



Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly

Pastor Leroy Wiggins, Ryan Kozey, John Camardo
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Good morning everyone. Well, what we knew was imminent has actually happened. We have a new president-elect in our nation. And for some, that means that they are rejoicing, and for some they feel a bit despondent. But I would suggest to you that for the people of God neither despondency or gloating is really the right response, but instead that we respond by doing what we are called to do in the Scripture, and that is to pray for those who are in authority and who lead us.

Now what we found out during these last number of months in our country and even through the time of the election and some of the response to the election is that we live in a bit of a divided country. And so how do we respond to that as the people of God? Well, like God has told the people of God in the past to respond.

In fact, Israel itself was a divided country, not just theoretically like here in the United States, but literally a divided country. After the time of the Davidic kingship and after Solomon's reign, the country divided, and by the time you get to around the eighth century BC and the 700's, you've got a division that is clear between Israel to the north and Judah to the south.

And in that divided country, that divided kingdom God raised up some prophets. In fact, some of those prophets were actually prophesying at exactly the same time, they were contemporaries of one another. People like Isaiah and Amos and Hosiah were all kind of sharing what God had said to the nation of Israel and to Judah. They were doing that at the same time and there was another of their contemporaries named Micah. And Micah had some incredible things to say, much like the other prophets there was always warning and rebuke and correction and hope kind of all at the same time.

And when Micah who we're going to look at today, when he wrote in chapter 6 he was making a case from the Lord, the Lord was making a case that He had against His people, who were not really following Him as they should. And so ultimately, the people were saying what should we do? Should we bring, you know, all kinds of olive oil or sacrifice bulls or any of those kinds of things? And listen to the response that God gives in Micah chapter 6 verse number 8. "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Now I think that instruction for us in this day in age is really good instruction. And so I've asked some of our pastors, Pastor LeRoy Wiggins, and John Camardo and Ryan Kozey to spend a few moments with us today, kind of unpacking this for us and helping us to see maybe what God wants us to respond to with instruction He gave to His people of old, and I believe gives to His people of now. And so I pray that you will listen and allow the Spirit of God to say what He wants to say to your hearts.

Good morning everyone. I'm going to ask you to do one more thing before we get started. Could I ask everyone to please stand. Everyone here in the main Worship Center and in the Atrium and the East Worship Center and Lockport as well. For you folks at home I don't know what you're going to do but you can try it if you'd like. But here's what I want you to do. I want you to look around at the people that are here to worship Jesus Christ. Just look around. It's okay, you can stare. Don't stalk but you can stare and I want you to just see the richness and the diversity of the people that are here this morning. Every ethnicity, every nationality as well as every spectrum of the socioeconomic scale. Stay standing. Every spectrum of the socioeconomic scale is here. You see the richness and the diversity of the church is an asset to the kingdom. And the richness and diversity of the church can be an asset to the world as well.

But there's one thing that's certain, we all bring our own experience, don't we? We all have our own experiences of how we were brought up, the things that we were taught, where we lived, all of those things we have our own experience. Even within the same ethnicity. I mean my African American male experience is not going to be the same as every other African American male's experience as well. It just won't be the same. There will be some commonalities, but there will be some differences.

But in light of the differences that we have within ourselves, our ethnicities and nationalities, here's what I want us to do given we have those differences. Grab the hand of the person next to you and I'm going to pray. Father, we are so grateful for the diversity of the body of believers you have brought here today. We know God that through your word that you

have already given us unity through the Spirit and Jesus Christ, but what we are to do is to preserve that unity. We ask that you would help us to do that God as we get into the message this morning of what we are going to be speaking about, I ask that you would break down the walls that are prejudice and any biases that we may have towards one another. That you would allow us to hear what you would say to us this morning strictly from you, unencumbered by anything that would get in the way of this message. So Father, we thank you again for the richness and the diversity of the people here. We love you and we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You can be seated.

So in light of the different experiences that we have again, there's ethnicity and nationality, socioeconomic status and family upbringing, we changed the format of this morning so that right here on the stage we can demonstrate some of the diversity that we see out there as well. So, what I'm going to be doing this morning is moderating a conversation with a little bit of input and dialogue from myself, but to talk to my brothers in Christ and colleagues John Camardo and Ryan Kozey and as I ask the questions, here's what I want you to do. I want you to think about how you would answer these questions. Because they're not simple questions to answer and chances are we probably have never even asked ourselves these questions before, but I want you to walk away with what would my responses be to this and what response would Jesus Christ want us to?

You heard Pastor Jerry talk about the passages just there in Micah and we're going to focus and spend our time on that passage right there, because we believe that there's a crisis in the church in this country. And a

crisis is the mobilization of God's people. The mobilization of God's people to take the things they are passionate about and link that with missional activity. The two of those things should not be mutually exclusive to one another. Those passions that we have need to be linked together for a missional connectivity in God's mission.

So we'll go to Micah 6:8 one more time. "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." You see, so oftentimes we want to please God, don't we? We want to please God and we just think we're going to impress Him. But God's not impressed, He's not saying, LeRoy, man since the beginning of time, I've never seen anyone serve like you. He's not impressed by those things. But that passage tells us what He wants. He wants His people to do what is right, to love mercy and to walk humbly before Him. And in order to do that I think what we have to do at times is ask ourself those questions. These questions here so that we can become self-aware. Do I do what is right and just to the people that God has placed before me in my circles of influence and even outside of that. Do I show mercy to people who have hurt me? People who have offended me, people who are different and people who are marginalized. People who are poor, do I show them mercy? And as I continue to grow in my faith am I walking humbly before God?

So to start with these questions I'm going to start with John first and here's the first question, but again folks, I want you to take this personally and ask yourself this same question and how would I answer that. First

question is John, what has God awakened you to in your life as it relates to acting justly?

Thanks, LeRoy. Well, what I've recognized is that over the past handful of years and God's been doing a work in my heart and causing me to really be wracked for the idea of social justice. And I had recently read a book called "Generous Justice" by Pastor Tim Keller. It's a great book, I'd recommend everyone to read it if you have an opportunity. But he summarized that text in Micah of saying essentially "doing justice out of merciful love". So, Micah 6:8 if you summarize that, it's doing justice out of merciful love.

Now, I believe that that's something that as a church we need to really understand. What I also recognize though is that there are many Christians who believe that the church that's focused on justice implies a watered down gospel. So commonly that is referred to as a social gospel where one is at the exclusion of the other. And I believe that there is a divide in the church as it relates to social justice because of those things. And it's a recognition of the fact that sometimes the gospel will take a back seat to good deeds. Yet we also have to recognize that the gospel is our motivation for these things. So given the passage we're discussing, this shouldn't be.

Theologian Jonathan Edwards, solid Bible teacher, passion for communicating God's Word with authority, he wrote a discourse called "The Duty of Charity to the Poor", and it's one of the most thorough teachings on the good Samaritan parable. And he said, "where have we any command in the Bible laid down in stronger terms, and in a more peremptory urgent manner, than the command of giving to the poor?" The

parable of the good Samaritan is a great example from Jesus of who our neighbor is. It's anyone at all in need, regardless of race, politics, class, religion, all of those things were addressed in that parable of the good Samaritan.

In addition, the book of Job gives great insight into what was viewed as righteous actions related to justice. So, Francis Anderson, another theologian, noted in his commentary on Job that "to [Job], right conduct is almost entirely social, so in Job's conscience, to omit to do good to any fellow human being, of whatever rank or class, would be a grievous offense to God."

So our role as Christians is to reflect the heart of God by caring for the defenseless and vulnerable. Those are our neighbors. So who are the defenseless and the vulnerable the Bible refers to? It's in James 1:27, this is a fairly popular verse related to this says: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." So if you were to summarize that, it says caring for the defenseless out of a pure heart. And in addition, Zechariah 7:10-11 references widows, orphans, the immigrant and the poor because they were individuals that had no economic or social power.

So who additionally is on the fringes of society today? And in the book that Tim Keller wrote, he added to that list a little bit based on our current society. He added refugees and migrant workers, the homeless, single parents, elderly. And as you can see by this lengthy list, the point is that the

gospel transcends all of these things. It transcends race, gender, socioeconomic status, employment, family structure, all of those things. I even heard last week in Pastor Jerry's message on unity that the heart of God is that His church would stand in the gap and be a witness to the world around us. And I've heard it said before that we want our community to experience the gospel and not have to come or go anywhere. That's what we need to do as a church to act justly.

I think for me there's been a few things in terms of acting justly that I've kind of anchored to. Number one would be God's Word. So a couple of verses in particular like the one that John had mentioned James 1:27, this is a book that's kind of near and dear to my heart. My daughter and I sought to memorize the whole book of James last year. She made it, I got to chapter three. But I'm a father of four so, and my wife is the father of five actually. So but James 1:27 says I'll just restate it, religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. So that's been one that I've looked at and said that this is God's word, I can't escape this. I can't ignore this, God's word shows me this.

I think a second verse that's been really helpful to me is Isaiah 58 verses 10-12, and it says "If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the

foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in."

And that verse had a very deep meaning for the people of the time, but those verses mean something deeply to me too. I want this for Western New York. I want for every, I want this to be the experience, I want that when I draw my last breath and people think of me like if there's a legacy that I could leave this world it would be that I poured myself out for the hungry and satisfied the desire of the afflicted. That's a desire that I have personally. God's word points me to that.

I think a second thing is that God has used prayer to awaken me to this. You know, just the idea of driving around the city of Buffalo, you can hear talk about a renaissance that's happening. And about five or six years ago I began to drive regularly throughout the city of Buffalo and in particular my heart was drawn to the east side. And as I began to pray, I would drive through every little nook and cranny of the east side. And I just drove these streets regularly, and I didn't know much about it, I didn't have any deep relationships in that context, but God had put on my heart I need to pray for this part of Buffalo, because it didn't feel like there was a renaissance happening there. And so I just thought Lord, please help this part of town. Help the people that are here. Help me to identify relationships. I'll talk about that in a little bit, but God used prayer to awaken me to call for "Lord I want justice to happen here, I want to live justly and I want to see justice happen". And so prayer has been a part of that.

I think circumstances have made me aware of this as well. You know, a few years ago with this renaissance of Buffalo that everybody's talking about, there was a conference that happened. And I don't know why this happened, but I was invited to sit on this panel. And they were talking about the renaissance of Buffalo. And you could at one point you could go on walking tours of the city of Buffalo. So you could go to a working class neighborhood in the First Ward, you could go to Little Italy on Hertel, you could go to kind of the LGBTQ in Allentown, you could go to Village Life in Elmwood Village, you could look at Little Africa on Grant Street. They were offering tours throughout all these parts of Buffalo. And I just thought wow that's interesting, I thought what about the East Side? There's no walking tours of the East Side. And the individual, who is not a believer said something that I just was like, I'm not okay with that. I'm not okay with that. This circumstance, like I can't ignore that this circumstance shows that people are ignoring... this feels unjust, Lord. I want justice here, so help me to act justly and then help me to find other people that seek that as well.

And I think service has awakened me to this as well. Just serving, putting yourself in a position where you can, you can put yourself into a spot where you're looking at poor, marginalized, vulnerable people and saying Lord, I want justice for these folks. Well, sometimes it's just serving that does that. So for a handful of years I was after school tutor at a program at the Excel Leadership Center. You and I, we serve on a board together that seeks to help at-risk youth in urban Buffalo and so there are ways that we can begin to serve.

And lastly I will say this. God has also put me in relationships with men and women who daily are working with poor and marginalized people as the center of their concern. And when I have begun walking in relationship with these people, it has been incredibly humbling for me to walk hand-in-hand with them, not transactionally, but hand-in-hand and they teach me in this process. And as they want to see justice happen it breaks my heart to want to see justice happen as well. To walk justly in this land.

Thank you, thank you. Most of you know that I spend a decent amount of time in Haiti. Over the past few years I've been there maybe seven, eight times or so and I go quite regularly and one of the things that I still find difficult when I go there is just to see the senseless and unjust, the needs of the people in Haiti, they experience on pretty much a regular basis. We think of the basics of food and water and clothing and shelter and adequate healthcare and education, these are things that when you think about it, everyone should have access to that. As a society where we are in life right now, we have all the things well within our wisdom, well within our intelligence, well within our means to make sure that every person on the face of the earth has access to those things. What we lack though, we lack is the moral fortitude and the desire to make sure that those things are happening.

And one of the things I think as believers we need to do is position ourselves to make sure that the defenseless and the poor have hope, and those are integral things of having hope. And we have to find where that resides in our life so that we are able to do those things as well. And one of the things I challenge all the people that go on mission trips with us is to

allow God to do something in your heart that after your one week of being in Haiti changes so that when you come back to Buffalo, there's fifty-one weeks of something you can now be engaged in. Because when you look at the poor, you look at the defenseless, you look at food and things of that nature, last I looked that's still in Western New York as well. There are literally thousands of people who do not have access to those things. If we look amongst our church here, I know there are hundreds that still lack those things as well. So when we have that in our heart, what we've done over there we need to do here, what is that? What are the things that you see as unjust, that you can institute in your life as a believer in Jesus Christ so that others have the hope of the gospel and they can be the gospel presence? So that is the unjust that rests in me and the unjust that I need to say to myself okay, now how do I even take that to another level, not only personally but with my family as well? So that we have a role to play in the unjust. So I want you to think of that same question as well.

John, our next question is "what does this lead us toward as the body of Christ? And, how can we love mercifully?"

I believe justice reflects the character of God, we've just spent some time talking about that. So the question that I have is how can we separate our faith from our generosity, our being from our doing, how we spend, the work we do, the way we choose to live. The point is that we cannot. It's our desire to encourage everyone who attends here at The Chapel towards the right outcome, yet at the same time we recognize that there's a form of passive Christianity that represents the big middle of the church in America. And we want to encourage the church to address those needs.

For me personally, a desire to love mercifully has brought our family to a place of fostering children in our communities. We just recently adopted our two youngest daughters through the foster care system, which we're really grateful for. Thanks. You're really applauding my wife who does most of the work anyway, so, very true.

So, maybe the idea of foster care and adoption resonates for you or maybe not. The point is that we're all called to do something, so showing grace and mercy doesn't only translate into charity or charitable acts alone, it implies relationship, a hand up versus a handout. And there are multiple Scripture references including Deuteronomy 15, Leviticus 19, 23, 25. They speak not to just giving a token handout but extending help until our neighbor is out of need completely. Loving our neighbor as ourselves would also imply that we don't wait until our neighbor is in extreme need before we act. To me that is, that's merciful love and that reflects the heart of God.

Yeah, I think that with what John mentioned, one of the things that's really important is, I don't believe that we can love mercifully if we don't put ourselves in relationship and in contexts where we have poor, vulnerable and marginalized people at the center of our concern. We have to walk in relationship if we're going to love mercifully.

And it's interesting, when I was looking at this verse earlier this weekend, like loving mercifully, one of the commentaries says, basically what that means is that to love mercy means that you actually follow through on the commitments that you make. That this has to go deeper than just, oh, I

have a desire to want to do that, but it's actually this element of following through. And if we take that and if we think about some other things in loving mercy and loving mercifully there are some other things that we can do that deepen this relationship that we can have with folks.

One is breaking bread. Meals disarm people, especially good food. I don't know about bad food, but I would say good food disarms conversation. I've experienced this where the fellowship of a meal, it's disarming. And what happens is as you experience the fellowship of a meal, you begin to see things break down over time and you begin to see trust build up.

I think the other thing is you've got to, when you love mercy, you have to seek to want to build the relationship. That this is not just a transactional thing. If you're looking to transact something in these relationships with folks that are poor or vulnerable or marginalized, we're about to have a conversation with you about missing the point. You have to have that.

In addition to that, we want to meet a tangible need and John was talking about this. Like, there's this tendency in the church depending on where you come from tends to be, sometimes we take good deeds and we take good news and all of a sudden like they become exclusive. Like the idea of like you can just meet needs and not talk about good news. And vice-versa, that you can just talk about good news and not meet a tangible need. We need to meet the tangible needs that are in front of us.

And you know, the experience I would have with this is as a math tutor in an after school program, I just love math, it was just something that I really enjoyed. But the reality was, I was working at a faith-based after school

program and so yeah, I'm going to help people with their common core math requirement which by the way, I had to tutor myself so that I could tutor people with common core, but I know that's a different conversation. But I just realized like I don't even know the math that they're wanting me to teach and so I have to learn this. But the reality was, I wanted these children to accept Jesus. I realized that a good way for me to see that happen was to help them tangibly with their math homework. And as that trust was built, you know that those things happen.

I would also say that understand that the vulnerable are not your project. Poor, vulnerable, marginalized people are not your project. So if your paradigm is that I'm going to fix this person, I'm going to help them, you know pull them up by their bootstraps. No, believe it or not, you're the project, I'm the project. We as people that are pursuing sanctification with God, we're the project every day. But these people - poor, vulnerable, marginalized, among us, within us - they're not your project. And that's really important.

And I would say lastly, just understand the difference between being a coronary Christian and an adrenaline Christian. And these aren't my terms. These come from John Piper's book Bloodlines, and I'd really recommend this book. It's a conversation about race. You can actually pick it up in our bookstore. It's been a deeply profound book for me. What he's talking about - being a coronary Christian - here's what we want you to be. We want you to be compelled by the Word of God, by prayer, and by the movement of the Spirit toward a just cause that sticks. You're coronary because you're convinced through the gospel that you're going to give your

life to this. What we don't need are adrenaline Christians. Adrenaline Christians are those that you're emotively moved to jump in a situation, but you're compelled by a moment, not a cause, and it flickers out. It doesn't last. And unfortunately, we have a lot more adrenaline Christians in my observation than we do coronary Christians. So these are things that God's been teaching me.

That's good. That's definitely good. You know when many Christians pray, you often hear something like this - and I say it myself: God, I thank You for Your grace and Your mercy in my life, in our lives. Right? We say that all the time. But I think when we say that we have to be reminded that when we say something like that, we need to remember what Luke 6 said. Luke 6:36 tells us be merciful as your Father is merciful. Because if we are going to be asking for that and thanking God for the mercy in our lives, that also means we must be demonstrating that as well to the poor and to the those on the margins of society. That that has to be something that is part of what we do as Christians. And one thing for sure is that Jesus and as described in 1 Corinthians is a life giving Spirit, or life giving presence if you will. And the only way to be a life giving spirit or presence is to be present in the lives of other people.

So Ryan, I really appreciate what you said there with regards to putting ourselves in relationship with the marginalized. And that's not going to be a comfortable position to be in, and it's not going to be a convenient position to be in. Sometimes our lives are so filled to the margins that we have no capacity for anything that's outside of what we would desire to do. So that if anything does want to get in, if God does want to move we've got

zero capacity for that and now it becomes uncomfortable and now it becomes inconvenient for us.

What I like about what John and the Camardo family have done - in the church that I used to go to a long time ago, they'd always say the doors of the church are open, right? But when I look at what John has done with his wife and family is the doors of his house are open in the adoption of two beautiful girls. So I have to ask myself even the same question: where are doors to my house open? Where are the doors to your house open? How are we opening our doors to those neighbors that are all around us so that we could become in a relationship with them.

When I was just recently in Haiti I caught up with my buddy Favio who I had spoke about earlier this summer. I asked him, hey, Favio, did you have any family that was affected by the hurricane in Haiti? And - just a young, wise kid, 23 years old - says, Leroy, they're all my family, so of course I had people that were destroyed by that. Everyone. And it just again, to say they are all family, and here's a kid that just gets that. Again, we have to demonstrate mercy, we've prayed for it, been thankful for it. It has to be in our lives toward those that are in our circles of influence. So where is that in your life?

And here's a tough one right here. We're going to tackle it though. There is no wiggle room in the gospel when it comes to caring for the defenseless. So, what gets in the way of the church from responding - both individually & corporately? And where does the body of Christ need to learn to walk humbly? John, I'll offer that to you first.

So, we just spent some time talking about the fact that we need to walk humbly with God. So if we're walking humbly with God that's going to affect and impact our relationships. So I think a few things drive our ability or our inability to walk humbly and I believe our pride and our prejudice play a role in that. Personally I believe the church lacks a measure of self awareness when it comes to our biases and prejudices.

So here's an example of how that plays out. Many would say that they have a tendency to be prideful - including me. There's something about our culture that we're aware of our pride whether we appreciate it or not but how many would actually openly say that they have prejudice? I find it interesting that it's more socially acceptable in our culture to be aware of our pride but not our prejudice. So here's the danger. Our bias and our prejudice which are typically internal thoughts and feelings - they can lead to outward discrimination whether knowingly or unknowingly.

The question I have for you is what about our bias and our prejudices? Do we have any? Like I was just saying - of course we do. But how aware of them are we? How do we know? What has shaped them? In what areas of your life are you discriminating whether knowingly or unknowingly?

So I had to ask myself these questions. And I even remembered times from my own life experiences that had shaped my prejudices and some of these things may or may not resonate for you and earlier on I had said this is not an indictment on my mom and dad or anything along those lines. This is really just a matter of I recognized that there are life experiences that I

have had, whether it be positive or negative, that are shaping how I view the world.

Here are a few examples: being told to lock the car doors when traveling through certain neighborhoods. I attended a rural high school with no racial diversity at all. So what that meant was that I lacked a relationship with anyone of a different race until I was an adult. I also have family members that have strong opinions on a number of topics whether that's morally or politically. And again there isn't anything inherently wrong with those experiences, but I recognize that they shaped my assumptions about people, and the assumptions that I have around people who remain in poverty. People who have tattoos and piercings or may dress a certain way, or music preference. I don't understand country music, it doesn't make sense to me. Those who are homeless or begging for money. I also am wrestling with why do I feel uncomfortable when I'm in a nursing home or in a hospital - so around the sick and elder. That's something I have to ask that question of myself. As a Christ follower, I have to be aware how these things affect me, whether I actually act on them or not. So a fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Now I recognize that I can't control something that I don't understand, so I need to take the time to being self-aware when it comes to these things.

I said this earlier but you know what happens when you play a country music song about this? You get your wife back, you get your car back, you get your truck back, you get your house back. Life is good. He's a very prideful person, by the way. No, he's good and he signs the checks that I

take home. So, thank you. Very humble. Yeah, for now, until what time is it here?

Yeah, so some of the things that I observe with churches - I work here but I also work with a number of churches throughout the country. Some of the things I've just observed is consumerism. That's a huge one. There's other things that you could be doing with your time. There's other interests that you have. There are these worldly distractions that keep you from seeing the Kingdom win and honoring God by following Him and His word.

I think just a painfully obvious one is the sports culture that we find ourselves in. And I'm guilty of it although I feel like I've made incredible leaps and bounds in the last... Marriage does that, you know - just weeds out some things in your life and so... You'll see people, just die hard fans of some team or some individual or some sport and yet you don't see the same interest as it relates to the local church. I think that the things that we have available to us to consume, we do just that. We consume them and so the interest in the things of God had to fall to distraction.

I think another thing is convenience. Honestly, if it's not convenient for you, many aren't going to take the time to put themselves in positions of being inconvenienced by the calling of God and His word. The poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized - many situations that you'll find yourself in, it's not convenient.

I've had a taste of this in doing a foster care. It's not necessarily convenient for you. And there are others who have done this way more than I have. That's just something I've observed - I've got to confess it in my own life.

There's just times where I'm like Lord, I want to love mercifully, but something that gets in the way is just convenience. I like things to be convenient.

I think another thing is putting yourself in a position where you may be uncomfortable because you've not served the vulnerable before that gets in the way also. The uncertainty of what could happen when you're not spending time with folks that you've not been around before. When we've not taken the time to serve the vulnerable, the unknown can create anxiety for us and so a way that we can alleviate that is to start being in and among the vulnerable and the poor and the marginalized. It's something that as you begin to do this, you begin to be more comfortable with this. And you discover some things about yourself and I think that's another thing - I don't know that I want to know this about me.

And I would say in terms of where the body of Christ can learn to walk humbly - John mentioned this briefly, and I would just add to it. The verse says that we are to walk humbly with our God in Micah. And so what that means is that we should start by fellowshiping with God first in humility. Coming to the throne in humility shapes our heart, it positions us the right way. Walking with God and pushing arrogance aside - the outputs of that in my life have been the following, and I'm not perfect at this, but God has been sanctifying me in this. When God is helping me to start in fellowship and humility with Him first, I've found that I tend to be more in a position to do what God tells me to do. That's the first thing.

The second thing is my willingness to obey has begun to grow and my ability - and I'm not perfect in this - but my ability to fight off consumerism and convenience and being uncomfortable, those things are shaken because those aren't Kingdom things. I want Kingdom things. I want to be connected to Kingdom things. If we can do this as Christ followers, I like the chances of everyday followers of Christ to represent our God well when we walk in humility with Him.

You know, I don't know whether I can really add anything to what both of you have said, but there are two things that really jump out at me. And Ryan you mentioned one - the uncomfortableness that inhibits the gospel. And John, you spoke about the biases and prejudices that we have and those things right there.

And I'll tell you, when you walk the streets of Haiti and you walk into the villages, your biases, your prejudices and uncomfortableness - they are right there in front of you. As I walk into a home, maybe it might be 12'x12', 10'x10', a mud thatched hut. There are maybe a couple of chickens running around, a dog that's underweight, maybe a goat, maybe a bed that just sleeps 8 people in that whole room, and a number of different things that are not very desirable. And then a person comes out relative unkempt for company. The first thing that would come to my mind is why don't we go to the next house? We'll just go over to another house. But that's not why we're there. So we engage with the individuals in that house. And if I allow my prejudices and my biases and uncomfortableness to move forward, man the gospel gets crushed. The Holy Spirit gets quenched when those things happen and the only way that we can ensure that the gospel is

spoken truthfully is when we act humbly before them. We literally will sit right there on the ground, allow them to take the seat, allow us to be in the humble position to look them in the face and to have open discussions and conversations about their lives, their hopes, their dreams as well as ours as well.

Because the worst thing that can happen is for us to have those conversations and to realize after having these conversations that I have just been judge and jury to a brother or sister in Christ - that I downgraded them before even meeting them. I don't want to be in that position. Or, I might find myself doing the exact same thing. I have just been judge and jury to someone that God wants saved.

So we have to look at these things. We cannot let prejudice, we cannot let uncomfortableness and biases get in the way of the gospel presence in people's lives. We simply can't as Christians. So I would ask you again that same question - what are the things that get in the way from you showing grace and mercy and justice to the marginalized and to the poor and to those who are different than you?

So in light of this, John in the conversation we've been having so far, how are you personally choosing to respond? And Ryan, the same point - how are you choosing to personally respond to this?

Sure - so what am I doing to try and act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly? Start first with, like Leroy had mentioned before, we start with our relationship with God. I need to preach the gospel to myself regularly.

That keeps me grounded and keeps the first things first. But then also I'm endeavoring to listen to those who are different than I am.

And here's something for the church to pay attention to. If we could learn to listen to those inside the body of Christ that are different than us, it maybe a lot easier for us to listen to those who are outside of the body of Christ. I'm also looking to lovingly challenge other peoples' prejudices and helping them to become more self aware.

Also, I've served as a foster parent for more than four years and we've adopted children of a different race. I'm not sure what that's going to look like for us and what we're going to continue to learn as we go. But I'm also looking to intentionally develop friendships with those that are not like me. I also am trying to recognize who Jesus says and who my neighbor is. And like we had talked about earlier, that's anyone in need. And I want to intentionally create margin in my life to be generous in meeting the needs of others. So I have to be able to ask that question - how am I demonstrating in leading others, including my own family in this regard?

I've also noticed that as I've created margin, intentionally creating margin in your life to freely respond to needs, what is does is it helps us to pay more attention to the needs around us because we've created space in our life for it. And Tim Keller in that same book that I had mentioned earlier - he had one statement in there that I think is important for us to remember that if you have been assigned the goods of this world by God and you don't share them with others, it isn't just stinginess, it is injustice.

I think for me there's three things that the Lord's been teaching me in terms of how I could respond to this. One is I want to be that coronary Christian that Piper talks about. I don't want to be an adrenaline based Christian. I want to be motivated to do this based on the justice of the cause - the gospel compelling me to do that. I don't want to be guilty in something. I want to be convicted righteously through the gospel. So I feel like the Lord has been working on me in helping me to better understand what it means to be a coronary Christian.

The second thing is, man - pursue intimacy with God. Pursue, pursue, pursue intimacy with God. The more that you understand what God's word commands of you, you'll do it in humility. I think that's just one of the great things. And one of the challenging and the saddest things for me to observe as someone who has researched the Church now for the better part of 8 years and surveyed over 60,000 evangelicals as of this year, collected a ton of information. People constantly want to act justly. They want to act out on what they know - this is wrong, we are to stand for this in the name of the Lord, and they don't have intimacy undergirding them. They're not spending the time with the Lord so it just flickers out. That's not coronary - to flicker out is adrenaline. We can't let that be.

And I would just say lastly, understanding that God, in His infinite wisdom, in terms of how I'm responding, God's growing me a great deal when I exercise concern for the vulnerable. And I've got to be honest - it's probably, in my spiritual formation of following Jesus now for 19 years, it's one of the deepest wells that I have been drinking from is that concerning

myself with the vulnerable, that's a deep well of spiritual formation to drink from. God will teach you a great deal.

You know with - personally, me - with all of the racial tension that we've been experiencing in this country, I'd like to say it's not experienced in the church, but it is. But with all of the racial tensions we've been experiencing, one of the things that I'm beginning to do personally and have even challenged all of the guys in this chapter of Fight Club is to attend an ethnically different Christian church. You see, if the world doesn't see Christians begin to forgive and seek reconciliation in our racial differences, where will they see it? There is no place that they would see it if it doesn't happen in the Church. So we are each responsible for a part of that. And I've challenged all of them and myself to that as well is to go to an ethnically different church or synagogue and begin to have relationships with other people. I don't know what their experience will be. I don't know what my experience will be when I'm there, because I'm bringing something in the churches that we will go to. They're bringing something as well. But we have to begin to step across the aisle for our brothers and sisters in Christ to begin to have conversations, to begin have relationships that can be built on Jesus Christ in harmony and racial forgiveness and reconciliation of a number of different things. So that's one of the things that is really, really prevalent right now in my life.

And likewise, I sit on a board with Ryan, and a couple other boards as well that are seeking to advance the poor and marginalized in the city of Buffalo. And I know personally I need to dig a little bit deeper so to speak into those lives of the people that we aim to serve. It's great to go to the

meeting and do all the things that need to be accomplished, to see the ends met, but there's also a part that says, ok I need to invest more tangibly in my time and my talents and my treasures into those lives specifically so that there is intimacy there as well. So again, but that comes with intimacy with our Father to be able to do those things. Again, I would ask you - how do you respond to those things as well? Questions that we don't typically ask ourselves, so I'm comfortable in us asking those today and will challenge and encourage you to give that some consideration also.

And John, as we wrap up here, one final question is what is the one thing that everyone should walk away with, or the one thing that everyone should walk away with?

Well, as I had mentioned earlier, I think it's important for all of us to begin a process to be self-aware around what biases or prejudices do we have related to other people groups - those who are not like us. Where have those biases turned into active discrimination whether knowingly or unknowingly? But more importantly, I think for all of us - we need to find our something. Find something that allows you to love your neighbor on a regular basis and respond to obedience - and respond in obedience. For me, that's been to the Every Child ministry. And if you ever considered foster care or adoption in the past and you haven't taken that step of finding out more information, stop by and speak to some of the individuals that are out in the Atrium. The recognition of the fact is that the need is great within our community and the Church should respond generously. So I see there's a great opportunity. Find your something. In fact, turn to your neighbor and say Find your something - including the introverts, yes. Now

turn to your other neighbor and say I'm going to find my something. All right. Now as the Church, we need to hold each other accountable.

Yeah, I would agree. Finding your something is huge. The thing that I thought most about was we've been really fortunate - Pastor Jerry, Pastor Deone, Jonathan Drake, Pastor Wes - you know, I feel like when we come here on a Sunday or Lockport or Cheektowaga, I feel like we get to eat a filet every week. You know, they put the truffle butter on it. It's real good. Look, there's some really good teaching that comes in these environments. But do you know what breaks my heart about this is our knowledge - that what we understand of what God is asking us is up here. It's unbelievable how we are taught here. But our obedience is here. And I believe with all of my heart that the Church is a sleeping giant. And that a big part of how we could transform this region would be that if we were to wake up our obedience to what our knowledge base already is. So find your something and obey in that process, I think that that's huge. It's not a mistake that you're here, and it's not a mistake that the ministries that we partner with are here today either.

Pray, investigate, and get going - that's what I would say. Pray, investigate, and get going. I once heard someone say that God can move mountains but until He moves your mountain, get your shovel out and start digging. So that's what I'm asking for you to start digging because it's easy to say I'm going to pray that God would place something on my heart and I'm going to sit right back here and wait for Him to do that. I think what God wants us to do is to get in motion. To get in motion, to get started. And one of the things that I would recommend for all you to strongly consider is a couple

weeks ago we were given the On Mission magazine. Grab a big cup of coffee, grab that On Mission magazine, say a little prayer and say, God, what's sensitive to me in these ministries. Just read through this. Read the many different ministries and circle some things that might be of interest to you. Jump on their website. Listen to some of the testimonies of people on the website and then give them a call and check a few things out. Just check a few things out and just see what God might be saying to you from the passions that you may already have but have not really connected to missional activity. And it's a perfect opportunity to do that.

And better yet, we have a few partners here today that you can choose to do that immediately to begin to find out more about those ministries and what God may have already placed inside of your heart. So what I would ask you to do this morning is just stop out and take a listen to some of those ministries. Here are the ministries that we have here at the CrossPoint Campus. Every Child - foster care ministry. People Against Trafficking Humans; Jericho Road with regards to health care and refugee support; Saving Grace Ministries - parolees and the homeless; SonRays - crisis pregnancy; Let The LOL - orphan care, clean water, education; Potter's Hands - donation center and tangible needs; and The Chapel's Visitation ministry for hospitals/nursing homes/and shut-ins. So we encourage you to give consideration to those things and allow God to speak to you and get your shovel out and start digging. I've got to believe and I'm confident that God will place something on your heart that He desires you to live obediently in your life and to live missionally.

So we'll take a moment and pray and I'll allow you time to go back out into the Atrium. Lord, we thank you so much for this day and as always the opportunity to hear what You say to us this morning. God, I pray that whatever bias and prejudices we have that we've left those aside. That you've broke through all of those things to allow us to better understand what it is God, to live mercifully, to live out what it is Micah and doing what is just. Father, motivate our hearts into action. Help us to follow in obedience and let that start first God with intimacy with Your Son, Jesus Christ and intimacy with You. So Father, we thank you for all that you have blessed us with, that grace and that mercy and that we'd be demonstrating that in the lives of those that you have placed in our circles of influence. Jesus, we love You, we can't thank You enough. It's in your name we pray. Amen.

So folks, thanks so much for coming out this morning. Have a great morning and please stop by the Atrium. Thank you so much.