

Pastor Caleb Duvick
Why Trying Harder Isn't Working

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Series: Be Free
Romans 7:1-13

BIG IDEA – IF YOU WANT TO BE FREE, YOU NEED A NEW WAY OF UNDERSTANDING AND RELATING TO THE LAW

Good morning, and welcome to Two Cities Church, everyone. Glad to have you here if you're in Winston or Lexington or our Multiply Campus, and welcome to the men of Butner. We're glad to have you all here. My name is Caleb Duvick. I'm one of the pastors here at Two Cities Church. If you don't know me, you're going to get to know me a little bit better today.

One of the things my best friends would say about me is I'm as well known for the things I hate as I am known for the things I love. So, I'm going to be honest and vulnerable with you about some of these things. I realize I'm giving you some ammo this morning, so please don't abuse it. All right?

So, what do I hate? I hate bananas. I hate the taste of them. I hate the smell of them. I hate everything about them. For me, there are certain athletes we just can't stand. I know I'm not the only one. For me, that's Matt Leinart. You don't even know who he is. I do. Also, the ex-Chicago Cub Milton Bradley. He was the worst.

I hate Internet ads. You know, for some reason, I just want to read my article or watch my YouTube video, and the Internet thinks, instead, I want to sell my house for cash or I want to meet single grandmothers in my area. Just for the record, I'm not interested.

Here's the thing I hate about Internet ads the most: I am a sucker for some of them. You guys know this. Yes, I am interested in the six things high-performing men do before 6:00 a.m. I am weirdly interested in the ancient diet the Aztecs used to get shredded. I'm just so curious about it because it's speaking to something I want to experience myself.

Underlying each of these messages is *this* message: "If you follow these simple rules, you'll become the person you want to be." So we're hooked. Right? What do we do? We buy the mouth tape. We buy the fat-burning pills, the cold plunge. We buy the productivity apps, the whole self-improvement machine. I know I'm not the only one because Americans spend \$13 billion a year on all of these kinds of things.

And what happens? How does that work out? It *doesn't* work. How do we know that? Exhibit A. We also know this because when is the time of year when everybody is getting on all of these different regimens and things? New Year's. Studies have shown 92 percent of people never meet their New Year's resolution. Why is that? Why can't we take these simple rules and see success?

You see, the problem is not knowing the rules; it's having the power to actually do them. The apostle Paul understood this 2,000 years before the self-help industry even emerged. What we're going to see here in this passage is he's not talking about a diet; he's talking about how we, as Christians and people trying to follow Jesus, run into the exact same wall when it comes to God's perfect law.

If you have your Bibles, you can open to Romans, chapter 7. In this passage, Paul is going to be grappling with this question...*What do we do with the law?* What do we do with these perfect commands and rules that God gave to his people back in the Old Testament? What we see is whenever we run into this wall of the law, we tend to topple over into one of two ditches.

We can topple over into *license*, and that's where we say, "Well, these laws don't work, so we're just going to throw them off and do whatever we want," or we can run into the law and topple over into ditch two, which is *legalism*, where we're saying, "You know what? We're just going to keep trying that even harder. We're going to keep going after that. We're going to keep trying to do this, and if we can do that, we're finally going to get what we want."

What Paul is going to show us here in this passage today is we don't want to completely cast off the law, but we don't want to become enslaved to it either. Paul is going to show us the gospel gives us a third way of understanding and relating to the law. Here's the big idea: *as followers of Jesus, if you want to experience freedom, if you want to be free, you need to have a new way of understanding and relating to the law.*

So, Paul is going to walk us through this passage. He's going to show us three things: *we are diagnosed by the law, we're deceived by sin, and we're delivered to another.* So, I'm going to take us through this passage. I'm actually going to start in the second half of my

Scripture chunk today, because that's where we're going to see the problem. Then we're going to go back up to the top, because that's where Paul gives us the solution.

Look with me at verse 7. We're going to look at what Paul says about how we are *diagnosed by the law*. Verse 7: **"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'"** Verse 12:

"So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."

Okay. I know there's a lot here in just these three verses about the law and sin, but before we go anywhere, I want you to understand something that Paul considers crucial. He wants you and me to understand the law is holy and righteous and altogether good. The law is a great thing.

The reason we know that is because here he unpacks three things it does for us, three ways the law helps us. It *reveals our sin*, it *names our sin*, and it *exposes the depths of our sin*. I want to unpack that a little bit more with you, and I'll give you this picture that may help you guys. I want you guys to think about an MRI machine. An MRI machine is to the body as the law is to our souls.

So, let's look at how the law *reveals our sin* first. A little way into verse 7 it says, **"Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin."** The law reveals sin by waking us up to the fact that something inside of us is wrong. Before the law even names it or categorizes for us, the law breaks through for us. It's like turning on lights in a room that we didn't know was dark, because before the law speaks, sin can reside in our lives, hidden, ignored, and unnoticed.

I mean, you guys can probably understand that. We have all been blind to certain sins in our lives, or maybe it has just been around so long we feel numb to it. There are a lot of reasons for this. Part of it is that we live in a culture that celebrates sin rather than condemns it. As long as those sins go unnamed, we are just blind to it. Then the law comes in and wakes you up to that reality.

Some of you know this. Like, maybe you've been reading through your Bible before, and something jumps off the page at you and just hits you right there, or maybe your friend says something, and it makes you feel unsettled and uneasy. That's the law doing its work. It's doing its first job of revealing something that's in you. It's waking you up to the

reality that something is not quite right in us. So, what do we do with that? That's the moment when you say, "I think I need some help. I think something might be wrong."

I know one thing about us. I've never woken up in the morning and said, "You know what sounds great today? Lying perfectly still in a metal tube that sounds like a transformer, having a panic attack." What prompts us to go into the MRI machine? It's the reality, "Man, I think something is not right."

So, the doctor puts us in there, and when we get out, he puts up the scan and says, "There's something there. There's something there that you didn't know was there." That's what the law does. That's the first purpose of the law. It reveals there is something in us that is wrong.

The next thing it does is *names it*. It goes beyond just revealing that something is there; it actually puts a name to it. It helps us identify what exactly our sin is. Look at verse 7. ***"Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'"***

Paul is saying, "Listen. The law didn't just point out some inner wrongness in me; it gave me a name to what was wrong in me." In his specific case, it was coveting. One of the things we do instead of giving it names is we use euphemisms to our sin, because as long as we don't put the name on it, it's easily tolerated. We're experts at using all of these euphemisms. We have all this dictionary worth of things we can use instead of the actual name of a sin.

Instead of calling it *lust*, we call it *just looking*. Instead of calling it *gossip*, we call it a *prayer request*. Instead of calling it *anger*, we say, "Well, I'm just being Italian." Instead of calling it *pride*, we call it *confidence*. As long as we can keep the euphemism, we don't have to deal with our sin.

What the law does is it walks in, rips that label off, and says, "No. That thing has a name, and it's sin." Back to the MRI. This is the moment when the doctor points at the screen and says, "Do you see that right there? It has a name. It's cancer." The moment it's labeled like that, you can't minimize it anymore. It demands a response.

So, the law reveals our sins and names our sins, but it also *exposes the depths of our sin*. Look with me at the end of verse 13. ***"...in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."*** The law exposes sin by helping us see how serious, how deep, and how deadly our sin really is.

It goes right down to the twistedness of our hearts, our motivations, our desires, the things that drive us that nobody else is looking at, that nobody else can really see what's

underneath the surface. It shows us our sin in high definition. This is when the doctor says, "Listen. That's not just cancer; it's aggressive. It's advanced. It's life-threatening." Because it's one thing to know you have a tumor; it's another to know it is wreaking havoc all throughout your body.

This is where Paul gives us a specific example of what this looks like. Of all of the Ten Commandments he could have chosen, he chooses coveting. Why does he use the example of coveting here? Well, for one, it's one he deals with personally, but of all of the other commandments, it's the one that gets underneath the surface. It exposes what's going on in here at the heart level.

Coveting isn't just wanting what other people have. Here's what coveting really is: looking at other people's lives and saying, "Not only do I want that; I deserve that." It reveals our twisted desires. It reveals our discontentment. No religious performance can cover that up, because this commandment shows us that obedience is not just what we do with our hands; it's what's happening in our hearts.

I want to ask some of you a really uncomfortable question that may help bring some more concreteness to this. Is your social media habit really a coveting habit? Some of you might say, "Well, no, it's a distraction" or, "It's poor time management." But I want to invite some of you to start calling it what it really is. It is a violation of the tenth commandment on a massive scale.

For some of you, when you open your phone, you're pulling up curated highlight reels of everybody else's best moments in life that make your life look worse by comparison. When you pull it out, you're looking at something God never intended for you to have, and you covet and covet and covet.

Maybe it's not social media. Maybe it's getting on Facebook Marketplace and seeing all of these things you can't afford. Or maybe you don't struggle with porn, but some of you struggle with Zillow porn. Right? You're just looking around at all of these things, like, "Man! How does she have *that* house?" Every time some of you pick up your phone, you're picking up a coveting machine, and instead of calling it *sin*, you call it *scrolling*.

For some of you right now, it's like, "Man! It's a good thing I don't have social media." I'm coming for you next. Don't worry. Paul was one of those guys who wouldn't have had social media. He was a Pharisee. He was the best at keeping the law. But what he tells us here and reveals in other parts of Scripture is all that outward obedience that everybody thought was impressive was all inwardly twisted.

Why was he doing it? It wasn't out of love for God. He was doing it out of love for spiritual superiority, for people's praise, for people to look up to him. Inside, his

motivations were rotten to the core. Now I ask some of *you* guys. Is your religious devotion coveting in disguise, like it was for Paul? Are you genuinely zealous for God or are you doing what you do so God can be impressed with you or others can be impressed with you?

Listen. The most dangerous form of coveting is not necessarily the person who's struggling with Instagram; it's the person in church looking at the person next to them and saying, "I'm sure glad I'm not as bad as you." It's competition dressed up like devotion.

Paul wants you to feel the weight of this. He wants you to see the law reveals our sin, names our sin, and exposes the depths of it. I know some of you, and if you're like me, you don't like that. When the law comes in and starts pointing out how sinful, how broken, how wrong we are, it's not a pleasant experience, I know.

For some of us, the reaction we have whenever we encounter that... The wrong reaction is to rail against the law, to want to cast it off, to say, "No, that's dumb. It doesn't understand me. My situation is different," or "Listen. That was written for a different people at a different time." So, we rail against the law. We try to cast it off.

Listen. Do you know what that sounds like when we do that? It's like the person who just found out they have cancer, and they start yelling at the MRI machine. They start smashing the MRI machine. Listen. The MRI machine was just doing its job. Its sole purpose is to point out the cancer that is there. It didn't cause the cancer itself. That's what the law is. There's nothing wrong with the law. It's simply pointing out what was already there. We can't know what to do for treatment unless we have that diagnosis.

So, listen to me. Paul wants us to understand. Verse 12: **"So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."** When you think of the law, I want you to think of it as God's mercy for you, because you have a God who's loving enough to be able to tell you the truth, even though it hurts sometimes.

So, the law is a good thing, but it does raise the question...*Why does it feel sometimes like the law is killing us?* Why does it feel like the law is oppressive? Here's what you need to understand: the law was never the problem; sin is. The law is not the villain of the story; our sin is the villain of the story.

That leads us to the second thing Paul wants us to see: *we have been deceived by sin*. Look with me at verse 11. **"For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me."** I want you to notice the language. Sin *seizes*, *deceives*, and *kills*. Paul is personifying sin as a predator with a strategy. There are three things you need to see that sin does from this passage.

The first thing sin does in us is it *seizes opportunity*. Look at verse 8. **"But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead."** Then, again, in verse 11: **"For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me..."**

This phrase *seizing the opportunity* is a military term in the Greek. It's like when an army sets up a beachhead in enemy territory. What you need to understand is sin doesn't create the battlefield. It takes a good thing and twists it into its own use. It sets up camp inside of it. Sin is literally insidious, because God gave us the law as a gift, and here's what sin does. It looks at that gift and says, "I can use that."

Sin can't create; it can only corrupt. You see this in so many different ways. God gave us sex, but sin weaponizes it. God gives us ambition, but sin twists it into greed. God gives us community, and sin takes it and turns it into tribalism. Sin is like that one guy who can literally ruin any group project. That's what it does. It just comes in and jacks everything up.

That word *deceived* that we see in verse 11 is the same word that's in Genesis 3 when the Serpent deceives Eve. Sin pulled the same con on Paul that Satan pulled out in the garden. The con is to deceive us, to trick us into thinking the law is the thing that's bad. "If we could just get rid of the law, then everything would be good. You'd be living the good life." But that's a lie. The problem was never the law; it's the sin.

Sin weaponizes the law. You need to see this too. How does it do that? *Sin provokes rebellion through prohibition*. I'm going to say it again. Sin provokes rebellion through prohibition. Where do I see this? Look with me at verse 8. **"But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died."**

Do you see what happened? The commandment said, "Don't covet." Then something inside of Paul woke up and made him say, "I want all of it." You see, the prohibition doesn't kill the desire in Paul; it inflames it. Let me make this more concrete for you, because we do this all the time, almost on a daily basis.

I told you you're going to get to know about me a little bit more today. I come from a town called Sandwich, Illinois. It's a real place. There is one theater in Sandwich, Illinois, and do you know where it is? It's on Duvick Avenue, named after my family. So, whenever I walk into that theater, I'm already kind of feeling like a big deal.

At Wow 7 Cinemas in Sandwich, Illinois, as in many other places, they have a rule that says, "No outside food and drinks in the theater." Do you know what that inflamed in

me? "I'm bringing outside food and drinks." It started small. In middle school, it was like, "All right. I've got my big coat." I'm putting some pop and some snacks in there.

Then, as I got older, it got pretty serious. Instead of sneaking in snacks, I'm catering for the whole theater. You know, I'm brazen about it too. I'm walking in with this 75-ounce cup of pop from Taco Bell and a bag of burritos, looking at the guy who's taking the tickets. I'm like, "Yeah, theater 5? All right. I got it." Listen. You guys do this too. Don't act like you don't. Come on.

That's so silly, but we all do that in so many different ways, don't we? When the doctor tells you, "Hey, you need to stop eating that," you know that's the only thing you want to eat now. Or when your wife or a roommate comes up to you and says, "Hey, can you please stop doing that one thing?" you know they're right, but inside you're like, "Darn it. I want to do that even more."

It's not just petty stuff. For some of you, the affair was not just about the attraction; it was about the thrill of crossing that line. For some of you, with a lie, it was not just about convenience; it was about seeing if you could get away with it. Listen. Rules don't restrain us. Sin has made it so that it is a kindling for our rebellion.

It's not really about wanting freedom. What it is revealing in us is in our sinful nature, we want sovereignty. We want to be the ones who decide what's right, what's worth it, and what applies to us. We want to be the gods over our own lives. That's the oldest sin in the book. It's the sin of the garden. It's alive and well in every single one of us.

So, we need to see that sin is seizing opportunity. It's provoking rebellion in us. Here's the third thing we see here: *sin uses what is good to kill us*. Verse 10: ***"The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me."***

Do you guys feel the weight of that? Sin is so sinful it can take God's holy, righteous, and perfect law and weaponize it into a death sentence for us. Sin is so sinful it can take this good gift from God and turn it into a grave. So, how does it do it? Like I said earlier, it either pushes us into license or legalism.

It deceives us into convincing us, "Hey, this law is not good for us, so we're going to throw it off. We're going to live however we want instead of living in God's perfect and bright path and plan." When we cast that off, it leads to all kinds of death...death after death after death.

Or it's just as happy pushing us into legalism, which says, "Listen. The law is the cure." It convinces us into thinking that the MRI machine is somehow the treatment for the

cancer instead of the thing that just reveals it. So, we go back to the law thinking it's going to cure this problem that's killing us from the inside out.

Some of you know exactly what that's like. You have had the same spiritual New Year's resolution since 2014, and your game plan is always the same: go back into more law, more rules, more accountability. And here's what happens: you fail every time, and when you feel that failure, you feel guilty, and because you feel guilty, you try harder, and you try harder, and you keep digging yourself more and more and more into this hole.

As you're spiraling down, at some point, I know you're thinking, "Why isn't this working? Why is it the harder I try, the farther I feel away from God?" Do you want to know something sad? Not only do we do this to ourselves; sometimes we impose this on other people as well.

Parents, some of you in this room are building a law-based home. You think you are helping your kids, but the laws and the rules you're imposing on your kids are actually pulling them farther away from the faith you're trying to instill in them, not because the rules you're trying to give them are bad but because sin wants to weaponize the rules you have in place, and it turns it into something your kids can never survive.

Listen. A law-based home that does not account for grace upon grace is going to do one of two things to your kids. It's either going to turn them into Pharisees or it's going to turn them into rebels. Or maybe some of you are doing this with your spouse. You've heaped expectations on them that they could never live up to, and all you ever demand is perfection.

You guys need to hear this. This is so important. The law has zero power to bring about real heart transformation. The law has zero power to bring real change in your life. If the law could have done it, it already would have done it by now. So, more effort, more rules, and more accountability groups will not get you there. This is a failing strategy. Paul is desperately trying to help us feel it. He wants you to feel the weight. I hope you feel the weight in this sermon. It's awfully quiet in here. That's good.

Listen. If you don't feel the weight of the diagnosis, you are never going to be ready for the cure. Until you feel like you can no longer try harder to fix things, you're never going to be ready for what's next. So, let me ask you this just as plainly as I can. Are you tired yet? Are you tired of living in that cycle? Are you tired of the voice in your head that's saying, "Do more. Be more. Try harder"? If the answer is "Yes," you're finally ready for the best news you've ever heard.

Listen. If the law provokes sin, if the law makes things worse, if the law produces death, then the solution is not more law-keeping. We don't need better rules. Here's what we

need. We need a better husband. Now, where do I get that? That sounds strange, but this is what Paul says. Look with me at verse 1 where Paul is going to show us that we have been *delivered to another*.

"Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress."

Paul doesn't pick marriage as a metaphor by accident, because of all of the human relationships God gave us, marriage is the most binding. It's the most intimate. It's the most complete. It's not a contract; it's a covenant. It exists until death do us part. Paul says apart from Christ, that's your relationship to the law. You're married to it. You're bound to it, and the only thing that could end your marriage to the law is death.

I want to paint a picture of what that marriage feels like. Imagine that your husband's entire personality is just a list of demands. The first thing that happens in a marriage with the law... You wake up, and the law is just standing there looking at you. A little creepy. You just open your eyes, and the first thing is "Hey, are the dishes done? Have you taken care of the kids? Have you read your Bible yet? Have you read your Bible long enough?" Before you even get to coffee, you're 0 for 4. Right? That's what it feels like.

Whenever you knock those things out, waiting for you is another list of demands, and the standard is perfection. You never hear "Good enough." Instead of someone waiting for you with flowers and a mom's morning out, it's just another list of things to do. That's what it can feel like when we relate to God solely through the law. It's like a constant performance evaluation where God is our boss, we're an employee, and we're always being evaluated.

Here's what's even sadder about that relationship. Look at verse 5. ***"For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death."*** Paul is saying it's the same cycle here. The law shows up, sin is provoked, the result is death, and the fruit of this marriage to the law...the only fruit it can bear...is death. It's exhaustion. It's shame. It's guilt. It's pride when we're doing well and despair when we're failing.

That is the marriage that so many of you have been trying to make work, and you need to hear it again today: it can't work. Not because the husband is bad in a sinful sense. Remember, the law is good. But the reason is because you and I are broken, and we

could never live up to the expectation. The fruit we always want to see out of our marriage is not possible. Paul says that kind of marriage can only end in one way. It can only come through death.

That's why I've been saving this verse for you. You need to hear verse 4, because this is the hinge of the whole passage. It is the good news that so many of us need to hear today. Look with me. **"Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God."**

Y'all, I want you to take that in. "You have died to the law through Christ." Paul is saying, "Listen. The only way out of that old marriage was death, and death has already happened. Jesus died on the cross, and guess what? You died with him. When his body was broken, so was the bond of your marriage to the law. His death is your death. His life is your life. His freedom is your freedom."

Look at what Paul says next. He says that you died to the law so you can now belong to another. That's marriage language. You didn't just get released from a bad covenant; you got remarried. Who did you get remarried to? It says, **"...to him who has been raised from the dead..."** You have a marriage to Jesus Christ.

Here's what the new husband did that the old one could never do. He fulfills the law's demands for us. Listen. When you wake up in the morning, Jesus is waiting there with the list, but it has already been completely checked off. You've not done a single thing, but he has done it for you.

Let me show you what else this marriage looks like. When I got married to my wife Kelly, I didn't just get married to Kelly. Right? I got everything Kelly had. For me, that was a pretty darn good deal, because my wife, when I married her, owned a condo. She had a savings account, a fully stocked kitchen, and a paid-off Honda Civic. Do you know what I brought into our marriage? Student loans, a favorite mug, and a whole lot of potential. It was amazing.

When we got married, her condo became *our* condo. Her savings account became *our* savings account. My student loans became *our* student loans. Those two things might have offset each other, the savings and the loans, but that's not the point. The point is that exact same thing happens when we are married and united to Christ.

Christ takes your debt, your sin, your failure, your record, and makes it his, and you get all of his assets in return, the things you could have never achieved in your marriage to the law. You get his righteousness. You get his obedience. You get his standing before his

Father and before the law. In this picture, the bride wears white not because of *her* purity but because of the purity of the groom. Amen?

It goes even more. At the end of verse 4, it says why this happened. It says it happened **"...in order that we may bear fruit for God."** Here's what I want you to see. The old marriage led to fruit of death, but this new marriage leads to fruit for God. What's interesting is that the fruit in both marriages was always the same.

Both the law and Christ are pointing us to patience, kindness, self-control, love, holiness...all of these different things, but what the law was aiming at, it could never produce those things in us. It could point at fruit all day, but it could never grow an orange. It could say, "Hey, love your neighbor" but could never actually help you love your neighbor. The new marriage does the opposite. Here's how a good marriage works. It works through intimacy. Intimacy produces what the law could only demand.

Another scenario. Picture my wife Kelly. I wake up in the morning, and she's sitting there with a list for me and saying, "I want you to do these things or else I am going to be disappointed in you." I'm going to do those things because I'm a God-fearing husband, but I'm not going to do those with any sort of fruit of the Spirit. My heart is not going to be in it.

But if I love my wife, if I cherish my wife, if I have beautiful intimacy in our marriage, I'm going to do those things, but for a completely different reason. I'm not going to do them because I have to; I'm going to do those things because I'm excited to. I want to. I get to. I genuinely see it that way.

Listen, church. If you want to live rightly with the right motivations, I think one of the biggest applications for you guys from the sermon is you need to find ways to experience more intimacy in your relationship with Christ. That is going to be the fuel for so much of what you want to see.

I need you to hear this. I am not giving you a new list. I can feel some of you. In your minds, you're already putting together a new spreadsheet for you to fill out. That's the old husband talking. Don't do it. What I'm pointing at is there are rhythms in marriage that lead to more intimacy, and I want us to imagine what that looks like for us in our marriage and relationship with Jesus Christ.

Maybe, for some of you, it's finding time in the Word again in a fresh way. Not so you can keep a streak alive in a Bible reading app or check off another thing on your list but to simply sit and hear the voice of the God who loves you. Maybe, for some of you, that's sitting down and reading a psalm tomorrow, and instead of asking when you're done, "What do I do with this?" it's asking the question, "What is my God trying to say to me?"

Or maybe, for some of you, it's thinking about prayer in a new way. Instead of you going and giving your list of demands to God, it's sitting and enjoying time with the one who loves you. It's not so much about the content of the conversation; it's about the time together.

Or maybe, for some of you, it's stepping into community and maybe sharing something with somebody that you've never shared before. Listen. One of the ways we grow intimacy with God is by growing intimacy with God's people. So, maybe it's confessing something. Not like an accountability group where all you ever ask is "How have you sinned this week?" No. It's being known and being pushed and lovingly encouraged to look more like Christ.

Listen. The way this works is not by trying harder to bear fruit. The way we actually bear fruit is being rooted in good soil. It's being rooted in abiding with Christ and abiding in his love, because when you're in that place, you're not going to be able to help it. You're going to grow fruit on fruit on fruit that leads to God and goodness and all of the things he loves. Your fruit changes.

Here's the other thing that's going to empower you. Look with me at verse 6. ***"But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code."***

The law could never empower us or even make us want to do the right things, but when you have a marriage with Christ and are experiencing intimacy, the Spirit is going to be indwelling you. It's going to be working, and all of those things the law could never do the Spirit is going to empower you to. It's amazing. When you're intimate with Christ, he's going to grow your desire for Jesus more and more and more. You're going to love to do the things Jesus loves, not out of performance but as fruit.

Guys, as we come to a close, I want to leave you with just one line that I hope ties this all together for you. I want you to write it down. I want you to put it on your fridge. I want you to tattoo it on your arm. Maybe try the fridge first. Remember this. ***We obey the law from salvation, not for salvation.***

Some of you have been trying to do the exact opposite of that. You're trying to obey the law *for* salvation. You're trying to obey the law *for* God's acceptance. You're trying to get him to love you by obeying the law. But listen. Jesus is saying, "You've already got it. I have accepted you. I do love you." So, we love and obey *out* of that relationship, not *for* it. Guys, that's so important.

You guys need to hear today, again, the law is holy and righteous and good. It's beautiful because it shows us who God is like. It guides us in what we want to be. Listen. When you

are married to Christ, here's what you can experience. You understand the law differently, and you relate to it differently. You understand the law can never cure you; it can only diagnose you. You understand the gospel is the only thing that can heal you.

When the gospel has healed you, you no longer see the law as a judge; you see it as a guide. When you rightly understand and relate to the law, it's no longer your husband but a friend that gets to come alongside you. Instead, you get to experience the most beautiful relationship the universe has ever known...marriage with Jesus Christ. God is not some judge sitting and condemning you. He is not a boss who's constantly evaluating you as an employee. The way you get to relate to God is as bride and groom.

So, as the band comes up, I want to invite you to respond today. The altar is going to be open at all of our campuses. For some of you, you need to respond. Some of you have never had a relationship with Jesus Christ. Listen. You know there's something wrong inside of you. I hope God's Scripture today was like a scan for you. You saw the sin that's in your heart. You need to know this: you will never be able to outwork it. No amount of rules, no amount of accountability, nothing you can do can give you freedom, can bring you healing.

The invitation for you today is to go to the healer who can do something about it, the person who *can* change and transform that thing in you. His name is Jesus, and he wants a relationship with you. So, I want you to come down here. We're going to have elders and prayer team members on both sides of the stage who can walk with you through what that looks like to be in a relationship with him.

Some of you have a sin that the Scripture held up and showed you its real name today. You've been using euphemisms for a long time, but it's finally time for you to start calling that sin for what it is and repent of that. Come lay it down here at the altar.

Some of you have been following Christ for a long time, but maybe somewhere over the last few minutes, you realized that you have been living with the old husband the whole time. You've been trying to work *for* that relationship, not *from* the relationship that you already have with Jesus Christ.

Here's what I want you to do. I want you to come down here, and I want you to lay down that list of demands you've been living by and pick up the freedom that Jesus Christ has purchased for you on the cross. Be free today. Listen. The old husband is dead, and the new one is calling you home. So, after we finish praying, I want you to come and respond. Pray with me.

Jesus, we thank you that you loved us enough to give us your law that tells us the truth about ourselves, that shows us our need. Jesus, I thank you that you didn't give us a

better set of rules; you gave us yourself. We belong to you now and always. God, I pray that we would rest there. Remind us, every one of us, that we obey *from* your love and never *for* it. We have all we need in you. Jesus Christ, would you move us to whatever it is you're calling us to today? In Christ's name we pray, amen.