

Three Chairs

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- August 13, 2023

Well, well, well ... it's back-to-school Sunday here at Grace Covenant Church, and when I was thinking about what we could talk about today—again, I feel like this is the time of year that's like a January 1 with New Year's resolutions and those sorts of things.

I have two purposes for our time together today. One is to look at three conditions of the human soul and have an honest evaluation, which each of taking inventory and seeing where we are, which chair we're going to sit in. And then the second part is a bit of an introduction to Grace Covenant Church. I was told when I got back that we have a lot of people visiting here. I know a number of you have moved here from out of state and you're looking for a church. How's your summer so far? This blistering heat! I'm ready to move out of here and I've been here for forty years! Wow, welcome to Austin.

Anyway, I thought I would remind some of you who go here or are members here and inform some of you who are relatively new about what we do and why we do it, and literally, how we do it and how you might get involved. And you'll see how these two parts actually overlap.

So, for part one we're looking at the conditions of the human soul. And this comes from observations from a class I took a number of years ago at Boston College. It was a night class on the meaning of life. And we studied various geniuses throughout history. We studied works from four thousand years of wisdom, six different languages. In this particular talk, I enjoyed what I learned from a scholar named Søren Kirkegaard. And he talks about the different stages of a person's life or the different conditions of the human soul—that overlapped with a lot of Bible information about conditions of the human soul. So, I'm going to define these three conditions. I want you to think about where you would sit--that's how it's going to end (there's a test at the end)—and what you're going to do about that.



Chair One: Committed

We start right here with the first chair. And I'm going to call this "committed chair." This is a person who has a surrendered commitment to Jesus Christ. If you look at the chair itself, it's a simple chair. It's very portable. It's spartan. And it's to emulate this—not a simplistic faith, but a simple way of looking at God and a relationship with God—that Jesus Christ is this person's king. And that means that He has absolute authority over his or her life. And the person who is in this chair, this committed chair, the marrow of their soul runs rampant with joy and appreciation for being an heir to this great King. Joy and happiness and gratitude are what drives this person. And their purpose is somewhat simple—not simplistic, but simple. One, it is to have a progressively deepening, intimate, loving relationship with the God of the Bible, Yahweh, in this life all the way into eternity, knowing Him more.

And the second purpose that they live with is to become like Christ in all of life; to glorify God by becoming in the image of what they were meant to be. This is a person who enjoys the energy of serving the King. And the chair is to show that this person is not calling this life their home. They're foreigners here. They're just passing through. They serve a greater kingdom, an eternal kingdom whose author and designer is God himself. And so, they live a life like they're tourists. And how do you pack as a tourist? You pack light. You're just passing through. That's the committed person.

Chair Three: Comfortable

This one is a person who lives for their personal comfort. That's their value: whatever makes their soul or body feel good, however they want to define that. There are people who want to live comfortably who live an exciting life and who are adventurous and are living for the next adrenaline buzz. Sometimes it means *I want to be lazy and fat like a cat. That's me.* They make decisions based on whatever makes them feel safe or excited or whatever it might be.

Now the reason I went from chair number one to chair number three is because they're consistent with their values. This person [*Chair Three*] answers to no one and has no ultimate authority, and this one [*Chair One*] has God as their authority, and they live consistently like this.

Chair Two: Compromised or Conflicted

The second chair is compromised, and I would maybe even use the word "conflicted." Because they're trying to live both somehow. And if you look at the chair itself, it's neither efficient nor comfortable. If you've had one of these chairs, they're good for nothing. This chair is like a futon chair. Do you remember futons? Oh, yeah. I mean, a lot of us owned futons, because do you know what a futon is? It's a couch. It's a bed. And then you bought it, and it was neither. And then you hated it, so you gave it to a friend, and you could only give it to a friend who hadn't had a futon yet. And then they gave it to a friend. And then we ran out of people who hadn't had a terrible futon experience, and we put them on the curb for big trash pickup. And those guys wouldn't even pick it up. It's like this thing doesn't even deserve to be thrown away because it was neither: it was a terrible couch, it was a terrible bed. Just choose one or the other.

This is a futon Christian. You get in one or the other. Just choose. This futon Christian comes in two different flavors. There's one that gravitates toward this and sometimes looks like a committed follower of Christ because of their extreme ethics. But mostly they're very disciplined people; they're legalistic, is the point. They're not in a relationship with God in a loving way. They're just dutiful. And their legalism allows them to be able to control. They control their own life, they like to control other people's lives, and honestly, they like to control God. If they do their part, then God is obliged to do His part.

They're not filled with joy, I can tell you. They're usually filled with judgment. Because of that they're usually angry, and their anger sometimes looks like depression, because the control thing is really hard to hold onto. And when you're busy judging others and judging yourself and even judging God, because He's not playing according to this person's rules, it makes the person angry. No joy—just frowns.

And then there's part of the futon Christian that looks this way towards the comfortable, and they're the camouflage Christian. You can't tell them apart from this group of people. This person goes to church on Sunday. They probably, maybe--who knows—maybe God knows—if they really, sincerely trusted Christ for their forgiveness of sins. They're living like this, because ultimately in the war between surrendering to God and surrendering to their own comforts, whenever it gets difficult, they're going to go towards comfort. And they're just going to live with vocabulary and Jesus-speak, but not live that life.

This is a miserable chair to live in. Because this person has this continual slow and constant drip of guilt and regret. Futon Christian, choose. It's a terrible place to live.

Generally speaking, those are conditions of the soul. And what I'd like to do now is to look at an outline that shows how these three relate to God. And then I'll look at how they choose values and ethics.

Relating to God: Chair One

How they relate to God—chair one, this person has a morning ritual, quite often, and it goes like this. It's based on a loving, progressively intimate relationship with the triune God of the Bible. And this person says, "What should we do today? I'm here to enjoy living my life with You." This person prays regularly, "I will go anywhere to do anything with anyone at any time" and looks forward to answers from God himself to be part of that. This person is doing whatever

he or she needs to do to enjoy the comfort of being with God. This person's relationship with God is as an acquaintance.

Relating to God: Chair Two

The legalist, the one who's leaning this way, has a relationship with God that's like a distant boss with whom he meets daily with a checklist of things to do. This person's spiritual condition is working for God, getting stuff done. Again, most of the time it's in the context of control. Because if you do the right things—the legalism, the rule of the law, the letter of the law—they don't know the spirit of the law, because you'd have to know the writer of the law. They just know the letter, the do's and the don'ts, the blacks and the whites, of all of life. And it's so that if they can control enough and follow the recipe, then God will be obliged to keep their family and their own life safe and predictable.

And this person, the camouflage/futon Christian, when they relate to God on this side, he looks at God and His relationship and will say words like this: “the big guy upstairs.” You can read the Bible from cover to cover and you're not going to see anyone, even antagonists towards Yahweh, have a flippant attitude expressed in the phrase “the big guy upstairs.” What? No. This person looks at God like He's a grandfather, not a father trying to help him become like Christ, but as a grandfather that's out to spoil him. And God forgives ... Hey, he's going to blend in and do these things and practice sin regularly, because you know what? That's what God does; He forgives.

Relating to God: Chair Three

This person's relationship with God is living a paradox of the transcendent and immanent nature of God. In other words, He's almighty and great, and yet He's local and intimate. It would be like if you were the daughter of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. That man for years had power and authority and respect as he was the supreme commander of all the Allied Forces during World War II. And if he had a daughter--I don't know if he did--but if he had an eight-year-old daughter, she could climb up into his life and tell him about the happiest moment of her day as a little eight-year-old and the things that made her cry. And he would be attuned to that.

And as a twenty-eight-year old she could still climb into the lap of General Dwight D. Eisenhower on a particularly bad day and put her head on her father's shoulder and weep. It's an

interesting dynamic in the Bible where we talk about the greatness and the grandeur of the great Creator, but also the Savior who became man so that we might have a co-reigning relationship with Him.

That's how they relate to God. I want to look at how they find value—how these different states of the soul find value and ethics.

Finding Value and Ethics: Chair One

This person who's committed chair—let's talk about that person again. The committed looks at the Bible as the absolute authority on the nature of God and who He is and how we're supposed to live our lives. So, when the Bible talks about how to dress, that person will dress accordingly. What sorts of things should we use for entertainment? *I will submit to that.*

Here's the key. Why? Why would a person be in such subjection to the Bible and its values and ethics? Because they know that the King who they serve is a good, good King. He's a benevolent leader and owner of our souls. And this person knows that whatever the King would have them do, wherever He would have them go, to be with whomever they are to be with, would be good for our souls and for the kingdom of God that they serve.

And knowing that, they look at the passages in the Bible that say, *You know what? Chair one people should only date Chair One people, because Chair One people should only marry Chair One people.* And so, they would rather be lonely than compromised. Because He's a good, good Father and wants what's good for us. That's where this person finds his or her ethics.

Finding Values and Ethics: Chair Two

This person is torn and twisted about what to do. The legalist is following the details of the law but not knowing why and not enjoying obedience. There's a passage in the Bible that literally says that obedience is not cumbersome. And the reason obedience is not cumbersome is because love is the single most enslaving motive that a human being can experience. Let me say that again: love is the most enslaving motive in the human experience.

Have you ever loved someone, hopefully, that you would give your freedom for them? *I will do anything you want me to do because of my love for you.* Love motivates. This person knows no love to this acquaintance and, in this case, distant boss. So, they might be looking and

then living this life, but it's out of duty and it's out of obligating God to do what He promised (He didn't) He would do, because *I did my things*.

This person, when they find their ethics and values, will obey up until the point of it interrupting their primary values of being comfortable. So, certainly, *I will do what the Lord calls me to do until it causes me to be embarrassed in front of my friends, mocked at work or school, or keeps me from my ambitions to become the owner of the corner office or whatever it might be*.

So, in the war that's happening in this conflicted futon lifestyle, there's a war between the Lord and me ego. And most often the ego wins.

Finding Values and Ethics: Chair Three

And this one ... their ethics and values are simple. Everything's relative. Morality is relative. There really are very few absolutes. And the way they look at God is that God is everywhere all the time, maybe, or the new atheism that's entirely nihilistic but still tries to find purpose in life.

Bible Labels

So, those are the three conditions of the soul, particularly in their relationship with God. It's how they relate to God, it's how they find ethics in life. In the Bible, just to be clear, there are names for them. The first one over here [*Chair One*] nowadays would be called a committed disciple or a dedicated follower of Christ.

In the Bible, this one [*Chair Two*] is called a carnal Christian. Now, those are church words. Let me describe it. "Carnal" is a word that literally means "flesh" or "meat." It's an oxymoron. And the carnal Christian is showing the conflict here by saying that carnal means "flesh, earthly, or temporal." And Christian means "eternal and spiritual." So, it's trying to live this carnal, spiritual flesh-spirit life. And it doesn't work. For the futon Christian, it's like, *Choose, one or the other. Come on!*

So, the Bible calls that one a devoted follower, this one is a carnal Christian, and this one [*Chair Three*] the Bible says is just a nonbeliever. And the vocabulary used in the Bible will either be "lost" or their soul "is dead to God."

Biblical Examples

There are examples throughout the Bible that put people in different chairs of the condition of their souls. We're going to be looking at the Old Testament United Kingdom period for our fall teaching time. And we're particularly going to look at the life of David, because David finds himself in this committed chair. He's going to get a nickname or tagline for his experience, and it will say "David, a man after God's own heart." God calls him that. *That's David, a man after my own heart.*

He gives birth to a son named Solomon. This is a generational decline. David's son will have a divided heart. He'll have that war between trying to follow Yahweh like his father did and following his own ego. And there will be conflict after conflict, and he leaves a ruinous experience for the nation of Israel and in his own life as well. And in the worst chair: Solomon has a son who becomes king and his name is Rehoboam. There is little or no evidence that Rehoboam has a spiritual life.

I'm trying to use examples that you might know from the Old Testament. And then in the New Testament there's a wonderful story that many of you might know called "The Prodigal Son." In this story there are two prodigals, actually.

But the younger son is right here [*Chair Three*]. He's comfortable. He's going to live a sensual life. He just wants to live with love and excitement and physical pleasure, and he will spend his father's money to make that happen. He has a dreadful experience.

And then the older brother in the story that's leaning this way is a legalist [*Chair Two*]. And in the story, he is literally enraged by his father's forgiveness and generosity. Because when the prodigal son returns, he shouldn't get gifts of forgiveness and generosity; and he had done the right thing, and so his father owes him grace. Owes him grace?

And then the third, the committed example [*Chair One*], would be the prodigal son having come to his senses and returned. He just wants to be on his father's ranch just shoveling manure. Because he would love that. And when his father greets him and restores him to full sonship with a robe and a ring and sandals, he will live out his entire experience wanting to know the love of his father like he never has before. And he will be intrinsically motivated forever by joy and gratitude for his salvation, because he was once lost, and now he's found. He was once dead and now he's alive. He will live a committed life.

Do you know those stories? That's what it looks like.

Application #1: What Chair Do You Sit In?

Now it's time for the test. Boy, if we had time I would lock these doors and I would have you guys come up and have a seat. Let's start with my wife Melinda. I'm watching.

We don't have time for that, but what we do have time for is this. Why don't you tell someone who you met during our meet and greet time which chair you're sitting in. And why don't we stand up and do that for a second. No, we're not going to do that! I would have done that the week I left for vacation, not the week I got back. *You go first? No, I'm going to serve you by going last.*

It's not chair you're in; it's what chair you want to be in. You want to be in that chair. We all want to be in that chair. Would you listen to the calling of God's Spirit to your spirit? He wants you to live here, for His glory and your joy.

Application #2: How to Get into Chair One

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

And so, we're moving into part two—how you get from Chair Two and Chair Three to Chair One. And we're going to see in Deuteronomy chapter 6, a simple passage, but a passage of primary influence—it's going to be quoted throughout the Bible and the Jews today still memorize it and quote it every day, sometimes three times a day—that it tells us how we get to Chair One. And the reason I'm bringing this up is because it's a nice overlap with what we're doing at this church. I want to remind some of you and I want to inform those of you who are new. This is what we're doing.

Step 1: Love the Lord with All Your Heart

Step one in getting to chair one is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul and your strength. Look what it says in Deuteronomy chapter 6: "Hear, O Israel: Yahweh

our God, Yahweh is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”

That’s how it starts. He’s trying to show us we need to define this with a relationship, and it’s a loving relationship. And the nature of God is to enjoy Him. And you need to start this journey of loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength by answering this simple question in your heart of hearts: Do you believe this to be true, that your wildest and greatest dreams, your hopes and ambitions for your life, are pitiful, shallow, and worthless compared to God’s plans, hopes and dreams for your life? If you believe that, if you have completely and absolutely surrendered to Him, it could take you places, having you do things and enjoy the fullness of what it means to be human—if you just did that. If you believe that in five and ten years, fifty, a hundred years from now, if you would just trust that He is a good, good Father, that He’s a benevolent King and only wants what’s great for you that glorifies Him, then that will take away your fear to love Him with all your heart, soul, and strength.

Do you want to know if you believe that or not? Pray this prayer: “I will go anywhere to do anything with anyone at any time.” You pray that sincerely and then listen for the glitch. If you get a glitch—like “Whoa!”—it means that you think that if you pray that prayer and mean it, God Almighty will send you somewhere you don’t want to go to be with someone you can’t get along with to do something you can’t stand at a very inconvenient time. And do you know why you believe that? Pause ... because it’s the oldest lie in all of creation.

This all started with a lie in the garden. When Adam and Eve are quite literally living in paradise and the devil says, “Is He a good god? Did He leave something out? Wasn’t there something more that would make life better for you?” ... that’s how it starts. That lie rattles around in every one of our souls. It’s intrinsic of our bent, our sin nature, and we have help from outside. And it’s because we can’t get to this chair because we can’t love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, because we don’t think He’s truly, absolutely, perfectly good and cannot do ill for us. And if we can check that box, we can move towards Chair One with a complete sense of surrender. Anytime, anywhere, with anyone, to do anything. And I can’t wait to see how this ends. It’ll end with the glory of God.

Step 2: Live the Bible

Part one: love the Lord your God. Part two: basically, in just a few words, it means to live the Bible. Now this is on parenting, but you can parent yourself. It's the way to get to Chair One from Chairs Two and Three.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Look what it says in verses 6 through 9: “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your heart.” Sure, “impress them on your children,” but on your life too. Here’s how. “Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

Look what it says—it says, “Teach them diligently.” That’s like a formal kind of teaching. That’s what we do here at Grace in our courses, in the classes that we have—formal teaching, learning what the Bible says—to the original audience and what that says about God and how to become like Christ in all of life.

Then it says we’re supposed to talk about the Bible when you’re going into your house and when you’re going out of your house, when you’re lying down and when you’re getting up. The point is that we’re learning how to apply it in all kinds of life situations. The Bible is coming up and it’s defining what is right and real and true in real time. We do that here a lot in our communities where we have age-graded classrooms so that you can go through life in stages together and look how to talk about the Bible as it’s happening in real time.

He says to walk the Bible. And what I mean by that is he says to tie it on your forehead, tie it on your wrists. You may have experienced this in New York City in Orthodox Jewish

neighborhoods, and sometimes in Israel, particularly in Jerusalem. They'll have these boxes and they'll have them tied to their head and to their hands. But I think there's a bigger meaning to it than literally doing that. It's to think biblically; do biblically; be transformed by the renewing of your mind by the Bible. And then, give your bodies as a living sacrifice to Him, and then all that you do with that flesh is a reflection of obedience to a good and godly King.

And then finally, I think it says to brag about the Bible. Put it on the doorposts of your house and on your outer gates. When people walk in, they think, "Ohhh. You're one of those Bible people." "I am." Some of you do this literally; you put Bible verses on the side of your living room wall. Good for you. One of the ways I do it is that a lot of times when I have big God things that happen in my life or He is miraculously showing up, I will grab some kind of token, some kind of memory tool. Sometimes it's a rock, and I have a bearing set—that's a longer story—but anyway, they sit there on my shelf. And then sit on my shelf for two reasons. One is the bragging part. They help me remember in times of doubt, *Hey, look at all the God stories you have all around you*. And then they're attention getters. People walk in and they say, "So, why do you have a constant velocity bearing in your office." And I'll say, "Well, I'm surprised that you would ask, but I'm glad to tell you. Here's how the story goes—and God's the hero." Brag about your walk with God with the Word of God.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength. Live the Bible out in your own life. And guess what? That's what we do at Grace Covenant Church. That's why we meet. That's why we exist.

Grace Covenant Church's Purpose Statement

Look what it says in our purpose statement. You can see it on the website. "Grace exists to glorify God by guiding people to become like Christ in all of life. We are transformed by grace and biblical truth, committed to relational discipleship and engaging in ministry." What does that mean? It means that we are a community of First Chair people trying to guide other people to become First Chair people. It means that as believers we're all ministers. We're looking for people that God brings into our lives who are Chair Two and Chair Three people, and we say, *Hey, I'm on a journey there. I'm trying to stay in this chair. Do you want to come with me?*

In the detailed application of that purpose statement, you'll find in some of our other literature this sentence. It says that "Grace is a regional church that worships God, equips disciples for ministry, and takes the good news of Jesus Christ into our community and into our world."

I want you to see in that statement two points of emphasis: one, that we're a regional church, and I'll show what that means; and two, that we're equipping disciples for ministry. In the way that we do things around here, when we say that we're a regional church, it's an acknowledgement that we're on the corner of three freeways. But it's more of an acknowledgement that we know that many of you, and even most of you, are driving several miles to get here, and that you're driving by two or three outstanding Bible-teaching churches. And you're coming on Sunday. And when the leadership makes decisions here at Grace Covenant Church, we make decisions saying, *Look, they did their part to get here; let's make sure it's worth it to them. Let's make sure we provide as many opportunities for a person, that once they get here on campus, we can maximize their ability to move from Chair Three and Chair Two to Chair One and stay in Chair One by loving the Lord and living the Word.*

And so, that's why we have so many ministries that take place here at Grace Covenant Church on Sunday, because there is no easier time to experience connection with other believers than on Sunday morning. We know you've made the journey in.

And here's a fact of spiritual truth—that you can't get to Chair One committed and stay in Chair One committed if you come to church for one service and leave. That's soul physics. It can't happen. You have to have more. There are non-Sunday opportunities available to us through Grace Covenant Church—midweek, daytime, morning, whatever it might be. The easiest one is Sunday morning, because you could go to a community that is helping you through your stage of life. You could go through a course that helps teach formally what the Bible says about various things. Your children will be cared for, depending upon their age. And you might actually be disciplined during that period of time.

My challenge is, this is the easiest time, from 9:00 to 12:30, that's available all week long. If you're coming once and leaving, would you consider coming to both services? Come to one worship time together, collective worship, and then go and enjoy one of the multiple opportunities to either serve or get involved in one of our communities or courses, because it's

the most convenient. We know you've come a while to get here, and we're going to make the most of that.

The second part of the way we do things is that we're a regional church that equips disciples. I want you to know if you're new that everyone around you is part of a discipleship process. I'm just a pastor, but what we have out here are the ministers. We equip the people to do the ministry. Everybody's involved in helping guide people from Chair Three and Chair Two to Chair One. We're a family. We're a community. We're a collective whole that has a single purpose, and that is to enjoy Chair One living. And we want to be there and we want to bring as many people with us as possible. We're not a church that says, *You know, you come, you sit, the pros will show you how to do it. Go back and take good notes and go home.* No, no, no, we want you involved in that process because the Bible says so.

Now today we have a connection event here. There's a word for it, I think—a Connections Fair. We should call it that. We have a Connections Fair today that helps you get a picture of what's going on. There will be leaders and pastors and volunteers in the old auditorium. After church you can go through, grab some pizza on the way in—we're doing pizza under the trees in 100-degree heat, so we don't want anyone to leave the building and die. We do want you to go get your children, then come back and get the pizza, and then stay indoors where everything is air conditioned. But look at an opportunity to get involved on Sunday morning, or to serve, or to get involved in one of our courses or communities. There are some cards and some literature available that will help you understand all that's available to you, on Sunday and midweek. You can't get to Chair One if you're here an hour and fifteen minutes a week.

Two ministries I want to bring attention to beside our courses and our communities is our men's ministry, which is about to fire up. It's going to start on August 27. There's a thing called "Man Night." It's here on campus. We're just going to eat meat and get to know people. Why wouldn't you want to do that? Even if you're a vegetarian you can come and enjoy? Just smell it, you know. And then on August 29 our women's ministry starts with its "Girlfriends at Grace." That's here on campus as well. It's a wonderful opportunity to meet ladies who are trying to all go through life together to get to Chair One, a committed life to the glory of God, enjoy Him forever, and guide as many people as possible.

What we're trying to do here is provide a place for you to belong. Everyone needs to belong somewhere. So, why not here?

Let me give you my lunch talk. This is a talk where people say, “Hey, I’m new, I’d love to know more about the church. Can we go to lunch?” And this is what the lunch talk looks like. I’ll say, “Look, we’re a big church. Sorry, but we spend a considerable amount of time trying to be small. And here’s how you feel the smallness and intimacy of a church as big as ours. You go somewhere and you get involved. And one of the best ways to connect with other people is to serve. There’s something about serving shoulder to shoulder with someone—not necessarily just being a taker but being a giver—and you’ll make friends. And maybe through all of that and the providence of God, you’ll meet that person that you can go through life with on this journey to chair one. Get involved. Go to things. Find this as your village with a common goal and a common purpose—to know God and to enjoy Him.”

And then if they have children, I’ll usually say, “I’m going to tell you something, because I’ve lived longer than I ever thought I would, and I’ve seen things and I know a pattern. You have children, and if I were you, I would just do this. You’re going to lose your primary influence in their lives during their teen years. It’s going to hurt. It’s good and it’s necessary. It’s part of becoming an adult. And when you lose that influence, the primary influence will fall upon mentors and their peers. They’ll do what they say. Now, what you can do, because you’re obligated to God to raise your children in a godly way? What you can do is make sure they’re hanging around the right mentors and the right peers during that difficult time when you lose your influence. If you do nothing, their mentors will be their coach, their dance instructor, their drama leader, and their peers will be in that group of people. But if I were you—I’m not telling you how to live your life, but I’m telling you how to live your life—this is what you do. You make sure your children are on this campus by fourth grade. You make sure they’re plugged in by the fourth and fifth grade for sure. They will be brought into a communal relationship with people in Chair One who will mentor them and who will be their peers to make them like Christ in all of life. When they get to junior high and high school, I don’t care if they want to come or not. I slow down to about three miles per hour, I kick them out of the car and make them go up in the Loft. That whole ministry is built around this, knowing this to be true: that their primary place of people of influence will be mentors and their peers, and they’ll surround them with college kids and adults that love Jesus Christ as their King. And obedience is not an obligation; it is a privilege. And the sap in their souls is joy and appreciation. And you get them there in those

junior high and senior high years, providing peers and mentors, and you'll be glad you did. It's up to you to raise your children."

This community, I think, is wanting to help. Because this value of making mentors and disciples and peers starts in fourth grade around here. Our fourth graders help with the elementary kids. Our junior high and high school kids help with our children's ministry. Everyone's looking to help everyone that God brings them move from Chair Three and Two to Chair One. Join the team.

I got to go to the last two days of youth camp. There was a lot going on there and I wanted to see how the skit ended and I wanted to be part of watching the teens get baptized. Oh, wow, we have a great youth program! Anyway, this one father was baptizing his daughter, and here's what he said.



This is Matt Zink and he's baptizing Jordan, and he said this: "I am so proud. Seventeen years ago, we dedicated Jordan as a baby at Grace Covenant Church—seventeen years ago. And it was our promise to raise her for the glory of God, being part of the church. And we promised the church that we would come alongside in that journey. And on that journey over seventeen years it's been a joy to be the father that watched you grow in Christ" (he's talking to Jordan) "and in your faith as a person. Your kindness, humility, your patience, oh, your deep patience. We are

just so proud of your journey.” And then Matt said, “I baptize you as your brother and your father in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

And I watched that, and as I was listening to him, I was thinking, *He just did it*. I want you to be the Zink family. Look at all that’s available. If there’s a better ministry, church, youth experience in the city of Austin, go there. Do whatever it takes, whatever it costs, to get to Chair One as a dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ. And then bring as many people there as you possibly can.

I’m asking, maybe this is the place for you to belong. And I’m not asking you as a pastor of a church; I’m asking you as a brother and a sister, like all the other ministers all around you. We want to be part of helping you become like Christ in all of life and to enjoy a loving relationship with the Creator of the universe and the Savior of your soul. Everyone around you wants that. I ask for them. Maybe this is the place for you to belong.

And maybe this is the place for you to serve. That’s Grace. I love this place.

Would you join me in prayer?

Lord, we celebrate Your glory, that You would be a transcendent God that’s unknowable in many ways and profound and out there. And then, You are immanent, You are close, and You came and became one of us so that we might enjoy an intimate relationship with the most Holy God. Because of that, Lord, I’d ask that You would help us see Your providence in our lives, that You’ve arranged good works in Jesus Christ before time even began. We look at souls around us on our left and our right, even in our grocery store, that we are here for a purpose, and it’s to be a dedicated follower of Christ and to guide other people to be dedicated followers of Christ, that we might all become like Christ in all of life. There it is—the chief end of man. And I would ask that You would help us play our part. And I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.