

The Choice is Clear

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning if you have a Bible handy, I want to encourage you to either turn to or turn on your phone or tablet or whatever it may be to the book of Deuteronomy 28. When we turn to the book of Deuteronomy 28, we're going to find ourselves in a situation very similar to today on our campus. You see, today is the day that we celebrate our graduates and I'm going to be honest with the family and the friends and the rest of us today, that you may catch me today looking a whole lot and focusing on these recent high school graduates but don't think it is a message only for them, in fact, today's message is for all of us, it's just very strategic for these graduates for they find themselves in a very important position, today, this time of year is the time where they get to celebrate that the trials, the tribulations, the turmoils of all that has been over the last few years is in the rearview mirror, and you gather today with the robes and mortarboards and the tassels and you know and your family knows that there is a land before you that you know not yet. It's much like the Israelites in Deuteronomy 28. They ended 40 years of wandering. Now I know high school is only four years but it felt like 40, did it not? I mean, it felt like you were wandering, it felt like that were days where this is never going to end. Some of you got senioritis the second semester of your sophomore year. You know what I'm talking about, and you felt like you were in the desert of life. Well, that's how the Israelites felt and when you get to Deuteronomy 28, they're about to go into the Promised Land, they're about to cross over what we know as the Jordan River to the place that the Lord had prepared for them.

As we just had put on display for us, our graduates, they're headed to a multitude of different places, and as you look at the graduates in our community in totality, when you begin to think of all the possibilities that lie before these young people, some of our graduates are going to go directly to the workforce, and when they go into the workforce there are tens of thousands of different possibilities and careers and occupations and such that the Lord may lead them to. There are many young people in our community, they're going to be headed into what we know as the military and regardless of which branch they serve in, there are tens of thousands of different responsibilities and opportunities both near and far. And we heard today that there are a bunch of young people in our community, that they're headed toward that next stage of academia, they're headed toward that next challenge of college, and the road before them is varied too. It may not be ten thousand possibilities of occupations but many of them will change their major

three times before Christmas comes this year. And nonetheless wherever the Lord is leading each and every young person in our community who is going through this stage, think about all the vast opportunities, all the possibilities. I don't want to make some parents cringe but there are some students today that they announce where they're going and they may graduate from another location, they may go a different path, there's no telling how the Lord may or may not lead them. Today it's irrespective of the occupation that one has, it's irrespective of the degree that one possesses or the socioeconomic ladder rung that one stands upon, what we discover in Deuteronomy 28 really there's only two paths that we can be on, there's only two roads in life that can be traveled. Irrespective of where you go to school or don't go to school or the major or the job that you have, there is either the path of blessing or there is what Deuteronomy 28 calls the path of curses. Deuteronomy 28 as the Israelites were about to embark on a journey much like these graduates, the Lord made it very clear to them what these paths look like and I want to share with you today, particularly the graduates, that the choice is very clear when it comes to these two paths.

Deuteronomy 28, beginning in verse 1, the Lord makes this statement. He says,

1 And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth:

Now what's interesting about that very first verse is he makes the parameters very clear. He says, "And if you do this." The Lord is making it clear that there are two paths that we can walk down, his path or any other path, and see, all the other paths of life are collectively not his. So it's very conditional, "If you walk in my path, you'll be blessed. If not, the consequences."

Now there's a little more detail when you get to verses 9 and 10 here, it says,

9 The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if you will keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. 10 And all people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee.

Now if that's not a blessing, students, I don't know what is. The Lord says, "If you walk in my ways, if you just do it the way I've told you to, not only will I bless you but I'll cause it so that opposition will be removed from you."

Now on the other side of the equation, notice what verse 15 begins with, "But." In other words, if we so choose not to walk the path of blessing, it says,

15 But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD your God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes

which I command you this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:

The Lord makes it very clear when it comes to the parameters, we do it his way, there's blessing, we do it any other way, there's curses. Now something I want you to notice about this passage. Deuteronomy 28 is one of the longest chapters in all of the Bible. There are 68 verses in this chapter, only 14 of them deal with blessings. Think about that for just a moment, that means that 54 verses deal with curses, overwhelming majority of Deuteronomy 28 is describing what happens if we go down the wrong path. Now don't get me wrong, there are verses and we'll look at this in just a moment where the Lord offers a blessing and it's just one of these collective simple statements, but when it comes to the curse side, boy, does he get into the minutia here in a moment. We're about to read the details of some of the specific things that happened or can happen in our life when we walk down the wrong path.

It's very reminiscent to me of Matthew 7. Matthew 7, Jesus is concluding what you and I know as the Sermon on the Mount. He's been communicating all these great truths and ideas about, "Blessed are these and blessed are those," but when you get to chapter 7, verses 13 and 14, I want you to hear what Jesus said. He said, "narrow," narrow, "is the way of righteousness, broad is the way of destruction." Graduates, I want to share something with you as somebody who is old enough technically to be your daddy. Are you ready? There are more voices that will try to lead you down the path of destruction than the path of righteousness. The volume will be deafening. There are more people that will encourage you to go down roads you have no business going down, make decisions you have no business making, and being places you have no business going.

It is broad. You say, "Well, how broad is it?" Just wake up and start walking, you're probably there. Narrow, very narrow is the way of righteousness. You understand that when someone speaks into your life the way of God, it's going to be in the minority position. There will be 10 other voices that try to drown it out, and let me give you some warning, just because it's the loudest voice and just because it's the most frequently heard voice does not necessarily mean it's the right voice.

The parameters are very clear but I want to talk about some specifics this morning. These are for all of us but allow me to give somewhat of a warning shot to our graduates. As you embark adulthood, as you embark into the collegiate, workforce, whatever it may be, even in the military, let me give you some warning about how these blessings and curses work on some issues that are very relevant to our life. If you take all the blessings and curses, you begin to categorize them, you'll see that they line up into five very easily grasped concepts and the first one is this: society at large. In verse 3 of Deuteronomy 28, the Lord makes a very simple broad statement. Notice what he says,

3 Blessed shall thou be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field.

Now turn to verse 16. This is on the other side of the "but," remember?

16 Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field.

Now that's a very collective statement. In other words, what the Lord is saying is it doesn't matter where you live, it doesn't matter where you go to school, it doesn't matter what your major is, it doesn't matter what your economic level is, that if you do the things of God irrespective of that you can be blessed, and if you don't you will not be.

You know, it was announced this week by Amazon that 70% of Americans now live within a one day delivery service of all that they have to offer. Seventy percent of us can get anything from Amazon within 24 hours. They're also saying that within the next decade over 90% of Americans will collectively be in 40 major metropolitan areas. And when you begin to take a step back and you begin to hear the voices that are starting to chatter, one of the things that you'll hear people say is this, that rural America is drying up and it's drying out and it's falling apart. You're also going to hear out of those same voices that the cities are being overrun and overcrowded. Isn't it funny that everybody is saying the cities have got problems and everybody is saying that rural America has got problems, and the thing I want you to recognize today is this: just because you move to a certain city doesn't mean you "make it," and just because you have a certain degree doesn't mean you "make it," just because you don't go somewhere doesn't mean you do or you don't make it. Hear me clearly: you can live in a building with 50,000 other people or you can live on a plot of 50,000 acres and the blessing and the curses have no differential on your geography, it's based on how you relate to your Creator God himself.

Do you know what you're going to hear over the next few years specifically, those of you going to college? You're going to hear that if society just did this, we'd all be better off. If society just did that, it would help everybody. I've got one for you, how about if society just did it God's way for once? What if we said, you know what, it's not about their theory or their thesis, what if we did it God's way? By the way, let me repeat myself, graduates, you do realize what I just shared with you is the minority voice in your life. Don't expect to hear that from a lot of individuals who stand in front of you in a lecture hall of a classroom.

The second issue, verse 4, how about personal health. Boy, we are fascinated with this in our culture today. Everybody wants to talk about healthcare and services and access to and what's this and what's that. Let me qualify what I'm about to say. I'm a huge advocate for healthcare. I'm the son of a pharmacist and I'm going to tell you what, every time I walk into a hospital I am grateful and thankful to everybody who works there from administration, nurses and hospitals and the such, but do you realize that our bodies that are depleting, this is the byproduct of the fall, folks. This is it. God told us in Genesis 2:16 that "in the day that you eat thereof the forbidden fruit, you will surely die." Romans 6:23 tells us "the wages of sin is death." What that means is this, that without a relationship with Jesus Christ, there is an eternal death that takes place, but even if you're saved, even if Jesus has forgiven you of your sins, we're still going to physically deplete.

A couple of days ago was a very eye-opening experience for me. My wife and I journeyed to a place where it was somewhat of a market of goods, so to speak. It was one

of those places, to be quite honest, that she was really interested in going and I was just really interested in her being happy so I went with her. But one of the booths that they had sold vintage purses, ladies. Vintage purses. Two of the purses that they had for sale I had bought my wife. I'm now vintage. I have become vintage. I'll tell you another thing I've also noticed. In becoming vintage, things that used to be up higher are falling, things that used to last.... In other words, I can tell you, it's happening. I can tell that I'm slowly being fulfilled of what the garden of Eden told us.

But you know, not all of our medical issues are just because of the garden of Eden. Not all of them are just because of the fall. I want you to notice what verse 4 says,

4 Blessed shall be the fruit of your body

That's pretty quick and to the point. Basically what the Lord is saying is that your health, your demeanor, who you are, even the offspring will be blessed by him when you do it his way. Now I want you to go to verse 21. I want you to see what the Lord says when we don't do it his way.

21 The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto you, until he has consumed you from off the land, whither you go to possess it. 22 The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until you perish.

Now that doesn't sound fun. Go to verse 27.

27 The LORD will smite thee [listen, this is incredible] with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch, that cannot be healed.

Now doesn't that just scare you? I hope it does. I don't want an itch that can't be healed. Verse 28,

28 The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart:

You know, graduates, you're entering what those of us who are now vintage will tell you is the prime of your life, and I could give you a whole lot about avoiding the freshman 15 and all that kind of stuff, just don't order pizza at midnight when you're not really hungry. But nonetheless, you are going to have friends, going to have roommates, that over the course of the next few years, they're going to experience sickness and they're going to experience illness and they're going to experience some things that are even described in here, and yes, there are times where that's just a byproduct of the fall, but you and I have to ask ourselves a very important question: how many sicknesses and illnesses and diseases do we suffer through because of our own sinful behavior and not just because we got kicked out of the garden of Eden? We don't like to talk about this, we don't like to

discuss this, but think about some of the things that we experience from a physical nature and then look back and say how many of those are related to our personal rebellious behavior. You see, sometimes all of this medical stuff, sometimes it's a byproduct of the fall and sometimes when we say, "God, I think I know what I'm doing here," we find out just like Adam and Eve we don't have a clue.

Moving on, how about global issues here, kind of those who are contrary to us. Notice what it says about opposition in verse 7,

7 The LORD shall cause your enemies that rise up against you to be smitten before your face: they shall come out against thee one way, and they will flee seven other ways.

That's incredible blessing. Look in verse 25, on the other side of the "but."

25 The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

Hm, basically what it says there is those who are in opposition to, if you're walking in the way of the Lord, he will supernaturally go before you, but if you're not, you will be the one that has to flee seven ways.

As one who has been somewhat of a student of history, I want you just to think about something for a moment. You realize, graduates, you are now the beneficiary of about three or four generations in our culture who have decided to embark on a revolution. There's been all kinds of revolutions since World War II, we've had all kinds of endeavors where we've said, "You know what, we want to carve a different path, a rebellious path. We want to do what we want to do, how we want to do it, where we want to do it, and when we want to do it." You know what's interesting about that? If you just look at it from a historical perspective, go back throughout the history of our culture before we started all the revolutions and I want you to think about how our enemies behaved toward us: they went before us and they flee seven ways. Since we started going through all these "cultural revolutions," what's happened? We are the ones that are fleeing. Do you know what I find intriguing? That you and I live in a culture today that has a defense budget that is larger than most countries' gross domestic product and we can't win anything. Maybe it has nothing to do with the armory and has everything to do with our sinful living. Now students, that is going to be so politically incorrect in whatever campus you step onto but think about it for just a moment: when we do it God's way, he protects us, when we don't, we stand defeated. We can triple the budgets, we can add more to this, we can add more to that, but if we're not doing it God's way, how do we dare expect to be blessed by him?

Speaking of budgets, the next passage talks about finances. Look at verse 8,

8 The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

In other words, whatever you attain, you will prosper. Notice verse 31 on the other side of the "but."

31 Your ox shall be slain before your eyes, and you shall not eat thereof: your donkey will be violently taken before thee: and your sheep will be given to your enemies,

Graduates, you know the Bible has over 2,500 verses about money. You say, "Why is that?" Because we don't have a clue what we're doing when it comes to it, that's why. In fact, I'm going to make you a promise: whatever the day of the calendar month is, if you will get up that day and you will read the proverb of the day, in other words on the twelfth day of the month such as today, you read Proverbs 12, if you do that every day and every month for the next four, five, six, seven, how many years it takes you to get through school, whatever it may be, I'll promise you you'll have a bachelors degree in biblical finances by the time you graduate and you will understand how God has orchestrated how to handle our finances.

We live in a world today where it seems like everybody is just a little bit short and not enough time. Let me give you some wisdom here and I don't know who originally came up with this statement but it wasn't me: quit keeping up with the Joneses. Do you know why? Because they just left Bankruptcy Court, that's why. What's happening in our world today? We've bitten the bait of the lie, folks. We're following the loudest voices as they drive us over the cliff.

Last but not least if we couldn't be any more politically correct, today go to verse 12. By the way, these are issues, students, you're going to have the moment you step on the campus if not before. Let's talk about the hot button issue of the day, are y'all ready? Let's talk about the climate. Let's talk about the environment. Some of y'all listen to the radio and y'all just, you know, pulled over right now. Here we go. Verse 12,

12 The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of your hand: and you shall lend unto many nations, and you shall not have to borrow.

Look at verse 24 on the other side of the "but."

24 The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, and you will be destroyed.

Now let me give you a biblical example. In the Old Testament there was a prophet by the name of Elijah and the people of the Lord and the society as a whole, they were headed

the wrong way and Elijah prayed, he said, "God, stop the rain for three and a half years," and it stopped. Three and a half years later when he prayed, it started again.

Now many years ago before I was vintage and I was in your seats, graduate, I was told that we were experiencing global cooling, then I became an adult and it was global warming, now it's just climate change. Nonetheless, one of the things I've learned about these issues is this, is that everybody's got data, everybody's got an opinion and nobody can get along. In fact, I've never seen where two people on different sides of the issues had a debate and convinced the other one of their position. You say, "Well, why is that significant?" Because I think we've all got it wrong. I've got news for you, our environment is not in your hands, it's in God's.

I've got to give you some advice, graduates, and I know I'm pointing the finger but here we go: there is a God and you're not him. You're not God so quit thinking you are. You're not God, and by the way, parents, neither are you and neither am I. You know, it's funny that the meteorologists can't predict tomorrow's weather right and yet we think they got 70 years from now right. Have y'all ever thought about that just for a moment?

But in light of Deuteronomy 28, let me share something with you. Do you know that if everyone one of us made our houses solar, all we did was drive a Prius, and wear clothes made out of hemp, that does not mean it would save the environment. You say, "What do you mean it doesn't mean it would?" Because if you're not doing it God's way, it doesn't matter how green your policy is.

What did God do? Drought, three and half years until they prayed, then it rained. I'll give you an illustration. Back when y'all were in middle school, I lived in a different state. We had a severe drought in that state and it was a badge of honor to not wash your car. If you didn't wash your car, you were saving the environment. Those of us who like to wash our car didn't wash our car because we got tired of people yelling at us about washing our car. So everybody is driving around with dirty cars because we're saving the environment. Well, finally the drought came to an end and here's what they said: it's going to take 10 to 12 years for the lakes to fill up. It took nine months. Why? Because it doesn't matter how hard we try at changing the environment around us, if we are not in a relationship with God himself, it's all for nought.

Please hear me, graduates, you're going to hear lots of rhetoric and, parents, you as well, about how we can all get together. I've got news for you, what if we all got together and did it God's way? I'll tell you what'll happen, we wouldn't have all this stuff happening anymore. You see, we need to understand that science comes from our Creator. There's a God and you're not him.

Now these are very clear parameters, but there's also some very clear products. In fact, hopefully you have Deuteronomy 28 still open, I want you to look at the end of verse 31 and what happens? I promise I will wrap this up. What happens if you decide to listen to the voices? I'll tell you what's going to happen, look at verse 31, the last statement, you'll have,

31 ...none to rescue them.

The voices who tell you to do it their way, that will walk you off the cliff of life, they will not be there to pick you up when you crash and fall. They won't be there. In fact, Luke 15, there's a story of the prodigal son, this young man who demands of his dad his inheritance. He says, "Dad, please give me my money. I want to use it now while I'm still alive and young." So his dad gives it to him and the Bible says he goes out in, and listen to this students, riotous living. Now have you ever thought, what is riotous living? I'll tell you what it is, anything you can dream up. That's what it is. The Bible says he threw great parties, he had lots of friends, the money was flowing and so was everything else, but when the money dried up, the friends were nowhere to be found. He was alone in the slop of the mud. It's interesting, let me give you a warning, students, the very people who try to convince you to do something against God are they very people who will leave you hanging when you face the consequences. You will be all alone and there will be nobody to help you out.

But there's another product, too, look in verse 67 at the very end of this chapter. Listen to what it says, it says,

67 In the morning when you say, Would God it be evening! and at evening you will say, Would God it would be morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.

Let me unpack that real quickly. At the very end of all these curses basically they're mad at God, they're angry with God for the plight of their lives. I see today not just among young people but even adults, this bubbling up of anger with God, but there's a difference between us and this character in the Bible known as Job. You see, Job is a man who the Bible says was upright in the Lord's eyes, a man who was blessed by God, had family, had finances, but the Lord allowed them to be taken away. He found himself without his family, he found himself without his finances on a dunghill with sores all over his body. As you read through the entire story of the person in the book of Job, when you get to the very end the Lord blesses Job. Do you know why? Because he did not curse God. Now the Bible says he cursed the day he was born, the Bible says he even cursed the womb that he came out of. In other words, "I don't like this, God," but he never blamed God for what was happening because he realized he lived in a sinful world and there are sinful people and there are sinful situations.

You know, there are a lot of people who get angry with God and when you go into college, you're going to find a lot of angry people. Do you know who some of the most angry people with God are? Your professors. Am I lying, parents? No, they're mad at God. Let me give you a little secret. Do you know why they're mad? Because they're mad they're suffering the consequences of their bad decisions, that's why. They went down the wrong path. They bit the bait of what the world was selling and they don't like it at all, so what do they do? They blame God for it.

You see, that's what happens. When we go down the wrong path, we're all alone and we get mad at God but here's the good news, here's some clear publication as well. Go a couple of chapters to the right, chapter 30. I promise I'll make it quick. Verse 11 of chapter 30. This is great news for all graduates, all parents of graduates, and anybody else who is listening to my voice. It says,

11 For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not hidden from you, neither is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 13 Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 14 But the word is very nigh unto thee, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it. 15 See, I have set before you this day [graduates] life and good, and death and evil;

You know, particularly those who are being led in the academic route, it's interesting the rhetoric you're about to hear. You're about to hear that if you don't read this book, you'll never truly understand. You'll be told that unless you go to this geographic location and see with your eyes that which you studied, you really can't comprehend what you're studying. In other words, until you go here, until you go there, until you attain this, then you're not going to be in line. Do you know what the Lord is saying real clearly here? He says you don't have to travel across the ocean, you don't have to go read the Library of Congress. What does he say? It's very near to you. Let me translate that, it's in your hand. You don't have to run off to find the truth for life. It's not only in the paper Bible, it's on your phone, it's on your tablets. It's readily accessible. Some of you have got access to it on your watches. I mean, it's right there before you.

Particularly today since it's graduation Sunday, I want to close with a very important analogy. The average high school graduate that goes on to college, and I know that's not the path for everyone but the average one that goes on to college, that over the course of your degree depending on what your major is, you will read between 50 and about 150 different books. For those of you that are history, literary majors, congratulations you're on the high end there. Underwater basket weaving, not so much. But that being said, you're going to be encouraged to read a lot of books and I've been where you're about to go. Do you know what they're going to do? They're going to produce more questions than answers. They're going to contradict each other. They're going to cause you to say, "Well, I read this and now I'm reading this." That stack of books would at least be this high compared to this one. Students, parents of students, anybody listening to my voice, all the degrees in the world don't give you the truth of God's word. All the money in the world doesn't give you the answers of life. He says, "It's nigh unto you, in your mouth and your heart, I have set before you this day to do good or evil." Students, the choice is very clear as you walk across the stage, you can either go down life the road of blessing or the road of curses. It's up to you.

Let's pray.

With our heads bowed and our eyes closed, whether you're wearing a cap and gown or whether you're driving down the road listening to the radio, maybe you're that person today that the proverbial light bulb turned on and maybe you realized that it really isn't about you, it's about God, and maybe today as you grasped that, you've realized that this person of Jesus that you've heard about some or maybe some of you a lot, maybe it's more important than you ever realized. You know, the Bible says whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. You say, "Well, what does that actually mean?" It means just to have a conversation with the Lord. That's what it means. Now that conversation could be out loud or even necessary with the same phrases somebody else would say and maybe you're that person today who said, "Do you know what? I've been on the wrong path and I need to be on the right path and I know that the person of Jesus is the only one who can get me on the right path." Can I encourage you to have this conversation with the Lord, maybe not the same words but somewhat similar? Say, "God, today I realized something very important in my life, that I'm the problem and that Jesus Christ is the answer. God, I realized today that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he actually was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to pay the price for my sin on his cross. And I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that when he rose from the dead three days later, he made it possible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I just want to be honest, I don't have all the answers for the problems of the past, I don't have all the answers for the problems of the present or the future, but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer for my sin problem. The best way I know how, God, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads bowed and our eyes close, maybe you're that person today who had that conversation with the Lord. Like many others on our campus today, we'd love the privilege of having a conversation with you. I'm about to pray for us and then we're going to stand and sing and while doing so, feel free to come and we want to celebrate what the Lord is doing in your life.

Heavenly Father, as we draw this service to a close, Lord, as we celebrate the journey of these students, thank you that you have given us the privilege of blessing and not curses; thank you that you're willing to save us in spite of ourselves; thank you, O God, that you're a God of mercy and grace and second chances. May we never take you for granted again. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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