

So, like I said, we are in the midst of a series called God unfiltered. And the idea here is we're looking at God's character. And so over the last few weeks, we've been burning through this list and exploring on a deeper level who and what God is as it relates to his compassion, his graciousness. Today we're going to focus on how God is slow to anger and how that impacts us and how it allows us to then impact others in situations we might face. Last week we'll look at abounding in love and faithfulness, but to get ready for it, we're going to spend our time today on slow to anger.

Now, I have to tell you, I knew full well that these teens would be in the space today. And I know my children are here. And so I thought, oh boy, here we go. Dad gets to talk about anger. And in our house, my children would tell you, dad yells loud.

And some might say, dad yells a lot. And I'm here to confess, I do. In my family, the one I grew up in, we were a yelling family. And whoever yelled the loudest appeared to be heard better. And so that was something we picked up.

But what I want to talk about is sometimes we look at our human anger and how we get frustrated with situations or expectations aren't met. Or perhaps things didn't turn out the way we intended or hoped. Sometimes we don't hear things the way others have intended them. And so we walk away upset and ultimately angry. And it's very easy to take our human emotion and look at God and say, well, I get angry.

It looks like God sometimes gets angry as I read through the Bible. And so therefore, God must experience the same kind of anger I do. And what I want to tell you today is that's not entirely true. Yes, we have a God who does get angry. But as we're going to explore, we're going to see that that's nuanced in so many unique ways.

And it helps us better understand that his anger is out of this righteous love that he has for you and I and how our God is unwilling to leave us where we're at when he knows there is somewhere better and something better for each one of us. So, like I said, you picked a great day to be in church. When we try to explain the character and nature of God, one of my absolute favorite verses to best understand this idea of slow to anger comes to us out of the book of Exodus, where God is described like this, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger overflowing with this loyal love and faithfulness. We don't often think that God has a loyal love to us. And that's why sometimes when you read through the scriptures, you'll hear God say, I'm a jealous God, because he is so faithful to us and he longs for our faithfulness to be his.

And so this is such a beautiful image of who God is. And we're going to begin with this because this becomes the foundation if we're to fully understand how God can have righteous anger. But sometimes we might think upon ourselves, isn't the God of the Bible mostly angry, striking people down for their sins or

allowing evil to go unpunished in our world? It's an unfair place in which we live sometimes, and it certainly would appear that way in many people's lives. And so it's easy for us to think, well, really, God is just out to punish, hurt and maim, and that makes him dangerous.

And if he's dangerous, that means he's scary. And if he's scary, I don't want to be near him. Well, I'm here to tell you that that's not accurate. There is so much more to who and what God is, and that these images that are on this screen might start to kind of show us something, maybe deep inside of us that we struggle with when we think about the person of God. But truly we have a God who is compassionate, full of grace, slow to anger, loyal in love, who knows each of us by name, how many hairs are on our heads.

He knows us intimately inside and out, and he longs for that relationship to go deeper. And so these images we're going to seek to kind of tear down and destroy, even though they've become some of the mainline images we see throughout our whole culture, but they're not accurate. And if we're going to be disciples of Jesus Christ, that means if we're going to be students of the person of Jesus, then we have to know accurately the character and nature of God. So let's begin with this idea, slow to anger. And underneath is the actual hebrew words that are translated into the english phrase slow to anger.

And I'll try to butcher this as best I can, but an english translation would be Eric Apayum. And it means something really cool. It means long of nose. Eric means long. Apayum means nostrils.

And so the idea here is, as you get angry in a situation, your nose begins to get really hot because your face gets hot. And so those that burn their noses are people that get angry so easily. In fact, the reverse of that is when the Hebrews talk of wisdom and they say, oh, that person has a long nose, meaning they have a long fuse of anger and it takes a long time for that anger to burn. So those are the images that they're going to be talking about or at least they have in their minds when they begin to describe our God and how sometimes he does get angry. But when it says he's slow to anger, it means our God is a God of long nose.

Or not a short fuse, but a long fuse. So the common biblical hebrew way to say someone is angry is their nose is burned hot. Now, I could just imagine trying to use this with my wife when we're in an argument and I don't think it'll turn out well when I say, honey, your nose is burning hot. But we see this unfold in stories like Joseph in Genesis 39 as he is brought into Potiphar's house as a slave and Potiphar's wife tries to sleep with him. He won't do it.

And Potiphar's wife tells Potiphar and of course Potiphar's nose burns hot as he is angry that a slave that he entrusted his entire household to has betrayed him by trying to sleep with his wife even though none of this was true. But his nose burned hot. This nose, hot nose heat. These are the phrases and ideas that we

capture. And if you grew up in the generation I did in the got to see Tom and Jerry get really angry with each other in the cartoons and they would burn so hot that what would come out of their ears?

Steam. Right. Donald Duck also was known to do that, although he said a lot of curse words. But luckily they were in duckees and we don't know what they were. So a person's wisdom is their long nose.

This is in proverbs. In fact, let me read you a couple that I think are so interesting. This proverbs 15:18. It says, the hot tempered person stirs up strife. The short nosed person stirs up strife.

But he who is slow to anger quiets contention. In other words, they avoid the arguments and they stop the quarreling before it takes off. Psalm 145:8 says, the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Now, in our day and age, there is nothing that is more exciting than to see somebody start to get heated in an argument and you can watch it unfold right before you and it's like a teapot. And as they're starting to boil and get upset.

The person next to them is starting to feel it, right? And you see them starting to get upset. And at that point, you want to grab the bucket of popcorn and see what happens next as the two usually explode. And so what we find is that often, when we fight fire with fire or anger with anger, all it leaves is destruction. And so there's a reason why we're going to be asked, as followers of Jesus Christ, to learn how to slow our anger or be people slow to anger so that we don't emulate the world, but rather we emulate the God in whose image we bear.

Now, you've seen things like this. This is a child being bullied or assaulted or beat up on a playground. This boy's kicking dirt in her face, and maybe he's going to try to take her little stuffed animal. And when you see things like this, there's an absolute reason why each of us should feel frustrated or angry or upset, because this is an injustice. And when we see injustices in this world, we should start to get angry because we know that's not the right way of things.

And you want to know something? Our God gets angry at injustices. In fact, what we're going to find out, as we start to peek behind the veil, is that God's anger burns against humans. Injustice, how we treat one another or how we disobey the way in which things were created and designed for us to experience. And we break them or we abuse them.

And so God's anger will burn at the injustice. Here's a great story that is also found in Exodus, where we have Moses the savior, coming to save God's people. Before Moses comes on the scene, though, we read that Joseph has now passed away the favor on upon his family, and all the Israelites has gone away. And Pharaoh now has kept all the Israelites as his slaves. And for 400 years, their prayers seem to almost go unnoticed to God.

And I'm sure they're questioning, who and what is God, and where is he in our dismay? And at that time, the pharaoh decides, oh, there are too many of these people. We need to start murdering their babies so they don't grow up and become mightier than the Egyptians. And so for the Israelites, he goes around and sends troops to take every child under tears of age and throw them in the Nile river to be drowned by the river. Now, this, of course, creates people crying out.

And we see that God's heart also is crying out as he sees this injustice. And so God is going to send a savior Moses. Now, what's so interesting about this story, though, is as Moses shows up, he's going to speak to pharaoh, and he's going to give pharaoh ten opportunities to turn his life around, to quit creating such injustice and turmoil for a group of people, and to listen to what God is saying. Now, if God is giving him ten opportunities, that means our God is slow to anger. There's a reason I'm not God.

I wouldn't have sent Moses. I would have said, oh, Egypt, sandbox. But that's not how God is. And it's because God sees something in each one of us, good and evil. He sees that there's potential and there's an opportunity for us to come and know not only the true God, but our true purpose, to live a life that is full of love and grace and purpose and hope, even pharaoh.

And so he gives him ten opportunities, or as we read, ten plagues that will come to his land. And they're so severe that you would think, pharaoh, for God's sake, did you not get the message? But God also loves us so much that he is willing to allow us, in this incredible concept called free will, to live our lives as we choose. The problem is, I don't always choose the best way to live my life. And so God then allows us to face the consequences of our choices.

And so Pharaoh ultimately will go against Moses and God so many times that by the 10th time, it's going to cost pharaoh his firstborn son. In the same way that he took a bunch of children's lives, his child will be taken. God allows him to experience the consequences of his own choice. And action. The next scene we see is Pharaoh finally lets Moses and his people go.

And as almost 2 million people flee Egypt and they come to the Red Sea and it parts, they begin to pass. Here comes Pharaoh on his chariot with his army, trying to get one last good strike against God and God's people. It says, if he's saying, I'll show you who God is, and I'll do what I damn well please. Now, the problem is God looks at Pharaoh and he says, I've given you ten chances, ten opportunities, pharaoh, I am turning you over and allowing your heart to become hardened. And so, as pharaoh makes his way towards God's people, the waters begin to make their way back together, and they enclose on pharaoh.

And Pharaoh meets the same end of drowning in the water that he did to all those babies. Some people might see that as an angry God, but I think I see it as justice. A God, who's willing to love Pharaoh so much that he gives him

opportunity after opportunity after opportunity. But at the same time, God allows Pharaoh to make his own decisions. Now, we see this unfold so many different ways in scripture.

In fact, I see this when I think of heaven and hell. And we often think, well, how can a God who loves send people to hell? And I think, how can a God who loves force people that don't want to be with him, to be with him? And so, as we see that free will and that idea of God loving us and allowing us to make our own choices and also to experience the consequences of those choices, we see those that want to spend their lives with God. Now, why wouldn't they get to spend their entire eternity with God?

And those that want nothing to do with God, but have given chance after chance and have allowed their own hearts to harden, why wouldn't God then say, I love you so much, I'm going to allow you this gift of hell, and you don't have to spend your life with me. How dare I force that upon you? Now, as you know, consequences are consequences, good and bad. But as we continue this story of understanding God's anger, these are things that I want you to place in your mind and in your heart, because we're trying to discern the character, nature of a being that is so far beyond us, but yet so close that we can touch him. So let's continue.

God's anger is expressed through handing Pharaoh over to the consequences of his own decisions. You sent forth your hot anger. Your nose burned. Here's that beautiful scene. Same goes for the story of the Israelites.

For hundreds of years, the entire people, that nation of Israelites remember as God plucked Abraham out of this God knows what tribe in the middle of nowhere, he says, hey, I want you to know me in such a way that I'm going to make you into a great nation. And you will become more numerous than the sands on the seashore. You will become the great nation of Israel. And all the nations of the world will watch you and your family and the lineage that will continue year after year after year. And they will know that I am God, and they will come to know me, and I will make my love known to them.

Now, same goes for the story of the Israelites for hundreds of years. They betray this God who rescued them from slavery. And although he gives them many chances, they keep giving their allegiance to gods of other nations. So this hot anger, this burning nose of God, burns against the Israelites, and he gives them over to their enemies. And if you read through the Old Testament, you will see this over and over and over and over again.

It's almost frustrating. And as soon as it seems like everything is good and they return to God, and they recognize him as the one who saves them and loves them and offers them everything they need for this world so that they can be more than what they could be on their own, then next verse will say, and they decided to worship gods of their neighbors. The Israelites wanted to serve the

gods of other nations. So God, in his just anger, gives them what they want. Those nations circle back and ultimately defeat, enslave, and sometimes even kill the Israelites.

This is one of the famous pictures that was painted to describe Babylon. When the Israelites were taken out of Jerusalem, their city, and brought to Babylon. This is when they will stay there for years and wonder, where is God in the midst of this? God is right there. But he has allowed you time after time after time, to make your own choices.

And this is a consequence. But God doesn't give up on us. Remember how we talked about God is slow to anger? How he gave pharaoh ten opportunities? Well, he does the same thing with the Israelites, but he does it over hundreds, if not thousands of years.

Opportunity after opportunity after opportunity. And when the parents don't get it right, God goes to their children and gives them an opportunity. Because we have a God of grace. The apostle Paul tells us. This is in Romans 118 through 32.

For the wrath or the anger of God is revealed from heaven against all things that are ungodly and all unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth and unrighteousness. Because that which is known about God is evident within them. For God made it evident to them. In other words, we know better. As a kid, I remember the rule was, as soon as I got my driver's license and I got this really cool red convertible, the rule was no tickets.

Now, back then, which is the same today, if you were under 25 in a male, the front part of your brain is not developed, and the insurance company knows this, and they penalize you for it. It's called the no brain charge. Girls, you don't get that because you prosper a little quicker than boys. But I got a ticket, and I came home, and I remember handing my dad the ticket, my license and the keys, and he said, okay. And for the next month, he made my life hell, driving me to school every day, honking the horn and yelling out the window, how's your rash?

And did you bring your medication and, oh, God, all sorts of horrible things. But it's this idea of, I knew what was coming, I knew the consequence. I knew I wasn't supposed to speed, but I did it anyway. The same is true for humanity. We know right, when we're doing something that's questionable, we know when something isn't quite lining up to what is given to us by God is good, but we have such great ways to justify or go ahead and move into it.

And in doing so, God says, look, I love you so much, I'm going to allow you to face the consequence of that decision. So no wonder. When we trust God and we give our lives to him and we do our best to live by his guidance, we face consequences of blessing and good. But when we strive to do things our own way and we try to make things happen, even though we know what's right, we

suffer consequences that are not good. Apostle Paul will continue to talk, and he'll talk about three specific times what he says about God's anger and what they look like.

And it all boils down to this phrase, and I want to share it with you. It's God hands people over to their destructive desires and decisions, even if it leads to death. Now, this doesn't bring God joy. This doesn't make God happy, but it's the reality. If God is to truly allow us to love in the way he loves, then we are allowed to make choices.

If we're not allowed to choose, then we don't have free will. If we don't have free will, then we really can't have love, because it's simply manipulation. Our God is a God of love, and he allows us choice and he gives us wisdom in which we can abide by to better understand and make choices. But we also can choose to do things our own way. And so God hands people over to their destructive desires and decisions, even if it leads sometimes to death.

But Paul also says that God is patient, giving people time to come to their senses and change. Remember again the story of pharaoh. And there's numerous other stories where God constantly comes around. Last week, Pastor Mariah talked about Jonah and how his heart was so hard against these people of Nineveh. But God kept allowing him opportunity to come and make himself new again, to give up that anger and frustration and allow God to do something great in his life.

And through Jonah, the entire nation of Nineveh changes. And eventually Jonah will change. God is patient, giving people time to come to their senses and to change. Why? Because God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, overflowing with loyal love and faithfulness.

These are our last few slides, and then I want to get to something that I think is somewhat controversial. So hang in there for a minute. Since the creation of humanity, God has been on a mission to save. For God is not content to let people sit in their self destruction, right? So God isn't okay that we sit in this area of self destruction.

He wants to intervene and help remove that from our lives and give us a life that is full and everlasting. And so we face things like discipline. It sucks sometimes, but it's so good for us because it helps us to grow and mature and become something better than what we would be on our own. Jesus came as a demonstration of God's love for his enemies. He would stand in the place of his people who were choosing self destruction and take the consequences of their decisions upon himself.

This is incredible to think about. In Christ's life, death and resurrection, we see God's anger at evil and his love for people working together to provide forgiveness and life for humanity who has lost ITseLf in RUIN. Now, remember when we talked about abraham a long time ago? And that incredible thing that

happens when God comes to Abraham in that dream, and he creates a covenant. And a covenant was this idea of a king or someone with great power and authority coming to someone lesser than and saying, let's make a deal together.

And here's the deal. You do what I say, or else what happens to this animal happens to you. And then they would split the animal in two, and then they would walk between it, and that's how they would make their agreement or their covenant. But what happens in this particular situation is Abraham is watching. And God says, abraham, I'm going to be your God and you and all your descendants after.

You will become my people. And if it doesn't work out that way, then what happens to this animal is what's going to happen to us. So if I fail you, then what happened to this animal happen to me? If you fail me, then let this animal happen to you. But then God does something radical as he walks through the pieces.

God says, I make this commitment to you. If I fail, then I will give my life. And then he turns to Abraham and he says, abraham, stay there. And he walks BACK through and he says, abraham, if you fail, then let what happened to this animal not happen to you, but Happen to me. And so from the very beginning, God has this plan of salvation in which he's going to give his very own life for ours.

Because he's not content with us sitting in our own dirty diapers. He wants us to be better. That's not the end of the story. When God is angry and bringing justice, it's because he's good and extremely patient, working out his plan to restore people to his love. It's hard to think that sometimes the most challenging things we go through are simply opportunities for God to help forge and mold and shape so that we can become more of what we were designed and created to be, and therefore have a life that's much richer now that we better understand an idea of God's anger.

How does this impact us, and how do we respond to things that make us angry? I told you there'd be a controversial thing coming up, and I want to share this with you because it's a video I saw in 2008. Let me share this with you real quick. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

This is the apostle James speaking about what it is for us to then take upon God's anger in our own life and decide how are we going to get angry and how should we live our lives. And I love that James is the one who brings this, because James is this basically brother of Jesus, but he's not a full brother, he's a half brother. Because, remember, Mary was taken upon by the Holy Spirit, and she gives birth to this child, Jesus Christ, as a virgin. It's a critical part of our theology, because if Jesus is truly going to become the savior of the world, he has to be 100% God and 100% human. And so the two can become



one in that when God comes upon Mary as a virgin, but after she has this son, her husband Joseph and her probably enjoyed sex in marriage, and they had more children.

And James comes along, and I'm sure James got to hear the whole brunt of it. James, can you walk on water like your brother? I mean, James, are you as good as your brother? Hey, James, I heard your mom had this kid out of wedlock. What's that all about?

I mean, you can imagine the torment this kid probably went through growing up. So he learns all about his tongue, and he speaks about it in the book of James, and he learns about anger and what fuels it. And he realizes that God gets angry because he's in response to humans and how we experience the world around us and whether or not we're doing things that align with what God's character and nature are about. Are we oppressing other people? Are we trying to harm other people?

Are we taking advantage of other people because we have a God that flips it all upside down? The first will be last. The last will be first. And so as he says this, he's saying, look, here's some just good guidelines we can take into our lives. He says, look, we need to be quick to listen.

That's the first thing to do when you want to battle anger in your life, is learn how to listen. The second is be slow to speak. In other words, don't listen with the idea to respond. I do that all the time. And I'm quickly thinking through my head, trying to think, how am I going to respond to this?

And therefore, I'm not really listening to understand. And so I'm missing out on the whole piece. And so, no wonder when I respond, that person gets more angry. And then I get angry. Slow to speak and slow to become angry.

In other words, use your wisdom in these manners. Know what's worth arguing and what's worth walking away. Now, I tell you that, because now we're going to get into this. In 2008, this movie came out. It's called Lord, save us from your followers.

And it's by a guy named Dan Merchant. And what Dan Merchant would do is he'd put on this white jumper, and then he stuck all sorts of funny bumper stickers to it. Like, my favorite is get the hell out of my way. I'm late for church. He'd have a Darwin fish and then he'd have a christian fish.

And everything was meant to be a conversation. And so he'd walk up to people and he'd say, pick a sticker and talk about it. And he filmed it. And as he would do that, he said, you know, there's a lot of things that we don't understand about people that don't know who God is. And we could learn from them if we would listen, be slow to speak and slow to get angry that we don't get upset just because somebody disagrees or believes something different.

So anyway, this whole movie comes out of this documentary where he starts interviewing really interesting people and having conversations. And the part I want to show you is this really interesting clip. And in 2008, he sat down a group of very conservative people. You'll get to meet them. And he sat down a group of very liberal people.

You'll get to meet them. And he put them on stage and they played family feud. Do you remember that game show? If not, you'll get the idea when I play it. And he would ask them questions about what was going on in the culture around them to see if they understood not their viewpoint, but the other side's viewpoint.

And all I can say is it doesn't work out the way you think. I hope you'll enjoy this. I hope you'll see it for what I want you to see it for, which is an opportunity for us to see our own folly in this world and learn how we can be slow to anger, by learning how to listen, by learning how to ask questions, by learning how to seek understanding, by not being afraid to share what we think. But can we do it in a way where we don't get so hot of the nose that all we do is start fires? I hope you enjoy this.

There is a culture war going on. Absolutely. Let's educate the people. What is the culture war and why is it so important? Well, the culture war is between secular progressives like yourself.

I am not a secular progressive, sir. I am a deep religious man who will do anything you say. Go ahead. Welcome to the culture wars, the game show that knows the headlines are the front lines. Let's meet our team.

On your left, the liberal media elite. On your right, the young conservative. Since so much of the heat behind the culture wars can be traced to our inability to think like the other guy, we took a page from my favorite 70s game show to see if we could get polar opposites to think outside of their respective boxes. Name a reason you would consider having an abortion. I would say life of mother.

Let's see if that is on the board. Mother at risk. On the board. All right, you guys might want to get ready if they miss this one reason. Rape.

Rape. Okay, rape. Show me rape. And it is the number one. Number one on the board.

The young conservatives got off to a fast start, but things went downhill from there. I think we're going to do incest. Not literally, but I mean, should we leave? You guys want a moment? Dim the lights.

Yeah. These young conservatives are different than they are in the books. All right, so show me incest. A reason that you would consider an abortion. No.

They did a much better job of understanding who we were than we did of who they were. We understood the game. The game wasn't about what our opinion was. It was about how many people surveyed. A number of people would say that there is no reason.

Okay. That anyone should have an abortion. You would consider an abortion. You guys are saying no reason. We think there are people who would say there's no reason.

Okay, 100 people surveyed. Did any of them say no reason. Correct. I think it was really important to us. I don't know what it was like for them, but it was important to us to show that we were smarter.

Really don't like liberals. All right, very good. Jonathan, tell me a little about yourself. I'm the western regional vice chairman for the Young Republican National Federation, and I motivate young people to get involved in politics and go make a difference. Now, young Republican.

How young do you have to be to be a young Republican that's 18 to 40 years old? 40 is still young when you're talking about republicans. You're a columnist for the Oregonian. That's right. What's your favorite part about that job?

I enjoy the total freedom I have. And when I also do a couple things on the side, I burn american flags and I officiated gay marriages whenever possible. Well, you've earned your liberal media flag. Whether it was abortion or Darwin or something, they were able to pick off the board some of our answers, but it was harder for us to pick off the board some of their answers. Name the most intriguing aspect of Darwin's theory of evolution.

Survival of the fittest. All right, show me. There it is. Natural selection. The top answer.

I was surprised that the conservative team didn't seem to be more in touch. Name the most intriguing aspect of Darwin's theory of evolution. Big bang. Oh, guys, now I wasn't sure that big Bang was part of Darwin's theory. Don't talk about it.

Show me big bang. Sorry. The christian conservatives kind of got beat to say at least we could not get outside of the world we live in. Every answer was right from where we live. The liberal media elite crushed the young conservatives 248 to 27.

I wondered if age had anything to do with the christian team getting stomped by the liberals. So we put together a game between college age students. One team from Reed College, dubbed the agnostic scholars, faced off against the young believers, a group of christians assembled from Portland area universities. Name something homosexuals are known for. Style.

I thought perhaps the young believers might be more flexible in their thinking, less set in their ways than the young conservative team. Wrong. Turns out the young believers had even less life experience considering the views of the other guy. And the agnostic scholars shut them out. 327 to nil.

After vanquishing the christians, agnostic scholar captain Derek stepped forward to face the speed round. Name something Jesus is known for. Dying for our sins. Name a movie that has generated controversy in our culture. Passion of the Christ.

Name a Sunday school lesson that is relevant in your life. Do unto others as they would do unto you. Derek understood christians better than christians seemed to understand him. And if that doesn't improve, we're going to live in a divided America for a long time. But here's the really cool part of this story.

After the taping, the young conservative team and the liberal media elite team hung out in the green room together for 2 hours and talked. I actually liked some of those people. After we would talk to them for a few hours, like, man, these are some nice people that we don't probably agree with a lot philosophically and politically, but they're nice people. What we discovered in the back room talking was if you take people who have opposing points of view and you sit them down long enough and talk about it, and you make it personal, everybody eventually finds a middle ground. We need to reach out to one another.

And even though we disagree, and especially on such the major issues in society, liberals and conservatives need to reach out to each other and be compassionate to one another. If we had the courage to act in public like we do in private and give people that respect, that we were showing each other backstage and letting each other finish our sentences and say, oh yeah, I agree with you on the first part. The second part I have a tough time with and just being less defensive. Obviously, the conversation sounded a lot different backstage than it did out front. If we're in the conversation with each other, we've got a chance to work through these important, complex, hot button social issues.

We got to be careful not to oversimplify. And remember, no hitting. Look, I'm not here to tell you you need to be liberal or conservative. That's not at all what this is about. In fact, church in the mall has always been a church in the middle, which means we have places for everyone here.

And that's one thing I love about this church, is that we can have conversations and even disagree. Some of you may disagree with some of the things I've shared with you today, and that's okay, because it's in that disagreement that we begin to ask questions. And if we ask questions, we begin to learn something. But what I want you to hear is some interesting things that I found fascinating because this was filmed in 2008 and it's now 2024. One of the lines

was, if we don't learn to listen, or as I would interpret it, listen slow to speak, slow to get angry, then the nation will be divided for a long time.

2008 is our nation divided? Yeah. Fascinating, isn't it? How about when they talked about, they picked, obviously some of the most conservative and some of the most liberal right. I mean, the majority of people in the United States are somewhere in the middle.

That's just the reality. If you look at statistics, about 70% or so are people would kind of sway somewhere in the middle. But they picked people that represent these two groups. And what I thought was so fascinating that challenged me as a Christian, is that when the conservatives got up there, they didn't know enough about the liberals beliefs to be able to answer questions. That tells me they know nothing of these people.

And the liberals actually did a really good job of understanding the argument and what people might think about these things. Now, what that tells me is that as a Christian, I may not be a good listener. That's something I can work on. And that by listening to someone and disagreeing doesn't take anything away from me. But it sure helps me better understand, because one of the most important things they shared is after the show, when they sat in the green room, they started liking each other because all of a sudden it was about, hey, you're a human.

I'm a human. You're trying to figure out how to raise your kids. I'm trying to figure out how to raise your kids. You're trying to figure out how to survive a marriage. I'm trying to figure out how to survive a marriage.

You find your job difficult sometimes? I find my job difficult sometimes. All of a sudden, they're humans sitting in a room trying to understand life and everything around them. And if they sit long enough and talk long enough. What did he say?

We often come somewhere in the middle. Now, again, I'm not asking you to give up your position on anything. I'm simply asking you if you would join me in learning how we could better learn to listen. Because last I checked, there's an entire world outside these doors of people that are trying to make sense of everything going on around them in the most divided nation we have ever been, in, the most divided time we've ever lived in. And they're looking for help.

They're looking for hope. And you and I have an opportunity to not only give help and hope, but it might even impact us and allow us to grow, too. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. What if we were able to look at people and topics and situations, even political parties, the way God looked at Pharaoh, and allow opportunities?

Now, just like Pharaoh, you're going to find that some people may not change and they might not adopt your views or values. And you know what? That's the way it is. You might not adopt theirs, and we'll both be left to the consequences of that. But you and I have something incredible.

We have the God of the universe who has taken up residence inside of us. Scripture says he tabernacles or builds his tent or his home inside of us. We have a holy spirit that speaks on our behalf and on God's behalf. And we have actions and opportunities in which we can display Christ because we are followers of Jesus Christ. And what would it be like to step out into this world and show people that we can listen, we can have intelligent conversations, we can even disagree, and we can share truth because our God can do the same with us.

Wouldn't that be life changing? Before we pray and we have an opportunity to respond with communion, I put this number up because I think it's interesting. In our church right now, we've been really focused heavily on prayer. Prayer is an opportunity for us to commune with God in thought and in mind and body and spirit and allow our words to come out of our mouths. And it's not that God's unaware of what's going on in your life.

God is well aware, but it's the idea of us recognizing that we also need God to be aware and saying it out loud. So if you have a prayer that you would like to text this number. We have a very unique prayer team that meets every week and goes through each one of these, whether it's on a prayer card or texted in. And they literally pray over those requests. It doesn't go in a basket, and we say, we pray over it.

It doesn't go in the trash. It's actually prayed for. And in some instances, people will take it home with them and continually pray or lift that in prayer because they love you. It's one of the ways in which we get to experience Christ in this world is because each of us have been empowered to not only bear the image and nature of God, but to be Christ's hands and feet again. I love that this church is diverse.

I love that our values and views don't always align. I love the discussions and the challenges that we face. But I love it because at the heart of each person in this space is a deep desire to want to know Jesus and to be just like him. And that's something we can all agree upon and encourage each other in. Let us pray, Lord Jesus.

It's challenging to think about this world and how topsy turvy it is. It's challenging to think of all the things that just don't make sense and how unfair life is, the oppression and the things that are going on out of our control. And, God, it just doesn't always seem fair. But maybe, God, if we looked at it differently, that perhaps these are all opportunities for us to seek for you and to find you in the mess of the storm and to learn how to step out of the boat, which

is our own securities and safety, and to trust that you want to do something great, maybe even allow us to walk on water. God, I know that you are doing things in our hearts and our minds.

You've been doing it all day. In fact, you've been doing it since the time we were born and brought into this world. God, you are not content with leaving us where we're at. Your slow to anger, spirit and heart allow us to transform through your love and grace to become so much more than what this world can offer, that we can be the light bringers and the hope bearers. Not only do we pray this to be so in our lives that people would come in contact with us.

Know the risen God, Jesus Christ. Lord, thank you for this community, for each individual, for those that couldn't even make it today. Father, we thank you and we love you. In Jesus name, amen.