

Your Potential

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We speak in the name of Jesus, the power that is contained in the name of Jesus. You know, the word of God speaks of itself in Hebrews 4 that it is more powerful than a two edged sword and oftentimes that edge is an edge of conviction. Sometimes it's an edge of comfort. Today the word of God is going to be so convicting that it's going to comfort us. You may question how can that be. Today is one of those days where you may hear a message from God's word that you have been wanting to hear for years and years and years and finally today you're going to hear it. So would you pray in preparation to hear his word with me?

Lord, we know that today is not by accident. We know it is not by happenstance. We know that you have ordained, you have orchestrated and you have desired us to be in this place at this time to hear this word and so, Lord, I do pray that this would not be just an exercise in religious endeavor, this would not just be the checking off of a box or the crossing of a "t" or the dotting of an "i," but this would be one of those moments as you have prepared our hearts to hear, that we would hear the words not just read them. Lord, that we would digest the words, not just hear them. And that ultimately that we would be challenged and we would be comforted and we would know that your plans for us and your desires for us are so much greater than we even have for ourselves. Help us, O God, as we walk through this passage. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of John 4 and as you're turning to John 4, beginning in verse 27, we have the conclusion of a story regarding a young lady known as the woman at the well or the Samaritan woman. To be honest with you, today's message though is not really so much about this woman as it is about how Jesus responds to the men of which this woman brings to him. And what we're going to see today is we're going to deal with this word that I love in the English language, I love the word "potential," because when you talk about potential, we define it as something that could be expected or something that we hope for or maybe even something that we desire but allow me today to define potential as an old football coach of mine did once. Are you ready? He defined potential as you haven't done it yet. In other words, you hope to, you want to, you desire to but it hasn't come to fruition.

There could be no greater example of our definition of potential today than this last weekend in our culture. This last weekend what we know as the NFL invested over \$1

billion into players that haven't stepped foot on the field yet. I know what some of you are thinking, "Well, they've proved themselves in the high school ranks, they've proved themselves in the college ranks." How many times though have we seen a first-round draft pick go bust? How many times have we seen somebody who wasn't even drafted become a perennial MVP? In fact, if you were to go to John 4 and if you were to survey the groups of people that Jesus was dealing with and the conversations he was having, he'd say, "I'll tell you what, I need you to draft somebody to make an incredible impact. I need you to draft somebody to make an unbelievable influence on our community and our culture." Nobody here would have ever picked this woman. Not a one of us. Here is a woman who had had five marriages that have come and failed, living with another man. She had a reputation. She had baggage. She had history. She had a story. Not one of us would say, "Oh, that's a first round draft pick," because we wouldn't see the potential. But what we see here is that Jesus saw her potential which is your potential and it is our potential as the body of Christ. What is it that he desires to do in your life, your family's life, our churches life? He wants to influence and impact this world for the sake of Jesus Christ but as we're going to see, there are some interruptions that can keep that from happening.

I want you to turn to John 4, beginning in verse 27. It says,

27 And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What do you seek? or, Why do you talk with her? 28 The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and she went unto and she talked unto the men, 29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? 30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him. 31 In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, you need to eat. 32 But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that you know not of. 33 Therefore said the disciples one to another, Has any man brought him ought to eat? 34 Jesus said unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. 35 Say you not, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; they are already ready to be harvested. 36 And he that reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. 37 And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. 38 I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and you are entered into their labours. 39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.

When you look at this story and this woman and all the baggage of her life, none of us would have ever picked out, none of us would have ever dreamed the influence and the impact that she made in the life not just of these men but an entire city. So how does her story become your story? How does her story become our story? And how can we reach the same level of potential in our life as well?

I think, first, we have to look at the influence which this young lady had in the lives of these people, the influence that she was able to bring them into the city, she was able to speak of them and they were willing to come and to see and to meet with Jesus. What was her influence? What was in her life that we so desperately need? Well, I think the first thing we see in verse 29 is she was transparent. She said, "Come and see a man who told me everything I've ever done." Transparency. Boy, that's a term that is rare in the church today. Do you know what we're really good at? We're really good at putting up an image. We're really good at dressing ourselves up and pretending like we don't have any problems and there are no struggles and there are no heartaches. Can we just be transparent today: we are all messed up. We are all messed up. You see, here is the thing about this woman: they knew she was messed up, she had had five marriages come and go, she was living with another man, everybody in her community knew everything about her and I've got news for you, people know about you too. You see, you think, "Oh, I've got it all hidden. I've got it behind my firewall." No, you don't. You see, the problem is we live in the south and we're just too nice to tell you that we know.

But we need to start being transparent. Let me tell you what we've got here in our world today. We've got the Scarlet Letter syndrome going on. Now, for those of you that are not familiar with that piece of literature, "The Scarlet Letter," a book of years gone by, it's a story of a man who was actually the pastor in town and a young lady of which they had a relationship together and a child was born by the name of Pearl. Because of the community and the culture and the over-religiosity of the community, they decided to do a public judging, a public stoning of this woman for her sin, her fornication and her adultery, and so her sentence was to wear a scarlet letter "A" around her neck the rest of her days to remind everybody of what she had done, to remind everybody of the sin of which she had committed. If you've read the book, the story is really about this man who is struggling with the fact that she has been exposed and he has not and there is tension and there is turmoil and because he fears what will people do if they know, how will they respond if they really know the deep dark secrets of my life, as that story unveils there comes a point where he goes into the public venue, he rips open his shirt and he reveals that he has carved the letter "A" in his chest and what he feared, which was retribution, what he feared, which was rejection, what he ended up receiving was repentance and restoration. We, the people of God, we, the church of Jesus Christ, until we quit acting like a country club and start acting like a hospital, we're not going to see influence in our culture again. We are so busy worrying about how we look. I've got news for you, I don't care how you perfume the pig, it's still a pig and yet we dress it all up.

She walks in and says, "Guys, I've found a guy who knows everything about me." So her influence was transparent but also it involved her testimony. Back it up one verse into verse 28. Notice what she does: she leaves her waterpot. Some of you are thinking, "Well, that's just a small detail. What's so significant there?" Huge significance. This woman would have gone through the same routine in the same community time after time. Again, she went to the well, she received the water, she went back into town. Everybody knew her routine. Everybody knew who she was, what she did, and I can make you a promise, young mommas, I'll make you a promise: there were young moms in those days who told their daughters don't end up at the well when she is there or people

will think you're just like her. She had a pattern. She had a reputation and when she shows up and she doesn't have the waterpot, here's what is significant: she was communicating something has changed in my life. After all, it was Jesus who said, "Do you know what? You're going to have to keep drinking from this water but if you take what I give you, you'll never thirst again."

It reminds me of one of my favorite stories in Scripture, a man by the name of Bartimaeus, he's found in the Gospel of Mark. He's on the road to Jerusalem. Jesus is on the way to the crucifixion and he begins to cry out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! Have mercy on me!" The disciples say, "Oh, just leave him alone. He's just a beggar. We don't have time for him." Jesus stops and says, "Call the man to me." It says that he got up, he left his mat and went to Jesus. I want you to think about that for just a moment: when there are crowds of thousands of people on a busy road, how was a blind man going to find his mat again unless he knows he's about to see for the very first time?

Here was a woman who for the first time in her life wasn't doing what she always used to be doing. She was different. There was something that was distinct. If we're going to influence our world for the sake of Jesus Christ, we have got to have a testimony, we've got to have a life that is different than what we see around us.

You know, in the last few days I had the privilege, I took my entire family to see a movie which is based on a book entitled "The Case for Christ." It's the story of Lee Strobel, a former Chicago Tribune beat writer who finds himself in a situation where his wife through a tragedy in their family, or should I say an almost tragic event in their family, finds herself going to a church service, hearing the Gospel and becoming a believer in Jesus Christ and he's an atheist and he is struggling with this. He cannot understand what has happened in his wife's life and so he goes on a journey because he's a journalist, because he's a researcher, he's going to prove that the tomb is not empty. He's going to prove that Jesus Christ did not raise from the dead and the story is about his research. The story is about his interviews and all the data that he collects and he cannot dispute it, he cannot doubt it, he can't eliminate it. Finally toward the end of the story of not just his life but the movie, there is a coworker who is talking with him about all the facts that he can't refuse and in the midst of that conversation he makes this statement, he says, "One thing I cannot change the fact of is that my wife is different now than she used to be."

Folks, we can argue facts, we can argue details, we can argue all of the information that is out there but you cannot refute the testimony of a changed life, and when this woman had this influence over these men, not only was she transparent and saying, "Hey, I am who you know I am," she said, "I'm different now. I'm no longer interested in the things of the waterpot and the daily routines of life. Something has changed."

Ah, but then there was the influence of transportation. I know what some of you are thinking, "That's kind of weird. They didn't have cars back then. They barely had chariots. How did she transport these guys?" Notice the story. It says they actually went with her back to see Jesus. Let me give you some facts this morning. In our culture today, less than 3%, less than 3% of people who come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior will

do so in a worship service like this. Less than 3%. Most people who come to know Jesus do so in a car, living room, ball park, classroom, somewhere other than this room on a Sunday morning, but what we also need to understand is those 97% who come to know Jesus outside of this room had somebody typically who was inside of this room that made an influence and an impact on their lives and spoke with them and talked with them and communicated with them.

Such was a young man in my life some years ago. He came to me one time and on Sunday morning regularly as a pastor and he said, "Pastor, I'm just discouraged." I said, "What's going on?" He said, "I'm the only believer in my family. I'm the only Christian. My parents don't believe. My sisters don't believe. My nieces, my nephews, nobody. I'm the only one." He said, "I invite them to church, I invite them to the special services, I do everything I can. I bribe them. I offer to buy their lunch. I mean, nothing is working." He said, "I don't know what to do." So we kind of talked through it and a couple of weeks later, he showed up at the guest reception just like we have between services and he had somebody with him and I found out later it was his mom. He had his mom with him and he was smiling from ear-to-ear and I said, "Friend, what's going on?" He said, "You're not going to believe what happened." I said, "What?" He said, "Not only is she with me today, she got saved today in the service." I said, "Wow, that is incredible. How did this all work out?" He said, "It worked out because it's my birthday." I said, "Friend, what does your birthday have anything to do with it?" He said, "Over the past years, Father's Day, Mother's Day, Christmas, Easter, I have begged my family to come to church with me to no avail." He said, "I told my mom, 'This Sunday's my birthday. My birthday present is you're coming to church with me.'" He said, "But I knew what had happened in the past so I drove to her house and I picked her up and I brought her with me to church and look what God did!"

You see, the same thing happened in this story. The woman didn't send a tweet out, she didn't send an instant message saying, "Hey, guys, you might want to check out Jesus." She actually goes with them back to him. She had this transparent life, she had a testimony of a changed life and she was actually willing to invest her time and her energy into these people hearing about Jesus.

Now before we talk about the impact and how much impact we can have for the Gospel, let's talk about some distractions, let's talk about some things that come up in our life to go counter-wise. Look what happens in verse 31: the disciples show up and they mean well. They think Jesus is hungry. They think he needs some food. They know that being a good Baptist he likes to buffet his body and he hasn't had any lunch yet and so they come to him saying, "Hey, Jesus, where are you going to eat?" And Jesus says, "Don't you understand I've got more important things to do." What are these interruptions that happen in our life? What keeps us from being influencers for the Gospel?

Let me tell you the first one: opportunity. You say, "Opportunity?" Yeah, you know, sometimes we believe that the only way that the devil moves and works in our life is by causing harm in our life. Think of the story of Job for a moment. Remember this guy in the Old Testament? He loses his physical health, he loses his family members, he loses

his money, and the devil's conversation with God is always this, "If you allow me to touch him and to curse him and to hurt him, he will curse you to your face." And God says, "No, no, no. I've got this. It's all good." Let me flip that story on the other side. How many times potentially in your life has the devil said this to God, "Just allow me to give them a promotion and they won't be as faithful anymore. Just allow healing in their life and they'll quit praying. Just allow them to be able to pay their bills and they'll quit seeking you, God." You see, sometimes it is the opportunities of life that interrupt our desire for the things of God in our life.

Some years ago, I heard the CEO of a major global corporation make this statement, he said, "Sometimes the most difficult things to deal with in life are the management of our blessings." Now, I'm going to give you an observation of a pastor over two decades here. I can tell you how the economy is going. You can go and listen to the news, you can read the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times and all that, I can give you an observation of the economy. Are you ready? Here it is, it's real simple: when the economy is good and we can afford our toys and we can go on vacation and we can do all the things that we really want to do, all of a sudden church isn't that important and neither are the things of God, but if the economy is bad and we're struggling to pay the bills, all of a sudden we don't have money to take trips, we don't have money to buy toys and church all of a sudden is of great priority. You see, you don't realize that this perspective up here, I can tell you how the economy is doing based on how we, the church of Jesus Christ, respond because the distractions, the interruptions are oftentimes the opportunities of life.

But sometimes they're the obligations of life. Notice what the disciples say, "Jesus, you've got to eat. Surely this is something that has to happen in your life." You know, there is a parable that Jesus shares called the parable of the sower. You know it well. Jesus talks about the four seeds that are sown and one of them comes on the ground and before it can barely even touch the ground the birds of the air swoop it up. There is another one that springs forth real quickly but there is no root in it so it burns up. The last one produces fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some hundredfold, but it is that third one that so resonates with me because it says that it grew and it was mighty and it was fruitful but it became unfruitful. Notice what Jesus says in Mark 4 about this particular seed. It became unfruitful, listen to this, because of the deceitfulness of riches, because of the cares of this world and the lust for other things. In other words, it is the obligations of life, the things that have to happen in life that so oftentimes bottle-neck us and they allow the life that we so desire to be squeezed out.

A book written some years ago entitled "The Screwtape Letters," C. S. Lewis, it's a story of two demonic entities discussing with each other, "How do we distract these Christians? How do we get them off path? How do we take them a path they don't really desire or want to go?" And one of the things they say, listen to this, "Just make them so busy that they don't desire the things of God." I'm not asking for a show of hands, I'm not asking for a verbal amen, have we got any busy people around here today? Have we got any folks whose calendars even on your phones are smoking because there are so many entry points into them? But, you see, we talk about the busyness and we talk about school

and ball and our jobs and our families and our this and our that, I'm going to be real transparent with you this morning: how about the busyness of church? Have you seen the list of activities on the church calendar lately? Did you know that sometimes we can get so busy doing "the things of God" we forget about the God behind the things?

And yet the disciples came and said, "Hey, you've got to eat. Surely you've got to meet these obligations," and sometimes it's the things of opportunity, sometimes it's the stuff we "have to do" that keeps us from being the people we're supposed to be, but last but not least, it is the opinions of others. Notice what they said, New Revised Jeff version, "But Jesus, we think you need to eat." Let me tell you what Jesus' response is, "I don't care what you think. I don't care how you feel. I don't care what you posted. I don't care what you tweeted. I don't care about all those things." In fact, oftentimes it is the opinions of other people that keep us from being the influence that we should be for the person of Jesus Christ.

Allow me to illustrate. How many times have you begun or thought about or wanted to get really excited or passionate or zealous about the things of God and somebody said, "Now, whoa brother, I don't think you ought to get that excited. Or I don't think you ought to be that expressive. Or I don't think you ought to... I don't think anybody ought to go to church that much. I mean, you're almost becoming cultish here. I mean, all you do is read your Bible and all you do is talk about Jesus. You're getting a little weird on us." I've got news for you: do you know that when people who claim to be a part of the body of Christ begin to criticize you for being excited about Jesus, what's happening is they're actually being convicted that they're not as excited about Jesus as you are and what we see happening here is the disciples show up and say, "But Jesus, we want to eat lunch. This is important." And Jesus is saying, "Should we not be more excited about this woman whose life has been transformed than just feeding our face one more time?"

Ah, then the story really picks up because then Jesus turns the tables. Those men that are listening, the disciples that are there, the woman who has returned, and he begins to share this illustration about reaping and sowing and what Jesus is sharing with us is: what is the impact? What happens if we, like this woman, become transparent? What happens if our testimony is revealed? What happens if we will allow the interruptions of life to cease?

He begins by talking about there will be four months until the harvest. What's interesting there, when you read that passage of Scripture really what Jesus is doing is giving us a very stark realization, verse 35, "Say not there are yet four months and then comes the harvest." Now, when Jesus talks about four months, some of you may be thinking, "Did he just pick some number out of the air?" Well, typically in the agricultural world, the time of which you would plant from which the time you would harvest was about four months, but in the "spiritual world" the time from the feast of Pentecost to the feast of Tabernacles was about four months as well. So when you overlay all these analogies, what you see is this realization that we as humanity have this really bad inclination to say, "Well, I'll get to that because I know it's important but I'm going to get to it at some point later in the game." Four months down the road, three months down the road, next year, when the kids are grown, when the bills are paid, when I get my promotion, then I'll

address these things. What does Jesus say? He says, "You say it's four months away, I say it is right now."

How many of you looking at the life of this woman who ran into town and grabbed these guys, how many of you would say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, she can't influence them yet. She hasn't been to school. She hasn't taken a course. She hasn't passed our test. She doesn't know what she's doing." And yet what happened? She made a greater impact that day than those guys had made in four months.

You see, it's not just the realization, it's also the reward. Notice what Jesus says, "He that sows and he that reaps shall rejoice together." What Jesus is saying is those that have made an impact in people's lives, those that have influenced people's lives for the sake of the Gospel, it's not just the person who's sitting with them when they get saved, it's not just the person that is there when the decision is made, it's not just the person that sees the fruit that is borne, but all along the way.

If I were to take you back to when I was my children's age, allow me to give you the statistics, allow me to give you the data of what we shared back then about sharing the faith and the message of Jesus Christ with others. Thirty plus years ago, the data showed that the average person who came to know Jesus did so after hearing the Gospel seven times. Seven times. It doesn't seem unreasonable. Maybe it's vacation Bible school, maybe it's a sermon, maybe it's a conversation, maybe it's an email in today's vocabulary. It doesn't matter but seven times and then eventually, "Oh, I get it. Now I understand." By the time I had become a young adult, it had become 15 and now it's up to 22. That means in our world today it takes 22 Gospel presentations before the average person is willing to repent and receive.

Here's my question for you: are you willing to be person number 18? Are you willing to be person number 14? How about number 1? You see, sometimes the difficult part is realizing that the rejected invitation, the rejected offer, the continued rejection is all a part of the process by which God is eventually chipping away at our hardened hearts and what we see is Jesus saying, "Hey, those of you that sow and those of you reap, you will be rewarded together." We need to understand today that in our culture, in our community, people are more hardened to the Gospel today than they were a generation ago. They are more hardened today than they were two generations ago. But that doesn't mean that after eight tries we just quit. Though the ground may be tougher, we don't stop planting the seeds.

And finally, finally at the end of this passage, what I can the impact of the need to rewind. At the end of this story, Jesus makes a very interesting statement in verse 38, "I sent you to reap that wherein you bestowed no labor. Other men labored and you've entered into their labors." Jesus is basically taking them back to the beginning. He's rewinding the story and saying, "Instead of overanalyzing where you are today, maybe we need to look at where you came from."

You know, one of my favorite sports is the sport of baseball and at least in recent days, in recent decades, one of the most impactful players on the field, one destined for most likely Cooperstown, the Hall of Fame, is a man by the name of Derek Jeter, a former shortstop of the New York Yankees, multiple World Series championships, a young man, though, that as a shortstop was not known for his defensive prowess. He was known as being a good hitter, being a great guy, but defense was just not his game. In fact, the number one criticism of Derek Jeter was that he didn't move well to his left. Now, I know some of you are thinking, "Well, what's the big deal there? Can't he just move to his right?" Well, when you're a shortstop, balls come up the middle and you've got to turn double plays and so moving to the left is important. He just struggled with it his whole career.

He began to approach his mid-thirties and not only was his strength waning, not only was his endurance going by the wayside, but this inability to move very well to the left was beginning to really show its ugly face and people began to question how much longer can he go? How much validity is there to his career? He began to analyze, he began to study and do you know what Derek Jeter discovered about himself? After very close analysis, he found out that when he stepped to the left, he was stepping wrong. He wasn't stepping the way you're supposed to step and the problem was, according to the experts, that the way in which he stood in the batter's box, the way in which he swung a baseball bat, has caused his hips to move in such a way that he moved erroneously when he was out in the field and that he had swung a baseball bat approximately 2.7 million times in his lifetime and he would have to undo all of that in order to fix the problem.

So, 35 years of age, Derek Jeter went on a quest. He went on a quest. Listen to this, this is a multiple World Series champion. He went on a quest to learn how to step to his left properly. It took months continually reminding himself drill after drill after drill. Finally he broke through. Finally he went through this problem that was happening in his performance and became the first shortstop after age 35 in the Major Leagues to actually win a Gold Glove. The only one to actually improve his defense post-35 versus to see it go the opposite direction. How did he do it? How did he pull it off? Do you know what he did? He had to stop where he was, he had to rewind and say, "Do you know what? I need to learn to step to my left properly."

Let me take that story and let me parallel it to our world today. In fact, I'm fixing to be real transparent with you, church. Are you ready? We, the church of Jesus Christ, not just this one but the church at large, we've become Derek Jeter. We have become anemic. We have become lackluster. I'm going to use a very popular secular word, are you ready? We've become plateaued. Hey, you can look at the data, look at the statistics, I don't care who you read, the church of Jesus Christ is not making the impact that it used to. The church of Jesus Christ is not making the influence that it used to. We've hit the proverbial wall. We're losing influence. We're losing impact. It used to take seven presentations, now it takes 22.

And you say, "Well, what do we need to do?" I'll tell you what we need to do, it's real simple: we need to step to our left is what we need to do. We need to rewind and realize

when you read John 4, what's it really about? It's about people with messed up lives meeting Jesus and having their life transformed. Everything else is just icing on the proverbial cake.

You say, "How do we start making an impact again? How do we start making influence again? What is the potential? What do we have?" I'm going to tell you: we need to take a step back. We need to rewind and realize that it's about changed lives and if we're going to have changed lives, we've got to be transparent and we've got to be open and we've got to be honest and we've got to be willing to be open with God.

Why did this woman's life change? Because when she met Jesus, she didn't perfume the pig, folks. She didn't act like everything was okay. She said, "Yeah, my life is messed up and I need you to fix it." The same thing that worked in her life is the only thing that will work in ours.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're that person today and maybe you're that individual today who you know that maybe your story doesn't look a whole lot like this lady's but it looks enough like her to be a great resemblance. Maybe you've put a presentation up, maybe you've put up a facade, maybe you've put an image out there but you know down deep things are not good, things are messed up and you desperately, desperately need Jesus to be a part of your life. Boy, do I have some great news for you today. You don't have to take a bunch of classes, you don't have to go through a series of tests or jump through some hoops, you just need to have a real serious, open, honest, transparent conversation with God. You don't have to say it out loud, in fact you don't even have to say the same words I would say but maybe that conversation would go a little something like this. "God, I know today that you know me better than I know myself but today I'm coming clean. Today I'm just going to be transparent and I'm going to shoot straight. I'm the problem. I've messed up. I've done things I should have never done. I've been places I should have never been. I've said things I should have never said. And God, I've thought things I should have never thought. God, I'm just coming clean, I'm just being transparent. What I need today is not another excuse. What I need today is not somebody to justify my behavior. What I need today, I need forgiveness. I need salvation. I need you to change my life from the inside out. So today I believe. I believe that Jesus is the answer to my sin problem. I believe you loved me so much that Jesus came on my behalf, that you loved me so much that he lived a perfect life on my behalf, that you loved me so much that he was willing to go to the cross and to raise from the dead on my behalf and so today, God, I'm just going to come transparent and say I need Jesus to clean up my life. I need him to forgive my sins. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, you know, maybe you're that person today, maybe that person that had that conversation with God, maybe you're that person who needs to have that conversation with God, well, we would love to have a conversation with you. We would love to know what God is doing in your life and desires to do in your life and how you're responding. So today, might that be our privilege to have that conversation with you?

Lord, as we come to this time of invitation, as we come to this time where we have the opportunity to respond, to lift our voice, even possibly to move our feet, Lord, we come under the umbrella of grace. We are not worthy of what you desire to do in our lives. We are dirty. We are filthy. We are messed up but you are able to clean and you are able to forgive and you are able to restore and so, God, we yield to you and to you alone. God, we come, we give ourselves to you at this time and may we do so appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask if you stand with me as our team leads us, whatever decision I'll be here at the front.

"You were the Word at the beginning
One with God the Lord Most High
Your hidden glory in creation
Now revealed in You our Christ.

"What a beautiful Name it is
What a beautiful Name it is
The Name of Jesus Christ my King
What a beautiful Name it is
Nothing compares to this
What a beautiful Name it is
The Name of Jesus.

"What a wonderful Name it is
What a wonderful Name it is
The Name of Jesus Christ my King
What a wonderful Name it is
Nothing compares to this
What a wonderful Name it is
The Name of Jesus
What a wonderful Name it is
The Name of Jesus."

As we continue our time of invitation, I know I used some sports terminology today and this isn't the end, this is really halftime. In fact, in just a moment, I'm going to pray over us and we're going to have a prayer and we're going to have an opportunity to give and maybe there's a decision that still needs to be made. I'll still be here at the front but this is the time we give of our tithes and our offerings, this is the time that we say, "Okay, God, you know more about my stuff than I do. You know better how to handle it than I do." So I'm going to ask that a friend of mine come and pray for us and then we're going to have our time of offering and I'll still be here at the front.

Our pastor has been preaching his heart out, shining light into the darkness, exhorting us to go and shine the light into the darkness. May we take up this offering at this time that

others may go and shine light into that darkness, go into that harvest field and harvest. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.