

Believers are Builders

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

Well, amen. Good morning, Champion Forest. How are we doing?

Listen, let me say this first and foremost to the men in the room: May I pray a blessing over you that your brisket and the crust on it will be glorious today, that your favorite team will win - unless you're a Yankees fan. I pray that the Yankees lose every day of my life - and that your naps may be long this afternoon.

Man, what a glorious honor and opportunity that's been stewarded to so many of us in this room who are dads. We thank God for you this morning and for what God has done both in your life and in your family.

Let me just go ahead and get the armless elephant out of the middle of the room, because sometimes on Father's Day, people see the empty sleeves and everybody's like, "Oh man, he's going to tell some crazy story about his bear attack and all the things he survived."

Y'all, it's nothing juicy. Just know this is how I was born. This is how I came into the world. And for all the other 8,000 questions you have, like, "How does he write? How does he eat? How does he do this?" Whatever y'all do with your hands, I do with my feet, from top to bottom. We're talking write, eat, drive, hunt, fish. There aren't too many things I'm really bad at. I'm bad at basketball, but you are too, so it's all right.

The Lord has been very, very kind to me in the life that He has given me and in so many of the graces that He's showered on me.

As I walk through life, just going out and going to Chick-fil-A and eating a chicken sandwich with my feet to the glory of God, so many people will see me out and about. They'll see the whole armless situation, and so many times people will come up to me and honestly say such kind and encouraging things. People look at me and say, "Man, I just appreciate the heart that you're showing." So many people will say, "Brother, you're such an inspiration. You're such an encouragement," this, that, and the other.

So many times, you can't drill deep down into your story in a casual conversation in the middle of Chick-fil-A or McDonald's. But I want to tell those people, in the same way I would tell y'all, at the end of the day, guys, I'm not the hero of my story. I'm not. I didn't get to this point because I tried harder than anybody else, because I persevered, or because I found a way through it.

Y'all, first and foremost, I'm in this spot this morning by the grace of God. Jesus knew what He was doing when He formed and fashioned me in my mother's womb. He might not have given me cool things like thumbs and wrists, but He did give me the talented toes that I needed to navigate this life.

Jesus is the hero of my story, but I also need y'all to know that the reason I'm here this morning is because two men stepped into my mess in the most difficult parts of my life and literally saved my life in just about every conceivable way you could think. Those two men are my daddy and my student pastor.

I know for a lot of us, our dads play a huge role in our story, but y'all, literally, I'm not physically here with you this morning if it wasn't for my father. When I was born, number one, nobody knew I was going to be born without arms. That was a complete and total surprise as I came into the world. As the doctor was holding me in the delivery room, that was the first moment anybody knew I didn't have arms.

But then in that moment, as the doctor was holding me in the delivery room, I wasn't breathing. I wasn't moving. I didn't have a pulse. The doctor's first response was to turn to my dad. The doctor held me up so my dad could see that I didn't have arms, and then the doctor asked my father, "Do you want us to let him go?"

Y'all, we live in a world - even when I was born back in 1984 - where, if in that moment my daddy had just said, "That's okay. You can let him go," nobody in the world would have blinked an eye. Nobody in the world would have judged my dad for that sort of decision because, from the world's perspective, they would have seen that as a great mercy.

But in that moment, my daddy looked at me, and my daddy looked at that doctor, and he said, "You're going to do whatever it is that you can do to try to bring my son back."

The doctors rushed me out and worked on me, and in less than two minutes, the doctor walked back in with a little kicking, screaming, armless baby boy. In that moment, God had brought me from physical death to physical life, all because a daddy looked at this armless life and said, "You know what? He's worth it. That's my kid. That is my son that the Father has entrusted to me. I'm going to try to make the most of this."

By my dad's own admission, he said, "Looking at you in that moment, it was just nothing but fear washing over me, because I didn't know how I was going to do this. I didn't know how I was going to parent an armless little boy. But I just knew in that moment that this is the child the Father had entrusted to me, and I was going to try to make the most out of it."

Man, by the grace of God, it worked out really well.

Through the first portion of my life, physically, the armless thing wasn't much of a struggle. But I think in so many ways, spiritually and emotionally, that's where the struggles, hardships, and insecurities crept in for me. Here's the thing: When you're the one armless person in the room, you start to feel real broken real quick. The stares, the comments, and the stupidity I had to deal with from other people - as I got into my teens, it wrecked every single part of who I was, my sense of worth, and my sense of value.

By the time I was 15 years old, even though I was raised in a godly household and my parents took me to church, I hated myself. I hated everybody else because of how they treated me. And in all honesty, I hated God.

In my mind, I thought, "If God loved me, He would have made me like you. If God loved me, He would have given me ten fingers and two arms. So clearly, I'm screwed up. Clearly, God doesn't love me. Clearly, God

doesn't have plans for me."

In that moment of my life, when I was at my worst, the Lord led me to a youth group event where I sat down with this student pastor. He spent more than an hour explaining to me, from His Word, the love and care God has for me.

I'll never forget it. The student pastor shared with me Psalm 139, where the psalmist says, "God, You have fearfully and wonderfully made me. You've knit me together in my mother's womb, and I will praise You, for wonderful are Your works."

He went on to explain to me, "Daniel, listen, you're not a genetic mutation. You're not some sort of disabled, broken kid. God made you as a wonderful work to show the world more of His power, even through your disability."

I will never forget the guts this man showed in the course of this conversation. He looked me in the eye and said, "Listen, you have to understand that the greatest issue in your life is not your disability. The greatest issue in your life is your sin. That distances you from a holy God, in whom there is no sin - a holy God who wants to be in a relationship with you. But the promise of Romans 5 is this: God shows His love for us in this, in that while we were still sinners, Jesus died for us."

Y'all, for us in this room this morning, so many times we look at our circumstances and the things that surround us, and we're trying to find the evidence for how much God loves us. But for me in that moment, and for us in this room this morning, so many times we miss the evidence of the love and grace of God in our lives when it's staring right back at us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus did what you and I never could. He lived a perfect life to die a sacrificial death for you and for me. And the promise of Romans chapter 10 is this: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

For me, that night at that youth group event, trusting in and resting in Jesus as my Lord changed my life. God used that student pastor to step into my mess and show me the hope that Jesus is, not only to change my life, but to change my eternity.

Two men that nobody's ever going to write books about. They're not going to be famous. They're not going to be podcasters. One's a trucker. One's a student pastor from the middle of nowhere, North Carolina. God used those two men to change my life and to change my eternity.

Y'all, for us this morning, I fully recognize that we have dads in the room, men in the room, and ladies in the room. My challenge this morning is very much going to be to the dads and the men in the room, but it's for all of us: How do we live like those two men who stepped into my mess and fought for me? How do we live like that in such a meaningful way that we can see the fruit of the gospel come to bear in the lives of those who matter to us most?

If you brought a copy of God's Word with you this morning, I'd encourage you to turn with me to Romans chapter 15. We'll read the first seven verses of the chapter.

If you're familiar with the rhythm of the book of Romans, one of the things we begin to see in the first half of Romans is honestly a lot of bad news. We see what sin is and the damage that sin causes. But then the tone of Romans changes in Romans chapter 8, verse 1, when we see this picture of the gospel: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

From Romans 8:1 all the way to the end, it is the picture of both the gospel and our response to it. Here in Romans chapter 15, Paul is encouraging us as the church to see the gospel for what it is, to see Jesus for who He is, and for us to do something about it.

I'd encourage you to read with me. Romans chapter 15, beginning in verse 1:

"We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.' For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may, with one voice, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

This is the Word of the Lord.

This morning, if you're a mental note-taker or if you like to take notes in your journal, there are three big things I want you guys to see here in Romans chapter 15.

Believers Are Builders

The first thing is this: Believers are builders.

Paul starts off chapter 15 by saying, "We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak."

Here's the temptation in the hearts of many of us in this room this morning. We read that first little phrase and think, "Well, you know what? I'm not strong. I'm not strong in any sense of the word."

Some of us can quickly allow our minds to slip into, "Well, I'm not physically strong." Guys, guess what? I'm not either. On Father's Day, we're always looking at big, bulging biceps and guys who are lumberjacks. Y'all, I ain't got no biceps. There ain't nothing bulging out of these sleeves. I'm not physically strong. Nobody's ever going to think that about me.

Paul's not talking about the physical sense of strength. But I think some of us in this room this morning will think that verse 1 doesn't apply to us because we look at our lives and see how spiritually weak we are. I see how many times I lack faith. I see how many times I doubt. I see how many times I allow sin to invade my life and wreck every part of it.

"I'm not strong. I'm weak. I'm busted up. I'm broken. I'm frail."

But y'all, in all honesty, as you look through some of the other writings of Paul and see the epistles he writes to the church, when you and I come to understand just how weak we are in our own strength and in our own flesh, that is the perfect picture of what God needs in you and me.

As Paul writes to the Corinthian church, he says, "Listen, in our weakness, the strength of God is made more known in all the world." We get a greater sense of just how frail we are, but how mighty He is.

Church, this morning, as you sit here and think you're too weak for God to use you, that is exactly where you need to be in your faith. When you and I can sit in this room this morning and say, "I can't do this," the great news for you and me is that He can.

As Paul goes on to paint this picture of strength for you and me, as we depend on and rest in Christ - as Jesus says in John 15, as we abide in Christ - that's when the fruit begins to bear itself out in our lives. That's when we begin to see strength. That's when we begin to see peace. That's when we begin to see joy. When we, as the branches, abide in the vine that is Christ, that's when strength shows itself.

That's when, as Paul encourages us in verses 1 and 2, we begin "to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up."

Now that we've gotten rid of the idea that you're too weak for God to use you, the challenge in verse 1 is that you and I are obligated to be people who bear with failings, who bear with weakness, and who step into the lives of those around us who just need someone to listen, someone to love, someone to encourage, and someone to spur them along.

For a lot of us in this room who are daddies, that means we have to be those who, at times, discipline and correct our children. We have to turn them from brokenness, turn them from the world, and turn them from their sins. But in doing so, as Paul says there in verse 2, do we also build up our kids? Do we see the fingerprints of God in their lives? Do we see the giftings He has granted them? Do we call those out? Do we encourage those?

Y'all, when God called me into ministry 26 years ago, I thought I was the last person in the world God could ever use. Think about it: When Jesus saved me as a 15-year-old, at that point in my life I was a recovering people-hater. I had been judged by others and bullied by others my entire life.

So for Jesus to save me as a 15-year-old and then, ten months later, call me into ministry as a 16-year-old, I thought, "Lord, You are crazy. I would rather be a veterinarian. I will learn how to do sign language with these toes. I will be an ASL interpreter. Lord, just don't have me be a person who spends the rest of his life investing in people who have been so terrible to me for the span of my entire life."

But the thing I began to see was that Jesus stepped into my mess, built me up, encouraged me, and showed me more of Himself, just as my dad said yes to me in the first minute of my life, in a decision that had to be incredibly hard.

For those of us in this room who are daddies, think of the nine months that your spouse, your wife, carried your baby to term and the dreams you have. You think of seeing your kid play Little League Baseball, seeing them play high school football, go to prom, do the whole homecoming thing, graduate college, and get married. You have all of these dreams that you build up in your mind.

When I think of my dad walking through that season of his life and I showed up on the scene, all of those dreams went away. There was no dreaming of me playing Little League Baseball. There was no dreaming of me playing high school football. I was not what my dad had prepared for. I was not what my dad had dreamed of.

But I was the kid my dad pursued. My dad loved me. My dad stood in the gap for me. My dad saw his little armless boy, and he became a builder, an encourager, and an empowerer in who I was and in the life God had given me.

Y'all, sometimes being one who builds up is the hardest thing you can ever imagine doing. But here's the thing I can guarantee you: As you build, encourage, love, and serve either your spouse, your kids, some of the members of this church, or some of the people God has surrounded you with in your life - whether at work, among your neighbors, or in this community - as you show them more of the grace of Christ, there is nothing that will surpass the beauty and the sense of fulfillment that comes from building up, encouraging, and discipling those God has surrounded you with in your life right now.

For you and me in Christ, godly people are builders. It might be hard. It might not be what we had planned. But I guarantee you it will be something that shows eternal fruit, both now and in the years to come.

Godly people are builders.

Believers Are Built Up by the Word of God

The second thing I want us to see is this: Believers are built up by the Word of God.

If you look in verses 4 and 5, the apostle Paul says:

"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another in Christ Jesus."

Paul, there in verse 4, points us to the fact that "whatever was written in former days" - from the letters of Paul all the way back to what we see in the writings of Genesis and everything else in between - all of the counsel of the Word of God was written so that you and I can be encouraged, can be built up, and can navigate this life with both the endurance and the strength that you and I need just to take that next step and go through that next day.

In all honesty, for a lot of us, that's the sort of encouragement and sustenance we need.

Y'all, when you look across the landscape of this world, this world is going to give you bad news at every turn. You cannot turn on any sort of news media, whether we're talking about what you see on TV or what you see on social media. Nothing you're going to engage with in 2026 in terms of media is going to build you up or encourage you.

You're going to turn that junk on and be like, "Bro, we're all going to die." That's pretty much the bad news the world presents us with on a daily basis. We're discouraged, frustrated, beaten up, and broken down.

Here Paul points us to the fact that the one source of encouragement and endurance you and I have in this life is contained right here in the Word of God.

When we sit here this morning, look across the landscape of our lives, and think, "Man, I'm discouraged. I'm beaten up. I'm swallowed up in darkness," I would ask you an honest question. It's not meant to be pointed. It's not meant to be angry or cruel. But I would honestly ask you: What's your relationship with the Word of God?

For most of us in the church in America in 2026, our one encounter with the Word of God happens on Sunday mornings in this time slot right here. Then we try to live on that single meal for the next six days of our lives.

It's no wonder we're discouraged. It's no wonder we're spiritually malnourished. It's no wonder we don't have the fuel to keep going.

Here's the thing: If I told you that once we leave church today, you should go out and eat some Tex-Mex to the glory of God - or, you guys living here in the great republic of Whataburger, if you go get a patty melt and fuel up on all 2,000 calories of that sandwich - but then I told you to live the next six days on that patty melt or the next six days on that brisket burrito, how many of us would be able to navigate the next week with a single meal like that?

That's what you and I do with the Word of God week to week. We come to this place, hear the Word of God preached over us, and then try to survive the next six days with that single meal. It is not going to keep you sustained and moving forward as the world showers you with bad news, brokenness, and discouragement.

Y'all, spend time in the Word of God. There is no excuse for us.

If you open up your Bible and read one chapter in most of the New Testament - Philippians chapter 1 or Romans chapter 15 - I guarantee you, for those of you who are men in this room, you could read one chapter of the Word of God in a single commercial break during SportsCenter. You don't watch those commercials anyway. Why waste the five minutes of that commercial break when you can open up the Word of God and be encouraged by the words of your Father as you navigate this life?

Maybe some of us in here, especially those of us who are men, can sit here and say, "Well, I'm not much of a reader."

Y'all, I was born and raised in North Carolina. I'm a victim of North Carolina public schools. You think reading is something I'm good at? I feel you.

But y'all, there are even apps in this day and age that will read the Word of God to you. We're without excuse as to why we can't take five minutes, ten minutes, or 15 minutes of our day to open up the Word of God and navigate our lives by it.

As we wake up and go through life, discouragement is not going to fail in coming our way. For me, as I shared with y'all, my weak point in life is dealing with other people - dealing with the stares and criticisms I have to face on a daily basis.

Probably the worst location where I have to deal with ignorant comments from people is the airport, because everybody's stressed and contained in a small space. People say things they regret quite a bit.

I'll never forget, last year I was flying to Texas. I went up to the little American Airlines digital kiosk, where you can check in virtually real quick and then go get on your flight. For me to use those touch screens, I have to stand on one leg like a flamingo.

I'm sitting there tapping in my frequent flyer number, choosing to print out my boarding pass, and tapping the little screen to give me the sticker to check my luggage. As I'm doing that, there's a lady beside me at the kiosk next to me. For the sake of illustration, let's just call her Karen.

Karen is standing there, watching me do my thing, and this woman looks me dead in the eye and goes, "You could do that with a different part of your body."

In that moment, y'all, sarcasm is my native language, so I wanted to eviscerate Karen. I just wanted to let her have it.

But in that moment, I let the Word of God wash over me. I realized, from Psalm 139, that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I'm a wonderful work, even if Karen doesn't think it. I thought of Jeremiah chapter 1, where God says to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I set you apart as a prophet to the nations."

The most important words in my life, the words that grant me value, are the words of my Creator, my Sustainer, and my Savior. If I allow those words to wash over me, the words of Karen don't affect me that much.

In that moment, I didn't say anything overly snarky, but I did look Karen dead in the eye and say, "Well, listen, I could use my tongue to type in my frequent flyer number, but sometimes that just doesn't work very well."

Karen gasped real loud. There was an American Airlines employee standing behind me, and she said, "Oh, baby, that was good."

I said, "Thanks. Well, thank you."

For us in this life, we need to allow the Word of God not just to be a bumper sticker on who we are, but to be the means by which we're sustained and the means by which we carry on. That allows us not only to endure in this life and be encouraged in the midst of its discouragement, but it also allows us to fulfill those first two verses that we read.

As we're fueled, we'll be people who bear with the failings of the weak. We'll be those who build up because we actually have something to give of ourselves.

Godly people are built up by the Word of God.

Believers Live with Jesus as the Hero of Their Lives

The last thing I want us to see is this, and then we're done: Believers live with Jesus as the hero of their lives.

Paul finishes the section we just read in verses 5 through 7. He says:

"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together, with one voice, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Here, in three consecutive verses, do you see Paul consecutively - one, two, three - point to Jesus, point to Jesus, point to Jesus? He is the focus of our faith. He is the focus of our lives. He is the apex of all we are and all we do.

Jesus ought to be the hero of the lives of those who claim Him as Lord. Y'all, He ought to be the One we think about, the One we talk about, the One we consider, and the One we build our lives around.

But y'all, even here in the belt buckle of the Bible Belt, in Houston, Texas, I think so many of us are content to hang out with Jesus on Sundays but then live the other six days of our lives however we want. That's not the way the lordship of Christ even remotely works.

We can't be people who talk about all these other heroes who dot the landscape of our lives, but we don't consider, talk about, trust in, or rest in Christ at any point during our week.

In all honesty, how many times in the past week have you talked about that one sports hero in your life? How many of us have talked about Jose Altuve this week? How many of us are talking about the Texans and how maybe they won't be terrible this year? How many of us have talked about Kevin Durant or the Houston Rockets? How many of us have talked about a World Cup match in the past week?

But then, how many of us have even had the name of Jesus Christ trail off our lips in the past seven days?

We'll build up heroes who play in arenas. We'll think about them. We'll buy their jerseys. We'll talk about them. But how many of us haven't given a single thought to the Savior who died to rescue and redeem

us, to give us both life eternal and life abundant to live in right now?

Y'all, we cannot be people who consider Jesus a side piece of our lives and not the Lord of them.

Some of us prayerfully need to say this morning, "Jesus, I've been giving You my Sundays, but I haven't been giving You my Tuesdays, my Thursdays, and every other day in between."

Some of us need to wake up every single morning and prayerfully say, "God, here's my day. God, here's my nine-to-five. God, here are my relationships. God, here's my time. Here's my talent. Here are my resources. God, use this for Your glory and for Your purpose."

For some of us here this morning, we simply need to take the step of trusting in Jesus as our Lord. Some of you have come to know a lot about Jesus. You've learned things. You've heard of this Jesus, but you haven't taken the step, as Romans chapter 10 says, to confess Him as Lord and trust Him with all that you are and all that you've done - the good, the bad, and everything in between.

Jesus is not scared of welcoming you into the family of God because His grace is greater than all your sin. He doesn't look at you as someone who's too broken to be brought into the family of God.

If you're sitting here this morning and you know that you know that you know this is the morning, then for you as a daddy, the most important thing you could do as a father this morning is surrender your life to your heavenly Father.

If you need to do that this morning, the challenge is simple. Bring yourself. Bring your good. Bring your bad. Bring your sin. Bring your gifts. Say, "Jesus, I'm going to give You everything I am and everything I've done. Jesus, save me from my sins, and God, allow me to walk in the newness of life You give me every day."

If you need to do that, here in just a second, Pastor Jarrett will walk you through what it looks like to trust in and rest in Jesus as your Lord, as your hero, as your everything.

But church, I would say a lot of us here have taken that step of faith. We've trusted in Jesus as our everything. Maybe prayerfully, some of us this morning need to have our lives look like Jesus is the greatest news we've ever come to know.

For some of us this morning, the most Christ-honoring thing we can do is give Jesus our Sundays, but also give Him our Mondays, our Wednesdays, our Friday mornings, and our Saturday afternoons. We need to prayerfully hold them up to Him and say, "God, here's what I've got. Use me. Use my life. Use my days. Use my weeks for Your glory, to show the world just how amazing a Savior and how amazing a God You are."

Let's pray.

Father, I thank You for the men and women You have brought here this morning. God, I thank You for the daddies in this room. I thank You, God, that You have trusted them with so many amazing spouses and so many amazing kids.

God, this morning, may our families reflect Your glory, Your grace, and Your love in how we function on a day-to-day basis. God, I pray that we, as Your church, would be people who build up our families and build up our churches. God, may we be people who are built up by Your Word. And God, may we be people who find ourselves in You, in Your grace, and in Your gospel.

This morning, God, may You be the hero and the focus of all we are and all we do. Father, we love You. We thank You.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.