

Citizens in Heaven

Part 2

Various passages

Dr. Matt Cassidy---- March 17, 2024

Check your passport, Grace. We're not from here. We're part of a different kingdom. In the next year or so churches all around the country and around the world will be divided over politics or politicians, or even on how to apply being civic minded as an American. And what we're going to do at Grace is to transcend that. We're going to choose a kingdom over a country. We love this country, but we belong to King Jesus.

As Paul says in Philippians, our citizenship is in heaven. And we can certainly relate to Peter when he says that while we're here we feel like we're exiles, like we're foreigners, like we're strangers in our own country. We have a kingdom value, and the kingdom value that we'll share together is that we will care less and less about more and more issues. But we're going to care more and more about less and less. We're going to care a lot about a few things, and we'll care a little about all the other.

So, like we said last week, it came up at our house this week. Hey, Grace ... same team. Same team. Let's not get lost in the trivia.

I want to share a testimony with you. Someone came up to me last week and she reminded me of how much joy we have when we go to other parts of the world and share those few things we have in common, but when we care so much about those few things. Susan Phillips is a long-term member here and one of our missionaries. And know this—she loves the country. Her son-in-law is the team leader for a very elite special forces team and serves the military well. She loves her King and country. So, this is Susan Phillips:

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Video Link: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/yrv13zrr211g830qkozbh/Susan-Phillips_3.mp4?rlkey=rcapwo1h6423o7jzrgnd68l27&dl=0

My name is Susan Phillips and my husband Greg and I have been members of Grace for thirty-six years. Several years ago, Grace sent us to a foreign country in the East where we were

able to serve for five years. The nationals of that country are not allowed to have the freedom to make decisions about where they worship or how they worship. Yet foreigners were allowed to gather together in what are called international fellowships. So, it may look something like renting a spot, renting a building, renting a dining room—that type of thing—and we would all come together there on Sunday. The thing about this is that, whereas we’re used to freely coming to church, here we would have to show our passports so that we could prove that we are citizens not of that country. And so, you would have people from all over the world working in that city in different capacities, yet they would be together. And the only thing, if you can imagine people from different denominations, from different liturgical types, anywhere from very, very traditional to Pentecostal—and the only thing we could be united in, in that kind of environment, in order to enjoy the privilege of being able to fellowship together, was that Jesus is God’s Son, that He died for our sins, He was buried, and He was resurrected. That was it. We couldn’t divide hairs on doctrine or how communion was done, or what worship sounded like, because we were needing to appreciate and love what God was calling other people to do. So, in this sense, the only way we could approach it was what Matt shared. We had to have humility so that we could have unity in that.

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Susan came up afterwards, and I thought, *She needs to share that with everyone—how to care a lot about a little, and a little about a lot.*

I’ve seen the future, Grace. There’s a storm coming. I’ve seen the future because I’ve studied the past. And I can tell you, we need to buckle up. Because the puppets will incite us with every form of anger or fear so that we might find ourselves enraged or cowering. And they will invent, they will allow and maybe even cause, circumstances of chaos so to get us addicted to anger or fear, so that they can make money, so that they can stay in power or gain power.

And we want to get ahead of it. We want to study how to think right in those times. We were going to call the whole series (just to make fun of a Dale Carnegie book)—because this is what happens often—*How to Lose Friends and Influence No One*. Right? That’s if you do this wrong. But we thought, Hey, let’s do this the right way. Let’s just talk about our citizenship in heaven.

There are two reasons that I am deeply committed to my belief that the future has storms waiting for us. The reason I can see the future is because I studied the past. There are two reasons, and one is kind of shallow and superficial. The other is a deeper and darker reason I believe that's going to happen.

The superficial reason is that people in power and with influence are going to light fires to our primal emotions—primal—fight or flight—hatred and fear. And they're going to do that, they're going to target those emotions because we just respond to those emotions. You just react. You don't think. They don't want us to think. And it just blows things up.

And the reason they're going to do that is because people in power and with influence—the politicians and the people in the media—are hemorrhaging money. And they are losing what little influence they had left. And they must, must have more money. And they must, must, must have more power. And so, they'll do whatever they have to do, they'll allow whatever needs to be allowed or even caused, so that you'll click here and vote here. That's the plan.

That's the first reason I'm convinced that it's going to be crazy. The deeper reason and the deeper motive, the one that's darker still; the reason that I have seen the future, is not just because I've studied the past, but because I've studied the Bible. And these people who are doing these various things are just puppets. And the puppet master is the devil himself, and he loves chaos.

Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world ...

Last week we briefly looked at Romans 12:2. It's where Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world." This world is in temporary custody of the devil. That's what the Bible says is going on right now in this period of time. And in temporary custody, this world is being commanded by the devil. And the devil thrives on chaos and disorder and confusion and division. He specializes in it.

The devil loves noise and hates music.

--- C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis said it poetically and simply. Here's the line—let's all repeat it: “The devil loves noise and hates music.”

And so, in this world, the devil has demons. The darker motivation behind all this is that he seeks out things of tranquility and peace and worship and order, and wrecks those. He makes those into noise.

So, in summary, “conformed to this world” is division through the addictive nature of the emotions of hate and fear to divide and destroy government, families, and the Church.

And so, today in our series I thought I'd spend some time helping us understand how we should live in the omnipresence of hatred and fear. How do we live in the sludge of life around us? And the answer is for us to turn our thoughts and be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We should turn our thoughts toward the nature of God and His attributes. And I've looked at the nature of God and looked at the names of God and synced those together so we can remember those in times of rage and times of panic. The nature of God is attached to the names of God, and this will describe His nature.

Anger

So, let's look at the first one: anger. This world wants us to respond impulsively to anger and doesn't want us to think about it. It wants us to just experience it, like two thugs just punching each other or touching each other on the chest, waiting for the first guy to throw the first punch, because that guy goes to jail. Don't think, *Is that going to be worth jail time?* Just throw the punch.

So, the first step in understanding anger and how to live with it is to stop and think. Literally, make a list. Why are you so angry? Me? I'm pretty good at anger. I've been practicing for years. And so, here's my list:

1. I love this country and I feel like it's slipping into chaos.

2. It's a beautiful thing, and I feel like I'm losing something precious, something valuable and enviable in all of human history. And the puppets who I'm losing it to are evil and greed.
3. Truth tellers get censored, and the lying liars get promoted and they get bonuses.
4. There's no consequence for those who are arrogant.
5. And occasionally, you'll see one of them literally mock God. And they wake up rich and healthy.

Ultimately, my anger is towards God. Does He see what's happening? Is He incapable of doing anything about it? *Do something here!*

That's just my list. You could go home and make your list of whatever it is particularly—not just the political climate of today, but anything, whatever it might be—at work.

And here's where I want us to go. We have a patron saint of anger. I love this man. I can't wait to meet him later. His name is Asaph. And he writes this psalm that I go to. It's a classic. "Psalm" means "song." It's a classic rock song. For those who have problems with anger, and the anger is generally towards injustice, memorize these lyrics. Psalm 73—it's a big hit in this world. It's such a good psalm, there's nothing hidden in the Hebrew. Let me just read it. And see if you can identify with this psalmist. I love this Asaph.

Psalm 73:1-8, 11-13, 16-22

¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.

³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.

⁵ They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills.

⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.

⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits.

⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression.

¹¹ They say, “How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?”

¹² This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.

¹³ Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence.

¹⁶ When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply.

¹⁷ Then ... I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

¹⁸ Surely you place them on slippery ground; You cast them down to ruin.

¹⁹ How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!

²¹ When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,

²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before You.

Verse 1: “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have not struggled; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression.”

And now they mock God. “They say, ‘How would God know? Does the Most High know anything, anything at all?’ This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.”

It makes Asaph and me, sometimes, regret even trying to do good. He says this: “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply.”

Do you like him so far? I love it. This man is reading my diary. Yeah, okay, I’ve got the anger part. Now how do I get out of this addiction to porn anger? How do I get away from this anger porn?

And then ... and then... and then Asaph says, “Then I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.” This is where anger goes to die—at that sanctuary of God. “Surely You place them on slippery ground”—not me, but them on a slippery ground. “You cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!”

Now he thinks back: *Boy, and I was thinking that I envied the arrogant.* Here’s what he said about himself: “When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before You.” He was just reacting in anger. He wasn’t thinking.

Psalm 73:23-28

23 Yet I am always with You; You hold me by my right hand.

24 You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

27 Those who are far from You will perish; You destroy all who are unfaithful to You.

28 But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all Your deeds.

And here's what he thinks: "Yet I am always with You; You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And earth has nothing I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from You will perish; You destroy all who are unfaithful to You. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all Your deeds."

I've seen the future, Grace, because I've studied the past. There's a storm coming. And I've seen the future because I've studied the Bible. And God is sovereign.

Adonai: Sovereign God

The name of God that I want you to learn or know today, the one that delivers you from anger, because you wonder if He's in control, is Adonai. God is sovereign. Sovereign God, Adonai. He is our judge. Every single person in any place of authority, any kind of authority, has been placed there by Adonai, the sovereign God of the universe. And because they have any kind of authority, they are judged according to the authority that they've been delegated. To him whom much has been given, much is expected. So, every person, then, will be held accountable.

And Asaph is saying, *Look, I have a list of reasons why I'm angry.* And we agree. And then he says, *But that anger is quenched when I find myself meditating on the temple of the Lord.* He was looking left and right and he forgot to look up. And when he realized he was in the sanctuary of Adonai, he was calmed. He was quenched.

The temple of the Lord God Almighty, right there at Mount Moriah in Jerusalem—you go into the temple itself and there's the great lampstand that brings light into darkness. There's the show bread that demonstrates that God provides for us. And then there's this altar of incense that fills the whole room with the glory of God and the holiness of God. And then right before you go up the steps to the Holy of Holies, there's a place, a box, a suggestion box that we can drop things in to help Him run all of creation.

There's no suggestion box. If you don't know that, there is no suggestion box. He's not asking for help. He's Adonai. And if we appreciate the attribute of sovereign God, we can play our part in Him running His creation, and we can simply enjoy His creation and look at every day as a blessing and a gift from God. And then we can focus more on less—that's one thing. And the other thing we need to spend our time thinking about is becoming like Christ in all of life—becoming holy. Because we need to be able to hear the voice of God and then have the courage to act. Because there is injustice. There is violence taking place all around us. And maybe it's ours to do something about. And when God speaks to us, we're able to hear that voice, and He says, *You're part of my sovereign plan to end this or make a chink in it.* And then we have to have the courage to do that, to do His will.

So, I know the future. I've studied the Bible. We don't have to be angry. We have Adonai, the sovereign God.

And so, one of the ways that my anger is dealt with is focusing on the Lord himself in His sanctuary. And another: shame works for me—it might work for you. If it doesn't work for you, this is not for you. I'm not going to be a puppet to the puppets. The devil is the puppet master, and all these people who are his puppets are throwing things at me and turning the world into chaos to make me angry. And if I respond to those puppets, I'm the puppet of a puppet of the puppet master. So, when I find myself doing that, I make fun of myself. *Shame on you, puppet of a puppet.* Okay, maybe it doesn't work for you guys. It works for me.

Fear

Anger—Adonai—God is sovereign. What about fear? The devil loves noise. He hates music. He's going to find anything that looks remotely orderly and destroy it. And that causes us to respond and react and not think.

So, the first step in dealing with our fear is to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Think, *Why am I afraid?* Is it because chaos ensues? It's an absolute feeling of lack of control. You don't know what's next, and what's next in the world around us could be very bad.

When my girls left the house, one went to New York City—Manhattan—and the other one went to Los Angeles. And I remember early on that at any given moment I could panic about where those girls were, just walking from the subway to work or driving in the Los Angeles area. Think about it. I had a lot to worry about. And sometimes I would entertain my fear by thinking, *What about what's going to happen in two years from now? What about five years from now?* I'm just looking for things to panic about. And ultimately, you come to this thought that can envelope you: *Am I all alone in this world of violence?* Because at times I feel absolutely helpless to do anything. And then the fear goes to where the anger went—to God. *Where are You? Are You even close?*

Emmanuel: God Is With Us

So, the attribute of God that we should use as an antidote to our fear is the name of God: Emmanuel, God with us. If you buy a book or read and study about what the big picture themes are in the Bible, there are probably about four. But certainly, one of those is the salvation. We call it the scarlet thread of salvation, cover to cover, from Genesis 1:1 to the end of Revelation. It's all about salvation.

And that's true. But even that, the scarlet thread of salvation, deeper still is the question *What is the salvation for?* That we would be near God. The story of the Bible is God getting near to us. It's His ambition for us to experience His closeness. He's the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God of the Bible. And throughout the Bible you'll see that He says, *Go do something dangerous. Yeah, you'll be afraid. Don't be afraid.* And what's the antidote for that fear? *I'll be with you. I'll never leave you or forsake you.*

And I want to add this. Not only does He say over and over again that He will be with us, but He says, *I'll lead you. I won't send you anywhere I haven't already been.* That's how committed He is to being close to us, to do something with our fear, to draw our focus on how He is Emmanuel.

You can go throughout the Bible, honestly, if you open it, and it will show this. I found myself going to Deuteronomy 31. Deuteronomy is the book of three sermons of Moses. And this is the last sermon. This is the last part of what Moses wants Israel to hear and wants their leader Joshua to hear. Because they're about to go into the Promised Land and do courageous things for the glory of God. And they should be afraid—no, they shouldn't be afraid, because it says—listen as we read: God is going with them. And more than that, He's going to lead them. He'll go in first. He's point man on this mission.

Deuteronomy 31:6-8

“So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.”

⁷ Then Moses called for Joshua, and as all Israel watched, he said to him, “Be strong and courageous! For you will lead these people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors he would give them. You are the one who will divide it among them as their grants of land. ⁸ Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; He will neither fail you nor abandon you.”

Chapter 31, verse 6: “‘So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them’—the bad guys. ‘For Jehovah your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you.’ Then Moses called for Joshua, and as all Israel watched, he said to him, ‘Be strong and courageous! For you will lead these people into the land that Jehovah swore to their ancestors He would give them. You are the one who will divide the land among them as their grants of land. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for Jehovah will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; He will neither fail you nor abandon you.’”

Emmanuel, God with us—He is with us, He is the first through the door. Jesus is called in Hebrews the “first fruit” of the resurrection. And I think, certainly, one of the applications there is: Do you fear death? Naturally—to be or not to be—the great unknown is death. And Jesus is the first fruit of the resurrection. *I wouldn't send you there unless I went there myself. And I want you to know about death. It's not a cave. It's a tunnel. There's an end on the other side. It's heaven itself. You'll be home. It's not a tomb. It's a womb. You'll have a birth again. I know, because I've done it.* And when you're lying on your death bed, you won't be alone. He'll never leave you. He'll never abandon you. He went there first.

That's how we deal with our fear, when we're afraid, when we're panicked, when we're incited, we go to Emmanuel, God with us. Adonai—sovereign God. Emmanuel—God with us.

El Shaddai: God Almighty

Here's what I came to share with you, because it has to do with both fear and anger. It's this attribute of God encased in the name of God. And it's found in the Book of Esther. Esther is a template--know this about God—Esther is a template for El Shaddai, God Almighty. I know the future. I've studied the past, I've studied the Bible, I've studied God. You know the nature of God, and you'll see this in El Shaddai, and you'll see this in Esther, one of the most exciting books and most unusual books in all of human literature.

Let me introduce you to the characters. One, there's Queen Esther. She is an orphan and a very beautiful young lady. The hero of the story, maybe, I guess, is her and her uncle Mordecai. Mordecai is Jewish and is an older man. He cared for her as an orphan. There's a comic character that plays a minor role, and he's a king of Persia. He's an angry, raging alcoholic. And then the villain of the story, who is evil to his core, is cunning, and he hates all of God's people. His name is Haman. Think Hitler. Those are the four major characters.

God's not in this story. Not even once is He mentioned. His name is not referred to, He's not secretly put in some way or some form or fashion. He's not in the story. There's not a single reference to Him. And the play itself, the plotline of this, is saturated with fear and anger. And it's as though this book is written in a way where God is up in the heavens and He's saying, “Good luck down there. Hope it works. You're on your own, helpless and alone in a violent world. Good luck.”

See, there it is. Luck. That's the key to the book. God Almighty, the Lord of all things, can be powerful and quiet at the same time. Know this about El Shaddai—know these two things. He loves coincidences and He loves irony. When you read the Book of Esther, you'll see all that happening. Let me fast forward through a really quick survey of the book itself.

Esther becomes queen by a whole series of lucky breaks. But even that is not a good thing. It's a lesser evil. And you're sad for her and afraid for her. Mordecai, a Jew and her uncle, just happens to be sitting at the gate of the city when he overhears two men in the army plotting to kill the king of Persia. He goes and tells Queen Esther, Esther tells the king, and the assassination is foiled. Do you know what he gets for saving the king's life? Not a thing. Well, that's not fair. I told you God's not in this story. He's not even mentioned. These people are on their own.

Meanwhile Haman (Hitler) hates the Jews so much that he puts together this declaration of annihilation. And he needs the king to sign it. But before he does that, he picks a day that all the Jews in all the world will be killed. And he'll pick that day by rolling the dice. Good luck. He rolls the dice. It turns out it's going to be eleven months from when he rolled the dice, on the thirteenth of Adar. The die (in the Hebrew the word is "pur")—good luck. If that weren't bad enough with all the fear that absolutely infiltrates all the Jews when they see this declaration, Haman walks around the capital of Persia, and because of all this power and this wealth he's amassed, he requires everyone to bow down to him when he walks by. And everybody does—but Mordecai. Mordecai is angry at this. He won't have anything to do with it. He will not bow down. And Haman looks at him and Mordecai looks back. Not doing it. Haman goes home and says, *I can't wait eleven months to see this guy killed. I'm going to do it tomorrow morning. I'm putting together a document, the king's going to sign it, I'm going to start my day tomorrow with the king's signature, and Mordecai will be killed. And then I'm going to a private banquet: me, the king and the queen, just the three of us.*

So, he goes out, writes a check, and has these guys build a giant gallows in view of his house with a post on the top. And Mordecai is to be impaled on that in a few short hours. Can you imagine the fear that is running through the city now? Where is God in all of this chaos? I've told you, He's not in the story. There's no God in this story.

Anyway, that night when the gallows are being built and the papers are drawn up for the execution of Mordecai, the king can't sleep. Imagine that—it just so happens. And so, the king,

in his desire to go back to sleep, has one of his servants come in and read the chronicles of his rulership. He's reading history books, and nothing will put you to sleep faster than reading history. And so, the king of Persia requires that, and so the slave, the servant, opens the book of history, randomly, mind you, to a page where it says that Mordecai saved his life by preventing this assassination attempt.

And then the king says, "Well, what was done for Mordecai?" He saved his life.

"It says here that nothing happened. Not a single thing."

Well, just then, knock, knock, knock on the door, the sun is rising, and there's Haman. Think Hitler. He's at his door with a sheet of paper for him to sign.

And the king says, "Hey, I don't know what to do about this. What should I do for someone who the king really delights in?"

And Haman says, "I've got just the thing." *I know you're thinking about me.* "I think you ought to parade this guy around the whole capital city on one of your royal horses wearing some of your royal robes, and have it announced. Have a parade just for this one person."

And the king says, "Haman, that's a great idea—that you would come up with an idea for Mordecai. Why don't you pull the horse?"

So, he spends that whole day parading Mordecai around on the royal horse and wearing the royal garment. Haman picked it. He gets home just in time to change and clean up because he's got this exclusive banquet just with the king and the queen, Esther, and him. And the banquet is going famously well, so much so, that the king says to the queen, Esther, "Wow. Is there anything I can do for you? Anything at all. Just name it."

And Queen Esther says, "There is this one thing. There's a man that wants to kill me. He wants to kill all of my people, the Jews. He wants to kill Mordecai, who saved your very life."

And the king says, "Who is this man? Surely he'll die."

And Esther says, "Haman." Think Hitler.

And the king of Persia does what the queen of Persia says. And that day Haman was pierced on that post on those gallows that you could see from Haman's house. He built the gallows. He died on the gallows. And all the wealth and the power that he amassed for his whole lifetime was given to Mordecai the Jew.

To this day that Jews celebrate his feast of irony, the feast of luck, the feast of dice, the feast of Purim. And what they're celebrating is this: El Shaddai, God Almighty. He's everywhere

all the time. Esther is a template for how El Shaddai works. Know these two facts. Once you see it, you can't unsee it. It's part of our past, it's in the Bible, it will be in the future. El Shaddai works quietly in His power. Sure, every once in a while He parts the seas. Occasionally, Jesus says, "Lazarus, come forth." His favorite card is quiet. It's coincidence. It's luck. It's happenstance.

And so, when you're afraid or you're angry because you can't see what's going on, it's because that's the way that God works, like in Esther.

The second lesson we need to learn from Esther is that Esther is a template for how El Shaddai works. And El Shaddai loves irony. Look for it. Look at it in our history. Look at it in the Bible. Look at it in the future. It's coming. Haman built his own gallows. That's what God does. The arrogant are crushed by their own egos. He loves when that happens.

When Jesus was before Pilate, Pilate says, "Do you know that power that I have? I can set you free."

And Jesus says, *Oh, no, don't put me on the cross. Because it's through the cross and resurrection that I will kill death and all the demons in hell. You and your power.*

Later in the Roman Empire—think of the Roman Empire—Nero is king. And just for fun, because he wants to rebuild the city of Rome, he burns Rome, and realizes that was a really bad political move, so he blames the Christians. So, all the Christians must die all over Rome. And he makes a game out of it—the gladiators. That's not fair. Everyone should be afraid or angry. Or they could look at El Shaddai and say, "What are you doing?"

And God says, "Look, I build him up so I can use him, and when I'm done with him, he's done."

"Even Rome?"

"Right. I assigned Rome to build roads so that when the good news happens, and then add a little (or a lot) of persecution and the Church is scattered, they'll have highways to take to the four corners of the world. And when I'm done with Rome, Rome is done." El Shaddai—they'll be crushed by their own egos.

And you go to Rome today, and what is Rome known for? Off the top of your head, three things, maybe? Maybe two. The catacombs where the Christians were hiding as they were being hunted. Oh, that's right, isn't Rome where the Vatican is? It's the home office of the largest church in the world. And they're also known for their ruins. Rome is known for a church and

what the city used to be, because of El Shaddai, God Almighty. He'll use them, and then they're done.

I know the future. I can see it because I've studied history and I've studied the Bible. And I've studied the nature of God. And the nature of God is found in His names Adonai, sovereign God; Emmanuel, He's close, and He swore to himself that he would never leave me or forsake me and that He'll go in first; and then, El Shaddai, God Almighty.

So, for the next twelve months, here's what I recommend we do. Get a good seat and a big box of popcorn. We don't have to play, but we can watch. We'll just watch what the devil does and all of his puppets, amassing all sorts of anger and fear. But we don't have to give into the chaos and confusion and division and destruction. We know better. They're just puppets. But the puppet master loves noise and hates music. But we're not going to be puppets of the puppets.

And do you know how we're going to do that? We're going to care a lot less about a lot more things. There are so many things that we are not going to care about. I want to make sure we can see this graphically. Here are the things that matter. Here are the things that I can control. This is the part that we care about. Look how little it is. This is what we focus on—inside there. Care about that. Do you know what's in there? Become like Christ in all of life. We want to be holy because God is holy. We want to be able to hear His voice when He speaks to us about doing good works in Jesus Christ that He arranged before time, and we want to have the courage to pull the pin and get out there and do it.

You know what else is in the red zone there? The unity of family and church. The government is a gift from God. Somebody told me today, "Government is a gift from God. Politics is what the devil did to the government." True.

We're not going to be angry. We don't need to be angry. We have Adonai. We're just going to go back and read Psalm 73 again. We're not going to be afraid, because God is with us, Emmanuel. And we're not going to play the games of this world, because we know El Shaddai loves a good story with plot twists and irony and secret moving of chess pieces. And all these kings are really just pawns.

And when we do that individually and collectively, we become a lighthouse. A lighthouse is a place where people who are going to drown go to for safety. When everything else is burning all around us and maybe quite literally, we'll know better, because we know

history and we know our Bibles, and we're learning to enjoy the nature of God and apply it to everyday life in areas of anger and areas of fear.

Let's pray.

Your Holy Writ says that these evildoers had every kind of wickedness and evil and greed and depravity right out of Romans. Here we are, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. These puppets are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, arrogant and boastful. They invent all kinds of evil. There's no fidelity, there's no love, there's no mercy.

And not only do they do such things, but they give hardy approval to those who practice them. They're stubborn and unrepentant. They're storing up wrath for the day of God's wrath, when in Your righteous judgment You will repay each person according to what they've done. You are a great God, a sovereign God.

And until that day, Lord, we will put away our malice and our deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander, debating on trivial issues. But we'll crave pure spiritual milk. We'll grow up in the salvation that You've given us. We're prisoners of You. And we will walk in a manner worthy of our calling. We will bear up one another. We will be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in our families and in this church. Because there is only one body and there is one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. We will serve our place in Your kingdom as ambassadors for the ministry of reconciliation. Open our eyes to how we can entrust the message of the gospel of reconciliation to the people around us, that we can make an appeal on Your behalf for Your salvation for the people whom You bring to our lives.

God, we look forward to an opportunity to be a hero in Your eyes, that we might be strong and courageous, doing dangerous things, because that's where You are. And we want to be with You. Make us that type of person. Make us that type of church. And we all pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.