THE REAL
THING

The Real Jesus
John 10:22-14 // Craig Smith
February 25, 2018

Craig // Welcome to Mission Hills. So glad you are here for our continuing journey through the Gospel of John. As I was looking at the passage we are going to be pouring into today, I was reminded of something that happened to me when I was 10 or 11 years old. It was a Sunday afternoon. I think I was alone. My parents might have been taking a nap. I don’t know, but the important thing is, I decided I needed chocolate chip cookies. So I would make chocolate chip cookies. I had done that before, so it’s not what you might be thinking. So I set out to make chocolate chip cookies. I got the sugar and brown sugar and the eggs. I had it all mixed together. I added the vanilla. Things were looking good, and then I realized we didn’t have any flour. I don’t know if you understand, but when you love chocolate chip cookies and you need chocolate chip cookies, you have to have chocolate chip cookies. Forgetting the whole thing wasn’t an option, so I remembered at the beginning of the Betty Crocker cookbook, there was a page of substitutions. So I flipped back there and sure enough it said, hey, if you are short a teaspoon of flour, you can substitute a teaspoon of baking powder. Well, I was short two cups of flour, so I substituted two cups of baking powder. Now I have since come to understand that those were intended to be small scale substitutions like one teaspoon to one teaspoon.

Here’s the other thing. I don’t know if you know this, but baking powder is called a leavening agent, which means when you expose it to heat, it causes the dough to rise, so if like if you mix a teaspoon of baking powder into a couple of cups of flour, it will make the flour rise. On the other hand, if you just replace the flour with all baking powder, what happens is it’s less of a cooking mishap and more of a science experiment gone terribly, terribly wrong? I can’t even begin to tell you the damage this thing did to the oven. By the time I had looked in, it had expanded to fill the oven. It was squishing against the glass. It had fallen, but it was still trying to ooze out. It was bad. You might be, or you should be asking by this time, what does this have to do with Jesus? Because what I have come to understand, when you are talking about in the kitchen or in life, substitutes can’t produce the results we are looking for. Substitutes cannot produce the results we are looking for. I want to show you what I mean.

If you have a Bible, I would love for you to grab it. We are going to be picking up where we left off last week John 10:22. John is going to basically come to the end of a description he’s given us of a period of Jesus’ ministry. It was a period where Jesus was ministering in the capital of Israel in Jerusalem. He was spending a lot of time working with the cultural and the religious elites of Israel, trying to convince them that he was the real deal. He was the real thing. He was the Messiah. He was the Christ. He was the Son of God, he was the unique Son of God. John tells us here today, really the ending of that period of time that Jesus spent in Jerusalem. He says this, and then came the Festival of Dedication in Jerusalem. It was winter. Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. He gives us several details here. Really, what he’s doing is giving us the bookend to the period of Jesus’ ministry. A lot of things that he says here are mirrored in things that he told us at the beginning of this particular period of Jesus’ life.

For instance, at the beginning of the period that he describes for us back in chapter 7, Jesus came to Jerusalem, and at that time it was the Festival of Tabernacles. Here at the end of it, it’s Jerusalem, and it’s the Festival of Dedication we know as Hanukkah. At the beginning of this period, it was fall. That’s when the Festival of Tabernacles happened. Here at the end of it, John tells us, it was winter, so about three months had passed. At the beginning of this period, Jesus was very public with his ministry. In fact, he began it in the middle of that big, very public festival, he stood up and he invited people to consider his claims that he was the Messiah, he was the Christ that they had been waiting for. He was the real deal. Here in the end, he’s still public with his ministry. John tells us that he was walking around in Solomon’s Colonnade. That was a section of the temple grounds where the Jewish leaders of the day would gather to talk and to debate about religious subjects. The fact that Jesus is walking around tells us that he’s still public in his ministry. One of the things we need to understand is that John’s helping us to get a handle on is that Jesus has spent a considerable amount of time working with the religious leaders, and working with the cultural elite of Israel, trying to convince them of the truth. He’s spent what was about three months.

John is going to tell us that, that period of time is coming to a close. But we need to understand that it wasn’t a passing fad for Jesus. Three months is a considerable period of time. He’s really poured into trying to convince this group of people that he is who he says he is, that he’s the real deal, because he cares about them. It wasn’t just, we’ll give this a shot for a couple of days. No, no, no. He has poured himself into them because he loves them.

Unfortunately, as much as he loves them, the reality is, he’s not getting a lot of love back in Jerusalem. Verse 24 says that the Jews who were there, they gathered around him saying, how long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, just tell us plainly. Jesus answered, I did tell you, you but you do not believe. The works I do in my father’s name testify about me. So he’s walking in this public place and some Jewish
religious leaders gather around him. They say, stop beating around the bush, okay, stop playing games. Just tell us plainly. Put it right out on the table. Are you claiming to be the Messiah? His answer is, I have already made it as plain as I can, not just with words but also with deeds. He says the works that I have done, he's referring there not just to teaching, but to miracles. He's saying, you more than anyone else in all of Israel should be able to recognize the truth of my claim.

You are the ones who know the most about God. You are the ones who know scripture so well. You are the ones so concentrating on doing the right stuff, and checking your boxes and crossing your T's and dotting your I's, and you have your religion so down pat, you should be in a place to know better than anyone else that I am who I say I am, but he says, you don't believe, and the question is, why? Why are they struggling? Why don't they believe? He gives this answer. But you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. He says, that's the reason you don't believe is because you are not my sheep. And understand, he's using an everyday life thing again, something they were all familiar with. What he's basically saying is, the clearest way to tell if the sheep really belong to the shepherd is because they recognize and respond to his voice.

Imagine for a second that there is a field and it has a whole bunch of the shepherd's sheep, but a bunch of imposter sheep make their way in. The shepherd suddenly realizes, there are a whole bunch of sheep here that are not my sheep. How does he sort them out? Does he go sheep by sheep looking for identifying characteristics and marks? I suppose he could, but he doesn't need to because there's an easy way to do it. That is, he just makes an announcement. He calls out to the sheep and he says, hey, guys, let's head back to the pen. And immediately, you can tell which ones are his sheep and which ones are not because those that are his sheep immediately, they recognize his voice and they respond. They start moving and all of the imposter sheep are standing there going, what's going on? Where's everybody going? What's happening, because they don't recognize and respond to the shepherd's voice because he's not their shepherd?

That's really all that Jesus says. He says you don't believe because you are not my sheep, but we need to understand what a bomb that was to drop on this particular group of people -- because throughout his ministry here in Jerusalem Jesus has been saying over and over again, I and the Father, we are one. I am the unique Son of God. I'm not just a prophet. I'm not just a teacher. I and the Father are one. Everything that's true of the Father is true of me. Everything that's true of me is true of the Father. When he says to this group of religious leader, you are not my sheep, he's really say, you are not -- God's sheep, and of course sheep is just a metaphor for people, so Jesus is telling this group of religious leaders, they are not really God's people. You can imagine, I think, how explosive that would have been to say.

That would be like going to the Vatican and saying to the priest there, you are not really God's people. Or you gather a group of pastors together and say, you might be shepherding the flock, but you are not part of the flock. You are not God's people. I mean, that's an explosive thing to say to anybody, but to a group of religious leaders who pride themselves on being God's people, you are mistaken. That's -- that's inflammatory, right? That's a big deal. You can understand why their reaction, as we are going to see in a minute is so emotional. But before we look at their reaction, I think we need to ask a really important question. That is, how is that possible? How is it possible for a group of religious people to not be God's people?

I think at the risk of oversimplifying, what we have to recognize is that they had confused religion with relationship. And I want to clarify something. Religion is not a bad thing. It's become very popular in Christian circles over the last several years to talk about religion as though it's a almost negative thing. People say, I'm not religious. I don't have religion. I have a relationship. And I understand the heart there. I understand what's going on there, but I think we need to be careful because I think that actually dishonors God, because God uses the word "religion" in positive senses throughout His Word, and I think to say and to talk about religion as though religion is inherently bad, I think that dishonors God. I mean James 1:27, right? Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: It's to look after widows and orphans in their distress, right? He says religion -- He uses the word "religion" that God loves, He says basically, that He says two thumbs up to, it looks like this, to look after widows and orphans in their distress. See God uses the word "religion" in positive terms, so I don't think it's an option for his people to think about religion as a bad thing.

The problem is that we somehow misunderstand what religion is supposed to be. Here's what religion is supposed to be. Religion is supposed to be what we do as a result of our relationship with God. Does that make sense? Religion is supposed to be the things that we do. For James, it's looking after the widows and orphans. Why? Because that's a result of their relationship with God. That's what religion is supposed to be, the result of our relationship with God. I have a relationship with Jesus Christ, so I go to church, and I worship God with his people. That's what I do. I have a relationship with Jesus Christ, so I read his word. I have a relationship with Jesus, so I don't -- look at pornography. I don't gossip about people. I don't drink alcohol to excess. Right? What can happen, people can look at me and go, you have all of those things you do or you don't do because you are religious.

No. No, not at all. I do or don't do those things because I have a relationship. Those things I do or don't do, they become my religious activity, but they are a result of my relationship. But what can easily happen is we get it backwards. We go, well, as long as I am doing all of the things that should be a result of the relationship that must mean I actually have the relationship, right? It's a really easy thing to slip into, and I think that's what happened to the religious leaders.
Nothing wrong with religion, and keep in mind, it's not the wrong religion, right? This is the revealed religion of God’s Word. Judaism was the right, true, religion. They hadn't made up a new religion, so how is it that Jesus could say you are not my sheep? It's because they confused religion with relationship. In fact, I would say that rather than religion being a result of their relationship with God, it had become a substitute for it. So Jesus has to look at them and sadly say, you don’t believe because you are not -- you are not my sheep. You are not the Father's -- you are not God’s people.

Unfortunately, no substitute can produce the results we are looking for, or that we are longing for. Religion cannot produce what a relationship with God can. Only a real relationship with Jesus can produce the results that we are looking for and longing for. Results like these. Verse 28 says: I give them -- that’s my sheep. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. Those are the results, he says, that come from a real relationship with Jesus. Two things, right? Eternal life and eternal security. The first result of a relationship with Jesus Christ is eternal life, which has two pieces to it. Eternal life it’s both a quantity and a quality. It’s a quantity in the sense that it goes on and on forever and ever. It never has an end. It’s a quantity thing. It’s the way we are supposed to be. God is the author and the source of all life. When we are plugged into God, we have life that just goes on and on. We are like light bulbs that never dim, that never fade out. The problem, of course, is that sin has disconnected us from God, has disconnected us from the power source, so our light fades.

In my basement, I replace all of the floodlights with L.E.D. lights because they are more energy efficient. I really like them, but they do an odd thing. Old school lights, the filament bulb, when you turn off the light, it’s instant. L.E.D.’s fade. It’s quick, but there’s a moment even after you turn off the current there’s still some light and it slowly fades to dark. That’s kind of the way it works with us. Because of our sin, we disconnect from God, we begin a slow fade, but eventually, we don’t shine with the love and the life and the grace and all of those things God intended us to because we are disconnected, but what Jesus says, when you connect with me in a real relationship, that’s never going to happen. There’s not going to be any slow fade for you. You are going to continue to shine in the way that God intended for you for all eternity. Wrap your head around this, in a relationship with God, you are going to turn one billion someday.

I have no idea what that cake’s going to look like. But understand in terms of the quantity, there is going to be a day you look back and think, that day way back when I turned a billion, I was so young. Like you understand, it’s unending. It goes on forever and ever. This is eternal life, but it’s not just a quantity, it’s also quality, okay? It’s a life that doesn’t just go on and on, it’s a life that goes on and on constantly filled to the point of overflowing with love and with joy and with hope and with peace and with significance and meaning. All of the things we looked at a few weeks ago when Jesus said I came that they may have life and have it abundantly as we said, have it excessively. Have it so that it not only fills them up, but it spills off of them because there is more than your life can contain. That’s eternal life. It’s a quantity and a quality and that’s the first result of a real relationship with Jesus, and no substitute can ever produce that result.

Beyond that there is a second result. That is the second result of a real relationship with Jesus is eternal security. He says no one can snatch them out of my hands. No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. Basically, the Father and I tag team to protect the sheep. We tag team to hold on to the sheep. Now, if you spent time in church you may be aware of that there's a debate among Christians about this thing we call eternal security. One group of Christians says when you make a commitment to have a real relationship with him, your salvation can never be taken away, will never be lost. That you will never get to the place where you don’t have that relationship anymore. There is another group that believes, no, you could lose your salvation. You could lose that relationship. I don’t want to get into the conversation -- I don’t want to unpack all of the theology, but I believe, based on what is being said here as well as in a number of other places in scripture, that the Bible teaches eternal security. I wasn’t raised with that. It’s not what I believed growing up, but it’s what I have come to believe from God’s Word.

If you think differently from that, that’s okay. I understand why the other side of that debate exists, but my conclusion after the study and based on the kind of things he says here, once you begin that relationship, it’s done. It’s permanent. You don't need to live in fear of losing it. You don’t need to live in fear of losing it that something is going to come into your life that will take you out of Jesus grip. It’s never going to happen. You go, well, what about the wrong things I do? Couldn’t I sin to the point God says, I’m done with you? No, because God knew about all of those things before you started the relationship in the first place. As we said last week, one of the reasons we can trust him is because his relationship with us is based on an informed intimacy. He knows everything there is to know, even the stuff that we don’t know yet. He already knows it. He’s never surprised by it. Because of that, I believe that the second result of a relationship with Jesus is a security that says I can live in light of that instead of living in fear of losing that.

These are the two things Jesus says comes as a result of a real relationship, eternal life, eternal security. That doesn't mean you can go live anyway you want because those of us with a real relationship with Jesus, we are going to see that change in our lives. It’s going to affect the kinds of things we do and don’t do. That’s the evidence of the relationship. It’s not the basis of it. It’s the result of it. If we start thinking if we do all of these right things, God must love me. Okay, we are getting it backward again, right? We are making our religion a substitute rather than a result. The thing is, these two incredibly important results can only be given to us if Jesus is who he says he is, right?

He has to actually be the unique Son of God. He has to be God to be able to provide these things, otherwise he’s just blowing smoke, so what he goes on to say is I can make these things true because of who I am, so he says this, verse 30, I and the Father are one. Makes that claim again. I and the Father are one. Again, his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him. He says I can only make this offer because I and the Father are one. I am the unique Son of God. It’s not just a title. It’s the essence of who I am. What the Father is, I am. What I am, the Father is. We are
so close. I'm God in the flesh here with you. That's the only way that I can offer eternal security and eternal life. It's the only way. But that claim was the thing they couldn't get past. That claim about who he is. So they picked up stones to stone him. Verse 32 says, but Jesus said to them, I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me? We are not stoning you for any good work, they replied, but for blasphemy because you a mere man claim to be God.

Blasphemy is one of those religious words. We don't use it all that often, right? And when we do use it, we use it in kind of weird ways. We might say things like, seriously, you do not like Krispy Kreme doughnuts? That's blasphemy, dude. No, it's not. It shows very poor taste in don'ts, but it's not blasphemy. Blasphemy means putting yourself in God's place. That's what they mean by blasphemy, putting yourself in God's place, and what we need to understand is, if Jesus is not who he says he is, he absolutely committed blasphemy. That charge is 100% accurate. Because Jesus put himself in God's place. He claimed to be able to do things that only God could do like forgive sins. Sometimes instead of just healing somebody, he would really stir the pot by saying, hey, get up and walk, your sins are forgiven. Only God can do that. He put himself in God's place. He took God's titles for himself. As we looked at a few weeks ago, he said before Abraham was, I -- what? Say it with me. I -- Am, which is the name that God gave to Moses when Moses wanted to know like, what should I tell people to call you? He said, tell them I Am is the one sending you.

Jesus said before Abraham was, I Am. He took his titles for himself. Absolutely, Jesus put himself in God's place. If he's not God, absolutely, he committed blasphemy. On the other hand, if he is the unique Son of God, it's not blasphemy. It's just truth. Now what Jesus is about to say next is going to be a little confusing? It's going to be confusing because he uses a Jewish traditional argument. So if you are a first century Jewish person here today, it makes perfect sense. Any first century Jewish people here today? Nobody? Okay, so we may have to do a little bit of work to understand what he's getting at. Jesus answered them, is it not written in your Law I have said you are gods? If he called them gods to whom the Word of God came and Scripture cannot be set aside, then what about the one that the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, I am God's Son.

I feel like about once a month, Oprah Winfrey recommends a book that quotes this verse and says, even Jesus said it. Jesus the great teacher said, you and I, we are all gods. You just have to realize your own divinity. Jesus said you are gods, didn't he? No. I hope that's not super disappointing for anybody? That's not what he said. Let me see if we can break it down. Jesus is actually quoting from Psalm 82. Psalm 82, I'll start in verse 5 for a bit of a context, here's what the Psalm writer says, he says, the gods know nothing. They understand nothing. They walk about in darkness, all of the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said you are gods. You are sons of the Most High. I want you to notice that the word "gods" there is in little quote kind of things, which I think is exactly right because it's being used sarcastically. If I was saying it out loud, I would have to do air quotes around it. "gods."

He says, the gods know nothing. What's he talking about? He's talking about the false gods of the nations, Zeus and Baal and that kind of thing. He says we use the word gods to talk about them which is interesting because they nothing. Why do they know nothing? Because they are fictional characters. They don't even exist, and yet we use the word gods to talk about these fictional, no-nothing characters, and what the Psalm writer says, no, no, no. They are not gods. He says to the people, you're gods. Not you are not divine, but compared to them, you are way more god-like because you know things because you are made in the image of God and he's given you revelation and knowledge. So he's not saying that we are divine, but he's saying it's more appropriate to use the word gods for us than it is for these fictional creations, and what Jesus is doing is extending that same argument.

He says listen, if it's more appropriate to call God's people gods than the fictional of the nations, how much more appropriate is it to call me God, since I actually am the unique Son of God sent by the Father. Does that kind of make sense? He's just kind of setting the stage that the use of "God" here isn't inappropriate for him. You might say yeah, but that doesn't really prove that he is God, and you are right. That's just setting the stage for it. What he goes on to say is this, do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father, but if I do them, even though you don't believe me, believe the works so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. He says don't just believe my claim that I'm the unique Son of God. Don't just believe my claim that I'm the Messiah, but look at the evidence, look at the works. The miracles and the teaching, you know better than anybody else that what I'm doing and what I'm able to do is only possible by God's grace, by God's power by God's presence because everything I'm doing, it lines up perfectly with God's Word and God's will.

You should know that better than anyone else. So the works that I have done should prove it. But I think one of the important things to recognize here is that we see Jesus' heartbeat in this. Because keep in mind what situation he's in. He has a group of religious leaders around him. What do they have in their hands? They are ready to kill him, and what is he doing? He's pleading with them to believe. Even in the face of their attempts to kill him, he's still pleading with them to trust him and to believe in him. Why? Because he loves them. That's powerful testimony of the breadth and the width and the depth of God's love. Even as they are looking to kill him, he's still pleading with them to see the truth. Unfortunately, his pleading falls on largely deaf ears. Verse 39 says again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

I don't know about you, but I would really like more details. John literally says that he went out of their hands. I'm like, how did he pull that off? Did he have some Kung Fu stuff? I mean, did he juke left and then right and fake them out? How did he get out of their hands, and it's frustrating that John is just anticlimactic, yeah, he went away from their hands. And the reason for that is because John is making sure we understand, he's still in control. In spite of what they are trying to do, he's still in control. We said last week, one of the reasons we can trust Jesus is because he
Here we are just seeing the same thing. He’s not quite ready to go to the cross yet. He’s perfectly willing, but he has some things he wants to do in the meantime. They are ready to get rid of him. He’s not ready to be gotten rid of, so he just leaves. Maybe the more important thing isn’t that he leaves or even how he leave, but where he goes. Verse 40 says then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. He didn’t just leave the temple court. He actually left Jerusalem. He went out of the city. He crossed the river. He went out into the countryside which is kind of John’s way of saying, he’s done. He spent three months trying to convince them. He’s done. And there he stayed, and many people came to him. They said though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true, and in that place, many believed in Jesus. There’s an interesting contrast there.

The people in the countryside, honestly, they weren’t that committed to God. They really weren’t that close to God, and unfortunately, I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that it was in Jerusalem that you found the most strict religious observance. I mean the really strict religious people, the religious leader, they kind of centered around Jerusalem, so the sense was as you got farther away, you got farther away from the people of God, which means that Jerusalem should have been the place where Jesus saw the greatest response. Because that had the most religious people. They should have been the ones with the most wide eyes open seeing God in their midst where they turned out to be blind as bats, whereas the people out in the countryside that should have been least able to recognize godliness because they weren’t nearly as religious, they flocked to Jesus in throngs, in droves.

It’s not what you should have expected, but it makes sense, doesn’t it? Because as we said, the core problem is that for so many of the religious leaders, religion had become a substitute for their relationship with God rather than a result of it. Again, there is nothing wrong with religion as long as it’s the result of the relationship, but I think over time, they lost that. It had gotten reversed, which is tragic because as you see, there is no substitute for a real relationship, right? Maybe more than anything else, that’s the truth that we have to grab hold of and wrestle with today. There is no substitute for real relationship. Religion that is a substitute relationship, religion can never provide eternal life and eternal security. It can’t provide peace and joy and hope. It can’t provide any of that. There is no substitute for a real relationship, but of course the danger the religious leaders were struggling with is the same danger that you and I can so easily find ourselves slipping into, and that is that we allow substitutes to creep in.

Two questions, if it’s true that there is no substitute for a real relationship, this is the first question -- is my religion the result of my relationship with Jesus, or is it a substitute for it? It’s sobering, hard question, but I think as people who claim to follow Jesus, claim to have a relationship with Jesus, we have to wrestle with it to make sure we are not getting off track. Is my relationship with Jesus -- or is my religion a result of my relationship or a substitute for it? You may go, how do I know? How do I tease that out? Well, honestly, just think about how relationships are in general. One truth about relationship, relationships thrive only with constant investment. Relationships thrive only with constant investment.

You know, Coletta and I got married, it will be 25 years ago this November. I remember before we got married the pastor asked me, hey, what are you most looking forward to about being married? I was like, I’m not going to tell you. That’s awkward. Some of you know what I’m talking about, so I came up with the next best answer, which was honestly true. I’m looking forward to not having to say goodbye. I’m looking forward to not having to say goodnight, so being with her, being in that relationship constantly. That first month it was awesome because we were finding out more about each other. We were deeply investing and getting to know each other. It was awesome, but listen, if that had only lasted for a month, if that investing period had only lasted for a month, 25 years later, my marriage would be a dry, husk of a thing.

I have to constantly be investing. What does your relationship with Jesus look like? Are you investing in it regularly? If it’s not, that could be a red flag that you are allowing religion, the things we do to become a substitute for the relationship. What does your investment look like? Another truth about relationships, relationships only thrive when we practice listening and responding, right? Listening and responding. Guys, I hope you know this, but when you are listening to your wife, just going uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. That’s not listening and responding. There has to be more. We are actually hearing and doing things as a result of things we hear. We understand that. It works both ways. That’s what a relationship looks like. This past week, I’ll be completely transparent with you. Coletta and I had a conversation where she feels I’m not investing in our relationship enough. It’s easy to get defensive, and that was my first response, but as we continued to talk, and I heard where she was coming from, I didn’t feel judgment. I felt, yeah, there’s a legitimate concern there. I realized, I need to make some changes. I need to do some things different, and I started to do that. I listened, and I responded. It’s not always easy, but it’s necessary.

So how is it with your relationship with Jesus? You read the Bible. You learn some things. You go to church, and you hear truth. Maybe you listen to podcasts and you learn new information about God or whatever -- what happens with it? Do you just hear it and file it away, or do you
hear it and say what does that mean for me? How do I change things? Even today we are saying there is no substitute for a relationship -- do you go, yeah, that's true. That's good, or do you wrestle with the question, is my religion a result of my relationship or am I allowing it to become a substitute for it? You have to respond. If you are not seeing a response, that's a warning sign. The third thing I'll say is that real relationships thrive only when they are not compartmentalized. I'm married all the time. It's not just a matter of having the ring on my finger. When I go out of town to speak somewhere, something like that, I'm married. I'm married, and that affects the conversations I have with women and what I do or don't do with my eyes. I'm married. I'm committed to my wife. It's true even with I'm not with her. It's true in absolutely every area of my life, every compartment of my life.

If it's not true, that's a warning sign about the health of the relationship. Unfortunately, Christians have a negative perception by people in the culture that they like to say things like, they're hypocrites. They like to go to church, and they say all the right things, but at work, they are jerks. In my neighborhood, the Christians are the least popular people on the cul-de-sac. Unfortunately, there is a reason that, that perception exists. It's not all on them. A lot of it is on us. You and I should be the most loved people in the neighborhoods because we should be the most loving. That doesn't mean that we shy away from speaking truth, but it means we couple our truth speaking with love doing so much so that people go I don't believe what they believe, but I love those people because they love me.

What happens is we can compartmentalize. At church I'm this. In this time or this time I'm this. We compartmentalize our relationship with Jesus rather than letting it -- rather than forcing it to in fact each and every single area of our lives. There are just three realities about relationships. You wrestle with the question, is my religion the result of a real relationship or is it a substitute for it? There are some ways to help us zero in on that. And then the second question that's related. It's just this. In what areas of my life am I most likely to let religion be a substitute rather than a result? Because I think all of us have at least one area of our lives that we go, that's where I'm most likely to coast. That's where I go, I have all of the other stuff going on right, so what does it matter if I let Jesus into this area? Sometimes identify the areas where we most struggle, where we are most tempted to say, my religion is fine. My religion will carry us through this, sometimes focusing on those areas helps us to begin to unpack where it is we need to be investing in that relationship. Guys, there is no substitute for the real thing. There is no substitute for the real thing.

It's only the real thing that can provide eternal life. Eternal security. Hope, peace, joy and everything else we are longing for. No substitutes. Would you pray with me? Jesus, thank you that you want to have a relationship with us. That you love us enough to do everything necessary to allow that to be at the center of our lives. Help us to -- help us to push into you, to seek you, to listen, to respond, to be your people because we have a relationship with you, and let all of the other stuff be a result of that and may it never be a substitute for it. In Jesus name, amen.