

Craig Groeschel: Well, I am excited to dive into this message this week. I hope you are, as well. Welcome to all of our LifeChurches. Every single one of you, all of our Network Churches on the other side of computer screens all over the world, we actually have been praying for you all. We're very, very glad that you're here. We are in a message series that's called Twisted and what we're doing is, we're looking at some of the most popularly-quoted Bible verses that are often misunderstood or misrepresented.

In fact, today I want to open up with a story about one of the most popular verses anywhere. Chances are, if you have been a Christian for any amount of time, you might know this verse. You've probably quoted this verse. You've seen this verse somewhere and I'm going to tell you a story that will introduce this very popular verse. Years ago, before I was a follower of Jesus, I partied, probably like a lot of you did. I got really rip-roaring drunk one night at college, came back to my fraternity room, and I got into the bed. It was one of those nights when the bed was spinning. I learned that whenever the bed is spinning when you're drunk, you're supposed to put your foot on the ground and that settles it. Last service, somebody said, "Amen." They actually said "Amen" when I said you put your foot on the ground, like, "Well, glad to know our church understands that."

I put my foot on the ground and that didn't stop it, so I thought, "Well, I'll put my whole body on the ground." I got on the ground; it's still spinning. I wanted to listen to some music, so what do you do in the eighties when you want to listen to music? You turn on your boom box. That's what you do. I reached up, turned on my boom box, and the station wasn't, it wasn't exactly on a station, so I'm fiddling with it, trying to get the tuner right. Evidently, I accidentally landed on a Christian station. Little did I know that the voice on the other side would say something that really impacted my life. There was the most angelic, soothing female voice.

It was like an angel's voice that said something along the lines like this: "I don't know who you are right now, but if you're hurting, God cares for you." I was like, "That's me. That's me. She's talking to me, to me." There might have been other people going, "That's me. I'm hurting right now." She's, "I just want you to know that there's a verse that really could impact your life." Then the angelic voice read this voice to the drunk guy trying to get the room to stop spinning. She read Jeremiah 29:11, the verse we're going to look at today, which says, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declared the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.'" Then she read the next part that talks about if you seek God, you will find Him.

I remember just sitting there in that drunk state, wondering to myself, "Could that be true? Was this verse for me? Did God, does He really care about me? Does He have plans for me? Does He have plans to bless me, to prosper me?" That verse impacted me in a massively significant way. Odds are decent that some of you have a story about that verse. Maybe you got it on a coffee mug and you drink out of it every day and you love that coffee mug. Chances are, some of you got a graduation card with that verse on it. It's the most popular verse on graduation cards. Chances

are good some of you have a refrigerator magnet with that verse on there. I would dare to say there is somebody here who has a pillow that your grandma cross stitched that verse onto that pillow, because there's no better verses for nanas all over the world to cross stitch onto pillows.

It's such an amazing and popular and comforting and soothing and hope-filled verse. What I want to do today, though, is show you that there's actually maybe a little more to that verse than a lot of us understand and I want to help bring some context to it, reframe it a bit, and then perhaps you might even love this verse even more after we've done it. What are we going to do in order to get a little deeper understanding into this verse? If you've been with us the last few weeks, we talked about 3 things that we do in order to better understand the Bible. The first thing, if you'll remember, is we try to understand the context. What is the context? We want to know who wrote this verse. To whom was it written? What was the broader picture? What was going on? What came before this verse? What came after this verse? We want to understand the verse in context of the reason that it was written.

The second thing we want to do is, we want to interpret scripture with scripture. The best commentary on the Bible is actually the Bible. When we look at a verse, we want to see what else did the Bible say about this theme or this big idea. We're going to interpret scripture with scripture. Context, interpret the Bible with the Bible, and then number 3 is, we want to apply it. I said it before, that the Bible is not just a text to be studied. It's letters to be lived. It's God's living word that transforms our life. We're not just students of the word, but we apply it and live it in every day life.

Jeremiah 29:11, "God has plans to prosper you." Let's look at that verse in context and see if we can get a broader understanding. Verse 1 of Jeremiah 29 actually gives us the context. See if you can pick it up. This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent. Question number 1, "Who wrote this letter?" The answer is Jeremiah. Ding, ding, ding. Very good. It's right there. It's the prophet Jeremiah, sent it from Jerusalem. Now, who did he write this to? To the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets, and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

What's going on? Well, Jeremiah is writing this letter to the Jewish exiles, the people who were taken out of their homeland into captivity under King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. They say, "Why were they in exile?" The reason is because they blatantly rebelled against God, disobeyed God, turned to false gods, turned to other idols. God says, "Basically, because of your ill behavior, because of your sinfulness, for the next 70 years, you're going to be under the control of the Babylonians. You are in exile."

When we read this verse, what we need to understand is, there will be specific promises in the Bible and there will be general promises. There are specific promises made to a specific group of people, and there are general promises made

to everybody. The truth is that Jeremiah 29:11 is a specific promise made to the Jewish exiles. We need to understand this promise is not specifically to us, but specifically to a nation. The problem is, for me, when I read that verse, "God has plans to prosper you," I always thought "you" meant "me." Why? Because I want to be the main character of everything that happens in the Bible. I want it to all be about me.

That's the problem. In fact, I'll teach you a couple seminary words just for fun. I went to 4 years of seminary. I'm going to give you some of the high points right now in 30 seconds. Okay. What we want to do is, we want to do proper exegesis, not eisegesis. Those are 2 seminary words. It's not J-E-S-U-S, Jesus. Wouldn't that be cool? It's actually G-E-S-I-S, not the same gesis. Exegesis means ex. "E-X" means to pull out of. Our goal is to pull truth out of the text. Eisegesis is a word that means to "see in the text what we want to see," or to "read ourselves into the text."

If you do Eisegesis, it doesn't mean you don't love Jesus. It doesn't mean that you're a heretic. It doesn't mean you're going to hell where the worm never dies and there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. What it means is, you simply do what all of us do at some point, is you're reading through your own filter and you're seeing yourself in the text. The reason why this is dangerous and we want to try to avoid doing it- We all do it at some point. Is that if we start to believe Jeremiah 29:11 as a specific promise to us: God is going to prosper us, God is going to bless us, no harm will ever come to us, whenever one of those things does not happen, "Well, I prayed and now I'm not blessed. I'm faithful and now I lost my job. I'm serving God and my kid is sick."

Whenever we believe this is just to us and it doesn't happen, it leads us to the conclusion that either God does not exist, or God is not really good. That's the danger so often when we have reading ourselves into a promise. We start to wrongly believe that God is some kind of cosmic Coke machine. We come up to God, we put our money in, we do what we're supposed to do, push the button. Then he must deliver on exactly what we want. Essentially, we're reducing God to our butler who exists to serve us. "May I serve you? May I serve you?" The bottom line is, we exist to serve and glorify God. His highest calling and purpose is not to serve us. He served us through Jesus. He blesses us in so many ways, but ultimately, God is not saying, "What can I do for you? I exist for your pleasure."

We exist to bring him glory, and that's why we have to be very careful not to read ourselves into a promise that was really not made for us. Glad you came to church today. I gotta throw away my coffee mug, can't wear my favorite shirt anymore, got to scrub over my Jeremiah 29:11 tattoo, and got to take a knife and cut up nana's pillow that she cross stitched for me. Great. Thanks, Craig. Okay.

No, no, no, no, no, no. Let's dive into it some more and I think you may actually find that there's power and truth all over this verse. Another question. We're looking at Jeremiah 29. What comes before Jeremiah 29? The answer is Jeremiah 28. You

guys are getting this down. Week over week, you're figuring it out. If you read in Jeremiah 28, and I hope that you will ... I'll give you a quick summary. There is a guy in there named Hananiah. Hananiah comes in and says, "Guess what? This is only going to last for 2 years. You thought you were going to be in exile for all this time, but God's going to break the Babylonians and in 2 years, you're out of here."

If you read Jeremiah 28, there's this showdown that goes between Hananiah and the prophet Jeremiah where Hananiah takes off the yoke of the prophet Jeremiah and breaks it. All of the sudden, Jeremiah is, "Oh, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. What you're saying, Hananiah, sounds good, but it's not true." What Hananiah was, was a false prophet and he was delivering what I call false good news. False good news, "This is only going to last for 2 years." Jeremiah the prophet says, "No, no, no, no, no. You're wrong and you're going to die." It's pretty serious. Don't get this wrong. It'll cost you.

In the seventh month of that year, guess what happened? The false prophet Hananiah died. Wow. It's better than an HBO mini-series. You ought to read your Bible. This stuff is good. That is precisely why parents all over the world name their children Jeremiah and ain't nobody named Hananiah, because he was a false prophet with false good news. Everybody say, "false good news." False good news. Today, it's so easy to pursue this false good news. I want what feels good. I want easy believism. I want God to do everything I want Him to do. I want it to be all about me. Without knowing, we can slip into the eisegesis, where the text is always about me or God is always here to serve me and everything's going to be about me. If we're not careful, we'll be drawn to a type of preaching that almost always says that kind of thing.

I really try to be careful not to talk bad about other preaching styles and such, but if you watch on television, especially toward the beginning of the year, you'll hear a lot of messages like this. "This is the year of abundance. This is the year of the breakthrough. This is the year of victory. Today, on this day, you will prosper. This seed will bring a harvest," and on and on and on and on. A lot of times, they'll have extra syllables when they say the words, too, like "God-ah." Whatever. Anyway, that's just ... I shouldn't. That's making fun of it. Anyway, it is what it is.

I sincerely hope that for every one of you, this is the year of your breakthrough. I sincerely hope that this is the year of prosperity for you. I sincerely hope that on this day, whatever you need is going to happen. The problem is if we only seek that and we only believe that, then one day when that doesn't happen, we end up thinking, "Well, God is not real or God is not good." Before long, we reduce Christianity to a means to an end. God exists to make my life easier. God exists to make me comfortable. God exists to make me prosperous. God exists to bless me. When we're not careful, we become the main object of God's word when the reality is, God is the main object of everything. He is the source of all. He is the answer to all. He is the object of our greatest desire. He is the prize. What we want is not the prize. He is the prize.

If we're not careful, we will settle for, search after, long for, hunger for false good news. If I teach Jeremiah 29:11, I want to teach it in such a way that it will preach consistently anywhere in the world. If it's all about you getting a new house, new car, better life, never being sick, try preaching that to the Christian mom in Syria who just lost a kid to kidnapping and now lives in a refugee tent. It's going to get quiet, but don't worry. It's going to get quieter as we go. God will never let anything bad happen to you. Tell that to the Christian parents who just lost a child to malaria and that sickness could have been prevented by a very inexpensive mosquito net that they did not have access to.

Here's the thing for me. As a preacher, I want to make sure that I can preach this anywhere. Let me just put it this way. Sarcasm warning, I'm about to be sarcastic. I'm letting you know it's coming. Sometimes, I don't. Sometimes, I just drop it on you. You don't know. I'm letting you know: sarcasm warning. Jeremiah 29:11, this verse actually applies to western Christians only. God bless the USA. God bless the USA. This is for United States Christians.

In other words, the rest of you in Church Online all over the world, God loves you and everything, but you're screwed when it comes to this because God blesses the USA. In the USA, we serve a god who always gets us the best parking spots at the mall and we serve a god who gets us our dream home and we serve a god who enables us to have an upgraded iPhone every time it comes out. Praise the Lord Jesus, that's the god I serve. Some of you are afraid to laugh. Is that really funny? Is God going to strike him dead? Is that true? God does bless the USA, right? Sarcasm over. Sarcasm over.

It's a very self-centered view. My thought is this. If I can't preach this everywhere, I shouldn't preach it anywhere. Let me say this again. If I can't preach this in a way, in a country where the average wage is \$2-3/day, then I don't want to preach it in that way. If I can't preach it the very same way in an inner-city to a youth program, to the wealthiest people in the suburbs, if I can't preach it with integrity in all environments, then I don't want to preach it anywhere. If it's not true everywhere, it's not true anywhere. What I want to do is teach it in such a way that applies to everybody so that we'll have integrity.

If we're simply pursuing a god who gives us joy without pain, blessings without trial, prosperity without any bumps in the road, we're actually pursuing a false good news. That's very dangerous, and that's why a lot of people walk away from the faith. "Well, God didn't do what I wanted to do. Well, I tithed and I didn't get rich. Well, I went to church and my kid got sick."

This is a specific promise to a specific group of people. Let me give you a general promise. You think it's been depressing so far? "I came to church to get built up today. Why'd I come to church today? This is hard stuff." You think it's been hard so far? We haven't got it started yet. I'm about to give you 2 really, really good verses to put on your coffee mug. These are for you. 2 Timothy 3:12 says this if you're a Christian. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be

what? Will be persecuted. Put that on a magnet and put it on your refrigerator so you can look at it every day. "Oh, praise God. I'm going to be persecuted today. I love this verse. It's my memory verse. It's my life verse. It's my life verse. Woo. I like that verse."

Philippians 1:29, "For it's been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him but also to," what? "To suffer for Him." Oh, glory to God. "I love that T-shirt. Every time I wear it into the Bible study, they love that one on my T-shirt." Here's the deal. Here's what we have to understand. The good news, the real good news, the good news is not that God saves us from our trials. The good news is that God saves us from our sins. That is the real good news. That is the real good news. That is the real good news. The reason you gave me a polite golf clap, and thank you for that, and you didn't stand up and go crazy, is because we often don't understand just how good of news that is.

Scripture teaches us that we all fall horribly short. I'll illustrate this. We fall short. Everybody say, "fall short." We all fall short. For years, we always got a budget motel whenever we went places. When Amy and I got married, we had nothing and we always got budget motels. I tell you, they were so cheap, this is a true story and she could tell you, for \$0.50 at most places, you could make the bed vibrate. Those were the good old days. She hated it. I'd get my quarters out, buh-buh-buh-buh-buh. That's the blessing of God, a vibrating bed. That's plans to bless you and prosper you, not to harm you, give you hope and a future. Glory to God.

Anyway, that's all we could afford. It was nasty. Nasty hotels. Well, when we were starting the church, I went to a pastor's conference that was mandatory for our church plan with Pastor Paul Cunningham. He's a friend of mine in town. He's a wild maniac, fun guy. This conference was at a hotel, like a resort place, so we had no choice. We got this really expensive, nice room. Well, all day long, Paul had been playing jokes on me. All day long, because when a lot of people go out of town, they sin for fun. We're not allowed to do that, so we just play jokes on each other. That's a pastor's life. We're playing jokes.

I'm just waiting. I'm thinking in the middle of the night, I'm going to give him a World Wrestling- He's going to be sleeping and I'm just going to go power onto his bed and just make him pay in the middle of the night. He's not going to see it coming. Well, that would have worked great in a cheap hotel. Cheap hotel, you go in to go to the bathroom, there's a wall here. You come out, you go around and the bed's right here. At 3 in the morning in the dark, that was my assumption. I'm up in the bathroom; he's going to get it. I come around. I'm thinking, "I can't see anything. The bed's right here." I go up for the power dive.

When I go up- You got to get the timing just right. You know how you do it when you do something? I got my tongue out. I'm going down. I'm visualizing landing on the middle of the side, giving an elbow. Well, the bed's over here in high-end hotel, so I mis-judged the approach, came in, took my arm down as hard as I could. Instead of hitting him, I hit the edge of the bed. My arm pops up, hits me in the

mouth, which closes on my tongue. My tongue burst into 2. Blood goes everywhere. I'm on the side of the bed, about to bleed out. I'm calling for help. He's barely waking up. He looks down. There's a pool of blood. "What happened?" "I fell short." See what I did with that? Missed it by that much. I fell short. Anyway, I just had to tell you that.

Here's the problem. When it comes to God's standards, His standard is holiness. His standard is perfection and we fall short. This is what most of us think. We don't fall short like this. We fall short like, "I am filthy rags. I am completely un-righteous. There is nothing good inside of me. I serve a good God who did for me when I could never earn and didn't deserve. He became one of us in the person of Jesus, who loved the most un-lovable, reached out to those that religion rejected, accepted people as they were but never left them as they were. On the cross, He became sin for me so much so that God looks away. He looks up to Heaven and says, 'I did what you sent me to do. It is finished.'"

This is the good news. This is the best news. This represents a good God. This is the good news, not that God exists to save us from our trials, but that God sent Jesus to save us from our sins. We serve a god that is better than just saving us from our trials. We serve a god who uses our trials to conform us to the image of Christ. We serve a God who is not just in it for our temporary well-being, but God is shaping us for his eternal glory. Therefore, when God does not do exactly what we want Him to do, we don't panic and run away from our god. We embrace Him for His character and for His nature. He is a good god.

The gospel is that Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. The one who knew no sin became sin for us, died in our place, that we could live. Because of that, our only reasonable response is to take up our cross, deny ourselves because it's not about us, and to follow Him. Our highest calling and purpose is to lay down our lives to serve Him, to serve Him, to serve Him. That is what we're created to do. It doesn't feel good. It's not popular. Ain't it more fun when it's all about us? It's right when it's all about Him. He sent His son for us that we could know Him, that we could serve Him, that we could follow Him.

The exiles, they want it easy just like we do. "I want it easy. 2 years, please. Get us out of here. We're in bondage. We don't want to be in bondage." Right before the famous verse in Jeremiah 29:11, what verse is before Jeremiah 29:11? The answer is Jeremiah 29:10. In verse 10, it says this. This is what the Lord says. When how many years are completed? Somebody, help me. All of our churches? "When 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come back to you and fulfill my good promise and bring you back to this place." When 70 years.

Who was Jeremiah speaking to? Do you remember? He was speaking to the elders. How old do you think the elders were? The answer is, "They were elderly." He's speaking to elderly people. Imagine saying to a 70-year-old, "In 70 years, I will come back. I know the plans I have for you, plans to bless you, prosper you, not to harm you, to give you hope and a future." They're going, "We're not going to see this

happen. We're not going to see this happen in the natural." God knew that they would see it happen in the supernatural because He had plans to bless them and prosper them, to give them the hope and a future that wasn't just based on this life. Why? Because no eye has seen and no ear has heard all the good things that God has planned for those who love Him eternally.

"I want it now. I want it now. I want to be prosperous and I want a car with butt warmers. That is what I want, God, butt warmers, because it gets cold here. It's your fault because you made it cold." 29:11, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you hope and a future.'" The next time someone quotes this out of context, the next time they're wearing a shirt, the next time you see it on their coffee mug, the next time someone says, "Oh, this verse changed my life," whip out your sermon notes and say, "This is out of context. You're a heretic and you're going to hell." That's what you do.

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I forbid you to do that. Do not be that person. Do not be that person. Don't ever be that person. Just because this text is not to us, doesn't mean there's not truth in this text. This text is true, true, true, true, true. One of the plans I have for you- Okay. Does God have plans for us? Does God have a purpose for us? All day long. Ephesians 1:11, "God works everything in conformity with a purpose of his will." God works in all things to bring about good to those who love him and are called according to His purpose. Yes, God has a purpose and a plan.

Does God have plans to bless people? All day long. The Bible says that we interpret scripture with scripture. God is a good god and loves to give good gifts to His children. Does God prosper people? All the time. God actually gives wealth. Wealth is not a bad thing. With wealth, you can do a lot of good things. God gives wealth. God prospers a lot of people. He doesn't prosper everybody. In fact, prospering doesn't just mean financial prospering. Sometimes prospering and blessing means relationships, which is actually better than money when you think about it. It means sometimes health. It means sometimes that we just have intimacy with other people. Sometimes, it means we just know we're right with God.

Whenever you get cancer, can you still have hope? All day long. We have hope that God uses doctors. We have hope that the name of Jesus is bigger than the name of cancer. We have a hope in a God who says all things are possible with me, and you still have hope. Whenever your life falls apart, you think, "Well, I could never overcome this. Well, can God ever use me again? After what I did, can God ever use me?" Yes, you have a future. We serve a god who works in all things to bring about good. He will use it for your future. He will take where you messed up, do something in you, help conform you to the image of His son, Jesus. You're not finished yet. If you're not dead, you're not done. God still has something for you.

This verse is not specifically for us. There is truth in it. Embrace it, but don't stop in verse 11. Do not stop there, because the verse that really could go on your coffee

mug is what comes after that, and that is verse 12 and 13 and 14, which does become a general promise for all of us. Why? Because this is consistent with other promises all throughout scripture, and that is this. God says, "When you call on me and come to me and pray to me, I will," do what? God says, "I will listen to you." God says this. He says, "You will seek me and find me when you" do what? "When you seek me with all of your heart, I will be found by you." God says, "No matter what you're going through, I'm going to be there for you. Whenever you call on me, I will hear you. When you cry out to me, I am there. No matter what you do, I will never leave you nor forsake you. I am with you always."

Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you will not fear. Why? Because you are with me, God. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You will never, ever leave me. You will never, ever leave me. The main point of this message is not that God delivers you from your trials. It's not that God always gives you exactly what you want. It's that God will never leave you nor forsake you. He's more concerned with your eternity than with your now and he is always and absolutely good through and through. Therefore, our faith does not rest on what He does do or does not do, because of what He already did for us on the cross is enough to say, "You are worthy of the rest of my life. Your character and your nature is good." Therefore, God, I choose to serve you, choose to follow you, choose to lay down my life for you.

Years and years later, after my drunk, spinning-room moment with God and the angelic voice coming out of my 1980s oversized boom box telling me, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord," and that verse really ministered to me. It's important to me today, one of my favorite verses, because even though it wasn't specifically meant for me, there is truth in it and the next part of the text is what truly changed my life. "If you seek me, you will find me. If you seek me with all your heart, says the Lord." That's what I did. That's what I did. In the middle of my brokenness and my sin, without even knowing how to do it, I started calling on Him, "God, I need you. If you're there, if you're real, reveal yourself to me."

Did He ever, because that's a general promise to every single one of you. When you call on Him, He will hear your cry. When you draw near to Him, He will draw near to you. When you seek Him, you will find Him when you seek Him with all your heart. That's why that verse is still one of my favorite sections in the Bible today, because it's one of the verses that helped bring me to know Him personally.

Father, today I pray that as we learn to study your word, even with a broader understanding, diving into the context, I pray that we would fall in love with you even more intimately as we see who you are, your character, and your nature.

As you take a moment and pray today in all of our churches, nobody looking around, I want to start with those of you who may be going through a really challenging time right now, and I understand that, as a pastor, sometimes when you're in a hard time, you're praying for help and a miracle and it's not coming, sometimes it can rattle people's faith. I want to take a moment and just pray for

you. Some of you right now, you're facing maybe financial challenges, like for example, where I live there are so many people losing jobs right now. It's really heartbreaking. God is your provider. He still loves you and He's faithful.

Others of you right now, you might have bad medical news for you or somebody that you love. Some of you are battling depression right now. Nothing's really wrong, but everything seems like it's wrong. Some of you, you've got relational challenges. You've got family chaos. Whatever it is, you're going through something right now and you really need God's presence and you want to ask God for a miracle. If that's you today, I'll be very honored just to pray for you. All of our churches, if you say, "Yes, I'm going through a very difficult time and I really need God's presence and I would love it if God would do something supernatural on my behalf," if that's you, would you lift up your hands right now. Just all of our churches, in a moment of honesty, lift them up all over the place.

God, I thank you today for those who are reaching out to you and even with an extended hand or an extended heart, God, we just believe that's what we're doing, is we're drawing near to you. We're calling on you. God, I thank you that many times, you do deliver us from our trials. I thank you, God, that you hear our prayer and you do miracles. God, I thank you that your highest purpose isn't just to do that for us, but to deliver us and save us from our sins. Right now, we rejoice in this, God, and we ask that, for those who are struggling and hurting today, that somehow by the power of your holy spirit, you would be enough right now, that you would guide our hearts and our minds and our souls in Christ Jesus that you would give us a supernatural peace that goes beyond our human ability to understand.

God, according to your word, you tell us that we can ask. We ask for miracles. God, we ask for healing. We ask for financial provision. We ask for forgiveness in relationships where they are wounding. God, we ask you would help us to overcome temptation. We pray that you would break any bondage that holds us back. We believe, God, that you hear our prayer and that for many people you will do all these things and even more, even now. We pray. God, we recognize that you respond to our faith and sometimes, God, when you don't do what we ask you to do in the moment, it becomes challenging for us. We choose right now to focus on your character, your goodness, believing God, you have a higher purpose, believing God, that you'll use our trials to help us to be more intimate with you.

God, we trust you. We believe you can. God, we believe you will. Even if you don't do what we ask, God, we still believe and we worship you. God, may we serve you well. May you be the center of our stories, God, reflecting your love, being faithful to you in all that we do as we seek you and worship you.

As we keep praying today, nobody looking around, here's the amazing thing. Some of you right now, you are here for a bigger purpose than you ever anticipated. There are those of you on the other side of a computer screen right now, some of you, you're sitting in a church. You're watching a screen and you recognize, "There

is something that's drawing me toward God." That's the very thing that happened to me in that spinning room years and years ago. There was something drawing me to God. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was the loving kindness of God drawing me to Himself. That's what His holy spirit does. It's like there's a force pulling you toward God, but what is that? That's His love. That's His spirit pulling you toward Himself right now.

What do you do? You recognize this, that all of us have fallen short of God's standard of perfection, all of us, all of us, way short. Well, why do you feel like you did something wrong sometimes? "I feel guilty." Well, it's because there's a conscience inside of you and you recognize you did something wrong. We tend to think, "Well, I need to be good enough and try to become religious and try to be right and stop doing wrong things." The reality is, you cannot be good enough for God. It is impossible. That's why God, in His mercy, sent His son Jesus who was without sin. The good news, the gospel, is not that he saved us from our trials, but He saves us from our sin.

When you call on Him, you become a brand-new person; not a better version of you, but new. The old is gone. The new has come. You're spiritually born anew and there are many of you that the very reason why you are here and you know it, it's time for new birth. It's time to say, "Yes, Jesus, take my life. It's no longer about me. I surrender it completely to you." In all of our churches here, you say, "Yes." That's my prayer. I turn from my sins. I turn toward Him. I give my life to Him. I'm drawing near to Him, believing He will draw near to me. Now I surrender my life to Him. That's your prayer. Lift your hands high right now, all over the place, and say, "Yes." That's my prayer. Lift them up. Both of you. Three of you. Over here, back over here. God bless you. Leave them up, if you will, back here toward the back, right back over here as well and over there.

God bless you guys. Right back over here, say, "Yes, Jesus, I surrender." Right over here, as well. All the way back here toward the back. "Yes, Jesus. I surrender my life to you." Others of you today, say, "Yes, that's my prayer." Lift up your hands and say, "I surrender my life completely to you." Church Online, you guys click right below me. We're all going to pray together because nobody prays alone. Pray aloud.

Heavenly father, I give you my life, asking Jesus to save me and to be my Lord. I believe He died for me. He rose again so I can live for you. Fill me with your spirit so I can follow you for the rest of my life. My life is not my own. Today I give it to you in Jesus' name I pray.

Would you all worship big, worship loud today? Welcome those saying yes to Jesus, born into the family of God.