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Heavenly Father, we thank You that You are here and that You are with us and that You are speaking to our hearts. I ask again now that You will confirm in each one of us anything that I have to say today that is from You. In Jesus' name, Amen. Good morning. I just wanted to point out that the ushers were handing out Lenten devotionals and in case you didn't get one, make sure you grab one on the way out the door. There's plenty sitting on those tables out there. I think it starts a week from Wednesday. We're trying to get them out there early so you can have them and maybe pass one on to whoever you feel would like to have one. I'm also going to mention that I don't want to mess up anything I'm saying today, so I'm going to be looking at my notes a lot and I apologize if that drives any of you crazy. I wanted to say everything just right. I started this week on a sour note. Keep in mind when I say a week, my week starts on Tuesday and ends on Sunday, so I'm talking about last Tuesday. I got a call from a salesman who wanted to sell us website services. He was pushing the idea that what our church needed was a better website that could take credit card donations. This frustrated me. Not the idea itself. I mean, taking credit cards, that's fine, whatever, but the mindset behind the idea is what frustrated me. Lately, we've been making changes to our building. We've got new paint, new lights, new sound equipment. These things are good improvements. The room feels warmer, the sound is cleaner, etc. In addition to the changes we've made, I've heard even more suggestions about changes we could make. These are all great ideas, most of them. I can't get over the fact that we're making changes to a halfway empty building. I'm not saying that our church is close to closing or anything, but we know that our numbers have been dwindling. If it wasn't for the help that we received from Forum Deo and Connection Church, we would probably not be making our budget for each year. We realize we need more people here, but we get stuck on the numbers of just getting people in and we forget the purpose behind getting people in. We say, "Get them in the door and let God do the rest." It doesn't work like that. God uses our hands, our feet, our words and our deeds to accomplish His will, and He only uses them to the extent which we allow. We get this mindset that if we put a glossy commercial finish on the outside, then we can just sit back and watch as people arrive and get served by God. We think that it's like a coffee shop and we just get the place ready and people will come in and God will serve them. God is the barista of the coffee shop. But that's not so. We are the baristas. When people come here, they won't be waiting on God, they'll be waiting on us to show the love and the fruit that God has placed in our hearts to be shared with the people in this world. When they come, we can't just say, "Look at our paint, look at our lights." Mood and atmosphere are great and they can make our job easier, but they can't replace our job, which is to serve Jesus. If being digital, comfy, hip, modern and trendy is everything that people on the outside are looking for, then they would find everything they need in a Starbucks. Starbucks has great paint, great lighting, and even smells like coffee. But Starbucks does not offer purpose. It does not help you find your destiny and it does not lead you towards fulfilling your calling in life. Jesus does those things. He is what people ultimately crave, whether they know it or not, and serving Him to people through love, service, and sacrifice is our primary responsibility. I've been frustrated this week because I've heard so many suggestions about coffee and decorations and so little about ways to love and serve and lay our lives down for others while boldly proclaiming Christ. And I've realized that in my heart I want so badly to be able to fix our problems without laying down my life. And I'm frustrated with myself because I know I need to and it's so difficult. Let me reiterate that in case you think that what I'm saying sounds attacking or accusatory. I see the chief perpetrator of this problem when I look in the mirror every morning. I like painting, I like sorting sheet music, I like running the sound board, because all of those things don't require me to become entangled in someone else's life. Give a little time, a little money, and my conscience feels clear. At least get used to it. It's not working anymore. We've made good progress. Our sanctuary is beautiful. Our office is running smoother, but I've run out of ways to spend my time on things that don't get me involved with people. I'm left with no way out of getting involved with people's messy lives and that terrifies me because to do so I will need to mess up my neat clean little life. This is a most insidious little fox and I'm not even sure what to call it. Apathy, laziness, selfishness. I don't know how to name it, but I know how to describe it. I don't want to do for others and for God what Jesus did for me, namely to completely lay down my life. I don't want to completely give up my control. I want to give a little here, a little there, but I want to go home to my comfort and security at the end of the day. I won't risk my safety net. I'll do a short-term missions trip, but I won't let go of it all. I've built a cozy little kingdom and I've steadied my boat and I don't want it to be rock. I'll give, but only what I can afford. I'll help, but only during working hours. I don't want to waste my resources on those who will squander them and then ask for more. I don't want to be taken advantage of. This is what the Bible says in Matthew 5. You have heard it was said, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," but I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him too. Give to him who asks you and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away. You have heard it was said, "you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven, for he makes his son rise on the evil and on the good. He sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even tax collectors do so? Therefore be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. We cannot be a club. We cannot associate only with those who delight us or enrich us. There is a hurting, suffering, dying world out there full of broken, messy people. Those are the ones ripe for the harvest. It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. We want to keep office hours on our service to God, but we can't. We want to be God's Air Force, but he needs ground troops in the trenches. We're willing to tithe our paycheck, but we don't want to get to know our next-door neighbor. We say, "how you doing?" But we don't really want to know. And it's not just strangers. We need to take care of the people around us as well. If you have parents or children, siblings or spouses, co-workers or classmates, these are people who need to experience Christ through you. They need to be served Jesus. Wherever you are in life right now, a family or a job or a school, that is where God has called you. And he has called you into your family, job or school in order to bring Christ into it. This is your destiny. If there is any area of your life where you don't bring Christ, you're failing your destiny. Like a computer that's never turned on or a car that's never driven, a Christian who does not bring Christ into any area of their life is not accomplishing what they were created for. I'm not saying you need to beat everyone over the head with your Bible. But if you have a spouse or kids, you need to be praying with them, reading the Bible with them and having devotion time with them. If you're not, you're failing. Some well-meaning Christian parents are more concerned with making their kids clean their rooms than in making them spend time in the Bible. If you have friends or co-workers, you need to pray for them regarding the difficulties of their lives. Do you believe that Scripture is God's very words? Then quote Scripture when you give your reasons for doing or not doing the things that you do or don't do. Don't just say, "Because I'm a Christian," but give the reason from Scripture. And if you don't know the Scripture behind the things you do, then study the Word more. Second Timothy 4.2 says, "Preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season." I know that before I was in pastor or youth ministry, it felt like "out of season" for me. But the Bible exhorts us to be ready "out of season" too. You've heard the phrase, "Preach Christ at all times, and if necessary, use words." This phrase is wrong. We love this phrase because we think it gets us out of awkward Jesus conversations. But if you're nice and Christian towards your unsaved friends, if you eat out with them and play cards, if you smile and wave at your neighbor, if you tip generously at Starbucks, but you never bring Christ into the conversation, you're just giving them a lovely send-off on their way to hell. The phrase should be, "Preach Christ at all times, both with and without words." That should be our motto. You cannot serve Christ without giving Him the credit because it will default back to you and you're just serving yourself. People will say, "You're a nice guy," but they'll never glorify God, and that's a waste of a good deed. Can you pass on all the credit and glory and praise you receive to God? God bless our youth group. About a month ago, I suggested that every time we do something nice and someone says, "Thank you," that instead of, "You're welcome," we should say, "Jesus loves you." They do that all the time. I don't know if they do it with other people, but they do it with me. Every time we're leaving youth group and they're holding the door and I'm walking out, I just hear as there's a line of people ahead of me, I hear, "Jesus loves you. Jesus loves you. Jesus loves you," as we're all walking out the door. That's the idea. You pass on the credit and the glory and the praise you receive to God. Let's do a little thinking exercise. Jesus made a special trip down to earth to meet with you, and the reason he came was to evaluate your performance as his ambassador, which is what 2 Corinthians 5.20 says you are. What suggestions would he give you to improve? What more do you need to be doing with the family that he's given you? What more do you need to say to those friends you hang out with? How should you be responding to that coworker whose life is falling apart? How would he suggest you improve your free time? I know that I have many excuses in place as to why I don't do the things I should be doing, so maybe it would be easier for you to think of this in terms of someone else. Imagine some other Christian family you know and then ask those questions about them. How should they handle their kids and their job and their free time? And then take those answers and apply them to yourself. It's much easier to demand higher standards for other people than it is for ourselves. When I think about doing these things, the thing that pops into my head is the ridicule I will get. It's the reason I put Tim Tebow on the cover of our bulletin today. Gail had a really beautiful, famous piece of artwork all picked out, and I made her change it. This picture makes me uncomfortable. I look at this and think, "He needs to turn down the Christian knob." But that's not true. He is a model Christian. He loves God more than people's opinion of Him. We say God is worthy of all praise. We say all to Him I owe. We need to learn to believe this. We need to embrace ridicule. We need to wear it like a badge. When the devil accuses you of acting like someone you're not, just tell him, "You better believe I'm acting like someone I'm not. I'm acting like someone better than me. I'm acting like the person I want to be." When he says, "They're all going to laugh at you," then say, "Good. They laugh at Jesus. I must be following in the right footsteps." When he says, "Everyone will lose respect for you and you'll look like a fool," then quote John the Baptist and say, "Jesus must increase. I must decrease." Anyone can give away their money to God, but how rare and precious a gift is it when someone gives away their reputation to Him? Or their comfort? If no one ever acted like someone better than themselves, then no one would ever improve. Get into your head that image of a bright shining example of a Christian. Imagine how he lives his life, how he treats his spouse and raises his kids. Imagine all the details of this model Christian and then imitate him. Be the person who breaks the awkward silence by offering to pray for someone. Accept that you might stumble over your words, but plant yourself on the truth that God hears and understands and answers every prayer. The effective, verbatim prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5, 16) Be someone who constantly sings or hums, prays, and worships to God. Accept it. Be the uncool parent who says their kid can't go to the R-rated movie. Accept all the labels the devil invented to scare you away from being the person you were created to be. Uncool parents, Jesus freak, Holy Roller, Churchy, Quaker. Our very name, Quakers, was originally given to us in derision, but we accepted it with pride. I think if someone called me Quaker today, it would be ironically because of how little quaking I do for the Lord. Let it not be so. These are not labels, they are badges of honor. They prove that you love God more than being cool. They demonstrate that just as Christ laid down His reputation for us, you are willing to lay down your reputation for Him. These labels demonstrate such great love and such great selflessness. We have done a fantastic job of making this place warm, inviting, and presentable. But let's be the kind of church that can draw a crowd to a church service in a garbage dump in a hot day. Let's be such people that when visitors leave this place, they forget about our paint and our lights and our sound because they were so overwhelmed with our Christlikeness, our unashamed willingness to glorify Him. And let's be that kind of people in every area of our lives, at work, at school, and at play. I want people to come here not looking to find out what we've done to this building, but to find out what God's done to us in this building. Let's brainstorm how we're going to inject Christ into our lives, into every part. Let's accept the ridicule and the odd looks. Let's stop being closet Christians and start being loud and proud Christians. Let's get radical with our prayer and see how God moves in our lives and in our city. Amen? Heavenly Father, we give You all the glory and the praise today, and we lay down our self today. We lay down our reputation. We lay down anything in our lives that is not You, anything that takes away from You, anything that steals Your glory. Teach us what areas of our lives we're still holding onto like a safety net and help us to let go and to fall into Your arms of love and faith. Help us to walk boldly and proclaim Your truth to all the people in our lives as we go through this week, through our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.