

What a privilege to be able to be here with you. I'm so thankful to the Lord. I don't know where I would be without him, but I know it wouldn't be here. I'm so thankful for the rescuer that we have. God is a rescuer, isn't he? Wow. I'm so thankful for him. My family, I'm just so grateful for them. I think I had a picture of my family up there. I had to Photoshop this together because my one son lives in Georgia, so we had to Photoshop him in. But you could see my dream girl on there too, Michelle. She actually gave me a Valentine card early. I'll show it to you later on. But so thankful. All of my sons love the Lord. I have three sons. They're all serving the Lord. They all chose to come to Cairn. All of their wives came to Cairn. So we're a Cairn family. My wife's also a Cairn graduate. And then we have nine grandchildren. We've already prepaid for all of to come to Cairn. No, not yet. But yeah, I was just very thankful for our family. I wanted to say to you that our lives, they're very short, but your life's very important.

The decisions that you make every day will impact the rest of your life and the people around you. I'm thankful to the Lord for his grace in my life. I was one lost boy, let me tell you. He grabbed on to me and he pulled me out, and I am amazed at his wonderful grace every day. I'm going to just speak to you for a few minutes today, but I'm really speaking to myself, and I hope that you'll listen in a little bit.

I've never met someone yet who said, My goal in life is to waste my life. I want to grow up and be a fool and ruin my life and ruin the lives of everyone around me. I've never I haven't met anyone that said that, but I've seen it. I've seen it, and I know that would have been me. But God, he has grace, doesn't he? He has a different plan for us filled with his wisdom. When we follow God's wisdom, he makes something of our lives, and all the glory goes to him. The Bible tells us to seek wisdom, to pursue it with all of our heart.

The wisest thing that we can do, and I want to challenge with this today, the wisest thing that we can do is to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind, with all of our strength, to love him with everything that we are 100% committed to him, 100% sold out, dedicated and surrendered, devoted to him, on fire for the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you agree? It's the wisest way we can live our life. When we lose our life and give it over to him, we will never be more alive. That's what God's plan is for us. I was one lost boy and one lost cat, and I wanted to tell you this story. I guess it was about a month ago now that my mom-in-law, her dryer was not drying the clothes. Usually when that happens, it's because the vent is clogged. Usually you can reach down and there's lint in there or something else. That wasn't true for her dryer, so we realized it's the duct. Her dryer in the laundry room goes under the house through a cement slab and to the back of the house, and something was blocking the vent on the way through there.

I put a plumber's snake down there, and sure enough, it got clogged down there, it got stuck. Something's in there. What is it? Well, I took the dryer apart, and this is what we saw was the vent. I think we can get that up on the screen, right? Yeah, the vent. I took everything off, and I could see that something was clogged down there, and that's what needed to come out. So just a little bit closer, and I couldn't reach it. It was just beyond my arm's length. It clogged up the entire vent, the entire duct. I don't know if you can see in there. Yeah. Yeah. There was a cat in there, and it was completely stuck. The cat was completely stuck in the vent, and he couldn't get out. I couldn't reach him, and I honestly didn't know what I was going to do because I wanted to save the cat. We figured he was in there almost a week because about a week before we heard that my mom was saying that we could hear a meowing, but we couldn't tell where it was coming from. And as I shined the light down in there, I could see more closely that his head was stuck in the duct and he had one paw out and he couldn't get any farther than that.

Well, I wish I could reach him and just grab him and pull him out, rescue that little cat. I couldn't reach him. So what we decided to do was to put... Well, we called animal Control first. And they said, Is he inside the house? They said, Yeah, he's in the dryer vent. They said, Oh, he's not in the house. We can't help you. And then they said, Call the police. So I called the police. They said, Call animal control. So we got caught in between. So we got some tuna fish and we put it inside a napkin and tied it up onto a long string. I put it down in there and put it right on his nose. He was so hungry. He wanted to get out so badly. So I could hear him starting to scratch and claw with all of his strength to try to get out of there. And over the course of about a half an hour, he started to inch his way loose, eventually got

loose enough that he came up the vent. Now I was afraid if I grabbed him, he would go back down in. So I waited for his head to poke out, and I grabbed him and pulled him out.

And that's where... He's now adopted. He's beautiful. It's a male cat and so thankful that we were able to get him out of there. But he was going to die in there. And he was completely stuck and couldn't get out. Is that you? Are you stuck? Is there something keeping you from being 100% sold out to Jesus Christ, completely dedicated and committed to him? Sometimes we look at the sin in our life and we say, I don't have any outstanding sin. I'm okay. Well, that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying, are you 100% both feet in, completely, totally, surrendered and devoted to Jesus Christ this morning? That's the question I have to ask myself, because every day it's a challenge. I need God's wisdom to help me stay on that path to be devoted to him because that's where life is. Do you agree? That's where life is, everybody. I found that there's three steps to becoming wise. The first step is knowing what wisdom is. Wisdom is living with skill according to God's word, and that starts with loving the Lord my God with everything that I am and all that I am, completely devoted to him.

The second step is to realize what foolishness is. Foolishness is when I live apart from God's word. Do you recognize any of these things? Thinking that I know it all. Using my words carelessly. Using my words selfishly or to hurt others. Living as if there's no tomorrow. Listening to the wrong voices. Choosing the wrong friends. Repeating the same mistakes. Wisdom is knowing when to speak and when to keep my mouth shut. Foolishness is getting bent out of shape when somebody else corrects me, freaking out and being miserable when I get disappointed. You know what? Wisdom is knowing how to react when I am intentionally and repeatedly hurt by someone. Boy, these are all things I need wisdom on. Wisdom, three steps. One is know what wisdom is. Number two, know what foolishness is. Number three, step number three, realizing that I'm a fool. I'm a fool. I am prone to do things that are against God's will in my own nature, in my own selfishness, and seeing life through my own eyes rather than God's eyes and wasting and ruining my life. If I want to be wise, I need to know what wisdom is, loving the Lord with everything, knowing what foolishness is, and realizing I need God's wisdom.

I don't know if that's where you this morning, and there's lots of things we could talk about. God gave us wisdom in his word, and we look at the Book of Proverbs, which every verse in the Book of Proverbs, wow, so packed with meaning. We know that it's Hebrew poetry, so it's not rhyme and meter, but it's parallelism, and it's pithy, it's dense with meaning, and it's filled with vivid imagery. I wanted to just focus on one proverb today as an illustration, and I hope that you will seek the Lord with all your heart. The verse that I wanted to just share with you briefly is in Proverbs 25. We read it just now. When your enemy is hungry, how do we react when we are intentionally and repeatedly hurt? That's a tough one. I don't know if that's happened to you recently or ever, but I have to say that probably in your life you will experience it. You'll sense, like I do, that our sin nature has a natural reaction to that and how we will react. But God's way is different. Wisdom is from God because God is all-wise. He's not telling us to do or be something that he's not, but instead, he wants us to take part in his own character.

This is the advice that he gives to us. In fact, the mandate that he gives to us, When your enemy is hungry, what do we do? When someone intentionally and repeatedly hurts you, your enemy is hungry, do you know what's coming next? Slap him. Right, everybody? Slap him. You know What? Your enemy is hungry? Good. That's great. That's what he deserves. That's the best place for him to be. That's how we react often, isn't it? Our natural reaction, isn't it, everybody? I want to get him back. Right, everybody? I don't get mad. I get even. Am I right? Now, this is from a generation before you, so you probably won't even recognize this, but we used to say, I'll fix his wagon. You ever hear that one? You'll regret ever crossing me. They'll see what happens when they mess with me. Do any of these sound familiar? No, we never heard these before. They'll wish they never had done that. Two can play that game. That's our natural reaction, right? Because in our sin and selfishness, we want to get back at the person who hurt us. But what does the Bible say? The Bible says that when someone intentionally and repeatedly hurts us, when they're hungry, we do something kind.

We give them bread to eat. If they're thirsty, we give them water to drink. We do something kind in return, and we're not wired that way. We're wired in the opposite way, aren't we?

I heard about a guy, he had a beautifully manicured lawn, and he took great pride in it. You can probably picture it. I mean, absolutely perfect. And his neighbor really irritated him because his neighbor had a large dog. And he had a habit of walking his dog every morning, and his dog would come and do his business right in the middle of his manicured lawn. Well, he went and cleaned it up every time. But after a while, he started to get really irritated with his neighbor. So he decided that he was going to collect it and keep it. So for about a month, he collected and kept all of his neighbor's dog's stuff. He put it into a big bag. And then one morning, very early in the morning, when no one was awake, he took that and he emptied it all over his neighbor's steps. He was pretty proud of himself. He felt like, I got him back. Except he didn't realize that his neighbor had cameras, hidden cameras.

So just a few days later, he found a few little treats on his own step. I won't tell you what it was. This is what we do, though, isn't it, everyone? We try to get back because that's our natural inclination. So many movies are geared with that theme, wouldn't you say? So many, that's the theme of the movie, to get revenge. There's a real difference between justice and revenge. Our God is a God of justice, and we can trust him with that. Justice is when we want what's right. Revenge is when we want personal vengeance. Justice is when we want restoration. Revenge is when we want to make them suffer. Justice heals. Revenge hurts. Justice is a legal standard. Revenge is my own personal feelings. Justice is rightful authority, but revenge is in my own hands. Justice leads to peace and eventually closure. But revenge leads to bitterness, retaliation, and guilt. Justice says, let wrong be made right. Revenge says, let them hurt like I hurt. We can all hear in our voices as we say these things that these things are not what the Lord intended for us. Instead, we know that the Bible says, If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat.

If he's thirsty, give him water to drink. And in so doing, you will heat burning coals on his head, but the Lord will reward you. It's true. That kindness is very difficult at a moment when we want to get revenge. But we are never more like God when we do this. I heard a story. I was telling this Bible verse to someone, and they said, That reminds me when my son was in first grade, and he would ride on the school bus, and he was just starting at a new school. He was very vulnerable. And there was a fifth grader on that bus that was just very mean to him. He picked him out and singled him out and was just giving no end of trouble. And so they decided they came up with a little plan. The next day, this little first grader came with a whole bunch of lollipops. And when he got on the bus, he gave one to every kid on the bus. And then when he got to the bully. He had a special present. I don't know if you guys remember, but lifesavers would sometimes come in a book.

It would be a whole bunch of packs of lifesavers in a little book, and that was the gift that he gave to him. Well, this fifth grader was shocked. He knew what he was doing. From that moment on, he treated that little first grader like he was his little brother. We like to say that every story turns out just that way, and it doesn't. But what you do spreads. The kindness that you show when someone hurts you, it spreads to others. And this is what happened. There was a woman in their neighborhood who heard that story. She was having a lot of it with her neighbor. And so she decided that rather than to take revenge, that what she would do is bake them this most beautiful pie that she ever made. She took it over to their house and presented it to them, and they were shocked. They were shocked. From that moment on, they became good friends. A lot of the disagreements that they had, they were able to work through. Life's not always like that, but God is. God is our rescuer. He's the one who shows us kindness when we were his enemies.

And he wants us to be like him and to experience the life that comes when we devote our whole self to him. It says that when we are kind to our enemies, that it will keep burning coals on their head. And I was really intrigued by what this means. I looked it up and there's an ancient practice. And whether the writer of Proverbs meant this or not, we're not sure. But what would happen is if you lived in a neighborhood and your fire went out, that what you could do is you would get a container and put it on your head and go to your neighbor's house in humility and ask, Would you please help me? And they could put some of their hot coals into your container so you could go back and have fire in your house. Whether that's what's intended or not, we're not sure. But what we do know, and we've probably experienced, is that when you're kind to someone who is mean to you, what happens is that oftentimes your kindness makes them realize what they're doing and makes them turn around and

act in a different way. In a sense, your kindness heaps burning coals on them and brings conviction to them.

It may be a reference to God's judgment as well, that the burning coals may be a figure of God's judgment that will come to those who persist in their arrogance. Whatever the case, we know that it's true, that this is God's will, that when we follow this path, that we will live a different life and we'll imitate the grace and love that God has for us. Paul quotes from this verse in Romans 12, and he says this, Bless those who persecute you. Bless them and don't curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Don't be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one. Listen, repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with everyone. Beloved, never avenge yourself. Leave it to the wrath of God because it's written, Vengeance is mine. I will repay. He's the God of justice. Then he quotes this passage from Proverbs. This passage in Romans was written in the context of persecution.

There were believers in Jesus Christ who were being persecuted because they believed in Jesus. This is still happening today, that people who are persecuted for their faith, they respond not with revenge, but with kindness. God uses that powerfully, just as he did in the first century church, to turn people to the truth of Jesus Christ and that there's repentance and renewal and reconciliation. Even today, Suzanne, who lives in Nigeria, she experienced persecution because of her faith. She was shot with a bullet that went in one eye and came out the other. Somehow she survived, blind. With hearing loss and memory loss, she could have been bitter against her persecutors, but she's a testimony to all of us. She publicly forgave those who did this and wished and prayed that they would know the love of Jesus. Mary was held in captivity for 54 days in Nigeria by militants. She experienced sexual violence. She was forced to be a slave for her captors. She one time asked them, Do you know that what you're doing is wrong? They didn't know how to answer. Then one of the guards said, Yes, but we just don't know how to stop.

She told them about Jesus, and Jesus loved for them in the midst of her persecution. She has since been released. But what a testimony to all of us, wouldn't you say? Someone who was persecuted and mistreated, and yet she showed the love of Christ to all. Our choice is we can carry the pain and the hurt. We can hold grudges in our hearts and hope to somehow have an opportunity to get back at those who hurt us. But we follow what Christ did. Christ told us, For this you've been called, everyone. Christ suffered for you and me, leaving us an example so that we can follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. And when he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he didn't threaten, but he continued entrusting himself to him who judges righteously. He himself bore our sin in his own body on the cross so that we could experience the freedom and healing of his death for us. When we look at this question, how should we act when someone intentionally and repeatedly hurts us? We look at Christ, and I have to ask myself a question.

Does Christ's kindness heap burning coals on my head? How can I give him any less than all of myself after all that he's done for me. I was his enemy, and he died for me, and he died for you. And so he calls us to a different life, a life of wisdom, where we give ourselves completely over to him. Total surrender, completely devoted, 100% sold out, wholly committed, burning white hot for Jesus Christ, sacrificially dedicated, purposefully pursuing God. I just wonder today, brothers and sisters, have you given yourself to him like that? Have you loved him like that, holding nothing back? Maybe someone is here and like that cat stuck in the duct, we're stuck. We know it. There's something holding us back. Maybe, as the writer of Hebrews says, maybe it's a sin that so besets us that we can't seem to get free from it. Maybe it's not a sin at all. Maybe it's some reservation that we have that we're holding back and not giving him everything. I just want to encourage you today to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with every part of you, with every room in your house.

Open the doors to him. Let him come in and fill you and you. You will never be more alive. You will never have a life more worth living and more meaning in your life. Recently, there was an article that was published in the Gospel Coalition, and it was a young person in your generation, and He was heartbroken because he said, I realize that our whole generation is bored. But we're not bored because we have nothing to do. We have millions of things to do. We're bored because we have no

meaning and no purpose. I want to tell you that if you want to have meaning and purpose in your life, if you want your life to count, live it all out 100% without reservation for the Lord Jesus Christ. Follow his wisdom, even when it seems counter to our own intuition. How could that work, that showing kindness to our enemies could ever work out? Well, that's what he did for us, and so we'll do it for his glory. Would you pray with me today? Lord, we thank you for this time that we could share together in your word to explore your own words and your example.

And so, Lord, we know we fall short of following you with everything. You told us, our Lord Jesus told us, Love our enemies. We struggle with that, Father. We instead want to give them the silent treatment or ghost them or spread a bad report or somehow post nasty things about them. Lord, we ask you, as we live our life, that we might imitate your kindness and that your kindness would lead others to repentance. Father, we pray today as we devote ourselves to you, help us to live a different life, a life that would glorify you. Now, Father, in a fresh and new way, we devote ourselves to you. On this day, we surrender to you, holding nothing back. Lord, use us, live your life in and through us, and help others to see your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.