

Models of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Oh, that's not bad. The sun is out. It feels like there's some light at the end of the rainy tunnel. And today's passage has got nothing controversial in it at all.

One of the great things about when you're preaching through a book of the Bible is you come across passages which you just can't hide from. And that's a good thing because we don't want to hide from what the Bible says to us. And what we're going to do, we're going to look at this passage over a couple of weeks. So I'm not going to say everything here. There'll be some juicy stuff for next week. So come back next week and we'll talk about that next week.

By the way, if you don't know me, my name is Chris. I'm on the pastoral staff here. I'd love to meet you afterwards if I haven't met you already. I used to have an aunt who, she was a great aunt, and she had Alzheimer's disease. And for those of you who have got relatives or friends who've had Alzheimer's disease, you know that it's a terrible disease and it causes you to kind of forget a whole load of things about yourself. You forget your identity.

You forget who you are. You forget who your family is. You forget what you're doing often a lot of the time. And my abiding memory of my aunt is going around to visit her in her flat. And we were there with the whole family. And I remember seeing her that she would forget that we were there. And she would go out to the kitchen. And outside of the kitchen, there was a goat. And she would stand there talking to the goat as if she was talking to her own family. And you didn't know whether you would laugh or you cry. It was one of those kind of strange situations because she'd forgotten who she was. She'd forgotten what she was about.

She'd forgotten how she was meant to relate to all the people around her. And that's the kind of case of the church in Crete that we're looking at in the book of Titus.

[2 : 14] And that's often the case with us. We get what I might call gospel amnesia. And that's why we're looking at the book of Titus to remind us of what it means to be a healthy, living church, knowing who we are and what we're meant to be here for in an unhealthy world around us.

And we kind of mentioned a little bit last week some of the issues that were going on in Crete at the time. You see, the church planter Paul is writing to his crack elite soldier Titus.

Okay, you know when there's, Titus is like the Navy SEALs. You know, when everything's going out of hand, you send in your best troops to deal and sort out the situation. That's what Titus is. He's sent in to deal with a messy situation. The small church, which is in Crete, is surrounded by a culture which is filled with just lying, corruption, greed, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity.

It's every man and woman for themselves. This church is supposed to be a beacon of light in this community. But what's happened? Some false teachers have come in and they've started teaching and saying things like, okay, you've got to stay pure from everybody else around you.

Okay? Sounds good. But then what they would say is, well, the way you do that is, first of all, believe in Jesus to get saved. But after that, you've got to keep lots of rules. Okay? To be a really good Christian, you've got to follow the rules. And you should do this. You shouldn't eat that. You should do this. And that's what's going to make you a good Christian. And that's what we called last week the performance-based religion. We call it the PBR virus, right? It infected the church. And when they got the virus, what was happening? It was creating division in families.

[4 : 06] And some people who kept the rules felt they were superior. Some people who didn't keep the rules felt they were inferior. And everybody in their actual lives reflected nothing of the fruit of love, joy, peace, and the goodness that is meant to flow from the gospel. They've got gospel amnesia.

And so Paul starts off the passage, and have your bulletin with you. And he says, basically, Titus, but as for you, not like these guys, these other false teachers, but as for you, Titus, teach what

accords with sound doctrine. The way you as the church in Crete are going to be who you're meant to be is not by telling people to keep all the rules. That's not going to change you. The way that you're going to be this transformed community is if you teach and you model a lifestyle which is infected with another virus, which is the gospel of grace. You see, when you get grace, then it shines out in your actions because you get the PBR virus and it tells you you should not sin. It tells you you should be different, which only makes you feel bad because you're struggling to do that anyway.

But the gospel tells you, you need not sin. You can be different because we have a savior, a greater savior, who has defeated the power of sin and whose love and approval is more significant, more satisfying than any reputation that you could seek, than any desire that you seek to be fulfilled. And this is good news, that we have an amazing savior. And if you get that seed continually sown in your heart, his love for you, fruit will be born. That's what he's saying. Okay? And he's saying that where you begin to see the difference, if you want to know whether this seed of the gospel is really working in your life, then look in, not just here on a Sunday, look in your everyday trenches of life. That's where you'll see whether you've actually understood the gospel. It's in your private life. It's in your public life.

And what Paul's going to do in this passage is he's going to go through the whole household, basically. He's going through older men, younger men, older women, younger women, and bond servants.

[6 : 32] All of them would have lived in the same kind of house together, and there would have been people coming in and out of the home. It wasn't like our private kind of Hong Kong homes. It would have been open. People would have come in, come out. And so your faith is to be seen in the kitchen.

It's to be seen in the living room. It's to be seen in the workshop. What shines out, if you've got the gospel, is a life which is different.

And Paul basically says, if you look in verse 10, the kind of climax to all of this, and today we're really just going to focus on older men and older women.

And if you're younger, listen in, because if you don't think you're old, well, this has still got something for you. But verse 10 says, do you know what God's great mission strategy for the church is?

Verse 10 tells you what his mission strategy for the church is. It's not great speakers. It's not great programs. It's not great events. It's God's mission strategy is ordinary Christians living out their lives, and verse 10 says, in everything, so that in everything, everything, that means in Greek, everything.

[7 : 48] It means like how you're disciplining your kids, how you're treating your colleagues, how you're changing the diapers of your kids, all those different things. In everything, our lives may adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior.

Adorn means make attractive. You know, like when I cook food, the food doesn't taste great, and the presentation doesn't make you even want to taste it.

But when a Michelin star chef makes food, the taste will be amazing, but the way he presents it draws you, attracts you to want to taste it.

That's in the same way that gospel is meant to do in our lives. The gospel is always meant to be amazing. It is amazing news. But in our lives, our marriages, our relationships are like God's presentation, so that the world can see this is good, come and taste it.

That's God's mission strategy. That's what this is all about. It's all about counter-cultural living, which draws people to see how beautiful our Savior is. So the question is, when people look at you, when people look at Watermark, do they see any difference?

[9 : 01] Do they see any difference? So we're going to focus today on character. Next week, we'll look at younger men and younger women.

But I want to talk about what character to develop and then how we build that character. Okay, just two simple things. What character did you develop?

You know, we live in an age where we lack heroes, right? If a Martian was to come down and say, take me to your leader, who would you take him to?

Like Taylor Swift, Tim Cook, Li Ka-Shing? Who would you take them to? You probably wouldn't take them to somebody of character, known for character.

Because a hero is someone who has courage to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others. But we live in a society which values self-fulfillment and self-expression more than self-denial and self-sacrifice.

[10:11] You know, in the past, duty and sacrifice, particularly for your family, everyone thought that's what you should do. And selfishness was wrong. But because many of you have experienced, people are just dutiful, often devoid of love.

So what happens is now, culture has shifted. And the great philosopher Elsa says, It's time to see what I can do, to test the limits and break through.

No right or wrong, no rules for me, I'm free. Let it go, let it go. And I'm not going to sing it to you, okay? It's okay. You can be... You see, what she's saying, that's the kind of song of the age, right? What she's saying is, you mustn't let others dictate to you how to live your life. Don't be restricted. Fulfill your dreams. Be true to yourself. Achieve your potential. Right?

So, work, we have to be fulfilled. If you're not fulfilled, change your job. In marriage, you've got to feel fulfilled if you don't change your partner. And we're left with very few models of character who self-sacrifice for the sake of others.

[11:18] You know, like people in the past, Nelson Mandela and Gandhi and people who were put in that. We have very few of those. Instead, we have celebrities who do self-expression, like Lady Gaga or Elsa or continue the list.

And Paul is speaking to his culture, to the older guys and women, and he says, you are to be a people, not of self-fulfillment, like all the other Cretans were following that, but you are to be people of character.

And when the Bible talks about older and younger men and women, we don't exactly know what age they're talking about, but in Judaism, we know that older men or women could be anywhere from 40 upwards.

So, if you're going through a midlife crisis at the moment, okay, 40 or upwards was considered to be an older man, more or less, and an older woman.

But let's look at what the passage says about older men and older women. Verse 2. I'm looking at your bulletin. It says, older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, or worthy of respect, that's what it means, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.

[12:43] I don't know if you noticed that pretty well every one of those characteristics are everything that the Cretans weren't. Okay? Everything, sober-minded, that means not drunk.

Everyone else was getting drunk. Dignified, that means worthy of respect. Something in your character that is worth respecting and looking up to.

Nobody else was doing that. The sound in faith, love, and steadfastness. Sound means healthy. You ought to be healthy. And this sound doctrine is meant to lead to sound faith, love, and steadfastness.

We don't always kind of say the word steadfastness. Do you know what that means? That means grit. That means godly grit. You know, there's a psychologist who's done a study on grit, and she's called Duckworth, and she says, grit is the ability to persevere in pursuing a future goal over a long period of time and not giving up.

It's having stamina. It's sticking with your future day in, day out, not just for the week, not just for the month, but for years, and working really hard to make that future a reality.

[14:04] Grit is living life like it's a marathon, not a sprint. That's what Paul's saying. Older men should have that. Now, I know not every older man fits into this category, and if you're younger, listen up to these things, but I know many older men get to the point where you feel like you've done enough.

You know, you've made enough money, you've served enough, and you begin to coast spiritually. You know, what I often see is people lose themselves in their work.

You know, they lose themselves in their hobbies, in their golf, in their gadgets, in all these different things, and the whole direction of your life becomes about getting enough money to make sure your kids are just safely in college, and then you can retire, and then life will be wonderful.

Wonderful. And some of us have lost, have stopped boldly taking steps of faith, and having a godly day-to-day grit where we're seeing how can I serve?

How can I love people? How can I, who are the people that I can be investing my life in? Because you're coasting, and you've lost godly grit.

[15 : 26] I don't know if that's you. Because if that's you, what I often see happening is as people go on later in life, and life has been all about your own fulfillment, then things don't kind of work out your way.

You get kind of grumpy, and cynical, and stubborn, and you think, oh, these young kids these days, you know, they think everything should fall into their laps, not like we were in the old days.

I wonder if you can see that in you. Because if you can, in the Bible, there's just this amazing guy who I think is so inspirational.

He's called Caleb. Caleb, I mean, he's the dude. I mean, when Israel is going into the promised land, and they kind of go in, they send spies out, first of all, to go and scout out the land.

And they go in there, and there are these big guys in there, but it's an amazing land. The spies come back, say to the people of Israel, hey, this land, it's amazing, but there's some big people there.

[16 : 31] They're frightening. Don't think we should go in there. But Caleb, and one other guy, Joshua, say, no, we can go in there, because our God is bigger than those guys.

He's bigger than those guys. But everyone else refuses to listen to them, and they just kind of wander around the desert. Fast forward 40 years. Whole generation has died out except for two people.

Caleb and Joshua. Caleb is 85 years old. He's 85 years old. The people of Israel go into the land, they take Jericho, and they're kind of just beginning to settle into the land.

And do you know what Caleb does? He's 85 years old. He goes up to Joshua, and he says, hey, Josh. He says, God promised me that there's an area over there where there are people who are against God, and he's promised me that I should go in and take that land.

And I want to go in there because my God is great, and he's always done what he said he's going to do. So will you let me go? And Joshua says, okay, fine. Go in and take that mountain. And off goes Caleb on his, like, Zimmer frame, on his little walker, up the mountain to go and fight these people, to overtake it so that this land becomes part of God's promised inheritance to him.

[17 : 53] 85 years old. Most of us would be wanting just to sit and watch the TV at that age. Not Caleb. Caleb was still going. He had godly grit.

I want to be like him when I'm older. Don't you? Do you want to be somebody who's just managed to get a handicap of 25 in your golf and you're content?

Because when you get to heaven, God's not going to say, how good was your handicap? He's going to say, how were you faithful? Where did you persevere? Where did you have sound love, faith, and steadfastness?

So some of you here, you need to hear, have you got gospel amnesia? Have you forgotten what God has called you to be? And the call for you is stop coasting, step up.

God wants to use you to be a godly man who's going to influence others. So look out, serve, look to see who you can mentor, look to see who the people around you are because God will use you.

[19 : 01] That's the guys, someone worthy of looking up to. But it works the same with the older women too.

Verse 3, it says, the older women, they are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. Reverent in behavior, that's a word that means there is a godliness that flows from the inside out.

Flows from the inside, there's something innerly attractive which just flows out, it flows out into your speech, it flows out into your conduct, it flows out. Just like with men, there's temptations for older women.

I heard one speaker who said it like this, older women can sometimes quit caring what people think, so they lose their filters on speaking their mind or talking badly about people.

Anyone know what I'm talking about? He said, what is significant is that that ugly spirit was always there. It was just hidden under the charms of beauty and the desire not to appear mean.

[20 : 18] But as you get older, he says, your natural physical beauty fades and you quit caring what people think and then this selfish, ugly character comes out. You see, by contrast, there are older women that I know who are tough as steel.

They've been through life. They are not pushovers at all but they are the sweetest, most loving people that I know. And they seem more beautiful in their older age than they ever did in their younger years.

Their beautiful character grows and shines. I don't know if you know people like that. I know people like that. There is something attractive about them. I used to go and visit two old people in their 80s. Every time I visited one, I went away thinking, when I'm your age, I want to be like you. I went to another one and I came away thinking, God, please don't ever let me be like her when I'm her age. Because you see, we will display in our old age the fruit of the seed that we've been watering in our lives. And what would it look like, this preacher said, if your physical beauty, charm, and your filters were stripped away, how beautiful would you be?

[21 : 46] It's challenging, right? It's challenging. Because whether you're a guy or whether you're a woman, there is a, we talked about there's an outside of the cup and there's an inside of the cup.

There's what you want others to see and then there's what's hidden in your heart. You can clean the outside and make yourself look beautiful on the outside. But what happens is old age strips much of the outside away.

Your success, overtaken by others. Your physical beauty, sagging. The education background where you can't remember anything you learn. And what you're left with is what spills out from what was inside.

Someone once said, be more concerned with your character than your reputation. Because your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what you think, is merely what others think you are.

Right? Be more concerned with your character than your reputation. But the question is, if you want to be someone worthy of respect, if you want to be someone reverent in behavior, how do you grow to be somebody of that character?

[23 : 00] And so this is the second thing I want to talk about. It's just this growing, how do we develop this character? There's a few things I want to just mention. First thing is this. Character is built in the ordinary, everyday moments of life.

There's one or two, there's three or four major things that happen in your life, you know, school, marriage, kids, retirement. In between all those years, there is 10,000 little moments that come our way.

It is in those moments and how you see and respond to those moments that will develop and change your character. It's the annoyances, it's the struggles, it's the things that you're facing right now.

This is what is shaping your character. Whatever age you are, whatever age you are, you are right now becoming the person you will be. You are right now making decisions, you are choosing who you will become.

Did you know that? This week, you are becoming part of that process. You know, you're forming the bedrock of the rest of your life this week. And the thing is, you can't say, well, when I'm less busy than I work on my character.

[24 : 20] You can't say that because every day you put off forgiving, every day you stay utterly obsessed by your work, every day you actively continue in criticalness, you're adding another brick into sealing up the wall of your heart and cementing in habits of ungodliness.

That's challenging. And as you get older, you know, it becomes even harder to change and harder to knock down those walls. But where do we go with this?

How does God change us? James 1 verse 2 says, Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

Consider it pure joy because you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, grit. Let steadfastness, let grit finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Testing of your faith.

[25 : 28] Romans 5 says this, We rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance. That's grit. Endurance produces character and character produces hope.

And hope doesn't disappoint us, it says, because God's poured out his love in our hearts. Did you hear what it said? He said, there's no three-month course on character where at the end you get a certificate and it's like, ooh, made it.

Character is built every day through the testing of your life, through the circumstances that you go through, the ups and downs of life, everyday life in your home.

What's going on in your workplace? That's where you learn character. You know, do you know how you get a, you make a gemstone like a diamond or a ruby from being a rough stone to being

smooth?

Do you know the process, how it works? It's through abrasion. It's through rubbing the rough stone with all of its imperfections against another hard, gritty surface continually over time until it gets smoother.

[26 : 43] right? But do you know what happens is as the process of kind of grinding happens, it creates heat and you have to stop it overheating because if you allow that heat to continue, it will crack the gem.

So what they do is they pour cold water onto the gem to stop it from overheating and cracking. over time, it then becomes this beautiful shaped diamond.

That's how God grows our character. You see, we're all rough diamonds. We all have so many things in our lives where if I was to create the list of all the things I wanted to change, it would reach higher than the room.

But what God does, he brings abrasion, he brings rubbing into our lives through circumstances to knock off those edges. Tim Keller said, suffering is God's gymnasium.

It reveals our spiritual weaknesses just as a workout reveals physical weaknesses. You see, I don't know what he's bringing into your life right at the moment. You know what I tend to do?

[27 : 54] When he brings people, annoying people into my life, when he brings circumstances frustrating circumstances into my life, I think everything else and everyone else is the problem.

Right? It's, I mean, it's my wife, it's my family, it's my job, it's my this, that's the problem. But actually, what God is doing, he's inviting us to see what is inside of the cup in our lives and to begin to knock off the edges in our lives.

I think I may have shown you this before, but let me, let me get in trouble here. There's some water here.

If I, if I shake this water, it came out of the cup, why did the water come out of the cup? Why?

Okay. Did it come out because of shaking? Maybe. But why didn't tea come out? Because water was inside the cup already.

[29 : 23] Right? You see, the shaking in life is our circumstances. People, things. That shakes us. But what comes out your reactions, your anger, your frustration, all of those things, that actually reveals what's actually already inside.

inside. And so, it's amazing how God, God brings people into your life.

Like, I thought I was fairly sensitive before I got married. And then I realized I'm as sensitive as a sledgehammer.

Do you know, I'm, you know, God brings people, if you're married, your marriage is one of the greatest tools God wants to use to make, grow your character.

If you're single, the people God places around you and your work is one of your greatest tools to grow your character. But we look at it and we think, God, get me out of here. And God says, I'm growing grit in you.

[30 : 27] Keep looking to me. Because the choices we make when we're faced to those things determine whether you'll become a beautiful old person or one you want to avoid.

How do we do this? Because when I'm infected with the PBR virus, my own performance, how do I choose to change?

The way I respond is this, to these things which come out in my life when I see my imperfections, all of those things. I justify myself. I justify myself because what I do is I show all the good, all the things, the big sins that I've avoided.

Okay? I've show all the big sins, I've avoided those things and I forget to see the blemishes of my character which are kind of inside the cup and I just say, that's just me.

And, you know, it's just small. And again, Tim Keller says this, he says, while our thoughts always seem small to us due to the natural self-justification of the heart, they often don't look small to others.

[31 : 39] As a result, these small thoughts cause large swathes of the Christian population to have little influence on others for Christ. You see, we stop adorning the gospel in our responses because we justify ourselves because we don't realize that the good qualities that we think we have also have a shadow side.

For example, you're a person who has strong convictions. That's good. But you're also sometimes unteachable, opinionated, don't listen to others, won't admit you're wrong.

Yeah, won't admit you're wrong. Right? You may be friendly and outgoing, that's good. But we're so easily offended and hurt by others' real or imagined criticism.

You may be laid back, it's good, not stressed easily. But maybe you're also apathetic and not passionately loving people. We all have, every one of us, myself included, we look at one side of the coin and say, look, look, I have strong convictions, I'm very friendly, I'm great.

But we don't see the flip side of the coin. But our spouse sees the flip side of the coin. Your colleagues see the flip side of the coin. Everybody else sees the flip side of the coin.

[32 : 58] But how do we work through that? What we need to keep us from cracking, when those things come out, you need the cold water of the gospel poured into your life.

Because otherwise, what you're going to go away with is you're going to go with, either you're going to go with feeling crushed and condemned because I'm not good enough. Or you're going to get into how, okay, I should do this, I shouldn't do this.

That's going to be moving to PBR virus syndrome. The gospel does a couple of things. What it does is this. First, it helps you to see your own sinfulness, your own flaws.

You recognize. You recognize that your worst character flaws are the ones that you're most blind to. Do you know that? The worst character flaws that you have are the ones that you probably don't even realize you have.

You see, they're the ones that I minimize and I justify. You know, when I'm in a fight with my wife, I can see all her flaws very clearly. It's amazing.

[34 : 04] But I'm totally blind to my own. And I say things like, I'm not worrying, I'm just concerned. I'm not being harsh, I'm just honest.

And you know, those things are good things, but actually, on the right occasion, those are good things, but often, we allow them to mask the shadow side that we fail to see that our worrying stems from not trusting in God, our harshness stems from pride and lack of love.

And the gospel helps you to see. So if you're married and I was to ask your spouse, what's your biggest flaw? Character flaw.

I wonder whether you would say exactly the same thing as your spouse would. If you're not married, if you're single, I wonder if you went up to a friend and asked them, what do you think my biggest flaw is?

What they would say and whether you would agree. And I challenge you to go and do that. Go and do that. Because if you're concerned for character, then you want to be able to see where the areas in your life you need to grow in.

[35 : 21] Or you'll see where, if you don't want to do that, where you're just concerned about outside of the cup. But the second thing that you'll see to help you to see your own flaws is people around you.

You know, in a world of celebrities with few role models, you need to surround yourself with godly people. Because you know, that's what our community groups are about. Do you realize? It's trying to surround yourself with a group of people who want to grow in their walk with God.

because you rarely learn your faults just by being told your faults. You need to be shown your faults. And do you know how you get shown your faults?

It's, when you're brought next to a person who's living the way you should be living but aren't, okay, it's, you may not think yourself as impatient or abrasive or oversensitive, but then when you come next to somebody who's incredibly patient or who's very gentle or who's very compassionate or very content and then you suddenly see, oh.

You see, that's God putting his finger on something to say, now I want to begin that process of refining you. So are you surrounding yourself with godly people?

[36 : 45] That's the question. Because don't expect to grow character if you're not. Not godly, character. Because the people you surround yourself with, you'll become like those people.

But it's all very well to say, okay, now I see my character flaws. That can be quite depressing. We see all the things which are wrong with us that still can sound like you should, you should, you should be better. But what the gospel comes in and says, how do you change?

How do you stop from cracking under the weight of condemnation or the weight of your own sinfulness that's released? You need the cool water of the gospel to flow into your soul daily.

And what I mean by that is this. If you take time to consider just how deep God's love and kindness for you really is.

That's why we did communion. That's why when you spend time with God, you remember that in spite of the fact that I and you are as broken as anything, He didn't give up on us.

[37 : 47] He showed complete compassion. He died to make you perfect and delightful in the Father's eyes. He gives you His righteousness which means He takes off this stinking, filthy clothes of all my sinful character flaws.

He takes it off the performance that I couldn't do. He then puts on His beautiful robes of righteousness on me. He looks at me. He looks at you. If you have trusted in Christ and says, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

There's nothing you can do to make me love you anymore. There's nothing you can do that will make me love you any less. You're secure. And we say this every week, but you know, do you know the reason why?

It's because I'm going to go out tomorrow and I'm going to forget it. And you're going to forget it. Because when you begin to see that kind of love daily, it will melt your heart and you'll begin to hate the character flaws in you, not tolerate them.

And you won't be about justifying yourself and ignoring them. You will hate them because you think, if God can love me that much, how can I keep rebelling against Him in these ways?

[39 : 07] And character is grown, not through being perfect. We'll never get there until Christ comes, but it's through repentance. And repentance will become a habit, a way of life as a child learning to walk who keeps stumbling and she reaches her hand back to her father to pick her up, set her back on her feet again, and that just becomes a habit of the heart again and again and again.

And repentance, not justifying myself, but running back to a father who loves me will give you godly grit to run a race, to give you a humility to see your character flaws, but a confidence that you are loved and accepted and you'll shine out like a diamond increasingly in the world.

So when you go into your home, when you go into your workplace, you don't have to justify yourself. You're secure. And that, in an insecure world, will adorn the gospel.

Let's pray. Father, I pray that you would, I pray that you help us to actually want to be people of character.

But we can't make it just by ourselves. We need you. We need you. I recognize in my life I so often trivialize the things which are just as blemishes, but Lord, help me to face them.

[40 : 55] Help us to face them, but not to run away because it's so painful facing what we're really like sometimes, but to realize that that cool water of the gospel pours onto the heat and takes away that heat so that we see you and we love you and we see how beautiful you are.

And that causes us to want to follow you, to want to love you, to want to love our families, to want to love the people around because you're good. In Jesus' name, Amen.