

Fighting For The Least

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Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Good morning. I want to invite you to take God's Word and turn with me to Matthew chapter 25.

This is a topical message series we've been walking through, talking about what we fight for, what we fight against, and what we fight through. This is a topical message, so we're going to be looking at a bunch of different Scripture references this morning. All of the Scripture that we look at will be on the screen, so I encourage you to follow along.

If you miss anything, just know that every single week, you can go on our website, download the message notes that I'm preaching from, and get these notes in case you missed anything or want to follow back up. I would encourage you to do that. You know, when you take notes, it challenges you to kind of lean in. You won't forget as easily, and when you follow along, it makes time go by faster, okay? I would encourage you to do that.

If you miss any of our messages in this series, you can go online, download our app, and get our messages. You can listen to them on your way to work or when you're working out. If you're having trouble sleeping, just turn me on, all right? I will put you right to sleep.

Matthew 25. This morning, we're going to get after it. I'm titling the message today ***"Fighting for the Least."***

I want to begin with two stories as we talk about fighting for the least—two people, two families, who are really important to me.

One is a man by the name of Mike Fetchner. Now, if you've never heard me preach, you've never heard his name. But certainly, if you have heard me preach, from time to time I bring Mike's name up a lot. He is a top-five influence in my life.

When I moved to Dallas to serve in my church there—which I served for 20 years—he was my first boss. He hired me when he was 39, and I was right out of college. Mike was just an impressive individual. He was unlike anybody I'd ever met. He was kind of a bigger-than-life kind of guy—very charismatic, very loud.

He had a home security systems company that he had sold a few years previously and made quite a bit of money from. The Lord was really moving in his life. He had started serving in an inner-city ministry, and he met a young man by the name of Ramon whom he started discipling. This kid just really changed his life.

More than this kid changing his life, though, it was actually the kid's grandmother, whom he was living with. Mike just began to see that here he was, from North Dallas, and from a material standpoint, he needed nothing. He was very well taken care of from a physical, material standpoint. But when it came to spiritual

things, he was kind of like that Matthew chapter 13 seed whose life was being choked off by life's worries, riches, and pleasures.

Yet he saw in this woman—this grandmother who was looking after her grandson—a woman who had nothing. She lived in a horrible neighborhood in South Dallas, was living off the government, and didn't have a whole lot as far as needs being met. But spiritually speaking, she had it all. She was rich in faith and loved the Lord, and Mike was just taken by her life.

As a matter of fact, I've got a picture of Mike and Velma that I'll show you. This is Mike and Velma. Mike went to be with the Lord in 2014. He had a battle with cancer, and he fought it.

While he was discipling Velma's grandson, her grandson was killed in a drive-by shooting, and that really rocked Mike's world. He took the money he had made from the sale of his company, and he started an inner-city ministry called Bridge Builders, which still meets to this day.

Bridge Builders' whole design—this was their vision—was to take people from North Dallas who had it all, so to speak, but were very poor in faith, and build a bridge to those in South Dallas who had nothing but were rich in faith. Mike just knew that when you took those two things, built a bridge, and developed relationships, man, things changed.

That ministry is still going to this day. I can remember my first week on the job. Mike put me in his car, took me down to South Dallas, and right then I began this lifelong lesson of learning the importance of looking after the outcast, the poor, the widow, and the orphan. It was Mike's life, and it is his legacy.

The second family I want to introduce you to is the Bells family. Connor and Mary Bells are, to this day, mine and Debbie's best friends. I talk to Connor every single week. He's a pastor up in the Oklahoma City area, but he wasn't always a pastor.

I was at our church in Dallas, and I was actually discipling his younger brother, who worked for him at the time. Connor was a graduate of Texas Tech University, owned a landscaping company, and was doing very well. As I was meeting with his brother, Neil, Neil said, "Hey, my older brother, who runs the company, is really wrestling with a call to ministry. Would you meet with him?"

So I met with Connor, and we hit it off. We became fast friends. God began to work this call to ministry in his life, and we began to walk through that together.

Our families were at the same age and stage of life. We were just starting to have kids, and we started doing what many of you did. You've got family friends, you go on vacations together, and they just become part of your extended family. This was Connor and Mary.

When they were having their third child, they were set to have sweet Libby. They knew there were some complications with the pregnancy, so they did some genetic testing. The doctor called them in and said, "Look, this baby that you're having has a genetic disorder that's very rare. It's called trisomy 16. There are only 30 known cases in the world at this time."

When they were having Libby, the doctor said, “You’ll be lucky if she makes it to two years old.” Here was the doctor’s quote: The doctor told them that her condition would be “incompatible with life.”

Now, I’m happy to report that Libby is 16 years old today. She has severe special needs. She has never communicated in her life, never been able to talk or communicate, and she’s just been a blessing to see grow up.

About three years after Libby was born, Connor and Mary decided to start trying to have

Another baby. And they were told that it would be scientifically impossible for them to have another baby with trisomy 16. It was just not going to happen.

And so they went through with the pregnancy. Sure enough, I’ll never forget getting the phone call on October 31, 2012. We went over to the Bales’ house, and they had just been told that their next daughter, who was going to be Libby, would have the exact same genetic disorder. They were heartbroken.

And so here are two babies—30 known cases in the world—and they have two of them. Connor has written a book called **Counted Worthy** about their story of raising these little girls.

And here’s their latest family picture. This is the wedding of their oldest, Catherine, right there in the middle. That’s little Libby on the left, 16, and sweet Hannah. Debbie and I are her godparents. She’s 13 now. They’re just two incredible kids and an incredible family. We’ve watched them grow up.

And just watching these two kids and watching this family, I can’t imagine them not being in a home where they were loved and where their needs were met. In seeing the Bales, I’ve realized that the world could overlook two kids like this, but they’ve taught me something about the heart of God.

And really, it’s the heart of the message today. Again, I’m calling the message “Fighting for the Least.” What I want to do is introduce this message by telling you three reasons why it’s important that we fight for the least. Why is this so important? Why is this so close to the heart of God? Then we’ll end with some application on how we can fight for the least.

I think you’ll find that this message is very practical. It’s something all of us can walk out of here wrapping our arms around.

So let’s get after it and talk first about why we fight for the least. If you’re taking notes—and I encourage you to—you can write this down:

1. We Fight for the Least Because We Are Commanded To

The whole of Scripture teaches this, and I’m going to give you just a few references. Honestly, I could stand up here for the next hour. I could fill my time reading verse after verse after verse of the Bible systematically teaching that we are to care for the least. I’m just going to give you a brief overview.

Micah 6:8 says:

*“He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you?”*

The very first thing—look at it:

“To do justice.”

I was up in Washington, D.C., this week. We were visiting with some friends and went through the Museum of the Bible. It's an incredible museum. If you've never been, I'd encourage you to get by there. With this being America 250, they had a special presentation on the influence of the Bible in America.

Speaking of America 250, I want to give a little commercial plug here. On Wednesday night, July 1, we're going to invite all of our church to the Champions Campus, and we're going to have a special night celebrating America 250. We're going to have Chick-fil-A there. What's more American than that, huh? Chick-fil-A—God's chicken.

Then we're going to sing patriotic songs and pray for our country. I've got a special guest, Dr. Robert Morgan, coming in. He's written a book called **100 Bible Verses That Made America**. He's not going to preach on all 100 of them, but he is going to teach on some of them. It's going to be a great night celebrating America. I would encourage you to be there at 6:30 on Wednesday, July 1.

At the Museum of the Bible, they walk you through exhibits on the influence of the Bible on movements and great speeches in America. This verse we just read, Micah 6:8—“What does the Lord require of you? To do justice”—was the verse that sparked the civil rights movement. This was the verse that was in the heart of Martin Luther King Jr. when he gave his “I Have a Dream” speech.

And so this whole idea of looking after the least—fighting for the broken and the down-and-out in society—is a theme woven throughout Scripture.

Let me give you some more verses. Psalm 82:3–4:

*“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless;
maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”*

Zechariah 7:9–10:

“Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another.”

Listen to verse 10:

“Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.”

Again, this is just the Old Testament. The Old Testament law was put into place to protect the stranger, the

foreigner, the outcast, the poor, and the widow. Those protections were built into the very structure that guided the nation of Israel.

Think about Jesus' ministry. When Jesus comes on the scene, the very first sermon He preaches is in a synagogue in Nazareth. He takes the scroll of Isaiah and unrolls it. When He declares what His ministry is going to be about—how you can know the Messiah is here—He reads Isaiah.

This is told in Luke 4:18–19. He says:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.”*

This is the Messiah. This is His mission.

*“He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

So look at the ministry of Jesus. Look at His teachings. The parable of the Good Samaritan shows us that we are to look after our neighbor, regardless of where they are from or what they look like.

Jesus is the One who stooped down and touched lepers. He's the One who healed the sick. He rails against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 for taking advantage of widows. This is why He overturned the tables in the temple: people were exploiting the poor and the outsiders. They were being taken advantage of through unfair prices and exchange rates.

The whole of Jesus' ministry is about this idea of fighting for the least.

You remember Paul and the Jerusalem Council. Paul comes down to Jerusalem to meet with the early church leaders.

Talking about Peter and James and John—these are stalwarts in the early church—Paul proclaims to them his calling to take the gospel to the Gentiles. They listen to him talk about his conversion and the ministry that's been going on, and they are all for it. They're like, “This is awesome!” But they said, “Don't you forget one thing. As you go and take the gospel to the Gentiles, don't forget one thing.”

This is Galatians 2:10:

“Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.”

And you see this in Paul's ministry and in many of his letters. What is he doing? He's taking up a collection for those in Jerusalem who are experiencing a famine—for those who are suffering, for the poor.

Time after time after time, throughout the whole of Scripture, from Genesis to the very end of the Bible, you

see this pursuit of the weak, the down-and-out, and the least in our society. James, the half brother of Jesus, wrote:

“Religion”—this is James 1:27—“that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.”

Some of your Bibles translate it, “in their time of need.”

We are commanded over and over again to have our heads on a swivel. Whenever we see the poor, the widow, the orphan, the neglected, the imprisoned, or the sick, we are not just to see that need. We are to have compassion, help meet needs, and bring justice to those who are oppressed.

This is what I mean when I say we are to fight for the least. We fight for them because we’re commanded to.

The second reason we are to fight for the least—and this is very important to note—is that we will be judged on this.

Now, Matthew 25, where I asked you to turn earlier, is an interesting text. Jesus is teaching, and this teaching is about the end of time. This is what we call the Olivet Discourse. Jesus is teaching His disciples, and they’re asking about the end times—what it’s going to be like when the end comes—and Jesus tells them this story.

I want to start in verse 31. Jesus, speaking, says:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory...”

“Son of Man” was Jesus’s favorite term to use to describe Himself. It was self-designated. In Daniel chapter 7, we see this figure “like the Son of Man.” Those are the words Daniel uses. At the end of time, God bestows all power and glory and majesty on Him. Jesus takes that figure from Daniel and applies it to Himself.

In the Gospels, I think He uses it more than 70 times to refer to His ministry: “I am the Son of Man.” Even before Caiaphas, the high priest, He says, “You’re going to see the Son of Man come in His glory.” Jesus was identifying as the Son of Man.

And so, as He’s teaching, He says:

“The Son of Man is going to come, and his angels are going to come with him, and then he will sit on his glorious throne.”

In verse 32:

“Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people.”

He’ll separate individuals, one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on His right, and He’ll place the goats on His left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right,”

—to the sheep—

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.”

“Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give to you? Or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, you did it to one of the least...’”

If you underline in your Bibles, underline that word **least**. It means “the smallest one.” It means “the most diminished one,” the smallest in stature in our society.

“Whatever you did to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

Now, just a couple of notes here that are important to highlight. Understand that the righteous didn’t even know they were being righteous at the time. “When did we do this?” They were simply living out their faith.

Now, this is not a works-based faith, okay? They are not righteous, they are not on the right, and they are not considered sheep because of their good deeds. Their good deeds are proof that they are sheep, that they are righteous.

And so you have this contrast. You have those on the right—the sheep—who are just living out their faith, and, as a result, their deeds are righteous. Then you have the contrast of the goats on the left.

Now, listen. The same wording is used. This starts in verse 41:

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not welcome me; naked and you did not clothe me; sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

“Then they will also answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, or a stranger or naked, or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’

“Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’

“And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

It’s amazing. What Jesus is saying here is that the ones who count for nothing in our world count for everything in His.

And check this: the ones on the left are condemned—separated from God and the righteous forever and ever and ever—not for doing evil, but for doing nothing.

This is what we call the sins of omission. There are sins of commission, and there are sins of omission. Sins of

commission are sins that we know we commit. We know there is that line where we rebel against God's authority, and we willingly and knowingly cross over that line. We've all done that. Those are called sins of commission.

But there are also sins of omission. Sometimes these are simply sins of neglect. These are things we don't do, and we don't even know that we don't do them. And yet the Bible says you're going to—

be judged on these sins.

Now again, salvation—I need you to hear this—salvation is by grace through faith. This is Ephesians 2:8–9. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That is saving faith. But a true, legitimate saving faith will always produce works.

Ephesians 2:8–9: You are saved by grace through faith. Verse 10 says that you are created in Christ Jesus for good works. This is what James wrote in James chapter 2. Remember what he said? “A faith without works is”—what?—“dead.”

Listen to what the Scripture says, starting in verse 14 of James chapter 2. Now, James is the half-brother of Jesus. He grew up in the very same house as God but didn't become a Christian until after the resurrection. How would you like to have Jesus as your brother? “Be more like Jesus, all right? He never messes up. He never disobeys.”

So James becomes a leader in the early church after the resurrection. His nickname is Camel Knees. The Bible says that he spent so much—not the Bible; Christian tradition tells us—he spent so much time on his knees in prayer after he came to know Jesus as Savior that his knees became hard like those of a camel.

And his book has been called “the Christian shoe leather.” You know, the gospel should have shoe leather. You ought to be able to walk out of here every Sunday and put the gospel into practice, and that's what James is about. It's very practical.

Listen to what he says, starting in verse 14:

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace and be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

Verse 24:

“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

What this verse is teaching is that you can say you have saving faith all day long. You can say, “I prayed a prayer and asked Jesus into my heart when I was in the seventh grade or seven years old.” You can say it all

day long: “That’s what I have—saving faith.” You can say it all day long.

But what James is going to say is that your works justify whether or not you have saving faith. You’re justified by faith alone, but you can’t just go around saying, “I’ve got faith. I’ve got faith. I’ve got faith.” You can, but what’s going to justify that statement is whether there are works that come along with it—specifically the works in this passage of Scripture.

That saving faith is revealed on Judgment Day. By the way, that’s a day that’s on every one of our calendars. Hebrews 9:27:

“It is appointed unto man once to die, and then we face judgment.”

Every single one of us—that is an appointment every one of us is going to make. And God is going to look at our lives, and according to Matthew 25, we will be separated. Those to the right are righteous; they’re sheep, and they are justified by their works. He looks at their lives: Do they have saving faith? It will be revealed in their works—specifically in what they did with the poor, the imprisoned, the sick, the oppressed, and all of those who are mentioned here, which is just the totality of need in a person’s life. We will be separated to the right and to the left.

So we fight for the least, one, because we’re commanded to. But secondly, we will be judged on this. Those with true saving faith will find themselves fighting for the least.

Number three: ****We fight for the least because we were once the least.****

Now, this is the motivation for fighting for the least. This is like the fuel that we get filled up with in order to fight for the least. It’s one of our primary motivations.

When God was giving the law in Deuteronomy, part of what He was giving the law for, when talking about taking care of the stranger, the poor, and the widow, was this: “This is who you once were.”

Deuteronomy 15:15—He’s saying, “Look in the mirror”:

“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you. Therefore I command you this day.”

And He begins to command them to look after the poor and to help the oppressed. Why? Because this is who you once were.

I remember when my dad would drop me off somewhere or I was headed somewhere, he’d say, “Son, remember who you were. Remember who you are.” And that’s essentially what the Lord is saying to the nation of Israel here.

Paul writes the same thing in Ephesians chapter 2. He’s talking to Gentiles, and he is explaining that at one time we were outsiders. He says in verses 12 and 13:

“Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers”—

Underline that word. I'm going to come back to it in just a moment.

“—we were strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off, you who were once strangers, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

And so what Paul is saying is, “Hey, Gentiles, remember. You know what it's like to be an outsider. You know what it's like to be a stranger.”

Remembering that you were brought near is motivation for us to go out—and we'll talk about how we fight for the least in just a minute—and fight on their behalf, because we know what it's like to be the least and the broken.

When Jesus gives that parable of going out into the highways and byways and compelling people to come in, He goes after the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and He says, “Bring them into the house of the Lord.” The whole principle that the parable is teaching is that that's who we are.

We were blind. We were lame. We were broken. And God invited us strangers in—not just into the party, but to sit at His table. And so now it's motivation for us to go out into the world and find the broken, the least, and the lost. We bring them in, and we sit them at our table, showing them the love of Christ.

So very important. I was—

At a lecture last night at the Lanier Library, N. T. Wright, one of the foremost New Testament scholars in the world, was lecturing. Much of what he said went—all right, I'm from Louisiana, went to school in Arkansas, and my family's from Mississippi. I've told you that before, all right? I'm never the smartest person in the room. You've got to put it right here.

But the thesis of his life is this: Oftentimes, Christians are waiting to go up to heaven, when the reality of the Scriptures is that God, in Christ, came down to earth, and He lives in believers. We are not to be consumed with going up to heaven; we are to be consumed with bringing heaven to earth.

This is what we're talking about today in fighting for the least. So why do we fight for the least? One, we're commanded to. Two, we're going to be judged on it. And then three, we were once the least. We need to remember that, and that's motivation for going after them.

So how do we do it? All right, let's get real practical here, and we're going to finish this sermon up. I'm going to get you out to lunch in no time. All right, here we go.

I'm going to give you three ways we fight for the least.

First, we've got to ****see the least****.

All right, this is where it starts. We have to open our eyes and see them. You cannot feed the hungry, clothe

the naked, or take care of the sick if you refuse to look at them or be near them. If our eyes are closed to need, our hands are going to be closed to need, okay?

What I'm getting at here is proximity. Proximity to need matters.

We, in our culture, do not like feeling broken. We do not like feeling need. We are self-sufficient: "We can do this." Oftentimes, that leads us to lives where we avoid those in need.

We often think of the spiritual disciplines as having a quiet time, praying, reading our Bible, and times of solitude. But if you read Matthew 25, it implies there's a discipline of physical proximity to the vulnerable that's very important. It does what nothing else can.

You cannot be around suffering people—people in need—and stay the same. Talk to anybody who physically sits with the sick. I see Greg Creel down here, who goes to the prison and fights on behalf of the oppressed. When somebody makes that personal, there's something in them that those who lack proximity to need simply do not have.

I remember Mike Fechner, when he was going to the inner city. One of the main reasons he was going to the inner city, he said, "Jarrett, you've got to have a ministry in the church world that protects your heart—one you do not because you get paid to do it, but because you're doing it out of the desire to be Jesus to somebody."

For him, that was the inner city. I love the inner city, but for me, I had a very close relationship with my grandparents. I love my Mama and Pawpaw. Let me tell you, if I weren't the senior pastor of Champion Forest, I would be the senior adult pastor, all right? We'd be planning so many trips to Branson, to the Ark, and to Gaither concerts. We'd be going on buses. It would be awesome, all right? That's what I'd do. That would be my dream job. I love old people.

I remember, back in 2002, I started going every week to a retirement home and teaching a Bible study with eight or nine senior adults. I've been doing it ever since. The only year I took a break from it was during COVID.

Now, why do I tell you that? Not to pat myself on the back. I'm telling you that to say that every Thursday at two o'clock, a test comes to Jarrett Stephens: "All right, Jarrett, are you going to be too big for your britches? Are you too important to go visit these thirteen or fourteen old people and teach the Bible to them?"

That proximity to need does something to your heart. I want to encourage you—we're going to talk about feeling something in a moment—but when we fight for the least, it starts with seeing them.

Very quickly, in my research this week, I came across a Princeton Seminary study. They brought seminary students in and gave them a sermon they were going to preach. To half of the group, they gave the parable of the Good Samaritan. They said, "You're going to deliver this sermon across campus." They gave them time to prepare for the preaching and then sent them across campus.

On the way to where they were going to preach, right before they got into the building, they placed an actor there who was basically playing out the Good Samaritan scenario. He was dressed like a homeless man, and he would moan as they walked by.

Here was their thesis: They expected that the students who said they wanted to help and serve people—especially those who had just prepared a sermon on the Good Samaritan—would be the most likely to stop.

But that's not what happened.

In fact, there was only one variable that changed whether people stopped. To one group, they said, "Hey, look, you've got plenty of time. You're going to be early, so go on over there. They're not expecting you for a little while."

To the other group, they said, "Hey, look, they're expecting you right now. You're late, and you need to get over there and preach your sermon."

Only 10 percent of the students who were told they were late stopped to see if they could help that man—and many of them were going to preach on the parable of the Good Samaritan. But 63 percent of those who were not in a hurry stopped.

Here's what the researchers concluded, and it's very interesting: The words "You're late" had the effect of turning an ordinarily compassionate person into someone completely indifferent to suffering.

In other words, most are not hard-hearted people; they're just hurried people. In a hurry, we have trained ourselves not to see.

We walk by people every single day who are weak, vulnerable, and broken—people we would consider the least. Isn't this true? We walk by them not because we're cruel, but because we're busy.

All I'm telling you is that if we're going to fight for the least, it starts with really, truly seeing them.

Secondly, to fight for the least is to ****speak****—

for the least. This is all about advocacy. Listen to Proverbs chapter 31:

*"Open your mouth for the mute,
for the rights of all who are destitute.
Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy."*

Speaking up—advocacy—is using your power and influence where the person you're speaking up for and advocating for has none.

Isaiah 1:17:

*"Learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
bring justice to the fatherless,
plead the widow's cause."*

Where you can be a voice, be a voice. Listen, we can't do it for everybody, but we can do it for someone. There's that principle: If we would do for one what we wish we could do for everyone, what kind of world would this be? You can go places where others can't. You can use your access, influence, and the platform you have for the sake of another.

I read a book years ago called **Just Mercy** by Bryan Stevenson. They turned it into a movie. This is a guy who is a Harvard-trained lawyer, and he was from the South. He went back to Alabama and found a guy who was 40—I think he was 45 years old—and had been sentenced to prison for a crime he didn't commit. He had six witnesses who said he was nowhere near the crime that was committed, but they had one false witness who was lying.

When Bryan Stevenson started peeling back the layers, they found a recording where the one witness whose testimony put him away actually admitted that he was lying. They sentenced him to the electric chair. He was in prison for six years.

Bryan Stevenson, with this heart to act for those who had experienced injustice, stepped in. In 1993, the Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals reversed the conviction, and McMillan walked out of prison a free man.

Stevenson founded the Equal Justice Initiative—lawyers who give their time to help exonerate hundreds of those who have been wrongfully convicted. That's speaking up for—that's advocating for—the least. Again, we might not be able to do that, but we can do something.

And so, fighting for the least is seeing them. It is speaking up for them. And third and finally, how do we fight for them? We serve them.

I said a moment ago, we can see them, but if we don't feel something in our hearts, we're just going to walk right on by. The parable of the Good Samaritan is the lesson on this, right? Read it in your own time in Luke chapter 10.

A priest comes by, and the Bible says the same thing: He sees him and keeps walking. Next, a Levite comes, sees him, and keeps walking. But then a Samaritan comes by—and the Bible doesn't say he's a "good" Samaritan; we just tag that adjective on there. It just says "a certain Samaritan."

When he sees him, his response is totally different from that of the priest and the Levite. They both saw, but the Bible says the Samaritan saw and felt compassion. He felt something in his heart.

This is what led Jesus to act. You read Jesus's life. In Matthew chapter 20, verse 34, He feels compassion, touches a blind man's eyes, and heals him. In Mark 1:42, He has compassion, so He touches a leper and heals him. In Mark 6:34, Jesus has compassion and begins to feed the five thousand because He has compassion on them. In Matthew 9:36, He has compassion because they're like sheep without a shepherd, and He begins to pray for them.

His compassion led to action. Compassion has been defined as "your hurt in my heart." And so, we can see something, but if we don't feel something, we'll never be moved to action.

The only way I know to feel something in our hearts is that we have to spend time with Jesus. The more we spend time with Jesus in His Word—reading about His character and reading about what He requires—the more we'll love what He loves, hate what He hates, and feel what He feels.

And so, we have to ask God, “God, would You open my eyes to see the vulnerable? But, Lord, also, will You soften my heart to move on their behalf?”

Practically speaking, serving the least could mean learning the name of your waiter today—the one who's going to wait on you. They have a story. You can be a witness to them just by caring for them.

It could mean serving in VBS or in our children's ministry. Talk about the weak and vulnerable in our society: children.

It could mean getting the name of a widow here at our church and asking our pastors, “Hey, is there somebody whose yard I could mow, whose light bulb I could change, or for whom I could do things around the house that they can't do?”

It might mean volunteering through our Community Ministry Center, where we help feed the food-impooverished in our community; mentoring a student in school; opening your home to foster care and adoption; or volunteering in our ESL program. Larry Koenig from our North Klein campus leads that ministry.

By the way, regarding “the stranger” in the Bible—Matthew chapter 25, Ephesians chapter 2—there's a lot of debate in Christian circles. Does that mean refugee? Does that mean immigrant? This is not a passage where Jesus is declaring immigration policy.

But what Jesus is very clear about is that anybody in front of you who is vulnerable is our responsibility. It doesn't matter how they became vulnerable or what they did. The person in front of us who is vulnerable—they're the least, and we're required to show mercy and kindness.

So, a couple of questions, and we'll land the plane and call it a day. I mean for these to be thought-provoking questions.

Number one: Can you name one person currently in your life who is genuinely vulnerable and knows that you are a reliable presence in their life—that if they have a need, they could call you?

Second question: Can you name one moment in the last month when you served someone we would classify as “the least,” when that person could do nothing for you in return?

If you can't answer yes to these questions, this isn't meant to be condemnation. Let it be a compass point. Let it be a start. We have to start somewhere.

Our response to the weak, the powerless, the sick, the imprisoned, and the least—it is our response to Jesus. He said, “Whatever you do unto the least of these, you have done unto Me.”

And so, if you want to move toward God, it starts in faith, moving toward the least. And I'm praying that we will be a church full of people who start moving toward need today. Amen?

Let's pray together. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. I want to give those of you here today who have never received Christ an opportunity to receive Christ. You know, the Bible—

We were poor and broken and lame, and Jesus took our place. The Bible says He left the riches of heaven and became poor on our behalf, for our sake. As a result of Him becoming poor, going to a cross, dying for our sins, and shedding His blood on our behalf, we become rich.

The reformer Luther called it "the great exchange." When Christ went to that cross and died, He took on our sin, our guilt, and our shame, and we took on His righteousness. It's amazing.

If you'll trust in the message of Christ—that He died for you, that He was buried, and that He rose on the third day—your life can be changed forever.

Don't go out of here today gritting your teeth and saying, "I'm going to do better. I'm going to meet more needs." That's not how it's done. No, you walk with Jesus, and as a result of abiding in Jesus, you will have a life that overflows with meeting needs, because Jesus is going to make you more like Himself every single day as you walk with Him.

Maybe you're here today and you need a church home. You've been visiting Champion Forest North Klein. Every person needs three homes. You need a physical home that you can go to, where you're loved and supported. You need a heavenly home, where you're going to live forever and ever and ever. And every single person needs a church home—a home where you can have people who speak the truth to you in love, hold you accountable, and lock arms with you.

If that's you and you need a church home today, you come forward during this time of invitation. Maybe you just need prayer. Maybe you need to be baptized, like those we saw today. I don't know what decision you need to make, but God is speaking to your heart. You come.

Here's what we're going to do: I'm going to pray, we're going to stand, and we're going to sing a hymn of invitation. Then, if God has spoken to your heart, I want you to come and talk to one of the pastors.

You say, "What happens if I go down there?"

We pray with you, we celebrate your decision, and we put resources in your hands to help you grow in your faith. That's all we do. So, if you need to respond, respond by faith today.

God, this is Your time of invitation. Where You've spoken to hearts, let us respond in a way that honors You. In the name of the Lord Jesus, I pray. Amen and amen.

Thank you for joining us for Champion Forest Online. We hope today's message encouraged and inspired you. At Champion Forest, we focus on advancing the kingdom of God by making disciples, loving our community, and strengthening the church.

We would love the opportunity to get to know you. To connect with us, just go to [championforest.org/connect] (<https://championforest.org/connect>). We're so glad you joined us today, and we'll see you again next time.