

# Be Blessed

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, we give you thanks and praise that we can be in your presence. We give you thanks and praise that you desire to lavish your love upon us.

We give you thanks and praise that we are not alone, but Jesus is with us, that the Holy Spirit is present. And we ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would work a deep work in our hearts so that we might receive in a very well from you this morning in a worthy manner and respond to you. And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. You know, we live in an odd time.

It seems to me, and maybe I'm just exaggerating a little bit, but it seems to me as if in many areas of life there's no mercy, that life has become harder, that it's not even a matter of three strikes and you're out.

But you take one, you say the wrong thing on social media, you have the wrong, you get a tweet and you forward it and it's not the right one, or that if somebody finds something that you put on Instagram or Facebook two years ago, five years ago, ten years ago, fifteen years ago, and they find out about it, you're just in lots and lots of trouble.

[ 1 : 19 ] And it seems as if, I mean, there's lots of freedom in our culture, and it's not like people walk around in fear all the time, but it really does seem, at least in what we can sort of gather from the media, that it is, it becomes, we're in a time with less and less mercy, less and less mercy, and a real type of judgmentalism.

I was about a year or so ago talking about this to somebody that I know quite well, and I guess I was a bit complaining about it because I know them very well and I was comfortable with them, and they just looked at me and said, George, you Christians invented it.

Like, you just don't like it because now it's coming back to bite you. But you guys invented it, and now you're reaping what you sow, and, you know, you were in charge and you did it, showed no mercy.

Now other people are in charge and they show no mercy, and that's just, like, in a sense, suck it up and deal with it. Now, at the time, I didn't really know what to say to them, and I want to really encourage you to know that I didn't know what to say to them because, you know, being a public Christian, letting people know that you're a Christian, sometimes there'll be pushback about that, and if you wait to be a public Christian until you know everything to say in response to every question, you'll never be a public Christian.

In fact, maybe what you should do is just say, maybe we should all get T-shirts about public Christian, and the image should be of, I could be my face, could be yours, with the foot in the mouth, and that's just sort of a comforting thing to know that it's not the end of the world if you don't know what to say in response to something.

[ 2 : 59 ] Because often what it means is, you know what you could say later on, actually. Because now, I guess, if I could go back in time, I would just quote an authority that they would recognize, the who.

And in their famous song, meet the new boss, same as the old boss, won't be fooled again. Anyway, that's probably not what I would say to them. But, you know, I think they're wrong, by the way.

The other thing I should have said is that it's really, it's not that Christians invented it, but that it's a human problem, and that if you get beyond our ethnocentrism and look at other cultures, there's lots of times in history and lots of places in the world where there's very little mercy that's shown. But I'm not going to deny that it might very well be the case that there are many Christians today in North America and Canada and Ottawa, maybe even in this congregation, or many Christians in the

past that have, in fact, shown very little mercy, been very judgmental, and very persecution-oriented.

But the question is, you know, I guess for me, it's never a matter of what Christians do is what the Bible says, what Christ says. So is it, in fact, the case that Christians just need to get more in touch with things that are going on in our culture to try to fix this if it is, in fact, a bit of a Christian problem? [ 4 : 12 ] Or is it really a matter that you need to get back to what Jesus says and to be corrected by the Bible? We're looking at a very, very old text today, and it actually talks about this issue of mercy and our narratives, et cetera, and all, and it gives great wisdom.

So it'd be a great help to me if you would turn in your Bibles to Haggai chapter 2. Haggai chapter 2, and we're going to be looking at verses 10 to 19.

Haggai chapter 2, verses 10 to 19. And here's how it begins. It goes like this. On the 24th day of the ninth month in the second year of Darius, the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet.

Now just sort of pause there. Some of you are here, you're just jumping into this book. This is just a bit of a context about it. About 70 or so years prior to this, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, took away the leadership of the country, the king of the country, took them into exile, most of them into Babylon.

And at the time of their destruction of the country, there were prophets like Jeremiah who prophesied and said that God was going to do a remarkable and miraculous thing, and that some approximately 70 or two generations almost, 70 years later, God's going to bring some of the Jewish people back to Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt.

[ 5 : 38 ] And then what happened is the Babylonians are in power for quite a few decades, but then the Persians defeat the Babylonian empire and Babylonians and take over their empire.

And that's where Darius comes in. Darius is the emperor, the Persian emperor. And, you know, you can't, to try to get a bit of a sense of the shock of the book of Haggai, just understand that we now call Persia as Iran.

And what happened is that as soon as, very shortly after, Persia took over the empire, God did a remarkable work in the heart of this Persian emperor because he gave permission for the Jewish people, some of the Jewish people, to go back and to rebuild Jerusalem.

He wanted it. It would be as if the Ayatollah of Iran today said that he wanted to rebuild Jerusalem.

And just as that would be a complete shock, it would be front page news.

Ayatollah of Iran says the temple must be rebuilt or he wants the Jewish people to thrive. It was just as big of a shock and just as big of a miracle really back then.

[ 6 : 49 ] So about 16 years prior to this, some of the Jewish people have returned to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is in rubble. If you want to get a picture for this, if you're a very visual person, picture Aleppo.

Picture parts of Syria with all the rubble and that's what Jerusalem looks like. And so some of the Jewish people have returned and they start to restore the temple but there's local pushback, very serious, hardcore local pushback and they chicken out and they stop all the work.

And so what they've done for the intervening time period is they've worked on their own prosperity and their own peace but they've also maintained the religious celebrations and festivals and stuff like that but they've turned inward and they've stopped all of the work on the temple.

And then about four months prior to this, in September of 520 BC, we know the dates because of the linking to Darius and all of that type of stuff.

Haggai gives this prophetic word that shocks them and we'll talk about this a bit more in a moment because it is relevant to this bit and they start to restore the temple and then about two months after that or approximately two months before this, there's another set of prophetic words and now there's this third set of prophetic words.

[ 8 : 01 ] So that's what's going on here, just a bit of a context. Jerusalem is in rubble. There are some Jewish people back. They're under Persian authority and they've started to restore the temple four months in and this is now a word that comes from God to the Jewish people but it's going to come through first asking a couple of questions of the priests.

Here's how it goes. Look at verse 11. Thus says the Lord of hosts, ask the priest about the law. If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold, bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?

The priest answered and said no. Then Haggai said, if someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean? The priest answered and said, yes, it does become unclean.

Then Haggai answered and said, so is it with this people and with this nation before me, declares the Lord, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean.

So just sort of pause here for a second. If you are like most Canadians, as soon as you start getting to clean and unclean, your eyes glaze over and you lose the plot because it doesn't really make much sense and it just seems like a weird, bizarre type of thing.

[ 9 : 26 ] And it's here where it touches in this whole area of our cultural narratives because we start to see what, so some things are clean and some things are unclean.

Like, George, this just seems exactly like religion. It's so lame and so random. Like, really? Just because you touch a dead body, you've become unclean?

Like, that just sounds weird. And so we interpret this whole story from this perspective of God being, like there's been no mercy shown and it can just be as simple as you like the wrong Hollywood star a day after a revelation or something like that and it's just, you're being picked on by God and this whole language of clean and unclean sounds like very, very exclusive and insiders and outsiders and just everything about religion which is bad and we hear this because we have our cultural narrative.

We read the text and that's how we interpret it but that's not what's going on at all. You see, what we don't think of is that the Bible has a very, very different narrative and this story is part of a very, very, very, very different narrative and the narrative is this.

The narrative of the Bible is that there is a God that does exist, the triune God and this God, well, he made human beings, he made creation not because he was lonely, not because he was bored, not because he wanted food, not because he wanted slaves, not because he wanted somebody to love and had a type of needy love, like we hate being around needy love people unless they're our brand new baby or something like that where you want them to be needy, but you know, for an adult to be needy love and it's just sort of repelling and it's not as if God did anything like that but we all know that part of the nature of love is that love is expansive, love is creative, love gives, love forgives, love loves to see more love, that it's just something about the nature of love and the God who is love made human beings in his own image so that he could lavish his love upon them.

[ 11 : 42 ] The living God created all things, created human beings so that he could lavish his love upon them but human beings turned from God and wanted to be like God themselves.

They turned their back on God's love and as a result of turning their back on God's love, well, shame comes into the world and messing up comes into the world and sickness comes into the world and death comes into the world and oppression comes into the world and racism and hatred and authoritarianism and no mercy comes into the world and human beings are sort of trapped in this and so the big story of the Bible, if you want to read from Genesis chapter 3 right up into the gospel and right up to the end of the story, the big narrative of the Bible is the narrative of the different ways that God tries to get the attention of people in their mess, in their shame, in their confusion, in their successes, in their failures, in their shame, in their despondency, in their despair, that this God who is love relentlessly pursues human beings to get their attention so that they would turn and allow God to do what only God could do to have them become his people, his children, his precious treasure so he can lavish his love upon them.

That's the big story of the Bible. a relentless pursuit by God to love you. And yes, he knows that you're not perfect.

He knows what your bank balance is for those of us who have bad bank balances. He knows your good bank balances too for those of you who have those. But he knows he knows you and he wants to lavish his love upon you.

Well, how does that fit in with this weird language of clean and unclean? And if you got lost in the whole story and you don't have your Bibles open to look at it, basically what the Bible is saying is this, is you go and perform a sacrifice and as part of the sacrifice there's an animal and as part of the sacrifice of the animal, sometimes there's some of that stuff of the sacrifice of the grain or the animal or whatever that the priest is able to keep to eat.

[ 13 : 54 ] And so the priest has done this sacrifice that God has set for and as he's walking away with his sacrifice, he comes up, imagine we go back in time and he touches Jono and the question is, does the sacrifice is holy, it's clean, and if now the priest touches Jono, does Jono become holy?

And then if I go up and I touch Andrew, does Andrew become holy? Does Daniel and Alexander become holy? And the priest says, no, the Bible says they don't become holy, they're just, they're completely unchanged by you touching them.

And he says, okay, well, let's do another example. What happens, George, if there's a dead body and you touch the dead body and according to the Bible what happens is if I touch the dead body I become unclean.

So what happens then if I go and touch Jono and Andrew and Daniel and Alexander? Well, according to the Bible they all become unclean. And then he says, listen, because of what's been going on with you people, your whole land is unclean.

So what's going on with this whole thing? So here's part of the thing that you need to understand. Remember, what's the big story? The big story is that God knows your mess, he knows your sin, he knows your shame.

[14:59] There's this relentless seeking of you to love you, to pour out his love upon you. That's the big story of the Bible. So how does this fit? Well, the first thing that wants to fit is that no human being can make themselves holy.

That only the holy one can make you holy. And you see, that's why it's connected to the sacrifice. That the sacrifice is what in a sense is making this particular thing holy or clean. But you can't then just go say, oh wow, I have a little magic wand that makes things holy and clean and I can run around and touch things.

No, no, that's not how it works. That's taking you far away from the fact that God has to provide the means. You see, you can't sanctify yourself. You can't make yourself holy.

You can't make yourself be in the realm of God to have God as your God for him to lavish his love upon you. You can't do that by yourself. You need God to make you his own.

[16:07] You need God to make you holy. You need God to make you clean. You need God to do that. And actually, if you understand this for a second, that rather than this being exclusive, this is the most inclusive news in the world.

No ideology, no religion, no spirituality, no nation is so inclusive. And that's one of the reasons why there is no body more multicultural, multi-ethnic than is this profound mission of God that is called the gospel and the Christian church that looks at people of all income levels, all IQ levels, all handicap-enabled levels, all colors, all nations, and says, did you know there's a God who loves you who wants to lavish his love upon you and he wants to have you be his?

And you know what? He knows all about your thing and he knows that you can't make yourself in his kingdom of love. Love has to open the door for love. Holiness has to open the door to holiness and to bring you in.

And so in a sense, all of this language of the clean and the unclean was trying to communicate these two things that you can't make yourself holy. You need to have God make you holy and you need to receive that humbly and that this, rather than being exclusive, is the most wonderful, inclusive news in the world because he doesn't look at your power, your prestige, or anything like that.

In fact, the only, it's like, what's the one criteria you need to be admitted to be in the hospital? Well, that you're sick. That's the only criteria.

[17:46] The only criteria to come to receive grace from God is that you need grace. That's everybody. It's actually very, very, and so the sacrifices of the clean and unclean is to communicate. You know what's the other thing to communicate is to, once again, and you can go back into the food laws, if we did a sermon series in Leviticus, we could talk about that, is that all of these different languages of clean and unclean, holy and unholy, is trying to communicate, to get into the imagination, to get into, in a sense, into the bones and the imagination and the narratives and the story of the people, what it's like to be under God's reign, to be under God's rule, to be his precious possession and treasure.

And a dead body is dead. To touch the dead body, in a sense, means you are being reminded of the fact that you are in the realm of death.

But to be under God's authority, God is the God of living. He's the God of life. He's the God of life who gives life. He is the God of life who desires to give you a life that is his, that will go on into all time.

And so by these things of the different foods and these different things, it's trying to structure and form the imagination of the people at the level of their reflexes, their imagination, their bones, their

reflexes about what it's like to be close to God.

That the closer you get to the true and living God, that when he opens the way for you to get close to him, the closer you get to him, the closer you're getting to life. Because he is not the God of the dead, he is the God of life, the living.

[ 19 : 22 ] To become close to him is to get close to life. So you say, okay, well George, that's very interesting, but what's this weird stuff about then everything they do?

You're saying that all their work, that all their worship, that it's unclear? Like what's going on here with this? That doesn't make any sense from what you said, but it actually makes, here's some of you who were here last week.

By the way, people remember 10% of what they hear, so I sort of think I could preach the same sermon 10 times before everybody's heard it once. And so some things could be repeated more than once, that's fine.

But so just here to try to understand what's going on. So remember, what has happened is they've come back to God does this remarkable miracle. He gets the Ayatollah of Iran to say, I want to see Jewish people in Jerusalem with a temple.

Like, whoa, that should knock your socks off in terms of a remarkable thing. Just knock your socks off, blow your hair back. Like, that's just crazy.

[ 20 : 29 ] But they go and they start to rebuild the temple and a couple of people say, I don't know, you know, it looks ugly, you look ugly, I don't like you, I hate your guts, and they just turn away. And so they turn away and they just say, I'm just going to make my own house really nice.

Boom, we're going to keep the worship and all of that type of stuff. And so, you know, so what's going on here? So now they're coming in, they're finally starting to build and he's trying to make a point that's going to make up in here. But here's the point.

Imagine for a moment that I decided it's really time for me to get into a deeper relationship with my wife, Louise. You know, better than we have right now. And so I consult some counselors, I call up, you know, some other people and I say, what's the type of conversations I should have?

You know, what should I be open about? What should I be vulnerable with? Like, how would a really good conversation like that go? And I get it all and I learn it and I think, okay, I'm going to ace this, okay?

So we get in the car to go to the restaurant and have this conversation and before we get into the car I take my wedding band off and I leave it at home. How many of you think Louise would notice in the car that I didn't have my wedding band on?

[ 21 : 36 ] Every single one of you would know that Louise will notice. How do you think my conversation with Louise will go in the restaurant? I've consulted the best psychologists and marriage therapists in the world.

I have all the things that I need to say to have the conversation go well. Do you think my conversation will go well? No. In fact, you know what? If 10 minutes into the meal Louise was to send a message to the whole congregation and just say, George is having a conversation with me at a restaurant and he took his wedding band off.

Like, what do you think is going on? And you'd all go, girl, let him have it. Like, he's, what's going wrong with George? He's nuts.

Okay? Like, there's something bad going on here, right? Because I took my wedding band off. So here's the thing connected to the text to make us understand this. Remember, what does God say? The whole big narrative of the story is that I want to be with you. I want to have you as my precious treasure. I want to give my life to you and have your life come under mine.

[ 22 : 44 ] I want to lavish love and life upon you. That's the desire of my heart. That's my, that's what I want to do. And so you gather together and the temple's not being rebuilt.

And God doesn't need a temple. Like, the temple is like nothing. Just like, you know, in a sense, Louise doesn't need the, I don't know, like the three dollars of gold in my ring or anything like that. Like, she doesn't need it.

But the ring symbolizes our marriage. The ring symbolizes that I'm married to Louise, that I first, I'm trying to and successfully forsaking all others to just be with her, that I want to be with her, that we're husband and wife.

And to take it off in public is to say something very, very different. And if you go back and you read Genesis chapter 1 and Genesis chapter 2, especially chapter 2, you see that basically what's going

on is that the Garden of Eden is in a sense the temple.

It's the dwelling place of God. And that the point of the Garden of Eden is that it would eventually take up the whole earth. And who knows, if we hadn't fallen, maybe it would take up the moon and Mars and Saturn and some other planets.

[ 23 : 48 ] And because God doesn't need a particular place, but the temple represents God's presence in their midst as their God that it matters to them. In a sense, the temple is the ring.

So just as they can do all the sacrifices they want and they could be the most assiduous Jewish people in the history of the planet with getting everything according to every word in Leviticus and Exodus and Deuteronomy, but they don't have the temple.

And just as I could have a conversation, I could have psychologists in my little, I have an earpiece telling me what to say. Wouldn't matter. Then they realize, what's going on?

He took off his ring. George, put your bleepity, bleep, bleep, bleep, ring back on right now. And then we'll coach you through apologies and repentance. And all of that stuff. That's what's going on here. That's why it's them functionally showing that they don't want God in their midst. And so what's happened to the Jewish people, and that's what's going to be very relevant right now in the next little bit, is that four months earlier their heart was pierced.

[ 25 : 05 ] And this is part of, you see, the grace that God doesn't say, well, okay, I'm waiting for a really nice big house and after I get the big house that I'm going to love you. No, no, no. As soon as he senses because he's God, the turning of their heart towards him and their own little efforts that picking up that first piece of rubble and trying to put it in the right spot to rebuild, then there's the turn in his relationship with him.

You see, because all of the sacrifices, all of them show God's grace. And as we now know as Christians, all of them point to the great sacrifice that Jesus is going to perform for us on the cross, that he is in fact the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

They all show his grace. And God doesn't wait for them to have measured up because why? He knows we can't. And he just wants to lavish his love.

And he takes that first turning of our heart to begin to have a change to be with him in a different way. So mindful of that, let's listen to what it said here, verses 15 and following.

Now then consider from this day onward. Now, yeah, I'll finish reading it. Now then consider, verse 15, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the Lord, how did you fare?

[ 26 : 26 ] When one came to a heap of 20 measures, there were but 10. When one came to the wine vat to draw 50 measures, there were but 20. I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the Lord.

Consider from this day onward, from the 24th day of the ninth month, since the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, or a better way to say it is from the day that the restoration began, consider, is the seed yet in the barn?

Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing, but from this day on I will bless you. Now, a couple of things here to sort of, you know, to wrap this up.

So, the first thing is this, that, like, I could well imagine if I was to say to a barista, like, for a lot of people, I mean, part of this thing is just all weird.

The idea that somehow or another that God actually actively stopped the crop from being good and the wine from being good, and somehow or another if he stops this, he thinks it's going to have people turn to him.

[ 27 : 43 ] And, like, you could well imagine people say, George, you know, if I found out that somebody was stealing my tips, I'm a barista, or just taking the tips and throwing them out the window so nothing happened, like, George, why do you think that would make, I'd be mad at that person.

Shouldn't they be mad at him? At God? Rather than actually turn to him? Well, you see, that's, once again, it's the case of we're bringing our narrative to the story, not the biblical narrative.

And, in our narrative, it would look as if, if I just sort of went in and started taking money from somebody or other and making you not get a promotion or something like that, that you'd be right to get mad at me, but that's not the narrative that's going on here.

The narrative that's going on here is that God wants to be almost as if he's their husband. He wants to be as if he's their dad. He wants to be in a covenant relationship that's real where he can lavish

his love upon them.

So, here's a different story. If you heard tonight, you go home, and you heard tonight that your best friend, that she found out that her husband was being unfaithful to her, and when he came home, he discovered that she had locked him out of the house and changed the locks.

[ 28 : 56 ] would you think she had done the right thing or the wrong thing? You'd say, you go, girl. Don't let that guy take advantage of you.

You need to affect where he can sleep tonight. You need to diminish him so he understands this is serious so he can return to you. That's exactly what God did.

He wants to lavish his love upon them.

He does something to get their attention. You see, the narrative of the story is of God desiring to lavish his love upon you.

And the other thing about this is that two things just in closing. The first thing is this. Sanctity or holiness or being God is its own reward but it always brings other goods in its train.

[ 30 : 06 ] Sanctity is its own reward or holiness or being God is its own reward but it always brings other goods in its train. And the other one is this that the triune God defines blessing not you or Canada or Hollywood or Bay Street or Wall Street.

See, that's why people who take this as a health and wealth gospel type of direction that somehow or another God's going to give them new cars he's going to give them this he's going to give them that that they're not reading the text right because God defines blessing and holiness always has its own rewards.

I'll give you just two illustrations to try to try to get you to bring this home to you by what I mean with them. When I was in my rural parish in Eganville I was there from 88 to 95 and one of the things that the church did in Eganville is they would tire themselves out about three times a year they would do these huge fundraising things to try to make money from the community to keep the church open.

It's a very common thing if you talk to some old Anglicans who were Anglicans back in the late 80s the early 90s they'd say yeah yeah yeah I mean this church we had a strawberry social we had another thing in November I think we had a third thing we had at least three things a year.

So one of the things that I did to the congregation is I was part of that first you have to convert them and let them know the gospel and then in light of the gospel say do you really think it's wise to go and seek the non-Christians in the community to give money to the church to keep the church open?

[ 31 : 32 ] Like shouldn't it really be that the church wants to bless the community? Like shouldn't it be like we have it backwards? And so I finally and I can also tell you another thing and I you know they all sort of knew this as well so a lot of times what would happen is they do all this work to make chicken suppers or something or other like that and all that would happen is at the end of the day everybody's exhausted you actually make very little money and then like people don't come to church like for the next month because they've done their bit and offerings go down for the next month and you know sometimes people would actually say to me you know George if we'd actually just gone and worked for a local worker for a day for minimum wage and then gave the money to the church it would have been less tiring and we would have had more money so anyway finally after like I've been there seven years or almost seven years and I finally convinced them that we would do something different we weren't going to do this fundraiser thing in February we would do something completely different we would do something in keeping with being gods and wanting to lavish his love upon people and so we made an arrangement that we had a we connected with the international student christian fellowship here in Ottawa at

Ottawa U and we said if you guys can get up to Eganville for a day we will give you a free lunch a free supper we will give you an opportunity to see what rural Canadian life is like we'll organize ice fishing we'll organize cross country skiing we'll organize snow mobiling we'll take you out to some of the local farms to visit some of the local people we'll give you free lunch free supper and we're also going to have even song and share the gospel and I don't know what it was like 50 some odd people all came up people from China and Africa all over they came up to Eganville and we gave them and you know anything about country people you never just offer one meat when you can offer three like you never just offer one type of salad when you can offer four right so they just stuff them like for lunch one of my big memories of this it's so cool but the the Asian students and the Chinese students in particular they loved being at the farm spending their time having their pictures

taken with the cows I don't know why but that was a big thing and and the by the end you know we gave them supper we had an even song we shared the gospel by the time they were going home they they loved us they they just had such the greatest time in the world everybody was so thankful and the congregation had not raised a single penny they'd spent money in a sense to be honest they were poor at the end of the day than they were at the beginning but you know what the whole congregation was so pumped for the next month or two attendance in my church was way up and the offerings were way up and by the end of the two months we had way more money than if we had done a stupid chicken barbecue or some other type of thing you see holiness is its own reward but it brings other goods in its train and this also fits with the other thing is that God defines the blessing not Canada not Wall

Street not Hollywood now obviously one of the reasons that Haggai was recognized as a prophet is there must have been see one of the things about this prophecy is it comes the late rains in early late October early November that makes a hard soil around Jerusalem soft so they could plant and then there's some other rains and so in December everything's planted but nothing's been harvested and so obviously there was enough of an increase in food that people could see that the prophecy by Haggai was true it's one of the reasons that they must have said we need to keep this book and read this book and study this book and pray for this book we need to understand that when we draw close to God that's its own reward but he will also bless us in other ways and there must have been enough there but you know it's more than just having enough food we live in a time when there's a crisis of meaning part of the reason there's so much anxiety in Canada is that there's no meaning there's no meaning people feel alone and they feel isolated and they feel guilty and they feel insufficient and they have anxiety and all these issues but you hear this story and God wants to lavish his love upon you and and he wants you to be his and when you're his he wants to lavish his love upon you and he wants you to be part of his great mission that the world will know that he exists that he loves you that he wants to lavish his love he wants a lavish life upon you he will give you love and life that begins today that goes on through into all eternity and so there must have been enough for them to have more that's completely fine but you see like think about that story of that congregation in Eganville let me tell you this being generous is way more whole and freeing than hoarding money forgiving is way more whole and freeing than being judgmental and attacking you know what embracing people who are of different cultures are you and befriending them or different colors of you or different religions of you and befriending them is way more freeing than the person who's afraid of them and being able to turn the other cheek when somebody hurts you is way more freeing than being able to be a really good person at punching them back and the person who gives rather than hoards will have a far softer pillow at night the person who forgives rather than seek revenge will have a far softer pillow at night see it's not just about the stuff although obviously there was this stuff is that when God blesses you

God blesses you the whole one simple way to understand blessing is that God wants you to thrive but not by the standards of Canada by the God who's created all things who wants to lavish his love upon you and life upon you and so that's this message here of this book that we are to put God first that we are in a sense to once again just understand the importance of being gripped by the gospel and how when we start to realize that it makes far more sense to put him first in his mission to transform human lives and human communities through the gospel so that more and more people will understand that God just wants to lavish his love and life upon you and to be part of that is to be meaning to understand that you're making something you're not just teaching Sunday school you're not just greeting somebody at the door you're not just helping a new Canadian learn how to speak English better when you're in for the name of Jesus you're not just doing these meaningless things you are doing something that's part of this profound mission of God this narrative and story of God that transforms human lives that will transform them beyond death and into all eternity and that is what God is asking you to do and so why would you take such a great ambition and pursue ephemeral things

I'm not saying that to you if I say that to you I have three fingers pointing back at me and one up to Jesus Jesus help me let me see me let's just pray that the Lord will help us to be so gripped with this story of Jesus and of God's grace and his lavishing his love upon us that it changes how we do our church which changes how we live our lives that time and time and time again we come to him and say Lord this week I've messed up or I've done good I so need to hear this story again to help me get where true north is and what life is all about that I can once again I recommit to you I recommit to you not in a way that I'm now saved because Jesus never lets us go it's all grace he's

opened the door not us he's opened the way not us let's stand close in prayer father we give you thanks and praise that you want to lavish your love and your life upon us and that you want to not only do that here on this side of the grave but that you want to do that begin that work in our lives and grow that work in our lives that will go on and survive death and go on into all eternity into the new heaven and the new earth so father we give you thanks and praise that that is who you are that is what you want to do that is what you want us to understand and so we ask father we give you thanks and praise that this on the Sabbath the

[ 40 : 19 ] Lord's day that we can gather and hear your word and be reminded about what is true and what is real and what is meaningful and what is significant and and and father that that we can double down and commit to this and if we haven't entered into this story that if we have not realized that that's why God's trying to get our attention so that we would give our life to Jesus said that but if there's anyone here in that or listening on that that they would say father I want to stop running I want to be Jesus's I want him to be my Savior and my Lord and I want you to never let me go and I want you to bless me and with your love in your life and I want to be blessed by you so that I might be a blessing father I want that to be the new and final story of my life and father we ask for them we ask for us that once again we will recommit father draw us close to yourself through your son in the power of the Holy Spirit make us open to receiving your blessing so that we might be a blessing to others for our great good the good of our city the good of our nation the good of the world and for your great glory and we ask these things in the name of Jesus your son and our Savior amen