Craig // Hey, we have had something kind of interesting happen over the last couple of months that we did not anticipate. That is we have had people that have come to us, and they have said, hey, we didn’t get a chance to get in on the Imagine initiative because we weren’t part of Mission Hills last fall when you did it, or we weren’t able to give last fall, and so we have a number of people say, is it too late to give? Is there any way we can give start giving to the Imagine initiative to expand our impact for God’s glory, locally, regionally and globally, and we went -- we didn’t expect anyone to be asking that after the fact, but yeah, absolutely.

If that happens to be you, if you are interested, if you grab your worship card at the top there is actually a website address. You can go there, and you can do two things. You can keep up to date on the Imagine initiative as it unfolds throughout the rest of the year. If you want to get in on giving, if you haven’t had a chance to do that, you can do that through that site as well.

Why don’t you grab your Bible.

I want to ask you to join me in Daniel 10.

While you are turning there, I want to tell you something interesting that’s happened to Daniel. We didn’t get a chance to talk about it last time we were in Daniel, two weeks ago, but it actually began back in chapter 9 of Daniel. The best way to describe it is this.

Up to this point in the Book of Daniel, Daniel has been operating as an individual. He’s been operating as just Daniel. By looking at Daniel, we have seen a number of principles for what it looks like to thrive in the middle of difficult circumstances. We can do what he did. We can follow his example, but in Daniel 9, Daniel ceases to be just Daniel, and he becomes a representative for all of God’s people. You see that in Daniel 9 in the prayer that he prayed. If you were here a few weeks ago, you may remember that we looked at this powerful prayer that Daniel prayed. We didn’t really talk about it then, but there is an interesting fact about that prayer that we need to notice, and that is, in that prayer Daniel never says I. He never says “me.” He always says “we” and “us.” It’s never, “I” have done this, and it would be great for me if you did this. It’s always we as your people, God, have done this. We are asking for these things for your people and for your glory. It’s never “I.” It’s always “we.” What happens at that point, Daniel kind of becomes a representative of the whole nation of Israel. He becomes a stand in so what’s true of Daniel is true of all of the people. Does that make sense?

It’s important because what’s going to continue to happen is that he’s going to continue to play that role as we finish out the book of Daniel, so what we are going to see today is that what happens to Daniel doesn’t just happen to Daniel. It’s really -- it’s a picture of what God is doing with all of us, okay? So what we are going to see in the book of Daniel is that what God does with Daniel is a picture of what he does with each of us. It’s not just happening to that guy, it’s really something that God is doing each and every day with each one of us, and Daniel is just kind of the picture of that reality.

So, Daniel 10:1 says this, now in the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel who was called Belteshazzar. So, Cyrus is the fourth king that Daniel has served under. Daniel was captured by Nebuchadnezzar, and then he was followed by a grandson of his, and then there was Darius, and now there’s Cyrus, and throughout this whole period Daniel has risen to positions of prominence, and he’s been knocked back down. It’s been a long period of -- chaos, honestly, and setbacks and advances and frustrating circumstances and victories -- basically, it’s just life, but it’s life in the midst of difficult circumstances. Daniel is probably in his -- he may be approaching 80 or even a little over 80 years old by the time you are in the third year of Cyrus’ reign.

There’s an interesting thing that happens here too, though, in -- you get the note that Daniel who was called Belteshazzar -- does anyone recognize that? If you were with us all along in the study of Daniel, you may remember that name. It was the name that Nebuchadnezzar gave to Daniel when he captured him. So all the way back in chapter 1, Daniel was brought from Israel with his friends, and he was given this new name. He was given the new name for a reason. It was a deliberate attempt at identity theft. It was a deliberate attempt to get Daniel to change teams, to switch his allegiance from the God of Israel, and the nation of Israel to the gods of the Babylonians. Daniel means, God is my judge. Belteshazzar, the new name given to him has something to do with one of the Babylonian gods, Bel.

So they are trying to get Daniel to switch teams. It’s interesting, that name doesn’t show up again throughout the whole book of Daniel until now. So at the beginning you have it, and now at the end you have it, and the reason for that is simple. It’s kind of a tongue and cheek way
of saying, hey, guess what?  It didn’t work.  It didn’t work.  Daniel never took this name.  He never lost his identity.  He remained rooted in his understanding of who God was and that defined him, and really, in some sense, the fact that this didn’t work is the most important principle for why Daniel was able to thrive for decades in this difficult place.  Daniel was able to thrive in Babylon because he never let Babylon define him.  You hear me?

In spite of all of the temptations, in spite of all of the effort, Daniel was able to survive and thrive in Babylon because he never let Babylon define him.  He never let his circumstances define him.  I think as Christians, we need to pay attention to that.  Because almost, every single day I work with followers of Jesus that are struggling with this feeling that if I don’t compromise in some way, I’m not going to be able to survive in this culture.  Especially, if I don’t compromise, I’m not going to be able to thrive.  I’m not going to be able to get ahead.  So I have to let the culture define me in some way.  I have to identify in different ways, even though I know they are kind of in conflict with my allegiance to Christ.  If I don’t make some compromises, I’m never going to be able to thrive.  What Daniel shows us throughout this book is that, that’s just not true.

There is a very different path to thriving, and it’s a refusal to let our circumstances and culture define us.  Instead, we stay rooted in who Christ is.  It’s been almost 70 years now, and now toward the end of his life Daniel receives one final vision.  It says, it’s message was true, and it concerned a great war.

It’s message was true and it concerned a great war.  The understanding of the message came to him in a vision.  At that time, I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks.  I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.

What Daniel is doing, he is expressing mourning.  Those are traditional signs of mourning.  And he’s probably in extension of what we saw a couple of weeks ago in Daniel 9, he’s mourning over the disobedience and sin of Israel that has lead to their exile, and again, he’s functioning as a representative.  He’s functioning as Israel itself.  He’s extending this period of mourning, and then on the 24th day, the first month, as I was standing on the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen with a belt of fine gold Uphaz around his waist.  His body was like topaz, his face like lightning.  His eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude.  I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves.

It’s an interesting thing that happens here.  Daniel is clearly not by himself.  He’s with a group of his people, and he’s by the river, and I think that matters because what happened throughout the ancient period is when the Jewish people were not able to be in the homeland of Israel, they had a habit, they had a tradition, and that was wherever they happened to be, they would meet by the river for prayer and worship.  So Daniel’s been part of a prayer gathering, and it’s not at all a stretch to imagine that what they are praying for is for God to move, right?  They are praying for God to do something.  They are praying for God to redeem His people and set them free from captivity, and return -- they are praying for God to show up and do something, and low and behold, God does something, and what do the people do?  They run.

Isn’t that interesting?  They are in a prayer gathering, God, do something.  Oh no, God did something.  Right?  And I find myself looking at that and going, you know, as I look back on my own life, over and over again, when I pray for God to do something, when He does, it’s almost always overwhelming in a way I never expected.  Which causes me sometimes when I’m praying to ask this question, am I really ready for God to do what I’m praying for Him to do?

Everybody else runs.  Daniel doesn’t run, but I don’t know that it was because he was necessarily braver than anyone else.  He has what I would call spiritual deer in the headlights experience.  He’s just sort of frozen.  What he’s seeing is an angel.  This is some kind of powerful creature from the spiritual realm.  We don’t know who it is exactly.  If I had to guess, I would say it’s probably Gabriel that we have seen earlier in this book, but whatever it is, he sees this powerful angel, and he’s just frozen to the spot.

Verse 8 says, so I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless.

Daniel’s overwhelmed, right?  He feels weak.  He has no strength.  He’s afraid.  His face turned deathly pale.  He was powerless.  He was helpless.  He was overwhelmed.  How many of you have ever felt overwhelmed at some point in your life?  How many of you are like, right now?  I think it’s important that we recognize that what Daniel is experiencing is something that God’s people consistently experience when we live in a fallen world that we don’t have control over.  Overwhelmed is a pretty natural thing to feel in the face of difficult circumstances.  Now, Daniel on some level is overwhelmed by the vision he is seeing, but at the same time, it’s interesting how closely his experience here parallels the way you would expect him to respond just for his difficult circumstances, the very ones that they are praying about.  There is the vision or circumstances, this feeling of being overwhelmed; it’s something that’s pretty common to us.

And the reason that I ask if you have been overwhelmed is because I want you to pay attention to what God does next for Daniel.  And remembering that it’s not just Daniel, that Daniel is a picture of what He does for each of us because what we are going to see is the way that God deals with us, the way that God comes to us, the way that God ministers to us when we are in the midst of feeling overwhelmed.

Daniel says, I heard Him speaking, and as I listened to Him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground.  A hand touched me and set me trembling.
in my hands and knees. This is the first of three touches that we are going to see throughout this chapter. And basically what's happening is that God is touching Daniel. You go, hang on a second. I thought an angel was touching Daniel. Yeah, but it's not quite that simple because the angel is a messenger from God. That's what the word "angel" means. So the touch of the angel is in some sense the touch of God, and even beyond that, he says, a hand touched me. That's an interesting way to say it. Not the hand of the angel, not even the hand that you would expect, but a hand, a deliberate ambiguity to it so you are left going, wait a minute, whose hand is this? I think the reason for that is because even though it might be an angel directly touching him, the fact is that it's God reaching out to Daniel.

Here's a fact that we need to come to grips with. God is constantly reaching out for us. God is constantly touching us, but God often touches us through Intermediaries. God often touches us through others. Sometimes it's an angel -- I have never had that experience, anybody here? I keep waiting for a hand to go up because I like, I want to have that conversation, but I believe that still happens. Sometimes God touches us through His Word. He touches me through His Word a lot. Sometimes it's through worship. It's a song. Sometimes it's through my wife or kids or followers of Jesus. Sometimes it's through circumstances, but God is constantly reaching out and touching. But He often touches us through Intermediaries, but it's still ultimately God that, and when God reaches out to touch us, He's looking to accomplish two things.

You see this pattern over and over and over again. And we are going to see this pattern consistently here in Daniel 10. When God touches us, whether that's through scripture, through the power of the Holy Spirit, through an angel or through someone else, when God touches us, two things happen. First is He delivers something we need, and the second, He demands something as a response. But they are often very closely tied together, and then the reality is that God always delivers to us what is needed in order to accomplish what He demands from us. He gives to us what we need to be able to -- meet the demand that He makes of us. Does that make sense? God will never demand from you that He has not given to you what is necessary first. We see this pattern over and over again.

So what's happened here is that Daniel has fallen asleep. He's basically blacked out, right? He's touched, and when he's touched, he's woken up. He's raised partly, he's to the point his hands and knees are as far as he's going, and it's interesting at that moment, the hand sort of pulls back. He's delivered what Daniel needs. He's woken him up. He's raised him a little bit, but then the hand pulls back and there's a demand that's made.

Verse 11 says this, and He said to Daniel, who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you. There's the demand. Stand up. The hand gives him what he needs. He wakes him. He raises him to his hands and knees, steps back, and there's a demand given. Stand up. To stand up, it's not just a physical thing. It's also symbolic of get ready, right? Anybody go to graduation ceremony in the last few weeks? Yeah? You know the best part of the graduation ceremony? It's that moment after all of the speeches you finally see somebody head down the aisle where the first row of graduates are, and they signal to that first row of seats, stand up. That's the best time, right? Because you know, okay. What they are doing when they are telling people to stand up, hey, you are almost up. You need to get ready. Get prepared. That's what's happening here. He's been awakened. He's been raised to his hands and knees, and then the hand steps back and says, stand. Get ready for what's coming. Stand up. Even as he does that, there is still another piece of encouragement. There is another thing delivered to him to enable him to do that.

That is, he says, Daniel, you are who are highly esteemed, and I'm actually not crazy about that translation because when we hear the word highly esteemed in our culture, we tend to think, okay this is somebody who is very important, or they are very impressive, right? Very important, very impressive, but that's not really what the Hebrew means. The Hebrew word really literally just means precious. It means valuable. The point is, Daniel, you are precious to God, and it's not because He's so impressed by all you have done. You are precious to God, and it's not because you are so important if He doesn't have you all of His plans are going to fall apart, no, no, no. Daniel is important to God just because he's God's.

Remember, I said Daniel isn't just Daniel. He's sort of a stand in for all of the people of God. What's said to Daniel is really a truth about what is also true about each of us. This is one of the hardest truths in Christianity that I have to wrap my head around is that I am precious to God, and it's not because of the work that I have done. It's not because I am so important to His plans. I'm just precious to Him because I'm His, but hear me, you are precious to God. You are valuable to God because you were made to be in a relationship with Him. You were made to be His son or His daughter, and you are precious to Him. It's not just true of Daniel, it's true of you. And I know that's a hard truth to get our heads around because we are talking about the God that created the universe, right? I mean, a God that flung the stars across the heavens, the God whose power is so great we can't even wrap our heads around the tiniest edges of its reality, and to say that God looks at you -- and beams?

That He is delighted, that you are valuable, that you are precious to Him? That's hard to wrap our heads around. And I realize it's a very natural question at this point. How can you know that? How can you possibly know that, that's true? It sounds great, but how can you possibly know that, that's true. The answer is the cross. How do I know that you are precious to God because He sent His Son to die in your place. He sent His Son to Earth to live a perfect, sinless life. His hands were completely unstained by any kind of wrong so that he could reach out, he could take our sin, put it on his own shoulders, and he could die in our place, and then three days later, he rose from the dead so that to go into a relationship with this God that we are talking about, all we have to do is say, Lord, thank you for dying in my place. I choose to trust you. That simple step of faith brings us in a relationship with God that goes on forever and ever and ever. The fact that God did that is how I know that you are precious to Him.

And by the way, I don't think I can skip this -- if you are here today, and you don't have a relationship with God, maybe for the first time you are going, wait, that's how you know that God loves me, because of the cross? Maybe that's just broken through in some new way at this moment, or maybe you have heard it a bunch, but you realize, I don't actually have a relationship with God? You can have it right now. In fact, I'm going to
ask everybody. Close your eyes. If you are here today and you want that relationship with God and you don't have it, here's what you say to Him. Jesus, I'm sorry that I have done wrong. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. I believe that you rose from the dead. I choose to put my trust in you. Amen.

If you prayed that for the first time, please come talk to me after the service today or talk to one of the people down here praying. We want to celebrate with you. We want to tell you what it looks like for the next step in the relationship, but the reality is, it's that simple. It's that simple because you are that precious to Him. You are loved that deeply by Him. He made it easy because you are that precious. This is not just true of Daniel. You are highly esteemed. You are precious to Him. He says to Daniel, listen, wake up. Wake up. He pulls him up a little bit, and then He says, everything I'm asking you to do, I'm asking you to do because you are precious to me. Now Daniel, here's the demand. Stand up. Get ready. And Daniel does, and when He said this, when He said this to me, I stood up trembling. And I love the way that's stated.

He stood up trembling. He didn't just stand up. When I think of Daniel, I think of this powerful man of God, this powerful prophet, like everything he does is probably strong and steady, right? But he stands up trembling. He just barely gets up. He's rocking back and forth, and his knees are shaking. He's there but only just barely, and then the angel continued. He said do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them, but the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me for 21 days, and then Michael, one of the chief princes came to help me because I was detained there with the King of Persia.

Really interesting thing here. We could spend a lot of time on this today, but let me kind of just go for the throat and tell you what's happening here. Daniel is being given a glimpse behind the scenes of the normal, everyday world that we live in, and what he's being told from Gabriel or whoever this angel is he says, hey — hey, Daniel, when you started to pray, God's response is immediate. I know you have been praying for three weeks. It seems like God was waiting, but the reality is there was something going on that you didn't see. Last time we looked at Daniel 9 where Daniel began to pray and Gabriel came flying, right? It's like God said, hey, go, go, go. What we are being told here is that the same thing happened this time. As soon as Daniel began to pray God said to this angel, go, go, go, and this angel took off, but he couldn't get to Daniel because he was in a conflict with somebody called the prince of the kingdom of Persia. Now that sounds like a human kingdom, but it's not.

This is actually a description of another spiritual creature. The Bible doesn't give us a lot of details about these things called angels. One of the things we know is that there are some angels more powerful than others, and that some angels rebelled against God, and they fell and became what we call demons or demonic spirits. And apparently there are some fairly powerful ones, and this one in particular, the prince of Persia is a fallen angel known as a demon, that's focused on influencing the Persian empire. I mean that's what scripture says, and so what's happened is, this angel says, I came immediately, but I couldn't get to you because there was a conflict in the spiritual realm. I couldn't get all the way to you. I have been fighting, and until another angel came and helped, I couldn't get to you, and I don't know about you, but when I hear that, my first thought is like, what did that look like? And I picture light sabers, right? I don't know about you, but I picture some kind of weird battle going on.

That's just my brain trying to take unfathomable spiritual realities and put them in familiar terms because I can't wrap my head around it, and we are not supposed to try, honestly. We don't need to know what it looks like. The point we are being given here is just this, is that we only see part of the picture, okay, you hear me? We only see part of the picture. The things that we see happening around us is only part of the picture, in some ways only the tip of the iceberg. There is a whole other unseen realm in which things are happening, and that they have an impact in the world that we see every day, but the world that we see is only part of the picture, and I realize honestly, that in the modern culture that you and I live in, that's kind of an uncomfortable reality. The idea that there are angels and demons and spirits and spiritual battles, and this unseen realm, and that affects the world we live in.

Our culture basically says, you can't believe in that sort of thing because that makes you primitive or superstitious, right? But here's the thing. I was thinking about it this week. How many of you have ever shaken hands with somebody, and then found out they were sick? Yeah? Happens to me every single weekend.

[Laughter]

After you realize they are sick, what do you do with that hand that you shook hands with? Right? Like keep it away from my face, don't let it touch anything. As soon as possible you make a beeline for the bathroom to do what? To wash? To get rid of what? Germs. Okay, next question. How many of you have ever shaken hands with somebody, realized they were sick, looked at your hands and said, oh no, I see them. If that has happened to you, come talk to me afterwards. We have a counseling center we want to connect you with. You have never seen germs, and yet, we live every single day in the rock solid belief that this unseen world of germs has a very real impact on the world that we live in. You say, come on, come on. That's an interesting analogy, but the difference is, we have special tools that allows us to see the world of germs. We have microscopes, right? Yeah, that's true. That's kind of what this is. The Word of God is a tool that allows us to see occasionally into this world behind the scenes.

It's every bit as real as the world that we see and touch in the same way that the world of the germs that we can't see is every bit as real. The point is that we live every day in the reality of unseen realms that have a huge impact on the world. There is nothing superstitious or primitive about that belief, and the Bible is very clear. This is a reality that affects the world that we think of as the real world. It's not. It's only part of the
picture, so the angel says, it took me a while to get to you because of this battle, but now I have come.

Verse 14, now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come. While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and I was speechless. He can't open his mouth. He's at a loss for words.

Verse 16, and then the one that looked like a man touched my lips -- there's your second touch. He touched my lips, and I opened my mouth and I began to speak. Second touch, like the first touch, there's a delivery, and then there's a demand. They are both kind of implied. The delivery is, he's delivered the ability to speak. He was speechless, but now he can't open his mouth. The hand touches, and now he can speak. The demand is implied, do it. Speak. Speak up. He's been told stand up. Now he's being told, speak up. I don't know about you, but when I hear that God through an angel touches someone's lips and says, hey, speak up, what I expect to come pouring out of his mouth is -- I expect prophesy, right? Or I expect a profound statement of wisdom or faith or something like that. Instead, what we get is a profound statement just of honesty. Here's what Daniel says.

I said to the one standing before me, I'm overcome with anguish because of the vision, my Lord, and I feel very weak. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my Lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe. That's what comes out of his mouth. God opens his mouth, and he just pours out, fear and insecurity and weakness. But do you understand how profound that actually is? One of the hardest things you and I will ever do is admit how hard things are. To admit even to God, I am struggling. I am insecure. I am weak, but here's the reality. This is a teaching we find from the first to the last page of scripture. It's the more honest we are about our weakness, the more open we are to God's strength.

The more honest we are about our weakness, the more honest we are saying, I don't have it together. I don't have it figured out. I don't got this thing. I can't do this. I don't have what it takes. The more honest we are about our weakness, the more open we are to God's strength. I love the way the apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 12:10. He just goes right for the throat and he says, when I am weak, then I am strong. When I am weak, then I am strong. It's only when I acknowledge that I am weak, that I don't have it all together. I don't have what it takes, it's only then that I'm open to God's strength coming in, and I'm actually strong. It reminds me when my kids were little and they would play in the basement, and the toys would get all scattered, and we would say, hey, before you can be finished here, you have to clean up the floor. The floor has to be totally clear.

And sometimes they would pack everything into the toy box in the middle of the floor, and they would get so much stuff in there that when it was time to move the toy box to really clear the floor, they couldn't move it, and I would hear them grunting from downstairs, and pushing and pulling because they knew they were not done until the floor is clean, but they just weren't strong enough, and inevitably one of them would say, let's go get dad. He's big. And as a dad, like at that point, you are going to move that thing, right? I mean they express their dependence on me, I'm going to pick that thing up, and I'm going to get a hernia, but I'm not going to let them know, and I'm going to go set that thing down, and daddy will be in bed for a while, right?

It's in that expression, I can't do this, it's in that expression of weakness that they are most open to my strength coming in, and it works that way with God. And so this is a very profound thing that happens, but notice that God actually enables it. He touches him. He enables him to open his lips and to pour forth a confession of weakness. I'm not enough, and God goes, that's okay, because I am.

Verse 18, again, the one who looked like a man touched me, and He gave me strength. There's your third touch. He touches him, and He gives him strength. We know now every time there's a delivery, there's a what? There's a demand. Here's the demand. Do not be afraid. You who are highly esteemed, He said. Peace be strong now be strong. That's the demand. Daniel has been touched, and he's been told to stand up. He's been touched. He's been told to speak up. Now he's been touched and he's told to step up. He's told, it's time to move forward in courageous faith. I'll give you the strength, but it's time for you to step up, to move forward.

And when He spoke to me I was strengthened, and I said speak my Lord, since you have given me strength. I'm ready. I'm ready to move. And so He said, do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come. This is not over yet. The spiritual battle is still raging. History has not reached its conclusion yet, there are still more stages to come, but first, I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. No one supports me against them except Michael your prince.

The battle's still raging in the physical world as well as in the spiritual world, and really, what the angel is doing here is he's setting the stage for the interpretation of the vision that we'll get into next weekend, but what he's doing now, he's preparing Daniel. Three touches. Three deliveries. Three demands. Stand up, get ready. Speak up, be honest about your weakness, and step up. Step forward with courageous faith. Really, in some ways, what we see there encapsulates the lesson of the entire Book of Daniel. What we see there is really, in some ways, the bedrock truth for how it is that Daniel has managed to thrive throughout these last 70 years, throughout all of the ups and the downs and the turns and the twists and the setbacks and the advances, and it's basically this truth is that we thrive when we respond to God's touch by standing up, speaking up and stepping up.

God is always touching. God never leaves us alone in our difficult circumstances. God is always reaching out. Maybe it's directly through the power of the Holy Spirit. Maybe it's He touches our thoughts and our minds. Maybe it's the people He puts around us. Maybe it's circumstances. Maybe it's an angel at times, but God is never leaving His people alone in their difficult circumstances. He's constantly touching them. But with
each touch He delivers what is needed to do with His demands. The secret to thriving is to respond to what God calls us to. We thrive when we respond to God's touches by standing up, getting ready, by speaking up, confessing our need of Him, and by stepping up and moving forward in courageous faith. That's the secret to thriving in difficult circumstances, to trust that God is touching, and God is calling.

Four questions for you. The first question is just this. What is God waking you up from right now? It's often the first thing that happens when God touches us. He wakes us up out of something. Maybe it's out of despair that has it locked where we are. Maybe it's self pity that has us changed to our past. Maybe it's apathy. Maybe it's fear. It's depression. Maybe it's sin. Maybe the touch of God makes us become aware of the fact that I'm living in a way that's not consistent with who God is, with what God calls me to, and I need to make a change. I need to repent. I need to turn from it.

Maybe He wakes you up to the reality that you don't have a relationship with Him. You have a religion. You spend a lot of time in church, but you don't actually have a faith-based religion, a faith-based relationship like we talked about earlier today, but what is God waking you up from? That's the first step, often, to recognize that. Question number two is how is God calling you to stand up? How is God calling you to prepare for what is coming? Maybe it's you begin reading scripture on a regular basis, and finding out who He is and what He called you to. Maybe that's how you begin to prepare. Maybe you join a life group, and you get a group of people around you who hold you accountable and challenge you and encourage you and support you and all those things. That's how you begin to prepare for whatever's coming next. Maybe you start coming to church on a regular basis. Maybe you are visiting today and God's calling you to make this your church home. That's awesome. Maybe you are visiting from somewhere else, then where's the church there that God is calling you to?

How are you going to prepare, which requires you understand first, how are you preparing for what God is calling you to next? Question number three is, how is God calling you to speak up? How is God calling you to confess that you don't have it all together? That you don't have everything it takes, that you need Him desperately, and in that way, and in that honesty to become open to experiencing His strength being poured into you. How is God calling you to speak up?

Maybe that's just in private prayer to God, but maybe, honestly, sometimes that's in another group of people where you say to someone else, hey, I'm really struggling with this. I'm really feeling inadequate in this area. My wife and I have these conversations all the time, and they are important because it's in those that God begins to pour strength. How is God calling you to speak up? Question number four, how is God calling you to step up? How is God calling you to step forward in courageous faith this week, to trust Him in some new and significant way that says, I have been touched. I have experienced what God is doing in me. He's woken me up. I need to start moving forward now. What does that look like in I don't know what it looks like for you, because it looks different for each and every one of us, but I do know that there is this consistent pattern. God reaches out and touches us. He wakes us up to some reality, and then He says, okay, stand up. Get ready. Speak up about your need for me, and step up and move forward in courageous faith.

It's really raining.

[Laughter]

So you probably don't want me to end this right now because you don't want to go out and get wet, so --

Let's pray. God, the truth that we are precious to You is precious to us. It's a little hard for us to wrap our heads around that You could love us that much, but we see it in the cross, and we cling to it. We thank You. We revel in the fact that we are valuable to You. We thank You that by faith from what we have seen in terms of the way that You act with our representative Daniel, that this is a truth, that You are reaching out and touching your precious children each and every day. Give us eyes to see that. Make us sensitive to those touches, Lord, and give us whatever is needed. Deliver to us whatever is needed to allow us to stand up and get ready to speak up, to be honest with You, and to step up in courageous faith. In Jesus name, amen.