercy to people who vote the wrong way.

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What's funny is in this room right now there are all the different people who vote the right way and the wrong way. Like if you just look up to the next row and just down the row a little bit you're gonna find people who vote really different from you. They cancel out your vote; it's awesome. It's really cool. Like that's part of the miracle of the church...it's people who don't vote the same way cause you're together in community. Jesus said that everyone will know you're my disciples cause you're all the same, right? No, it's because of your love for one another.

So we're not meant to just let the foreigner fend for themselves...we're not meant to do that. The gospel is big enough to address immigration. It's big enough to address all this stuff. So when we focus on people like us we lose that. Now listen...if you begin to have these kinds of conversations...you speak up for folks who are unlike you to your friends...if you say that God wants to show mercy to Muslims...if you say that God wants to show mercy to Syrian refugees...if you say that God wants to show mercy to those in prison...you're gonna experience anger from other people. Why? It's because we all struggle with the compassion of God. It's too liberal; it's too like out there; it includes everybody. We all struggle with this. Every single one of us has groups of people for whom we are willing to say 'that's it; draw the line; that group gets no more mercy.' All of us have groups like that. We all have that. I believe God wants to say 'no, sorry, every group deserves mercy. Every group deserves compassion.'

Alright so those are some things that rob us of compassion. We can have some fun with that, huh? I'm really looking forward to that conference "Loving Across Our Differences" that we're having right after Easter. That's gonna be a blast.

So here are 3 really simple things for how we grow in compassion. First one is this...you have to see yourself as needy. You have to be able to see the need in your own life. When everything is going well it is difficult to imagine that you're ever going to be completely dependent on the goodness of someone else...that your life is only hanging on by a thread. You see yourself as a potentially needy person...someone who's in crisis...who desperately needs the kindness and compassion of others...then your outlook will begin to change. You have to see yourself as needy. And if you can't identify need in your life, if you're going through one of those stretches where it's difficult to identify, just ask God to show it to you. He's really good at this. He does it for me all the time. Just say Heavenly Father, where is the need in my life? Where is the need in my life? Just let him speak it to you. That's number one.

Number two...if you want to grow in compassion you actually have to spend time with people who are in need. You have to get near people who are actually suffering. You have to go to them. Listen, you can't have mercy on teen pregnancy, but you can extend mercy to a teenager. Isn't that right? You can't have mercy or compassion for the whole problem, but you can extend it to a particular individual. You have to allow their pain to become your pain if you wanna grow in compassion. That's why it's so difficult. You see we like to think of ourselves as compassionate people who are basically good, patient, kind, gentle and understanding. Who

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wouldn't feel compassion towards an old man? Who wouldn't feel compassion towards a hungry child or a paralyzed soldier or a fearful kid? And we deeply feel offended, don't we, when someone accuses us of lacking compassion? But compassion asks us to go to where it hurts...into places of pain...to share in the brokenness and fear and confusion and anguish. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. And so it's not surprising that compassion, understood as suffering, evokes within us a deep resistance and even some protest. As it turns out compassion is not our most natural response. We are not naturally compassionate people. We are pain avoiders. And anyone who wants to go towards pain...we think they're just weird. They're abnormal. We do not naturally aspire to suffer with other people. But that's compassion, willingness to suffer, and that's exactly what Jesus did on our behalf. That's why we experience the life that we sing about.

So I wonder, who might be the Lazarus in your life? Who might be the Lazarus that you step over or that you walk around? We all have them. Now some people respond and say Michael, I'm not rich. I'm not the rich man living in luxury every day of my life. Listen in this room we are all rich in something. Let me just give you some examples. We're all rich in something. You might be rich in property. You might actually own a piece of the earth, or at least you're making payments on it. I'll never forget when Brenda and I bought our first house. We were barely making ends meet, in fact I couldn't even find the ends to make them meet. I didn't know where they were. We bought our first house. We had bought it from this 90 year-old couple who had built it themselves in Columbia Heights, MN. We moved in in the fall and there was this lush garden. They had concord grapes; they had tomatoes; they had cucumbers and peppers; they had stuff that I didn't even know what it was? Brenda knew what it was, and she made really good meals out of it. One of the first days that we moved in I'm out there...and you know those boxes that they put reams of paper in and are always by the copy machine? I had 15 of those boxes that I filled up with tomatoes from this garden. That's how big the garden was!

I'm picking this stuff thinking wow, some of these tomatoes are green...I knew a frost was coming and I thought 'I've never had fried green tomatoes; I'm gonna try it now!' So I'm all excited; I'm gonna make all this stuff out of it; we're gonna make salsa... and I felt like the Lord just asked me lovingly a question...'Michael, did you plant any of this?' And I'm like 'where have you been, God? Of course not, I just bought the house. Of course I didn't plant any of this.' 'You're harvesting where you haven't planted, and here's what I'm gonna do. In the same way that you've experienced this really rich harvest, I'm gonna bring people to your house who need a place to live, and I want you to share your house with them.' And I'm like that sounds cool, until it happened. It was like the next day...we were at church. I told Brenda about that, and she's like yeah. We're at church the next day, and this family with 2 little kids were getting evicted from their apartment, and I'm like oh my gosh, I think this is it! And I'm like Brenda, what do you think? And she's like we just moved in; we just finally got a house, and now you wanna give it away. And I'm like oh, I don't know what I wanna do! We went home and prayed about it a little bit; we invited them in. And over the course of the 7 years that we lived there I

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think we had 34 people live with us. And it was the richest experience. I don't know what your place looks like, but I bet you might have a free closet somewhere. What if you just invited someone who needed a place to live in and begin to love them? What if you did that? What if God spoke to you in doing that? Some of us are rich in property.

Others of us are rich in relationships and friendships. We've got a ton of friendships. Some of you are really good at relationships. I'm an introvert; I've gotta really work hard at that part. But some of you guys are just naturals at it. Your family is so close-knit, and it's always just like you guys...that's it. It's like puppies in a box, licking each other. Well, what if you just opened up the box a little bit. What if you just let some other people in? You know one of the biggest struggles in culture today is loneliness. What if you just invited some lonely people in? Yes, they're annoying. Yes, they have bad social skills. That's why they're lonely. And yes, they always talk about themselves, but what if you just began to love on them?

Some of us are rich intellectually. Some of us in this room are pretty darn smart, and you love to read and discuss and debate, and you really have no time for less-educated Lazarus with his silly uninformed opinions and his lack of reading or intellectual rigor. And when you encounter these dull and dumb Lazaruses of the world you just overwhelm them with your superiority. It's easy to make them feel stupid or worthless, not capable of having an opinion worth listening to. Have you guys done that? Anybody else besides me? Sure, just leave me out there hanging alone. Listen every one of us has a lot of something in our lives, and all of us have Lazaruses in our lives...people that we push to the back door, that we dismiss, that we walk around outside of our gates.

So here's the last thing you gotta do...you actually have to do something...you have to help other people. If you wanna grow in compassion, you have to put yourself with people who are suffering and then you have to do something. You have to do it! You don't grow in compassion by listening to a sermon about it. You don't grow in compassion by reading books about it. You don't grow in compassion by reading the Bible about it. You don't grow in compassion by singing songs about it or making movies about it. You grow in compassion as you actually get face-to-face with people who are in need and you help them. Then you'll find compassion begins to grow in your heart and in your life. So as a Vineyard community, as the church, I wanna see us be healthy in this. If you've never served at the food shelf, or if you've never worked with the 'Love Justice Team' or never kinda reached out and served other people just in your own neighborhood, I just invite you to begin to ask God how he would have you to do that, cause we wanna be a really healthy church. Why don't you guys stand up?

So Heavenly Father, I just thank you for the grace you have for each of us. And if we put ourselves into this story, Lord, we see ourselves as being the rich person. We can also see ourselves as being Lazarus. So Lord, I ask that you would come and that you would, by your Holy Spirit, minister to each one of us today. I just wanna invite you guys to come up and get some prayer. Prayer team, go ahead and make your way up here. I invite you guys to come up

# the **Vineyard** church

*Love God. Love people. Period.*

to the front as the worship team leads us in some worship; come get some prayer today. I think there's some stuff that God really wants to do in each of our lives. We just have to have a little courage and let him begin to speak to us. Open up the door. If you don't see where you're rich, ask God 'where am I wealthy? What part of life am I wealthy in that I could actually share?' And if the idea of spending time with people in need fills you with fear, like there's no way I'll have enough...come up and get some prayer. Allow God to show you the depths of his resources that go well beyond anything that you've ever even imagined and perhaps even asked for. His resources are so vast...his love, his grace, and his mercy. God's goal is not to crush you with a talk like this, with a message like this, but his goal is to set you free to be more like Jesus.

And if you're here today and you feel more like Lazarus...you're overwhelmed by needs going on in your life...maybe something you've recently heard from the doctor or relational failing, things that have broken up...I invite you to come up and get some prayer. I believe the Holy Spirit really wants to meet you and minister to you in deeply spiritual and deeply practical ways all at the same time. So these guys are gonna lead us in worship. I just invite you guys to respond and let the Holy Spirit just press in deep. You can hang out in here as long as you want. We'd love to pray for every person if we could. So God bless you. Thanks for coming to the Vineyard. Come get some ministry and hang around in here a little bit. And then when you leave, don't forget your kids.