



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

May God be in our mind. May God be on our lips. May God be in our heart. Amen. You may have a seat.

In the summer of 2000, my wife Amy and I purchased our second home. And at the time, our youngest child, Beatrice, she was probably two or three weeks shy of her first birthday. And our son Daniel was about two-and-a-half years old. And so we took these two little ones in tow and we packed up our small little bungalow first home, and we moved into this beautiful neighborhood that was only two streets and walking distance away from the kids' grandparents, my parents. And so we were super excited to be in this home in this neighborhood, we were thrilled to be close to my parents, and we were just happy to have a home that was just a touch bigger. Enough space for this young burgeoning family to continue to grow.

But after just a couple of years of living in this home, some strange things started to happen. And it started just with a tiny crack on the ceiling, maybe only this big in between the kitchen and the living room. It started as a small crack, but it continued to grow and went across the whole ceiling. And then there were some doors in the living room, and the corners of those doors, the drywall started cracking and pulling apart, and the doors were getting hard to open and shut.

And the back door, you couldn't lock it because the deadbolt would hit the doorframe. And so I would make an adjustment, and then sure enough, two weeks later or three weeks later, it would change again. I keep making these adjustments. Things were shifting. Now many doors were getting hard to close. The windows kind of were hard to pull up and shut down, and everything was moving.

And we started to see some of this form in the outside as well. There were some step cracks in the brickwork and they started to pull away. And we had a half wall by the garage and it started to tilt in a little bit. And something crazy – you'd walk out your front door and you'd kind of feel yourself lean down a little bit because the front porch was just kind of leaning a bit and pulling away from the home.

And obviously we were alarmed by these sudden changes. And so we started to research potential problems, anyone that might have experienced something that we were experiencing. And several experts and contractors later, it was determined that our newly purchased home was literally sinking into the ground.

To be more exact, everything on a 42-inch footer. So our front porch, our garage, our living room and our little sunroom in the back were all sinking in and pulling away. And because they were under the same roof, what was happening? They were pulling the roof a bit apart and we were getting some leaking.

So after many assessments and talking to too many people, the cause was deemed a soil issue, and the insurance company said they were not going to cover any of the costs. And the cost was estimated at about \$30 to \$60,000. Now, needless to say, we didn't have that money to cover that kind of catastrophic moment, and we had just a tiny little bit of stress in our lives at that point.

Now, listen, I'm not a marriage therapist. I'm not a marriage counselor, but here's what I know. I have a lot of confidence in this. If you have two little ones under the age of five that have a lot of energy and you don't have a lot of money in the bank and your home is sinking in the ground, don't do that for your marriage. I'm telling you what, those years were so intense and so stressful for us, but there we were. We were living in an outwardly beautiful home, but in reality, a home that was sinking and falling apart because of something that was unseen and buried in the darkness of the earth.

In the Gospel of Mark that we just heard, and many readings throughout scripture, it points to a spiritual truth that I think we discovered in the physical world through our home. Let me explain. In the Gospel of Mark, the religious elite of that time are monitoring Jesus, the Pharisees and the Scribes and the Sadducees. They were experts in the Jewish law and the ones in power to hold this entire community to the standards of this religious law. And they're trying to intimidate or challenge, or even maybe threaten Jesus and His movement and His disciples, because they're not following exact cleansing rituals.

Essentially, the disciples were eating food without cleaning their hands, and that was considered unclean. And even to a certain point, it could be considered immoral and dishonoring to God. To disregard or not follow these purity laws brought about consequences, and these religious leaders were setting the scene for confrontation between this Jewish law and what Jesus was bringing. And by the way, all throughout scripture, you see this confrontation happening.

Now, ceremonial washing was important in that culture. They did it because they loved God and they wanted to be honoring to God. They wanted to go through this and be pure, and they wanted to be seen as pure and acceptable and honoring to God. Yet Jesus, throughout His time on earth, pressed against this Jewish law in a unique way by highlighting two aspects of it. The first one is the letter of the law. This legalistic or ritualistic thinking, where as long as you did all the right steps, or took all the right steps, and were seen as acceptable and clean, in God's eyes, you were being honoring.

The second is the spirit of the law, finding the very heart of God inside the law, which by the way, God created. But finding the very heart of God where the love of God and the wellbeing and flourishing of our neighbor is of utmost importance. Jesus was trying to get these religious leaders of His day, and I think us today, to understand that you could practice ritualistic and legalistic religion, but still be far from the very heart of God. You could practice all of these things, but still be far from God. You could be outwardly beholding and looking pious and righteous, but inside there would be dissonance.

I like what Pope Francis wrote about this. He wrote something very beautiful. He said this, “The Lord invites us to avoid the danger of giving more importance to form than to substance. He calls us to recognize, ever anew, what is the true core of the experience of faith. And that is love of God and love of neighbor. And he does this by purifying it of the hypocrisy and the legalism and ritualism.”

You know, last weekend our nonprofit, the Open Table Collective, hosted a good friend of mine, Dr. David Gushee. And Dr. David Gushee has written, he's a great author and speaker. He's a pastor. He's a professor and also a very highly touted Christian ethicist. And one of his very, very first books that he wrote was something called *The Righteous Gentiles*. And it was looking at the tiny little percentage of Christian leaders at that time that were standing up for the Jews that were being persecuted. They were housing them and protecting them, and hiding them through Hitler's regime.

And upon studying them, Dr. Gushee found out something very interesting about these Christians, that they would go to church, many of them on a Sunday. And the pastor would say to them that you are not to house or hide or protect any Jewish people because it would be sinful and dishonoring and against the will of God. Yet these righteous gentiles will leave that environment and go to their very home where they're housing and protecting these Jews. Purposely going against the dangerous governmental leadership and even the church leadership because they put loving their neighbor, the very spirit of the law, over the letter of the law.

Now, we know we're not supposed to lie, right? But what if we lie in order to protect harm coming to our neighbor? Would God see that as breaking the law? A religious leader more focused on form than substance might see this as law breaking, but God sees it as loving our neighbor. So Jesus does something really interesting. He turns to these religious leaders and He calls them out. He turns to them and He says, you're challenging me, but you are hypocrites. And then He quotes to them, the prophet Isaiah, which they would know because they're experts in the law. He says, these people honor me with their lips, but their very core, their hearts are far from me. In vain, do they worship me, teaching me human precepts as doctrines.

Now these are harsh words of critique. And I think His community would've been rocked by how boldly He spoke to these powerful leaders. In essence, Jesus is saying this, your words sound good. You look righteous to those around you, but at the very core, you have something unwashed, unclean, and dirty. You look good on the outside, but underneath the surface, in the darker places, there are significant issues.

Now sometimes when Christians will read these, or sometimes when pastors are being taught, they'll be taught that these Jewish leaders might be a little cold to God, that they didn't love God. I don't think that's the case at all. I was even taught a little bit as I started to tear these apart, that this group of people was almost the enemy to the Christian faith. But if you look at it in the cultural context, there's much more happening there.

And so preparing for this sermon, I reached out to a friend of mine, Michael Smolash. Michael Smolash is the lead cantor and leader in one of the biggest reformed Jewish temples in the country. It's called Temple Israel. It's not very far from here. And we've done a lot of work over the past, and Michael's an incredible leader. Rabbi Josh is an amazing leader. That whole community is quite magical and remarkable. And so I wanted to call my friend to say, how do you see this from a Jewish perspective? And so what I think he gave me was gold. I hope you think it's gold too. I'll try to explain it the best I can. I might not do it full justice, but I think you're going to get the idea.

He said in the Jewish checks, there are numerous times where the prophets would challenge the religious leaders of that time, telling them the worship was empty or ritualistic, that they were just going through the motions, but missing the very core, the very heart of why they were worshiping God. And he said this, and I'm paraphrasing, he said, all good deeds, all mitzvahs, all commandments, consist of two things: a body and a soul. And he said, when either one of those are out of balance, there's an issue. And then he gave this beautiful image.

He said, think of it like this, Danny. Think of it as if it's two wings and one wing is love, the love of God, the love of people. And the other wing is awe, respect, ritual. He said, think of it this way. If one of these wings are compromised, the good deed for God is compromised. But if they're both flourishing, it brings flight to deep compassion. And then he said this, he said, love and awe are the wings that give flight to the compassionate deeds to God.

Isn't that beautiful? What Jesus is convicting these leaders of is having an imbalance between how they view the law and how they view the love of God. Now, remember, Jesus is not throwing away the law. God created the law. In fact, what Jesus says is, I'm not going to abolish any of the law. What I'm going to do is I'm going to fulfill the law. Jesus was the fulfillment of all the law, even the intent of the law leading up to that moment. Jesus is elevating this law. Dare I say that

Jesus is even bringing a new way, a new redeemed and reformed law, rooted in the very deep grace and mercy and love of God.

And so Jesus says this to these leaders and then He swings around and He tells it to His people. As He would do then, He's doing it to us today. Listen to what He said. “There's nothing outside a person that by going in can defile. But the things that come out are what defile.” And here's what – I want you to remember this line. “For it is from within, from the very human heart that evil intentions come.”

There is an amazing, consistent theme throughout all of scripture that God is obsessed with our hearts. And when the Jewish community talks about hearts, they're not talking about our emotions. They're talking about our full being, the very core of who we are. God is continually, throughout scripture, desiring us to welcome him into the very core of who we are. It says, from where the mouth speaks, it's where the condition of your heart is.

The very heart is the wellspring of life, the theme that God desires to transform his people from the very inside out, from the dark places that no one can see to the places that are visible. That God will exchange a heart of stone, which is a heart that cannot receive anything, to a heart of flesh that can receive and grow. But God does not view human beings the way human beings view human beings. It says that human beings see each other from the outward appearance, but God sees human beings at the heart.

So why does God care so much about our heart? Why does he care about the heart of these religious leaders of this time? Because when our hearts, when the inside of our hearts matches the outside, I actually think it's a spiritual superpower. When we are clean inside and out, it's a superpower. You know what it is? It's integrity. It's full integrity.

Now let me ask you something. In this time, in this day and age, do you value people of integrity? Think about the people in your life. You know, it hit me this morning. My father passed away about four months ago, and I'll tell you something, and I'm not exaggerating this, he was the greatest man of integrity I think I've ever known. I don't think in my 57 years that I ever watched him respond inconsistently with his family. Isn't that incredible? And I happen to be my father. Integrity is something we desperately desire.

Brene Brown, who's a sociologist and a researcher, she says this of integrity. She said, integrity is choosing courage over comfort. It's choosing what's right or what's fun and easy. Integrity is practicing your values, not just professing your values. Jesus knew that living a life where the outside does not match the inside is a life of dissonance and pain. It's a life where your doors don't shut, where your windows can't quite close, where things are a little rocky and sinking.

But when we have integrity, we can have courage, we can have confidence, we can have a comfort, we can have a transparency, we can lack in striving and ability to see and love ourselves and our neighbors and God the way that God desires us to. It all flows out of the very core of a person in a community. The very heart.

This work to make this inside look like our outside is super difficult work. It's dirty work. It's work that you don't see. But I'll tell you something, it's important. I've said this for many years to communities. I see people in communities like sponges. When you look at a sponge, you're not sure what's in it, but when it presses down on it, what comes out is what it really is. So how do we work on this? If it's such a big deal to God, it should be a big deal to us. Maybe the solution can be found in the solution we found to save our home. Let me tell you the rest of the story.

After several months of research, wrestling with insurance companies and contractors – I never want to see another contractor again – it eventually came down to two solutions of how to fix our home. We could stabilize our house by digging around the 42 inch footer and putting these cement pylons in there just to keep it from sinking any more. Or we could use something they called helical piers. They were like these big drill bits, and they would turn and twist them down into the earth all the way until it hit and anchored into bedrock. And then they would take that and they would attach it to your foundation, or they attach it to your footer and they would lift it back up into place.

We chose that option. We chose the latter. And we ended up having 32 helical piers put around our home, and they essentially had to dig up everything. I mean, all of our landscape, everything, they dug everything up. They made these massive holes, which by the way, our kids absolutely loved. They're playing in it, and Amy and I just have little tears coming down like, I can't believe what's happening. And after they did all that, they installed the helical piers, they attached it to our home. They lifted up our home back in order, and they backfilled all of these holes and then they left.

And we just looked and it looked like an absolute mess. But we finally had something. We had peace that one day our home wouldn't sink into the earth. We have peace knowing that our home was anchored to something deeper than the shallow earth beneath our feet. You know what's so hard to come to grips for me about our home? By the way, we still live in this home. We should have sold it a long time ago. No, but we still live in this home. But you know what drives me crazy is when you look at our home, you can't see the tens of thousands of dollars we invested in that.

Let me ask you something. When you walk through your neighborhood and you look at these beautiful homes, like, I'm driving in today, I'm looking at these homes and there's not one time I've ever looked and went, wow, that is the most

beautiful, sexy foundation I have ever seen. Have you ever done that? No. You know why? Because it's buried. It's underneath the earth. It's in the darkness. Yet it is one of the most important aspects of any structure, because without a foundation that has complete integrity, the whole structure is compromised.

And so I say to you and to us today, the same holds true for our spiritual life and our spiritual community. We can choose to be rooted in a shallower, legalistic religion. Or we can choose to be rooted and firmly planted in the deep bedrock of Jesus, the bedrock of Christ's love, which is a love by the way, that is of the highest integrity, the deepest foundation, and a love that supernaturally transforms us from the very core heart out.

I've shared this many times. The hardest work that any person or community will ever do is the work in the dark places that is only between you and God. You'll never get a degree for it. You'll never get celebrated for it. You probably won't get a job for it, but it's the most important work we can do. Let me end with this.

It's a story about the first time I ever took Communion here. You know, I think it has been over 40 years in my life that I've ever walked down the aisle of a church like this, came up and knelt down and put my hands out to receive Communion. Now I'm a pastor for 25 years. I've officiated Communion. I've administered it. I've been part of Communion, but I couldn't remember the last time. So when I was here for the first time, when Amy and I were going to get Communion, we were a little nervous.

And so we got up to this front pew right here. And you could even go right down this beautiful long aisle with the voices singing over you and go up to that main altar. Or you can make a quick left turn and go over here to St. Paul's Chapel. And when we got there, I'm going to be honest with you, this was a little intimidating the first time. And over here, Reverend Manisha was here and I had just met her and I looked over and I said, okay, I think I know her a little bit and so I think I'll make a quick left.

And so we came over and when our turn came, we knelt down and within a few seconds, Reverend Manisha was standing before us. And when she saw me, her eyes lit up and it seemed as though her hands were shaking with excitement to hand me the Body of Christ. And in Manisha's beautiful way, we know she has such an energy that takes over, you know? And it's so beautiful. With all joy and love, she looked at me as if her hands were shaking and she's like, this is the Body of Christ, the bread of life, as if she's putting all the mysteries and the wonder of the world in the palm of my hand.

And I'll tell you, I felt like a little kid, man. And I got up and I started walking and I got to about that first or second column and just tears welled in my eyes and streamed down my face. It was so unbelievably moving to me and powerful. Now, I've never had that experience with Communion. I've had plenty of those

experiences with Jesus where I've been brought to my knees and I've wept. But this was so beautiful and so powerful.

This is what I'm assuming upon Manisha. I believe Manisha is so excited to share Communion, which she does for everyone, because she knows intellectually, but more so at her very core of her being that it's the power of Christ that transforms our inner beings. She realizes the depth and the magnitude of this moment where Christ – in a minute, we're going to ingest Christ into our bodies and our bodies are going to break down Jesus and send it to every single cell in our bodies so that we can have rejuvenation, that we can be reformed, that we can be renewed. She knows that.

I pray we don't come here for ritualistic reasons, even though ritual is really important. Structure is very important. It's one of the wings. Yet, I would attest to us that our gathering has a greater purpose. I think, for this entire community, every time we gather you know what God is doing? He's taking the helical piers of his love in life and He's twisting deeper down into the bedrock of His love and grace and mercy, and He's attaching it to you and to this community, and He's lifting us higher and renewing us.

I pray that we continually come to the awareness and knowledge that God wants our entire lives at the very core, the very root. And he wants us to be driven down into the bedrock of His grace, mercy, and love. And as we leave today, I hope that the two wings, love and awe, are a little more balanced so that when we leave here, our good deeds in the name of Jesus can take flight into compassion. That's what I believe Jesus was saying to these religious people, and that's what I think Jesus is saying to us today. And I pray that the spirit of living God will make it so today.

And here's one more thing I want you to think about. As you drive around this week and you look at your neighbor's home or your own home, I just want you to look at those homes unto yourself, say, that is a beautiful foundation.

Amen.