

Matthew 9:35-38 “My Evangelism Teacher Pt. 2”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

So a big part of like what Into the Wild is, and that's the name of the ministry that I'm part of along with three other men, and two of them are actually elders here, Alan Judge and George Mayer. So George is over there, Alan's over there. And together we're thinking through what does it mean to be an evangelist, or at least think about how do we connect with people in our current culture. And one of the unstated things about Into the Wild is it's evangelism for the rest of us, right? Because evangelism has all this baggage. One of the things we talked about in January was like taking baby steps, because it can seem overwhelming.

And one of the baby steps we talked about in January was noticing a tattoo. And that sounds strange to you, but the image of God out in the wild, and the wild, by the way, is everything off of orthodox real estate.

[1 : 09] Because on Sundays we walk on Christian carpet, we shake Christian hands, we have Christian conversations. And then when we leave and we go out, we're in the wild. Okay? And so one of the things we talk about, a baby step, noticing a tattoo, because the image of God out in the wild is writing their stories in permanent ink on their bodies.

They're confessing things. They're telling you what hurts. And they want you to ask, but at the same time they don't want you to ask. It's that sort of thing. So we think about ways we can ask, noticing and sort of asking.

And you and I had a conversation about something that happened when you went out sort of noticing tattoos. John, tell us about it. Sure. So yeah, it was recently Andrew and I were out running some errands.

And we had one more stop to make going into a retail store. And I was not at all thinking about paying attention to other people, much less their tattoos. I just wanted to get in and get out. I knew exactly what I wanted to get. I knew that I was going to need help from an employee, unfortunately, had to deal with other people. But an employee came, he helped us, and out on the floor he helped us.

[2 : 25] And so then we were walking up to the front to go close out and pay. He was in front of us. And so as he was walking in front of us, I noticed in his back pocket he had this very large notebook kind of rolled up and sticking out of his back pocket.

And so I thought, oh, well, that's cool. You know, maybe he journals or writes poetry or maybe he writes songs, you know, when things are slow out here on the retail floor. And the Spirit used that to kind of rattle my cage like, oh, yeah, I'm supposed to be paying attention to other people and not just myself and my own errands that I need to run.

So the Lord was kind of reminding me of that as we were walking to the front. And, you know, Bill and I have been engaged. I'm like, okay, I'm going to work up the courage at least to look for a tattoo.

Maybe not ask, but look. Look, so as the young man's actually checking us out, I look and instead of seeing tattoos on his arms, I see cut marks from self-injury.

And did well not to just start crying there in the moment, but just kind of reeling from that. He was very kind and helpful.

[3 : 41] We closed out our business and all I could really do was at least look him in the eye, thank him for his help, call him by name. And that was kind of it in the moment because I was just feeling so overwhelmed and brokenhearted, I guess.

And so as we talked about that, I think one of the things about evangelism and one of my goals in January was if we could just start thinking about it, right?

Because sometimes things seem so much, such a big step. And so you took a step. You took a step and you started to notice how you felt. And I think a big part of evangelism is having compassion for people.

And do you remember what you said? I wrote it down, if you don't, but sort of what your conclusion was. As you reflected on it, you thought something. You know, do you remember what it was? Well, I think if we're thinking of the same thing, it was just kind of that realization of this young man is a precious image bearer of God.

And in this case, he was bearing part of his pain and his story, you know, quite literally on his arms and in that notebook sticking out of his back pocket.

[4 : 55] So like you said, he had a story that involved a lot of pain and part of him probably wanted people to notice that and to know that. And then part of him maybe not.

So yeah, we wrestled together with that because probably it would not have been great for me to ask him about the cut marks. And so we've been wrestling with some questions like, what should I have done in that situation to share the love of Christ?

You know, it's just this passing moment. Is it enough just to feel that heartache and to maybe shed those tears and even maybe, you know, pray a brief prayer, but knowing I'm probably not ever going to see him again.

So is that enough? And, you know, is that evangelism? And even if they had been tattoos rather than cut marks, and if I had gotten up the courage to ask about the tattoo, is that really evangelism? Or is that just a way for me to kind of check the box and make myself feel like I'm doing evangelism while avoiding whatever we might call real evangelism?

[6 : 03] Absolutely. We do have those discussions. And so, you know, I think one of the things we concluded as we talked, and, you know, I think our time, we can close with this, that, you know, evangelism involves a lot of things, but it's not less than having compassion.

It's not less than seeing the hurt that no one's really showing you, thinking about it like that, and developing that heart for it, and creating space in our own hearts to be able to hold that, right?

To see it. I think that's what God is doing in our hearts. And if we can have that, because if we start with like, hey, go do evangelism, John, you're going, you know, okay, it can seem like homework at a minimum, but if we can develop that compassion, and that's, by the way, it's a compassion that flows from Jesus.

It flows from his compassion for us. It flows from what he did, and that as that grips our hearts, it's like we start to see things we've never seen before, and people, and the hurt, and the pain, and we get to tell them about Jesus, right?

So, man, thanks. We're taking baby steps, right? Lord willing. Yes. Amen. Okay. Thanks, John, so much. I'm having a lot of fun.

[7 : 18] What we're doing, and the idea is, is that it doesn't need to feel like another program. Evangelism for you doesn't need to feel like another program. And so how do you take a church that exists already, and how do you get that help people catch that vision?

We believe it's baby steps, and we believe it starts like in a small, smaller, you know, grassroots thing. And so I've got six people. It's a total, I really think about it as five, because two of them are a couple, and we're talking about these things.

And we believe, and I believe, and Into the Wild believes, and the board of directors of Into the Wild believes, that that can be a grassroots thing that flows up, and that we all can have hearts and compassion that Jesus has, and we'll see it begin to happen.

All right? And so actually this sermon this morning is about that, so you're about to get pounded with this idea. All right? Let me just say a brief prayer, because I need to transition.

Father, I'm so grateful for you. I'm grateful that you don't prod and push. Satan does that. You gently lead like a good shepherd.

[8 : 27] You lead us into the wild, where we live from 12 o'clock noon on Sunday until 9.30 the following Sunday. That's where we live.

We live in the wild, Lord, and you have called us out into it. You lead us and guide us. You're the good shepherd, and you give us peace, and you give us a boldness, and a calm humility that is a curiosity in the world, in the wild.

So, Father, we want to be your hands and feet, and we want to see people come to Christ, because that's what they need. Give us a vision for that, even through your word this morning.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. All right, so into the wild. I said into the wild is everything off of orthodox real estate, sort of outside the walls. But what's wild about the wild?

What's wild about out there? There's a lot of things I could say. One of the things is that I've noted, and let's see if you've felt this, too. Outside, there's just a lot of noise.

[9 : 26] There's a lot of noise. A lot of distractions. We all have busy brain. It's just so too much sometimes.

Alan Noble, an author, wrote his book, *Disruptive Witness*, described it well. I just want to read it, because it sounds like me. It sounds like the wild.

He said this, And now we have our phones, too.

Because now with our phones, for sure, you're never alone, and it's never quiet. So when the notification goes off on our phone for an email or a text, we can't tell the difference anymore between something important or something frivolous.

Is something going to change my day? Like, I've got to address, and I've got to get onto it. I've got to handle this. Or is it another video of yet another video of Joe Biden tripping and falling that I'm supposed to laugh at?

[10 : 45] Can't tell the difference anymore just from the ding. Everything is pushed to you is either going to change your life or it's something frivolous.

But that has kind of always been the case, but now it's just ratcheted it up. Like, back in the day, people would still even ask you, Hey, give me a phone call when your plane lands. Have anybody ever done that for you?

Okay, call me when your plane lands. I tell people no now, because if the plane crashes, you will know. CNN will tell you Bill's plane crashed.

And then how about when you go on vacation, people give you homework. Send pictures. No, no, no, no, no, no. I want to enjoy where I am.

And when I get home, I will bore you with pictures from my vacation. Okay? We're never alone. It's never quiet. So what we do for all the anxiety that's created from all these distractions, all this stuff, what do we do to quell the anxiety?

[11 : 51] We're constantly wondering, what am I missing? Who am I offending? What are they saying? What happens if I don't send immediately right back?

What about all this stuff? We've got busy brain. We're a low boil franticness all the time. And we distract ourselves with the distraction of the distraction machine.

We get on our phones because we don't want to think about anything. What T.S. Eliot and the Four Quartets, the famous poem in the 20th century, he had that line that said, distracted from distraction by distraction.

That's what's wild about the wild. And it's wild in here, too. You all have busy brain. All of you.

I know you do. You just don't show it. I have it, too. Distractions galore. Now, here's something I've observed, just thinking it through. We're so distracted to the point that it's keeping us.

[12 : 57] It's a barrier from seeing the brokenness in people. And from being fully present, fully present to have compassion and to love people as Jesus had compassion and loved us.

I'm getting that from at least a couple of scriptures. Ephesians 4.32, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ, in Christ God forgave you.

And how about, you know, 1 John 4.19. You can complete this. We love because he first loved us. Do you see where that's flowing from?

You have to begin there. You have to begin with the love of God. That's the Star Trek prime directive for us, right? Above all else, love people. Above all else, show compassion.

Above all else, listen to them. Go and show them because God first loved us. God first showed us compassion. But we're so distracted we don't think about that.

[14 : 02] You know, we do. We go to the retail store. We're in and out. We don't slow down. So distractions are keeping us from seeing the brokenness in people and from being fully present to have compassion and to love them as Jesus had compassion and loved us.

I think that's something. We get that, right? Now, how about this? Have you ever in your best moments, in your best moments when you're thinking how you want to be, in light of the love of Jesus, in light of what you've been given through Jesus and the gospel and the grace you've been

shown, have you ever had those moments, in your moments of clarity, where you imagine how you want to be with people?

And doesn't it look like something where you have a calm humility, but a boldness that is informed by the love of Jesus? And you're not thinking of the next thing that you've got to do?

I mean, won't our spouses, if you're married, love that? And wouldn't the people in our lives love for you to be present enough to hold space for them to talk to you? And you listen.

And you're not trying to correct. You're not trying to judge. You're not formulating a reply in your head. You're just listening. I think in your best moments, you want to be like that.

[15:20] There's a quote. Oh my gosh, it's a famous quote. I know most, a lot of you have heard it. Even when I was on staff here years ago, it was floating around. But it's written by Henri Nouwen.

If you look at it, it says Henri Nouwen. But if you're sophisticated, you say Henri. Okay? It's Henri Nouwen. I'm not sophisticated. Henri Nouwen said this.

I'm just going to read it. It's beautiful. More and more, the desire grows in me simply to walk around, greet people, enter their homes, sit on their doorsteps, play ball, throw water, and be known as someone who wants to live with them.

It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence. Still, it is not as simple as it seems. Noise, distractions, right?

My own desire to be useful, to do something significant, or to be part of some impressive project is so strong that soon my time is taken up by meetings, conferences, study groups, and workshops that prevent me from walking the streets.

[16:24] It is difficult not to have plans, not to organize people around an urgent cause, and not to feel that you are working directly for social progress. But I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them but truly love them.

Henri Nouwen was a priest. I don't remember. Catholic, Episcopalian, something. But he ended up working with special needs adults. Just is an amazing person, right? But don't you wish that was you?

Don't you wish that that was you? You could do that? Our 26-year-old daughter told us recently, she said, man, I saw this movie and I love it. Well, you know, I don't know how she had not seen it because it's Sherry's favorite movie.

It's *Midnight in Paris*. And my daughter finally watched it. And *Midnight in Paris* is about this guy. He's a writer. He lives in modern times now. He's in Paris with his fiancée and her parents.

And just the chaos of him doubting his writing ability and just dealing with people and all this other stuff, he's kind of going crazy. But the story is real fanciful because at midnight, he's transported back to 1920s Paris and hangs out with Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald and Dali and Man Ray, all these artists and writers.

[17:50] And our daughter said, oh, I wish I could do that. You know, no phones. Your friends can't really find you. Maybe they catch up with you. And when you do, you just hang out.

Oh, man. So many distractions. So much noise. So much busy brain. How do we get to that place where we can have a calm spirit, where the Holy Spirit fills us and we still have room for other people, right?

How do we get there? Well, that's what I'm addressing this morning. We're going to look at a passage of Scripture, and I'm going to tell you two stories, and we'll be done. But I think I can get you there.

At least take a baby step in that direction, okay? Because I think all of us want to know how we can be with people like Jesus was with people.

Calm. Bold. Humble. Yet he told the truth plainly and clearly. He proclaimed the gospel.

[18:56] That's what we want to do. All right, let's look at our text. It's Matthew 9, starting in verse 35. And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

So at the time of Jesus, right, they had the Hebrew text, the Old Testament. And in the Old Testament, there's a number of prophecies, a number of things that are pointing, that's pointing ahead. And it's saying the Messiah is coming, and when he comes, you'll know him because he'll be healing people.

And he is going to fix everything that's wrong with the world. He's a king, and he's bringing the kingdom of God on earth. That's how you'll, but you'll know him because he's healing. That's one of the things. He's going to fix everything. So when you read the gospels, in particular, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they're called the synoptic gospels, right, because they sort of see eye to eye on how it's sort of structured and all that.

Right in the middle of all those gospels is a turning point, just like any great story. But this is a true story, right? Any great story has a turning point. And the turning point in the gospels, those three gospels, is when Jesus turns to his disciples and he goes, hey, who do people say that I am?

[20 : 12] And they say, oh, Elijah and all that sort of thing. But then, hey, Peter, who do you say that I am? And he says that you are the Christ, the son of the living God. And he goes, you're right. And upon that rock, I will build my church.

Have you ever noticed that right after that, it says that from that point on, Jesus began to tell them he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, die, and then be raised again on the third day.

And so if you think of an outline of how those stories, the gospels work, on the front end, you're learning who is Jesus. And then comes the turning point. And then he says, I must go and die and suffer and die and be raised.

And then from there on out, it's drilling down on who he is. More than who he is, but what did he come to do? Who is Jesus, turning point, what did he come to do?

And in this part, in chapter nine of Matthew, we're finding out who is Jesus. And that's so important for the gospel because you're going to tell people the gospel because that's the gospel.

[21 : 17] Jesus came to establish the kingdom. He is king. He's reigning. He's fixing everything. He's making all things new. That's the gospel. And I'm going to help you and tell you how you can tell people that right at the very end.

Okay? You're going to know how to tell people that gospel with humility and with boldness and a calm spirit. All right.

So next, verse 36. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. So a big part of what's happening in that front end of the gospels is that Jesus is winning the crowds over.

They see that he teaches with authority. And you know what they're feeling? They're feeling that compassion that's mentioned here, that he had compassion. They feel it. They see there's healing and they feel this compassion and this teaching has authority.

And they're amazed. And there's a whole group of people that don't like that, right? It's the Pharisees. It's the religious people, right? Because the religious people were laying on heavy burdens on the people to the degree where, as you read, they felt harassed and helpless.

[22 : 27] And those heavy things they're putting on people were things like, here's what you can and can't do on the Sabbath, which scripture doesn't say. Here's how you fast. Scripture didn't talk about how you do it that way.

But they're building to all kinds of things because they had the idea that they're the ones that are going to fix the world. Because if you do this, this is how things will be better, right?

Isn't that sort of all religions anyways? Here's how we're going to fix the world. You get your act together. You fly right and follow what we do. So when I think about like a people, a sheep without a shepherd is what Jesus calls.

The crowds of people are starting to listen to him and follow him. He says, you're a sheep without a shepherd because the people, the Pharisees, were supposed to be shepherding the people, not loading them down with burdens.

Okay, so when I think of sheep, I think that would be characterized as they're being attacked by wolves, right? They're being weighed down. Sheep are kind of dumb.

[23 : 25] So another way that sheep can be attacked is if they get caught, or things can happen to sheep where they become helpless, you know, and they're scared, is when maybe they get caught in a thorn bush.

And that's what I'm sort of imagining here. And I think that's sort of where our culture is. And I'll explain that. But I think a lot of our culture has tapped into maybe even different religions, but people who present things and it kind of feels like a religion.

They think this is how the world is going to be fixed. This is how I can participate in saving the world somehow. And that's big and grandiose. It's massive. There's that part of it.

But there's something else where people can get lost and feel weighed down. When Jesus was describing the parable of the sower and the seeds, the idea was that the seed was being scattered and you can see it in the Gospels.

And it's a parable. And the picture is of that seed, it's the word of God. And the word of God can flourish in only good soil.

[24 : 30] And so some of the soil, in particular this one, is soil where the word of God might sort of start to bloom a little bit, but the thorns and the thistles of life, as it were, crowded out and kill it.

And then Jesus says, you know what those thorns and the thistles are? And I imagine, you know, lost sheep being captured in it. I go back to, I think too, of like in Genesis, how when the curse came, that the picture was that, you know, the thorns and thistles will make, you know, work difficult.

But in the parable, the sower and the seed, the thorn bushes represent the deceitfulness of riches, not Jesus.

He said, Jesus said, it's the deceitfulness of riches, the desires for other things, and the cares of the world. I think when we look at the wild and we look at people, because they're just like us, they're being driven for the desire for other things.

The deceitfulness of riches is driving. That's how I'll be who I am. That's, I'll be happy when that happens. And then the cares of the world, and now that we have phones, man, the cares of the world are coming at us all the time.

[25 : 52] You know, back in the day, you used to sort of, at the end of the day, you might watch news and you might pull out the newspaper and read something. But I went through my whole college and I didn't know what was going on. I had no clue we were that close to like nuclear war or something.

I had no clue. I was much happier then, by the way. Young and dumb, but it was awesome. But that's the world that Jesus was looking at.

And they were harassed. It is kind of harassing. Phone dings, you look and go, oh no. Wow. Wow. You just kind of feel harassed.

And then the picture, you know, where it says that they were helpless, it's an image of sort of just, you know, like the sheep just sort of dropping on the ground like, okay, I can't move another paw. You know, I can't, I can't go, I can't move anymore.

And Jesus had compassion. That's the wild. That's out there. And by the way, it's in here too. It's up here also. So at the very end, if I were to summarize these last verses and let's read them and I'll summarize them.

[27 : 00] Verse 37, Then he said to his disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. There are two major points of this whole passage and I'll talk about them in just a second.

But if I were to summarize these last two verses, I would say this. And I sort of understand it. This is what those last two verses are saying. There are a lot of people out in the wild. And I want you to venture out, see what you've been missing, be with them and discover what I have already done and are doing and then proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and watch what happens.

I think that's maybe one way to say it. And I think that's what Jesus is saying, that he wants people to be out in the harvest, out in the wild, proclaim the gospel and see what happens.

And I think it can become very overwhelming though because there are a lot of people. You ever gone to Bridge Street on a nice day when it's not raining and you're sitting there and there's just tons of people, especially out in front of Cheesecake Factory?

You know, just tons of people. Or you're just driving around or just being anywhere or going to even like a major city. But even in our small city of Huntsville, it can be overwhelming. There's so many people.

[28 : 21] And I think maybe you might feel harassed. You might feel helpless thinking, how do I engage with people? I've got enough trouble that I can touch and feel at home and in my job, right?

Where do you begin with all the distractions available to help you forget? And yes, you'll pick up your phone to forget and see what's going on, what's going on, what's going on, what's going on. It helps you forget. It also does some really crazy things to your brain too, by the way.

Multitasking is from the pit of hell. I am certain of that. So what's a baby step that you can take? I'm going to tell you two stories and we'll conclude.

I promise. I'm going to keep saying that until you believe me. Early in the 2000s, when Billy, our oldest son, who is severely autistic, I don't mind saying he's more like, better described as mentally retarded.

I think that's a better word because again, autism is such a big broad spectrum now. Very, very smart people with, you know, that have a hard time sort of connecting with people who's considered autistic. Billy's on the very other end over here.

[29 : 35] And there are a lot of people in this room, a lot of people in this room. Nanette, there are a lot of people in this room that know what we went through to place Billy outside the home when it became violent.

He's being cared for fairly well now. Actually, very, very well. And, but back in the early 2000s, he was at home with us and he was like 10 or 11 years old. He's 31 now, but he was about 10 or 11 then.

And I was planting a church and we had worship every Sunday and we had a rented facility and it was just chaos and crazy and we're just doing our thing. And this particular Sunday after church, we were going to go to Billy's special needs school.

And there, because every year, like in the fall, like winter and spring, they have like a pageant. All the special needs kids go do something. All the families show up with the siblings and everybody. And I looked forward to that.

I loved it. But this particular Sunday when we're at church, I had to send Sherry and the kids ahead go because I had to handle an issue. There were two people in the church. Actually, there were two women that were in charge of a Sunday school class and they were arguing over something.

[30 : 38] I had to go get in the middle of it. And they were arguing over this. They were kind of butting heads. They were really upset with each other and I can't believe you said that about my kid and all that because one of their kids was talking in class, kind of being loud, that sort of thing.

And the other mom yelled at the other mom's kid, you know, you sit down and be quiet, you know. Can you not get control of your kid? That was one of those things that was going on. I got in the middle of it. I don't remember what happened. It's probably I have PTSD.

I've forgotten it. It's like, I don't want to think about it. But I got late. I showed up late to the special needs spring extravaganza.

Found my family, sat down. And it was so clear what had just happened and I'm looking at a room and I'm looking at a room full of moms and dads, siblings. They're out in the audience and their kids, their brothers or their kids are up front.

And I thought every one of these parents in this room would cut off their left arm to be that parent that had a kid who could talk and disrupt the class. You know, a normal, non-special needs kid.

[31 : 40] Any one of us. And I thought, oh. And then I looked in the front. I promise you, this happened. It's so clear in my mind. And I was looking at these special needs kids sort of slip syncing or singing or doing whatever they were doing.

And I thought, you know, there's no pretense up there because what you see is what you get. None of them are pretending. They're broken and maybe they don't necessarily know it but it's there for you to see.

And everybody in this room, if I were to go up to them like a mom, and this happens when you're in that special needs community, you go up to somebody when you normally like a church and you go, hey, how's it going? And someone goes, oh, it's going great.

Busy. That's usually the response, right? You ask, and this is what I usually do. I just go, hey, what kind of day, what kind of day is it? Oh, it's a good day. It's a good day.

You know, our child is doing well today and so it's so, you know, we're getting a little rest and, you know, it's, we're connecting on that level, right? Oh, it's a bad day.

[32 : 40] And you just give them a hug. That's the community. I thought, wow, those are my people. I love this. I love this because it reminds me of the brokenness that I'm trying to pretend isn't in my life or anybody else's.

As a pastor trying to plant a church, I thought, if I can just get these people to do certain things, we'll grow. You know, if I can do this and that and if I can get them to, I need people to do this. I'm just, it was just, I wasn't thinking about people hurting, you know?

I just wanted to solve that problem with the two moms and kind of move on. I had other fish to fry. I didn't have time. It's terrible. But in that environment, right, there's no pretense.

Everybody knows it's rough. That's the thing I love about it on one level. We all kind of know it's rough. No hiding. And what's going on, really, being part of that community, of special needs community, because special needs and having a child like that really defines us.

And we have, as a family, have a different posture going into situations because we know everybody's hiding their hurt and their pain. We've seen it because we hurt. And there's, and we know it's rough out there.

[33 : 53] And we take that posture into that, those settings. But I have to be back with my tribe every once in a while because, because I need to be grounded.

Kelly, our daughter, our youngest, she says, I don't have time and patience for normal people. Alec, our middle child, Billy's younger brother, he's 30.

His heart breaks for the siblings of special needs kids. And quoting Brendan Manning, he'll say he's just one beggar helping another beggar where he found food because he knows it's hard.

And Sherry, my bride, she is her most amazing self, on fire, kind, loving, calm, holding place and space for people when she's with other special needs moms.

It's a delight to see. I want that to be all the time for us. I want that to be all the time for you too with everyone. Last story.

[34 : 58] It's a story of contrast. This is not humble bragging. It's just, I just do this. Maybe that is humble bragging. I'm saying that. But I coach, I coach a special needs baseball team.

It's Miracle League. It's a great organization. I've been doing it, I think, 17 years. We started it because Billy was still in the home and he got to do it and I coached. So I do it. We just keep doing it.

We just keep re-upping every year. And now, I have had these same families for a while and now they're all adults, all the special needs kids.

I mean, gosh, I don't know how else to say it, special needs adults. But I had them when they were younger and they're still younger leagues. It's like three divisions. There's like this little itty bitty and then sort of the middle-y kind of teenage-y and then adult.

So every once in a while, I'll show up early for a game and I'll watch the little kids group and I notice something. I notice something like in the parents' faces. They're smiling. They're out there with their kid or doing something.

[35 : 55] They're smiling. But I couldn't help but thanking us back then, Sherry. It was just sort of back in that time where we had hope that Billy could get better. You know, we had this, we were sort of, you know, okay, you know, God, I know you've got this and I know maybe he can get better.

We had that smile. It was sort of, it was a smile that was sort of in a hope that was contingent. Maybe we can fix him. Maybe it'll get better.

Maybe the future, I think, won't happen, right? So then comes the 30-year-olds and they show up and we're out there with them and then some of the parents that are there because a lot of parents when they're adults they don't participate anymore and it's just life and I get it.

But those parents, I see a smile on their face but it's a wiser smile. It's a wiser smile that sort of has done this and Sherry has taught me this because she says when we see those parents it's sort of like a surrender.

It's this idea that you sort of take a deep breath and you exhale and you go, you know, I can't fix this. I can't fix it.

[37 : 05] I'm just gonna bring them close, my child, as they are. I don't have to fix them anymore because I can't. And there's a wisdom that comes from that and there's a wisdom that just grows from thinking about it.

And I don't always want to re-up but when I get where I'm with my tribe I re-up to be a coach. Here's what I've learned. It comes from seeing life for what it really is.

In those two stories I told you. What I've learned is that assume brokenness sheep without a shepherd. Assume brokenness in every context you're in.

Assume brokenness out there. Assume it no matter how good it looks because you're not gonna be at the spring special needs school pageant where you can see it and you know what everybody's going through.

You know, right? Out in the wild people are distracted. They're distracting themselves. Pursuit of riches, desire for other things, care to the world.

[38 : 18] I'm following a cause. We're gonna fix this. We're gonna do that. They're out there and they don't have time to think about it and if you don't see it you kind of wonder are they broken? Yes, they are. I promise you.

And so I've learned that and also learned this to run into it with the posture of someone who gets it. You're a fellow distracted person. You are harassed by everything too. You're tired. You're helpless. Sheep as well. And do it no matter how you feel.

Run into the situation. Proximity. Go into the wild. Discover your parish. Discover your tribe. You know, Miracle League is part of my tribe, my parish.

You know, it feels like a family reunion when I see them. Discover that for yourself and run into it with a posture of humility because you're broken too.

[39 : 20] So go do that. But here's the thing. I can't leave you there because that sounds like homework, doesn't it? It's like, ah, okay Bill. Sounds good and all but man, I can't do this.

I cannot. Sounds exhausting. You've tried evangelism. Compassion, man, I can't look beyond the tattoos sometimes, man.

What is wrong with those people, you know? I mean, or just anybody. You know, gosh, what's wrong with them? It kind of feels like homework, doesn't it?

You can't do it. You can't do it and it feels like homework. Here's the gospel. There is one who did though. There is one who ran into the wild and it didn't feel like homework.

It felt like love for him. He was motivated by love. There is one who ran into the wild. In our passage, and I'm going to tell you who it is.

[40 : 25] In our passage, there are two points of emphasis, right? And it's helpful here as we close. First, the word compassion. That's in verse 36, right?

I found, you know, doing, looking and research and reading, that word is never used. The Greek word, right? You know, it sounds cool when seminarians go, the Greek word, but I promise you.

That word is never used when it's referencing a man, a human being, you know, a person.

It's only in reference to the divine. This is the divine compassion. It's a divine compassion that we will for all eternity be astonished at that compassion.

It knows no bottom. And that compassion is what Jesus showed us. It's the kind of compassion you wish you had for people. You wish you had for, if you're married, you wish you had for your spouse so you wouldn't say the stuff you say.

Because you want that calm heart. You want that heart that leaves space to hold for other people, that you can love people because Jesus loved you. And it comes from grasping that compassion that Jesus has for you and that you saw on the cross.

[41 : 40] So that's one of the emphases. The second one is the last one because, hey, now go. Jesus is saying, look, I had compassion on these people. And he's going, now go out there and get them.

No, that's not it. He says, pray. He says, pray. Pray to the Lord of the harvest. And so I would tell you, your baby step for evangelism is praying.

Tell him what overwhelms you. Tell him how distracted you are. Tell him how you want his compassion that has shown you to be the thing that flows from your heart.

Pray that when that happens, you will see people like he sees people. And by the way, prayer is evangelism because Jesus is saying, look at the harvest, it's ready, pray. That's evangelism.

There's no argument about that. It's evangelism. Just like noticing a tattoo is. I think we concluded that. Prayer is evangelism because, you know why? Because it changes you and only a changed you will be comfortable, bold, humble, relaxed, calm, able to hold space for other people.

[43 : 02] You know what? You'll be a curiosity. You'll be a curiosity out in the wild because everybody is out of the low-boiled franticness and they're searching and they're lost. They're lost sheep, caught in the briar bushes, the deceitfulness of riches, desire for other things, and the cares of the world.

Be a curiosity. All right. So when you're out there holding space for people and you're calm, right, because you're thinking about Jesus and the coin drops and the Holy Spirit fills you in that peace that transcends all our understanding, guarding your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus as you go out into the wild, you will be able to listen to people.

You will listen to hear rather than listen to respond or listen to judge or listen to correct and you'll give them space and you'll hold space for them. And when they ask, 1 Peter 3, you know, Will did

such a great job preaching on that.

And when they ask you for the hope you have, you can give an answer. And I'm going to give you the answer, what to say. But before I do, think about when do people ask, tell me where you get your hope from.

Isn't it when they're helpless, hopeless, when they're sort of like the sheep, the lost sheep, they're just, and they've been harassed and they can't take it anymore and they get to that place, you know, I'm coming up empty, where do you get hope?

[44 : 32] You can tell them. I got the answer that I'm going to give you right here in this room about this time last year. Richard Pratt, one of my seminary professors, preached, and then afterwards he did this Q&A.;

Q&A.; I mean, may have even been better than the sermon. It was fantastic. And so he said something in that and I'm stealing from him. And so you all pretend, I'm doing a, you know, Jedi thing.

Bill actually said this first, you know. But what he said, I hadn't stopped thinking about it. I heard a sermon that he did just recently where he had this in there again, but it's profound.

So when somebody says, where's your hope? You give them the gospel and here's what you say. Because people are at the end of the rope at that point. They're tired, they're broken, they're helpless, they're sheep without a shepherd. And as Will taught us, go be a shepherd out in the wild. Go. Pastor these people. Pastor non-believers. Be there. When they say, where's your hope from? And here's what you say. I didn't think of it, but you pretend like I did. I love it. This is what you say to them.

[45 : 40] I know the name of the man who is fixing everything. I know the man who is setting every wrong right. I know his name.

I talk to him all the time. And when I do, I don't feel harassed. I don't feel frantic. I don't feel anxious. I'm not distracted when I talk with him.

Because he's already making my heart new. Because he lives in my heart. And I'm tasting the new world he is creating. I'm tasting it right now.

I know his name. You know, we know him as the Lord of the harvest. But I know his name. His name is Jesus. He died and rose from the dead.

And I'm not afraid anymore. I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of the cares of the world anymore. I'm not afraid if I don't ever get what I desire. And I'm not afraid that I won't have money.

[46 : 46] And I don't have to control outcomes anymore. And I would tell people this if I was doing that. I would say, you know, what's my son Billy?

Everything that's wrong with him is being fixed. And one day, it's all going to be swallowed up in the new world that Jesus is creating.

And Billy will hug me in a way that he doesn't hug me now. And when I look into his eyes, I will see something that I've never seen before but I always knew was there. And when he talks, I'm going to hear a voice that I long to hear even when he was first born and I've longed to hear it and I'll hear it one day.

Because I couldn't help him and I couldn't fix it but there is one who is and I know his name and he's fixing it. So no matter how my life goes, I'm not missing out on anything because the best is yet to come.

And even on a real practical effort, it's okay if I never answer that email or answer that text. they're going to get over it. I don't care anymore. The Lord of the harvest wants you to be at peace and fully present out in the wild.

[48 : 05] He wants that. He, where you're bold and there's a calm humility about you. People are hiding their hurt but you know it's there and that you pray and you pray to the Lord of the harvest.

think on the divine compassion of Jesus. What did it lead him to do for the joy that was set before him? He endured the cross despising the shame and then go into the field, the harvest field, the wild and start the process of harvesting by listening to hear, not judge, not correct.

Hold space for people to listen. Do you know how unusual and what a curiosity you will be? No one listens to each other anymore. They're going to look at you and you go, what is in you?

What? And you tell them, I know his name, the guy who's fixing it all. Be a curiosity in a distracted, frantic world. Don't fret over outcomes, right?

Even as John was talking about, is this evangelism? Is this? You know, don't fret the outcomes. You know why? Because the Lord of the harvest knows what the harvest will be.

[49 : 21] He's not surprised. He's not disappointed. That's the beauty of it. He sends us out with his compassion. He already knows the harvest and he goes, go. Be fully present.

Then watch what happens. You'll be amazed. This church will be different. You won't recognize this church in five years. Let's pray.

Father, gosh, thank you so much for your compassion. You even saw it in your providence for a word to only be used about you.

So we wonder and we ponder and we think and your spirit allows the coin to drop in our hearts. and with that compassion we can go and pray to the Lord of the harvest and see what happens.

A calm, humble, bold presence is what we desire, Father, so that we can proclaim the gospel and tell people, yeah, there's a lot wrong.

[50 : 35] The world is pretty messed up and I know the name of the man who's fixing it. In Jesus' name, amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.