



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Ephesians

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Predestined

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Let's get our Bibles open to Ephesians, chapter 1. If you're new with us this morning or it has been a while since you've been in church, here's what we're doing. We're going verse-by-verse through the book of Ephesians. We're still in chapter 1. We just started a couple of weeks ago. Today, we're going to slow down just enough and deal with the elephant in the chapter, the doctrinal elephant of *predestination*.

The apostle Paul, who wrote this letter, loves this doctrine. He loves it so much that he included predestination or an allusion to it four times in the list of what he calls *the Christian's most heavenly blessings*. There's a list of blessings in chapter 1 here in which, four different times, he refers to this idea, this doctrine of predestination.

My conviction has always been that on Sundays, when we come together with our Bibles, we open our Bibles and we try to get as much as we can from God's Word in hopes that as our knowledge of God increases, so will our love for God, and as our love for God increases, so will our worship become more and more passionate. As our worship increases, the goal is that our desire to trust him, love him, and please him even more increases. That's really the whole desire of opening our Bibles together on Sunday mornings.

I'm still very convinced of this, more so than ever, today, as we slow down way more than normal and just look at this one prolific word in our Christian vocabulary and our Christian experience. It's the word *predestination*. If your Bibles are ready, let's stand for the reading of God's Word. We're going to back up to verse 3, just to take a little bit of a running start. We'll get some context around where we're going to land, and then we'll go from there.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

Father in heaven, we are humbled as we stand now in this ocean of your sovereignty and this idea of your predestination of those who are saved. God, I pray that in the power and presence of your Holy Spirit, you would open our hearts and minds to what this means, to what it entails and how it relates to how we go to heaven. I pray, God, we would understand you in a greater way today, first and foremost. I pray, God, that the result will be that we love you more and love each other more. We pray this in Christ's name, amen.

For the rest of our time together, here's my plan. I want to quickly and briefly define this thing called *predestination*. For some of you in this room, this is a word with which you're familiar. You may or may not know a whole bunch about this. Maybe you've dug into it or studied it and you have a little bit of a knowledge of what this means for you.

For others of you, it's a word you've heard of, but you've never really taken the time to unpack it. You know it has something to do with our faith, but you're not really sure beyond a surface level. For others of you, this is just a word that has never even crossed your lips. You have no idea what it means or certainly how in the world it relates to us, heaven, Jesus, and all that stuff.

I want to give you a very brief definition, and then I want to give you three reasons why we actually need predestination, three reasons the Scripture points out that we are desperate for this doctrine. Finally, I want to take a look at some of the objections, the struggles with believing what this means. I'm going to attempt to answer those.

Before I do any of that, I want to acknowledge some things. I want to put some conditions on our time together here for the next few minutes. Let's admit and recognize that this topic stirs up strong emotions about God and our relationship to God like no other subject in our Christian faith.

Let me assure you that total agreement on this doctrine is not a condition for our fellowship, nor is it a condition for membership in our church. We do not have to have 100 percent agreement on what we believe this to mean in order to love each other and to love our neighbors with the gospel, so let's be sure of that.

In fact, I want to encourage you with this. We have varying degrees of agreement and understanding, even amongst our pastors and elders at this church, but we deeply love and respect each other in spite of that. That is because we passionately agree that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone for the glory of God alone.

We absolutely, 100 percent agree on that, and if you do as well, then we have plenty of unity to move forward together in love. There are some other things on which we may disagree, but it doesn't ever compromise that which I just said.

Actually, right now, my wife Tammi and I are engaged in a 15- to 20-year-long discussion about predestination. She tells me, as recently as this morning, that she has chosen by her free will to still love me, even though she doesn't agree with everything I believe about predestination. To that, I have said to her that she couldn't love me unless God predestined her to love me; therefore, we live in perfect harmony.

All that to say, you could even be married to someone with whom you don't have 100 percent alignment on the ramifications of this doctrine and still love each other with all your hearts. Let's make sure of that.

Another acknowledgement: I cannot do this topic justice in one sermon, and so I humbly ask for your grace. It would be very arrogant of me to think I can unpack this in one Sunday morning. Centuries of debate... It would be impossible. Yet we do have a School of Discipleship that offers classes that cover this topic in a very worthy and deserving manner, so I would encourage you to keep your eyes out for those classes and make sure you jump in to keep growing on these types of things.

I want to assure you that I will not answer all of your emails or meet with all of you who wish to debate me on this a little further. In fact, let me just get it out there: I'm not going to meet with any of you at all, just so you know. Don't be deceived into thinking that could happen. See, I can assure you that I've spent hundreds of hours reading, studying, struggling, discussing, and debating this doctrine for many years. I can also assure you that most of you haven't. Right? You haven't.

So, I plead with you to be honest with yourself. If you enter this room today with 15 minutes of aggregate study on the topic of predestination and 15 years of hostility toward it, or at least what you think it might mean, I just want to say to go easy on yourself and the rest of us who might not share in all of your hostility. Like I said, this is an emotional doctrine.

All I'm asking is that we learn, grow, and open up our hearts and minds to find out exactly why it's so prolific in Scripture. It's not my goal to shove this down your doctrinal throats. It has never been my MO as your pastor. I want to do what I set out to do every Sunday I stand behind this pulpit, and that is to teach God's Word with clarity, conviction, and compassion, and so we're going to keep doing that even today.

Yet you need to hear me say I have come to believe, in my Christian life, that this doctrine of predestination is one of the more beautiful and faith-changing doctrines connected to our salvation in the entire Bible, but it wasn't always that way. I'll explain that as we go along.

Let's start out with the definition of *predestination* so we can all be on the same page. I want to tell you I probably spent more time than I probably had to trying to make this definition meaningful and simple enough so we don't have to take up five slides on the screens. Here's the best definition, biblically, of *predestination*.

In eternity past, before he created the world, God chose some people to receive salvation. We refer to that choosing of those whom God would save as his *unconditional grace*. He chose some people to receive salvation, and the rest he left to continue in their sins and receive the just and eternal punishment for their sins. Just let that sink in for a minute. That is a biblical definition of predestination.

Be sure that this is not some peripheral topic in the Bible. This is not something on the edges of our pages in our Bible that we're trying to pull back into the middle today and trying to make a whole sermon out of this. This is not something way out there where we don't really ever go with our faith. In fact, it's just the opposite.

This topic of predestination comes up 127 times in the Bible. It is a central piece of salvation doctrine. When you do a word study on words like *predestined*, *predestination*, *elected*, *chosen*, *chose*, *called*, *ordained*, or *appointed*, all of those words are relating to the doctrine of predestination. You find that this is a central biblical concept.

Every single detail of God's plan for the salvation of sinners was predetermined by God before he created the heavens and the earth, and not one single detail of his plan to save sinners was left to chance, our choice, or our merit. That's what this discussion is all about, God's sovereignty.

1. *Our need for predestination*. This may be what really started the dramatic understanding of what this means in my life. What radically changed for me in my understanding of this doctrine was when I realized this doctrine is all about God's sovereignty and his compassionate mercy.

See, before that moment when that dawned on me, when it finally made sense as I was studying Scripture, I always considered predestination to be in that category of teaching that made God out to be this cruel, emotionless, unfair, arbitrary dictator of a God. Whenever this topic came up, it actually made me angry and I wasn't willing to get past my emotions to at least just figure out what it really means, because to me, it just meant God was just mean, that he just arbitrarily picked people to go to heaven and others not to. I couldn't wrap my mind around that.

I discovered it was actually just the opposite. I realized how desperate we are for our salvation to have everything to do with God desiring to save us, not us desiring God to save us. Let me say that again. What changed for me and made this so radical and made grace come alive in my life is when I realized that the salvation of my soul had everything to do with God desiring to save me, not me desiring to be saved.

Are you with me still? That was the beginning of an understanding of grace I had not had up until that point, including a doctorate degree. That opened everything. Here's why. Scripture gives us reasons why we need predestination.

A. *We do not seek God, so God seeks us.* Nothing in our sin-broken nature desires to know God, to love God, or to submit to God. What comes naturally to every person born on earth, what comes naturally to us is that we want to be our own God. That's what comes naturally in a sin-broken heart. The Bible teaches that "**None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.**" There are no exceptions to this verse. Jesus said, "**For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost,**" because none of us would ever seek him.

B. *We don't willingly come to God, so God must draw us.* Our natural inclination is to resist God. It is to go the other way. In a verse in the Old Testament, Isaiah, chapter 53, we read, "**All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way...**" You might look at that and think, "Okay, well, that's an Old Testament verse. What does that have to do with this?" Everything!

The apostle Peter quotes Isaiah in his epistle, in 1 Peter, chapter 2, in describing who we are before God saves us. We're just like sheep, going our own way, trying to find our own way, doing what we want to do. Jesus said, in John, chapter 6, "**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.**"

C. *We do not choose God, but God chooses us.* Jesus said, "**You did not choose me, but I chose you...you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world...**" See, it's in these biblical realities that predestination started to make sense. We don't seek God. We don't willingly pursue God. We don't choose God. Therefore, God had to intervene. That was his plan all along.

Just as a quick aside, there may be some of you in this room who just saw those three things and you can honestly say to yourselves today, "That's me. I don't have a relationship with Jesus at all. I've never tried to seek him." Yet here you are in church. For whatever reason, I don't know, but I can tell you it's by no accident. God wants to invite you to come to faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. In fact, at the end of this message, I want to tell you more about how that can happen for you.

2. *Objections to predestination.* So, we do have a need for predestination, but there some struggles, some objections to this whole doctrine. Let me see if I can deal with them as fairly as I can. The debate, as I said, has been going on for centuries, but the debate over predestination is not due to a lack of evidence for the doctrine.

It's more so due to a perceived lack of logic connected to it. In human terms, predestination doesn't make any sense. In our idea of what we want God to be like, this idea of predestination, God choosing those whom he will save, doesn't make any sense. I confess that to you. I understand that. That's where I was for quite some time.

A. *"It seems so arbitrary."* Let's start with the obvious struggle. Predestination feels like God was up in heaven before he created the heavens and the earth, and he was spinning this giant wheel. On the wheel were the names of every human being who would ever live. Wherever the wheel stopped, that's who he would pick. That's kind of what it feels like. It just seems arbitrary. Or worse, God just closed his eyes and randomly picked some and not others. So, everything inside us starts to feel like, "That can't be what my God is like." That doesn't make sense, humanly speaking.

The answer is that we need to be reminded that *everything God does has a purpose and plan*, don't we? Nothing about God is random. I want you to notice how Paul is very careful to clarify, every time he refers to our predestination, that this isn't arbitrary at all. Look at Ephesians, chapter 1, again with me. Look at verse 5. **"...he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will..."** "There is a purpose to his desire to do this," Paul is saying, but he doesn't stop there.

Look at verses 7-9. **"In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose..."** This whole plan of redemption, of saving us through Christ, and God choosing us to be saved before the foundation of the world is according to his purpose, and it's a mystery of his will.

Look at verse 11. **"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will..."** Do you get the sense that Paul is really, really trying hard to help us understand that this idea, this doctrine, this sovereignty of God in choosing those he will save before the foundation of the world is a part of his plan?

We may not know why God elects whom he elects, but that's very different from saying he has no reasons. Whatever we decide predestination is, we must admit that God has a divine purpose in it. Again, referring back to Isaiah, chapter 55, it tells us God is perfect in all of his ways and his ways are far beyond human comprehension. At the very least, as we launch into this a little further, we can be confident that God was not arbitrary. He has a very specific desire, will, and plan he is carrying out for the salvation of sinners.

B. *"What about my free will?"* Doesn't everyone have the right to choose to believe in Jesus? Why doesn't God just leave it up to us? Why can't he just leave it up to me to choose? Fair question. Here's my answer. Be reminded: *God's choice is always perfectly right and holy*. You see, we've already seen that the hearts of sin-broken people never choose God.

Just as a side note, the term *free will* appears nowhere in the Bible, just so you know that. In fact, it's just the opposite. Every time you see man's choice regarding God before salvation, it is always sinful and rebellious. It is never loving. Every time you see sinful man exercising his choice toward God, it's always rebellious.

Nobody in the Bible ever woke up one day and said, "Today, I want to be a Christian. Today, I want to obey God. Today, I want to believe in Jesus. Today, I'm going to change everything about my life." You never read any testimony of anybody in the New Testament coming to Christ like that, and there's a reason for it. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "**The heart is deceitful above all things...**" Jeremiah 17:9 is honest. The human heart is deceitful above all things.

So, think with me for a minute. Let your minds go with me here. To think that God sovereignly ordained every detail of human history that led to the birth, death, and resurrection of his Son for the salvation of souls but then backed off and forfeited his sovereignty, leaving the destiny of eternal souls in our hands, seems, at the very least, illogical to me and, at the very most, very unsettling.

Keep going with me. Think about it. If, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, God sat back in his heavenly BarcaLounger, looked at Jesus on his right hand, and said, "Jesus, let's hope some people will believe in you and this whole plan of ours doesn't become a big mistake," if the divine plan of redemption of the soul of man (which, by the way, forms the entire meaning of human history), if God's entire divine plan to save sinners was left to human whim and human chance that we would make the right choice, I think *then* we would actually be right to call God's character and compassion into question.

To think that God would orchestrate, from Genesis to Revelation 22, his plan for the salvation of sinners but then get to the resurrection and stop and say, "Okay, Jesus. Let's hope they get it right," and just step back and let sinful man determine the effect of the cross, to me seems like a greater injustice than the objection with which we're dealing.

You see, it's one thing to say we can't completely understand the purpose and plan of predestination, but we can be grateful that God never has and never will do anything that contradicts his perfect love and his perfect justice. We're too hopelessly lost in sin to ever seek God's great salvation on our own. We desperately need God to intervene on our behalf. That's where this takes us.

C. "*It seems so unfair, still.*" This objection says, "Steve, I get what you're saying. I'm tracking with you. It's starting to make a little sense, but still, it just seems unfair. Why doesn't God just save everyone?" The premise of this objection really starts with the assumption that we believe everyone deserves to go to heaven. The key word is *deserves*.

The answer to this objection is simple. The truth is, *no one deserves to go to heaven*. Nobody! Think about it. If we deserve to go to heaven on any basis of our own goodness, or if God was going to just save everybody anyway, if you think about it, doesn't that automatically make the cross a cruel example of divine child abuse? Even more so, doesn't it make everything we believe in our Christian faith an absolute joke and unnecessary?

If there was anything in us that we could manufacture that was good enough for us to look up to heaven and say, "Okay, God. I deserve for you to save me. Look at me. I've done it right. I've made the right choice," whatever it is, if there's one ounce of that in us that is possible, doesn't it

make the cross a completely wicked thing? Why would God do that if he knew we could do it for ourselves?

Predestination is not about God deeming who's deserving and who's undeserving of heaven. The truth is we're all undeserving. Heaven, salvation, can only be about God's grace, and grace can never be earned. We can't ever do anything to look up to heaven and say, "Okay, God. My turn. Look what I've done. Look what I've done inside me. Look what I've changed. Now, save me." We can't do that, or it wouldn't be grace!

The pinnacle of the whole discussion is in Ephesians 2, verses 8-9. You'll remember this passage. It is the peak of the whole letter. It's the key passage in Paul's whole encouraging letter to these Christians. It says, "**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**" You get the sense that Paul is writing all of this and he's realizing it is a little hard to realize what this means about God.

So, he stops and he says, "Don't ever forget, it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. And this is not your own; it is a gift of God!" What is the gift of God? It is his grace that intervenes into our hearts and allows us to believe. It's his calling. No one deserves to go to heaven. Grace is the most compassionate gift, and it must flow from God's sovereign goodness, not our own. It has to, or there would be a whole lot of bragging and boasting in heaven, wouldn't there? Not by works, so that no one can boast.

D. "*My God wouldn't choose people to go to hell.*" The logic goes like this: If God chooses some to go to heaven, then that means God chooses others to go to hell. I know it sounds logical, but the objection here is based on the premise that God sends people to hell who don't want to go there. The objection is that there are all these people who want to go to heaven, but somehow, God chose, in eternity past, to not let them even though they want to.

See, that is what we call in doctrine circles *double predestination*, or some of you may be familiar with the term *hyper-Calvinism*. Those are camps that preach that God decided he'd create some people to go to heaven and some people to go to hell, and even if the people who he has created to go to hell don't want to go there, he still makes them go there. There's nothing in Scripture that supports that idea or that concept of predestination.

The answer is simple: God does not predestination certain people to hell. You see, when people have trouble or struggle with predestination (and many do), their real problem is not with the doctrine of predestination. The real struggle is with the doctrine of depravity and sin. How sinful are we, really? That's the question.

We talked so much about that last week as a buildup to this one message. I don't have the time to re-preach that whole sermon from last Sunday, but suffice it to say we are reminded that the Bible clearly tells us that all human beings are sinners, with no exceptions (Romans 3:23), and that the wages (the consequences, the punishment) of sin is death, physically and spiritually (Romans 6:23).

In a nutshell, the Bible says that when we're born, our heart, the core of all of our desires and passions, is selfishly motivated and far from God. When we're born, we are born with human DNA passed down to us from our first parents, Adam and Eve, which is sinful. Again, you get the sense that Paul realizes we have to get this part right, or predestination won't ever make sense. Look at Ephesians 2, verse 1. Look at what he does. In all of this beautiful conversation about the blessing of predestination, he stops in chapter 2, and he says,

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all..." Including himself. **"...once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."**

Paul is saying, "Listen. I know this sounds amazing, and it's crazy, beautiful, and confusing at the same time, God's predestining us, but don't forget where we were before you were called by God. You were by nature children of wrath, just like every human being." Then, he says in verse 4, **"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved..."**

Do you get the urgency, the intensity, and the joy of Paul writing this? He's saying, "Don't ever forget where you've come from. Don't ever believe for a minute that there was anything in you worthy of you deserving to go to heaven. Don't ever go down that road. You were saved by grace."

I think it's good for Paul to remind us that we're 100 percent responsible for our sinful choices, as well as the consequences of that sin, which is hell. We all deserve condemnation, and justice demands our punishment, so be careful. It's not fairness we want from God. It's grace. It's not his fairness; it's his grace. You see, sinners who reject Jesus are still getting what they deserve: justice. Sinners chosen by God are getting what they don't deserve, which is mercy. Yet no one is being treated unfairly. No one.

For a minute, I want you to picture God sending Jesus in a lifeboat to rescue drowning sinners. Picture the whole plan of redemption as God sending Jesus in a lifeboat into a world, into an ocean of drowning sinners. The temptation when we talk about predestination is to think in our minds that Jesus is leaning over the boat, and all these people are swimming toward the boat, reaching out for Jesus to save them, and Jesus is swatting them away.

"No, no! Not you. Not you. Not you! You, come here. No, nope. You can't. No, you're not getting in the boat. Nope, nope, nope. You, right here. Come on." That's what I think is natural to us. We think of predestination and we think Jesus is doing that, that that's what it means. Yet here's the reality. Everyone is swimming away from the boat.

When you were saved, when you were called by God, you were swimming away from the boat. He got your attention in his mercy and grace. He brought the gospel to you in some way. It could have been through a trial. It could have been through a blessing. It could have been through craziness. It could have been through your own failure, but he got your attention and he drew you to himself. The miracle is that Jesus is in this ocean of humanity which he described as hating him.

It says when the Light came into the world, the world hated the Light. In spite of that, in his mercy, he shines his light into our hearts, showing us our sin and our desperate need for forgiveness. It really boils down to two things. There are two camps. The first camp is the one that believes *God is leaving the destiny of our eternal souls up to our own decision-making*, that God's highest commitment is providing us with the right to let our choices be the decisive factor in where we spend eternity.

That's this camp, and many good, Jesus-loving people believe that. Many of you may believe that, that God's highest value, God's highest glory, is in the fact that although he is eternally all-powerful and all-knowing, he backs away and allows man to make this final choice for the destiny of their souls.

The other camp believes God's highest commitment is not in providing us with the right to make that choice. No, the other camp believes *God's highest commitment is to the full display of his glory in both his mercy and his wrath*. Whether we completely understand predestination or not, we can be comforted by Paul's confession in Ephesians, chapter 1. I don't think you saw it when we read it the first time, so I want to show it to you this time. Look back in your Bibles at Ephesians 1, and listen to what Paul does when he brings this up.

Verse 5: **"...he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will..."** We already saw that, right? But here's verse 6: **"...to the praise of his glorious grace..."** Now, look at verse 11. **"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him..."** [There's that purpose again.] **"...who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory."**

Look at verse 14. Speaking about the Holy Spirit, who comes into all he calls, it says, **"...who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of [our salvation], to the praise of his glory."** This is always God's purpose, to display his perfect love and justice. See, that's what the cross is. It is the perfect display of his love for sinful people as well as his perfect justice, that all people's sins must be paid for.

Predestination shines a light on both of those. It shines the brightest spotlight on God's glory in two ways. First, *the glory of his unconditional mercy, grace, love, and faithfulness*. Predestination shines this light on how unconditional God's love is for those on whom he has mercy.

Let me say it this way. If our salvation was left to just one ounce of our choice, it would make 100 percent of God's love conditional. If it depended on us to make the right decision about Jesus, then God's love, grace, and mercy is conditional immediately upon our ability to do the right thing. Predestination says, "No, it is unconditional grace, and he intervenes for us."

Secondly, as I said, it also shines a light on *the glory of God's wrath*. Wrap your mind around this. The glory of his divine wrath poured out on the unrighteous, meaning he refuses to by any means clear the guilty. Sin must be punished.

In this beautiful, deep ocean of God's sovereignty and his predestination of those whom he will save, the light shines perfectly and brightest on his mercy that is unconditional and on his wrath that is perfectly just. Either way, he gets all the praise. Either way, we cannot blame him and we cannot take the credit. He is glorified to the praise of his glory.

In his mercy, he chooses before the foundation of the world those whom he will save, then he makes that salvation possible by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for the punishment of our sin. Then, he makes us capable of responding to him in his grace (this is the gift) by sending his Holy Spirit to open our spiritual eyes and ears to understand the beauty and the meaning of the cross and the resurrection.

When we heard the gospel and understand, we believed. In that moment of belief, God credited all of our sin to Jesus and credited all of his righteousness to us. So, this salvation we enjoy requires God to do the merciful miracle of opening our eyes and calling us to believe.

Right now, some of you are still a little foggy. I totally get that. For others of you, the fog is starting to clear and you're starting to say, "Oh, okay! Wow! That adds some insight! That makes me think of this differently." Others of you, your hearts are just beating fast because you entered the room and this is where your study has gotten you, and you're praising God because you look back at when he called you and saved you and you can honestly say that at that moment, you weren't pursuing God. You weren't seeking God.

Like me and like some of you in this room, we were pointed in the opposite direction of God. For me, when God sent those two strangers into my life to tell me about why Jesus died, in the middle of a college campus, minding my own business, pursuing everything but God, I had no interest in God.

I had no interest in Jesus. I wasn't pursuing him. I wasn't swimming toward the boat; I was swimming away from the boat, and I didn't care where God was or *if* he was. In that moment, he brings these two weirdos, these religious fanatics, into my life. They sit down and say, "Can we talk to you about Jesus? I'm like, "Why? What for?" They said, "Well, we want to tell you something." For some reason, I said, "Whatever," and they told me the gospel, and everything changed.

The whole direction of my life changed. I can't take any credit. I didn't get up that day, saying, "You know, today I'm thinking I'm going to find Jesus." Some of you can relate to that and

you're smiling back at me. Some of us were headed away from Jesus at a much greater rate than others.

Some of you were really young. God, in his sovereignty, chose to save you at an early age and spare you from all the nonsense most of us had to go through, but either way, in his mercy, he called you to believe. In that moment, grace took on a whole different meaning. My love for God and his grace exploded when I realized if it wasn't for God, I don't know where I'd be today. However, I can tell you I would be a lot farther from him than I was that day. Praise God for his unconditional grace. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, oh, I pray you would take any of my words that have not been clear and you would clarify them in your Word. Remove any wrong teaching or confusing teaching so it would be clear that you are a gracious, unconditionally merciful God. I pray, God, in the name of Jesus, that as we walk out of this room, those of us who are saved, we would embrace and latch onto the truth that we are saved by your grace through faith in Jesus alone for your glory alone.

God, may we walk from here committed to continue to love you more, to love each other more, and to love our neighbors more for the sake of the gospel. God, may that always be what unites us first. God, if this doctrine of predestination helps us to understand your goodness and grace more, may it be so. In your timing and in the miracle of your Spirit teaching us, we thank you. In Christ's name, amen.

As I said, some of you find yourselves in this room relating to the fact that you aren't seeking God. You haven't sought God. You're not looking for God. Here you are, sitting here in this service, for whatever reason, I don't know, but it may be that God has you here and it's not by accident. He wants you to know how much he loves you and he wants you to know how much you desperately need him to save you. He has opened your eyes and your ears to this truth and you're finding yourself in this moment being drawn to Jesus Christ.

If that is so, I tell you that is God's gift to you today. I tell you with all my heart, respond to his invitation. These folks just standing right up here want to help you take that step. They want to give you something to go home with. I pray you would come up. All you have to say is, "What do I do now? I want to believe. What do I do now?" and they will help you take the next step. I hope you will.

For me, I'm going to go home to a nice, quiet place, and none of you can go with me. God bless you. I love you with all my heart, and I look forward to being back in God's Word next Sunday. See you then.